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North America

JENNIFER D. KEENE

The war in Europe had an immediate and direct impact on North America. The United States and Canada acted on their strong cultural, economic and political ties to Britain by contributing men, money and material to the Allied side. Mexico, long the site of economic competition between the United States, Britain and Germany, found itself at the centre of diplomatic intrigues which climaxed with the Zimmermann Telegram. Relations with Europe, however, only tell one side of the North American story. Within North America, populations shifted northwards to compensate for labour shortages once the war curtailed European immigration. To meet the Allies' escalating demands for industrial and agricultural products, Canada openly recruited US-based farm and factory workers, promising high wages and cheap transport until the US entry into the war dried up this labour stream. US labour agents turned southwards as well, fuelling the movement of southern workers to northern industrial centres with similar enticements. The 500,000 African Americans who joined this migratory wave (known as the Great Migration) set in motion a political and cultural reordering that transformed the racial landscape within the United States. Hundreds of thousands of Mexicans also migrated to the United States, mostly to escape the political and economic turmoil caused by the ongoing Mexican Revolution.

These demographic shifts are just one example of how considering North America as an entity during the First World War offers the alluring possibility of breaking away from the strictures of the normal nation-state approach to studying the war, presenting an opportunity to consider the war's regional and global dimensions. Uncovering the full scope of 'North America's War' requires evaluating Britain's dominant position in the global political economy, North America's contribution to the fighting, international relations within North America and how North American-based events and initiatives affected the course of the war and the peace.

Great Britain in North America

Britain's stature as the world's largest imperial power, centre of the financial world and dominant naval force, meant that its entry into the war affected nearly every nation in some way. Indeed the cultural, political and economic ties that bound the United States and Canada to Great Britain distinctly shaped the war experience of these two North American nations. As citizens of a self-governing Dominion within the British Empire, 'Canadians had no choice about their involvement in the war, but they did have a voice when it came to deciding on the extent of their participation', notes David MacKenzie.¹ The United States declared itself a neutral nation in 1914, but its financial and political elite offered aid to Britain that affected the course of American neutrality almost immediately. Taking advantage of these bonds, Britain moved quickly to facilitate economic mobilisation in Canada and the United States by establishing a robust munitions industry where none had previously existed. By managing a coordinated network that secured contracts, purchased machinery, inspected factories and transported goods overseas, Britain successfully funnelled North American resources towards its own shores and away from Germany.

The strong US-British trading and financial wartime relationship evolved naturally from pre-existing bonds. 'Britain was by far America's largest pre-war trading partner', Robert H. Zieger points out.² Less than six months after the war began, the House of Morgan, the financial powerhouse run by the J. P. Morgan bank, signed on as the purchasing and contracting agent for the British government within the United States. Over the next two years, the House of Morgan worked closely with British officials to award more than 4,000 contracts worth over \$3 billion to American businesses.³ Between 1915 and 1917 US exports doubled, with 65 per cent going to Great Britain.⁴ In 1916 the British Foreign Office evaluated Britain's dependency on the United States, reaching the alarming conclusion that for 'foodstuffs, for military necessities and for raw materials for industry, the United States was "an

1 David MacKenzie, 'Introduction: myth, memory, and the transformation of Canadian society', in Mackenzie (ed.), *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 3.

2 Robert H. Zieger, *America's Great War: World War I and the American Experience* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. 12.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 30–1.

4 Paul A. C. Koistinen, *Mobilizing for Modern War: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1865–1919* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1997), p. 121.

absolutely irreplaceable source of supply".⁵ This booming trade in rifles, gunpowder, shells and machine guns also benefited the American economy by pulling it out of recession, and created the industrial infrastructure that would eventually support the US war effort.⁶

The Anglophile House of Morgan aided the British cause even further by lending the British government enormous sums and putting pressure on other American banks to deny loans to Germany.⁷ The money flowing from American coffers to the British bolstered the entire Allied side, as the British in turn loaned money to other Entente nations like France and Russia, that could not secure American loans on their own. The \$250 million per month that Britain spent in the United States by 1916 (mostly to bolster the sterling-dollar exchange rate to keep commodity prices in check), 'reflected a dependence on American industry and on the American stock market which in German minds both justified the submarine campaign and undermined the United States' claim to be neutral', writes Hew Strachan.⁸

In November 1916, this flow of US credit suddenly appeared in jeopardy of drying up. The Federal Reserve Board warned the House of Morgan to refrain from making unsecured loans to Britain, which by this point had nearly extinguished the gold reserves and securities used as collateral for US loans. 'Lack of credit was about to crimp and possibly cut off the Allies' stream of munitions and foodstuffs', John Milton Cooper, Jr. contends, a scenario only averted by America's April 1917 entry into the war.⁹ Hew Strachan remains more sceptical about any potential rupture in this financial partnership. Cutting off war-related trade with Britain would have sent the American economy into a recessionary tailspin, he argues. Strachan goes so far as to suggest that in the long run, continued US neutrality might have

5 Kathleen Burk, *Britain, America and the Sinews of War, 1914–1918* (Boston, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 81.

6 Both the United States and Canada expanded agricultural production to meet Allied demand. Low-interest loans encouraged farmers to increase their production through mechanisation or buying more land. The high prices negotiated for overseas wheat and cotton sales made the increased debt seem negligible, but in the 1920s declining crop prices depressed the American and Canadian farming industry. These 'sick' economic sectors intensified the severity of the economic depression that swept the world in 1929, revealing how long North America suffered the aftershocks of the global economic mobilisation during the First World War.

7 After the United States entered the war, the government took over financing the Allies and lent them nearly \$11 billion during the period of active fighting and reconstruction. 'Less than \$1 billion of the money lent by the American government was ever repaid, but all of the approximately \$3 billion owed to private U.S. investors was', writes Paul A. C. Koistinen, *Mobilizing for Modern War*, p. 135.

8 Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 228.

9 John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 2009), p. 373.

benefited the Allied side more than American belligerency, since its 'financial commitment to the Entente' had already 'bound the United States to its survival and even victory'.¹⁰ As a belligerent the United States now competed with Britain for American-produced munitions and foodstuffs to supply its own army.

Great Britain also called upon Canada to produce iron, steel, artillery shells and chemical weapons. In 1914 Canada boasted only one munitions factory. Over the course of the war, a British-run Imperial Munitions Board (IMB) oversaw the creation of nearly 600 factories to produce shells, fuses, propellants and casings. 'Close to a third of the shells fired by the British army in 1917 were Canadian-made', notes Desmond Morton.¹¹ Booming Canadian textile, farming and lumbering industries helped pull the Canadian economy out of a pre-war recession, profits that Canadians used to purchase the domestic war loans floated by the Canadian government. Unlike Britain, Canada did not require massive loans from the United States to finance its war effort. Britain's desire to spend American loans in Canada, to the benefit of the Canadian economy, required a demonstration of reciprocity. In 1917, for instance, Britain only secured approval for using US-government loans for Canadian wheat purchases by promising to send at least half of it to American flour mills for processing.¹²

The cultural ties between the United States, Canada and Great Britain were very much in evidence throughout the war. Within the United States, Great Britain unleashed a ferocious propaganda campaign which emphasised German atrocities in Belgium and the loss of civilian life during Germany's forays into unconditional submarine warfare. British blockade practices arguably killed more civilians than Germany's unconditional submarine warfare, but German propaganda never found an equally compelling way to arouse American ire.¹³ The Germans increasingly gained a reputation as the enemies of civilised mores. A good case in point was the overwhelming success that Britain had framing how Americans viewed the *Lusitania* sinking.

¹⁰ Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. 1: *To Arms* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 991.

¹¹ Desmond Morton, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), p. 82.

¹² Burk, *Britain, America and the Sinews of War, 1914-1918*, pp. 172-4.

¹³ Alan Kramer estimates that 478,500-700,000 German civilians (depending on the source) died from blockade-related starvation and disease as compared to 14,722 British merchant seamen. Alan Kramer, 'Combatants and noncombatants: atrocities, massacres, and war crimes', in John Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012), pp. 195-6.

On 7 May 1915 a German U-boat fired a torpedo into the *Lusitania*, a British passenger ship that Germany claimed was carrying munitions. The ship sank in less than twenty minutes, and the 1,198 victims included 128 Americans.¹⁴ Germany noted that official newspaper notices had warned Americans to stay off ships headed to the war zone, but British propaganda successfully presented the attack as another example of Germany's inhumanity. US-based British agents distributed thousands of commemorative coins, which, they claimed, the German government had manufactured. In reality a private German citizen had created the coin, which showed a skeleton, representing Death, selling tickets above the caption, 'Business above all', to satirise the Allied willingness to endanger civilian lives while conducting a profitable arms trade. The original coins were stamped 5 May, not 7 May, a mistake that the British seized upon to accuse Germany of premeditated murder in the propaganda pamphlet that accompanied the coin duplicates.

The war strengthened Canada's cultural ties to Great Britain, even as it gave rise to Canadian nationalism. Over the course of the war Canada began to see itself, 'if no longer as a British colony, then at least as a British North American nation', notes Paul Litt.¹⁵ English-Canadians openly called themselves British, not to deny or dismiss their Canadian nationality, but rather to express their enthusiasm for British liberal democracy, membership in the British Empire and British cultural traditions. Canadians used phrases like 'British civilisation', 'British justice', 'British citizenship' and 'British fair play' to express a British-Canadian ethno-nationalism that 'was imbued with a handful of assumptions about what kind of country Canada should be', according to Nathan Smith, which meant, among other things, English-speaking and white.¹⁶

Not all North Americans supported aiding Great Britain's war effort, however. Dissenters in the United States and Canada emphasised North America's geographic distance from Europe, arguing that the Atlantic served as a natural barrier that protected the continent from the possibility of an

¹⁴ The *Lusitania* sinking set off a firestorm of debate within the United States over whether neutrality gave Americans the freedom to travel unmolested into the war zone. Wilson's decision during the *Lusitania* crisis to define neutrality as a status that guaranteed neutral nations unassailable rights (rather than a pledge to treat both sides equally) ultimately set the United States on a collision course with Germany.

¹⁵ Paul Litt, 'Canada invaded! The Great War, mass culture, and Canadian cultural nationalism', in Mackenzie (ed.), *Canada and the First World War*, p. 344.

¹⁶ Nathan Smith, 'Fighting the alien problem in a British country: returned soldiers and anti-alien activism in wartime Canada, 1916-19', in James E. Kitchen, Alisa Miller and Laura Rowe (eds.), *Other Combatants, Other Fronts: Competing Histories of the First World War* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), p. 305.

amphibious German invasion. These isolationists stood ready to defend their territorial borders, but found the idea of sending armies outside the Western Hemisphere unsettling. Throughout North America, scepticism flourished in ethnic and economic communities that had strong political reasons for opposing or limiting participation in the war. Isolationist sentiment within the United States was particularly strong among German Americans and Scandinavians in the Midwest, Irish Americans and the rural South. These populations embraced isolationism for a variety of reasons: support for relatives in Germany, religious objections, hatred of Great Britain and distrust of the eastern financial elite making loans to the Allies. Appeals to protect the British Empire failed to sway many French Canadians, who worried that wartime mobilisation would accelerate Anglo-Canadian nation-building. French-Canadian elites pledged support to the war, but many others embraced an ethnic-based North American nationalism that prompted them to resist fighting an overseas war. Concerned that the wartime push towards Anglo-conformism threatened their cultural autonomy and civil liberties, French Canadians proved reluctant to enlist and openly opposed conscription.

Critics of isolationism countered that it was not the Atlantic Ocean that protected North America, but the British navy. Canada and the United States benefited tremendously from the blanket of protection that British control of the seas offered to its former and present colonies, they argued. Britain maintained this naval dominance (with only occasional challenges from German U-boats) throughout the war by controlling shipping lanes, blockading the North and Baltic Seas through patrols and mines and providing ships to transport goods to Europe. Early 1917 was one crucial period when Germany threatened to gain the upper hand at sea. In February 1917 Germany resumed unconditional submarine warfare, knowing that this decision was likely to bring the United States formally into the war. Germany gambled that a relentless U-boat assault on shipping would force Britain and France to capitulate before the United States could offer much help on the battlefields. The sharp increase in German submarine attacks once it resumed unconditional submarine warfare (reaching a wartime high of 2.2 million tons from April–June 1917) left British Admiral John Jellicoe pessimistic over Britain's future capacity to wage war. Canadian-born US Admiral William Sims offered the solution – instituting a convoy system that relied on US destroyers (rather than Britain's slower battleships) to accompany groups of ships crossing the Atlantic. The use of convoys meant that in 1918, for the first time since 1915, Allied shipbuilding exceeded losses at sea. 'Better than almost any

other single factor, the convoy system reveals the truly global nature of World War I', writes Michael Neiberg.¹⁷

During the war the United States switched from being a debtor nation, dependent on British financing for its industrial development, to a creditor nation that did more than lend money to belligerents to fund purchases of American goods. When British financiers began liquidating their assets throughout the underdeveloped world to fund the war, American bankers and industrialists seized on the chance to finance and construct mines, railroads, factories and oil fields throughout the Western Hemisphere. America's geographical location vis-à-vis Mexico became a distinct advantage that aided its penetration into markets previously dominated by Britain. Accelerating a shift already underway, US imports to Mexico rose from 49.7 per cent of all imported goods to 66.7 per cent, while the British market share dropped from 13 per cent to 6.5 per cent from 1913 to 1927.¹⁸ Canada underwent a similar shift from borrower to lender, the result of credits extended to Britain for purchases of wheat and munitions.

Yet the war also laid bare the American and Canadian dependence on British purchases of its crops and manufactured goods for sustained prosperity – allowing Britain, at least for the time being, to retain its position as the epicentre of the international political economy. The twin effects of 'Britain's multiple centrality to the world economy [which] gave her critical leverage in moving resources toward the Allies and away from the Central Powers' and 'the United States' awesome productive capacity', produced a combination that was difficult for Germany and her allies to match, Theo Balderston concludes.¹⁹ The outcome of the war seemingly reinforced Britain's world supremacy, as evidenced by its ability to call upon a variety of resources (men, money and material) from North America to defeat its European enemies.

North America's military experience

Both the United States and Canada entered the war unprepared. In 1914, Canada possessed a regular army of just 3,000 with 70,000 in volunteer militias. The Canadian Corps would eventually total four divisions, with a

17 Michael S. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War: A Global History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 292.

18 Rosemary Thorp, 'Latin America and the international economy from the First World War to the world depression', in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. vi: 1870–1930 (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 66.

19 Theo Balderston, 'Industrial mobilization and war economies', in Home (ed.), *A Companion to World War I*, p. 229.

fifth division broken up to provide replacements. Overall, 619,000 Canadians served during the war, with 424,589 serving overseas, out of a population of 7.5 million people.²⁰ The situation was not much better within the United States in 1917, when the nation declared war with approximately 300,000 troops (federal and state) available. Eventually the United States would raise a force of 4.4 million, with nearly half of these serving overseas, out of a population of 103 million people.²¹ Overall, each nation suffered a comparable number of casualties, with 66,665 Canadians and 53,402 Americans killed in battle. The discrepancy was evident in the proportions that these numbers represented, nearly 11 per cent of the Canadian forces and 1.2 per cent of the US military.²²

The United States and Canada raised their forces differently. The United States adopted conscription immediately and eventually drafted 72 per cent of the armed forces. With this decision the United States broke with its tradition of fighting first with volunteers and only using conscription to fill the ranks when enlistments lagged. Introducing conscription after the nation suffered heavy losses on the battlefield would increase the likelihood of mass protests against the draft, American officials reasoned, aware that the nation had been sharply divided over entering the war. Canada opted to wait until replacement needs became acute, only turning to conscription in 1917 to raise nearly 100,000 troops.²³ The ability to apply for exemptions helped make the draft more politically acceptable within the United States and Canada. The majority of draft-eligible Americans and Canadians publicly registered for the draft, and then retreated to the privacy of their homes to fill out a form requesting an exemption. The pockets of outright opposition to conscription reflected pre-existing ethnic and regional schisms. Draft resistance occurred primarily in American southern rural communities that had opposed entering the war, and within French-speaking Quebec, which resisted the government's attempts to use wartime military service to underscore Anglo-Canadian dominance. Some Québécois even evaded conscription by fleeing across the border to New

England French-Canadian textile communities. This immigrant community saw no contradiction between sending its own sons off to fight in the US army while simultaneously offering refuge to French-Canadian draft-dodgers.²⁴

The time it took to raise, transport and train troops from North America meant that these armies did not actually enter the front lines until months after their respective nations entered the war. Initially both the Americans and Canadians fought under the tutelage of the more experienced French and British armies. Canada and the United States faced similar pressure to raise troops that could be amalgamated into the British and French armies, but domestic nationalistic sentiment and concerns about how European generals were conducting the war caused each to develop an independent, national army instead.

Unhappiness with the British decision to launch a counter-attack using Canadian troops after Germany's first mass gas attack during the Second Battle of Ypres ensured 'that the 1st Division became the core of Canada's national army rather than an "imperial" formation drawn from a dominion', Terry Copp concludes.²⁵ In April 1917, all four Canadian battalions went into action for the first time at the Battle of Arras, when they took Vimy Ridge. General Arthur Currie was credited with the victory and in June 1917 given command of the Canadian Corps. The Canadians became convinced that they were an elite fighting force which could succeed where the British and French could not. 'In those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation', Brigadier-General A. E. Ross declared after the war, a notion that has provoked much debate ever since.

Canadians placed tremendous faith in Currie (the first Canadian to attain the rank of full general) to use Canadian soldiers effectively and prudently while maintaining a certain degree of autonomy on the battlefield. General John J. Pershing, the commander of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), faced similar expectations within the United States. Seeking to demonstrate his own leadership abilities on the battlefield, Pershing steadfastly resisted any formal amalgamation of the American army into the Allied forces. An independent US army met Wilson's larger political goals as well. Pershing sailed to France with clear instructions from the American Secretary of War, Newton Baker, 'to cooperate with the forces of the other countries employed against the enemy; but in so doing the underlying idea must be

20 Robert K. Hanks, 'Canada: Army' and James Carroll, Robert K. Hanks and Spencer Tucker, 'Canada: Role in war', in Spencer C. Tucker (ed.), *World War I: A Student Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), pp. 257–9.

21 Jennifer D. Keene, *World War I: The American Soldier Experience* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 2011), pp. 33, 163.

22 Newfoundland was a separate colony during the war, so its disproportionately high casualty rate is not included in these figures. The 8,500 men who enlisted in Newfoundland represented nearly 10 per cent of the adult male population. Of these, 3,600 were either killed or wounded.

23 J. L. Granatstein, 'Conscription in the Great War', in Mackenzie (ed.), *Canada and the First World War*, p. 70.

24 Christopher Capazzola, *Uncle Sam Wants You: World War I and the Making of the Modern American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 41.

25 Terry Copp, 'The military effort, 1914–1918', in Mackenzie (ed.), *Canada and the First World War*, p. 43.

kept in view that the forces of the United States are a separate and distinct component of the combined forces, the identity of which must be preserved'.²⁶ Wilson depended on having a strong, visible and independent American presence on the battlefield when the Allies won the war. The United States needed to play a major role in the fighting, Wilson believed, to guarantee him a prominent voice in fashioning the peace, which, after all, was one of the primary reasons the President had led the nation into war. The Americans never gained complete independence (they were always dependent to some degree on Allied logistical assistance), but by the fall of 1918 the AEF did occupy its own sector of the Western Front.

Americans and Canadians claimed that their troops embodied a new brand of masculinity born on the frontier, which emphasised aggression, ingenuity and individualism. These traits supposedly separated North American soldiers from their class-bound, weary European counterparts. In 1917, the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Borden, unsuccessfully proposed that the Canadian army take the lead in training the American army, 'because Canadians, like Americans, did not have an aristocracy that placed birth over merit'.²⁷ American military training doctrine explicitly underscored the differences in temperament between American and European soldiers, identifying individual rifle marksmanship and 'open warfare' as the hallmarks of the American fighting man. 'Berlin cannot be taken by the French or the British Armies or by both of them. It can only be taken by a thoroughly trained, entirely homogeneous American Army', General H. B. Fiske, the head of the American Expeditionary Forces training programme, told his colleagues.²⁸ The preference for rifles over heavy artillery remained the bedrock principle of US army doctrine that in Pershing's mind defined the American 'way of war'.

Both the United States and Canada also felt that their military contributions and valour went underappreciated by Britain and France. The fear that Britain might not adequately document the Canadian war effort led to the creation of a Canadian War Records Office that collected materials and publicised Canadian military feats to Canadian and English audiences. Likewise an outpouring of nationally focused books, articles and films in the United States left

Americans with the clear impression that the United States had practically won the war single-handedly. The feeling of being junior partners in a European-led coalition no doubt caused some of this chest-thumping. More importantly, the political desire of the United States and Canada to parlay their wartime participation into greater influence within the new world order also necessitated impressing Britain and France with the contribution each nation had made to the Allied victory. The exact contributions of American and Canadian troops to the overall Allied victory continue to excite debate on both sides of the Atlantic to this day.

The increased importance of the Dominions to the British war effort led to the Imperial War Conferences in 1917 and 1918 which gave Dominion Prime Ministers or representatives a chance to negotiate how their economies and armies contributed to the war effort. The Dominions also sent their own delegations to the Peace Conference, then signed and ratified the peace treaties individually.²⁹ The leading American negotiator, Colonel Edward House, welcomed this development, viewing any fracturing within the British Empire as positive for the United States. The Canadian Prime Minister, Borden, 'deliberately brought the point of view of North America to the councils of the empire, a point of view that reflected the growing identity of Canadian and American interests', notes Borden's biographer, Robert Brown.³⁰ At the Peace Conference Borden experimented with a new international role as mediator between the two most powerful English-speaking world powers. In a manner of speaking, Canada had a foot in both camps, and saw itself as uniquely positioned to explain North American concerns to Britain and its Dominions and British Empire worries to America. Borden intervened several times to fashion compromises when American and British delegations clashed on treaty details, arguing especially forcefully (if futilely) against hefty German reparations to avoid antagonising the United States. 'Part of this was self-interest: a reoccurring nightmare in Ottawa was that Canada might find itself fighting on the side of Britain and its ally Japan against the United States', Margaret MacMillan

26 *United States Army in the World War, 1917-1919*, 17 vols. (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2001), vol. 1, p. 3.

27 John English, 'Political leadership in the First World War', in Mackenzie (ed.), *Canada and the First World War*, p. 80. Mitchell A. Yokelson, *Borrowed Soldiers: Americans under British Command, 1918* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), pp. 76-7.

28 Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 2001), p. 106.

29 Robert Aldrich and Christopher Hillard, 'The French and British Empires', in Horne (ed.), *A Companion to World War I*, p. 532.

30 Robert Craig Brown, 'Canada in North America', in John Braeman, Robert H. Brenner and David Brody (eds.), *Twentieth-Century American Foreign Policy* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1971), p. 359. See also Robert Craig Brown, "'Whither are we being shoved?'" Political leadership in Canada during World War I', in J. L. Granatstein and R. D. Cuff (eds.), *War and Society in North America* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1971), pp. 104-19.

asserts.³¹ The shared ancestry, language, literature, political institutions and beliefs made a potential alliance between the United States and Great Britain 'sufficient to ensure the peace of the world' if the League of Nations failed, Borden told Lloyd George.³² This plan never came to pass, but Borden's sentiments revealed that at the level of high diplomacy, relations between Britain and Anglo-North America emerged intact from the war.

The US and Canada: comparisons and relations

Comparing the war experiences of the United States and Canada uncovers an array of parallels that helped define the North American experience of war. These comparable paths underscore similarities in settlement patterns, political ideals and economic development. The national identities of the United States and Canada traced their political and demographic origins to the white-settler Anglo communities that had originally colonised the continent. This vision of national identity ignored the other demographic realities that had peopled North America: slavery, Spanish and French colonisation and large-scale immigration by non-Anglo peoples in the early twentieth century.

Throughout the war, the United States and Canada grappled with organised protests by marginalised minorities. The ongoing struggle for racial equality within the United States sparked racial riots, lynching and wide-scale state surveillance of African-American political organisations and periodicals. Over 400,000 African Americans served in the military, with 89 per cent placed in non-combatant, labouring roles. 'The attempted exclusion of African Americans from a national memory of the war complemented larger attempts to marginalize African Americans as citizens from the polity', notes Chad Williams.³³ The Canadian government's campaign to suppress bilingual schools, begun in 1912, stoked fears within Quebec that wartime military service would turn into one more vehicle that eliminated French-Canadian culture and autonomy. The lagging French-Canadian enlistments (estimated by the British War Office as the lowest in the Empire), draft evasion and the anti-conscription 1918 Easter riot in Quebec City, all attested to the vibrancy of this ethnic conflict. 'A war that many thought could unite French and English Canadians had proved everything to the contrary', Patrice A. Dutil

concludes.³⁴ Rather than breaking down the physical, cultural and political separation between the majority and minority populations, the war reinforced the isolation of these minority communities. Native peoples served in both the American and Canadian armies, an experience that provoked a contradictory mix of pressure to assimilate while in uniform and then, once they returned home, opportunities to revive traditional warrior ceremonies and traditions. The longstanding view of Native Americans as a 'vanishing race' fuelled an array of home-front assaults on Native American communities, as government agents in the United States and Canada leased indigenous lands to non-Indians as part of the drive to maximise wartime crop, mineral and livestock production. These minority groups thus ended the war with new sets of grievances over their poor treatment by the majority culture, amid fresh evidence that the federal governments in each nation intended to maintain the status quo.

The transatlantic labour market that linked North America to Europe had funnelled nearly 3 million people to Canada from 1896–1914 and over 8 million Europeans to the United States from 1900–09. Only British subjects could enlist in the Canadian army, consequently recruits came predominantly from the Anglo-British community, both Canadian and British-born. The ethnic composition of the military thus reaffirmed the 'British' identity of Canada. Besides putting their own German immigrant population under surveillance, Canada took concrete steps to protect its borders from the large anti-British immigrant populations residing in a neutral United States. Canadian fantasies that German spies might somehow entice German-American or Irish-American communities to conduct guerrilla raids, caused Canadian authorities to keep 16,000 soldiers stationed along the border, part of a 50,000-man force that remained at home to repel any direct attack on Canadian soil.³⁵ Once the United States entered the war, the need for such a strong southern border defence evaporated, allowing Canada to send reinforcements to France at a critical moment in the fighting. Within the US army, foreign-born soldiers (who had declared their intent to become citizens) composed nearly one-fifth of the wartime force, contributions to

31 Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), pp. 47–8.

32 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 48.

33 Chad L. Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), p. 301.

34 Patrice A. Dutil, 'Against isolationism: Napoléon Belcourt, French Canada, and "La grande guerre"', in Mackenzie (ed.), *Canada and the First World War*, p. 125.

35 Granatstein, 'Conscription', p. 66. According to John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, the US-based German military attaché considered such attacks, but the only actual case of German sabotage that originated on American soil damaged a railway bridge in New Brunswick; John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies*, 4th edn (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 94.

the war cause that helped recent immigrants from Allied nations assimilate into the mainstream culture.

Throughout the early twentieth century, native-born and immigrant workers moved freely back and forth across the US-Canadian border, helping solidify transnational bonds between labour unions, socialist groups and the radical Industrial Workers of the World that caught the attention of intelligence services in both countries. In the post-war period, Canadians and Americans accused recently arrived immigrants from southern and central Europe of diluting North America's Anglo racial and cultural heritage. These immigrants were also charged with importing radical, Bolshevik ideologies that threatened capitalism and representative democracy. Protecting North America from Bolshevism became a joint US-Canadian endeavour, with the two governments sharing information about suspect labour groups throughout the war and during the post-war Red Scare.³⁶

Culturally, economically and politically there was little reason for conflict between the United States and Canada. Diplomacy helped maintain tranquillity along the northern border of the United States. By 1914 an embryonic bilateral US-Canadian relationship allowed for direct negotiations (albeit with British oversight on the Canadian side). In the early twentieth century, several international commissions began tackling the traditional causes of conflict (settling formal boundaries, access to fisheries and agreed use of shared rivers and lakes) between the United States and Canada. These permanent commissions operated outside the formal diplomatic channels still controlled by Britain, and their founding coincided with the closure of the last remaining British garrisons in North America in 1906. Canada was now responsible for resolving disputes, diplomatic and military, with the United States. The temporary appointment of an independent wartime Canadian representative within the British Embassy in Washington, DC, made Canada the only British Dominion that had the ability to talk directly to the US government. These developments paved the way for wartime cooperation and the eventual establishment of formal diplomatic relations in 1927.³⁷

Cultural connections reinforced these growing diplomatic ties. A steady stream of US-produced movies, magazines, newspapers, books, advertisements and music poured into Canada. The sheer number of products created for the much larger American audience and the efficient railroad distribution

³⁶ Donald Avery, 'Ethnic and class relations in Western Canada during the First World War: a case study of European immigrants and Anglo-Canadian nativism', in Mackenzie (ed.), *Canada and the First World War*, pp. 286-7.

³⁷ Thompson and Randall, *Canada and the United States*, pp. 71-9, 96-7.

networks that transported them throughout Anglo-North America, made it difficult for distinctly Canadian cultural offerings to thrive. American touring companies regularly included Canadian cities and towns on their itineraries, exposing Canadians to a full range of American circuses, vaudeville shows, minstrel acts and Wild West shows. These facts dismayed the Canadian cultural elite, but the general public avidly consumed American movies and music with little debate or reflection before the war. The influx of British imports also hampered the development of Canadian cultural traditions, as many middle- and upper-class Canadians actively sought to maintain and cultivate this cultural connection to mother England.

The war, however, temporarily disrupted this benign cultural relationship between Canada and the United States. The first fissures appeared when Canada entered the war and the United States remained neutral. Wartime Canada avidly consumed Canadian-authored books explaining the war, along with British films like the *Battle of the Somme* (1916). 'Had American mass culture been merely inadequate, perhaps such [British] import substitutes would have seen Canadians happily through the war years', notes Paul Litt. 'But in fact, American cultural products were not merely lacking - they were offensive.'³⁸ Heightened Canadian patriotism, along with pride in fighting as part of the British Empire, suddenly made Canadians aware of how much flag-waving and jingoism permeated US-produced films, songs, books and plays. Canadians chafed at the tone of moral superiority that America adopted as a neutral nation, well aware of the profits flowing into US coffers from the healthy munitions trade. French-Canadian Senator Napoléon Belcourt aptly summarised Canadian views towards US neutrality: 'mere money making is after all but a very poor, indeed a very miserable compensation for the loss of national prestige, national honor, caused by neglecting or ignoring modern solidarity, the solidarity of civilized mankind'.³⁹ America's entry into the war helped ease these cultural tensions, but 'during the 1920s and 1930s, no Canadian forgot that Canada, with one-tenth the population, had more killed and wounded than the United States', noted historians John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall.⁴⁰

Conflict between Mexico and the United States

In 1916 it appeared more likely that the United States would go to war with Mexico than enter the Great War. Mexican politics had been in upheaval since

³⁸ Litt, 'Canada invaded!', p. 338. ³⁹ Quoted in Dutil, 'Against isolationism', p. 122.

⁴⁰ Thompson and Randall, *Canada and the United States*, p. 98.

the Mexican Revolution began in 1910. The United States played a direct role in the revolution, temporarily intervening in 1914 with a landing in Veracruz that helped bring a new leader, Venustiano Carranza, to power. As Carranza fell out of favour with the Americans, his supporters hatched the Plan of San Diego, which called for a series of raids into US border towns to kill all the Anglo-Americans living there and incite an uprising among the remaining Mexican-Americans and blacks.⁴¹ A Mexican invasion was to follow to establish Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado and California as independent republics that could opt to join Mexico. The plan fell apart when the US government got wind of it. An increased troop presence along the border dealt effectively with the few guerrilla raids attempted in 1915. On 9 March 1916, however, the anti-Carranza Mexican revolutionary, General Francisco 'Pancho' Villa, attacked Columbus, New Mexico with a force of 500, killing eighteen Americans. Villa intended to provoke the United States into invading Mexico, hoping to weaken Carranza's constitutional government by exposing its inability to prevent a US violation of Mexican national sovereignty. German operatives in Mexico helped finance these rebel activities, expecting a border war to distract the United States from the European conflict.

As Villa (and Germany) anticipated, Wilson answered this first attack on American soil since the War of 1812 by sending a 14,000-man expeditionary force into Mexico without Carranza's permission or approval. Another 140,000 National Guardsmen (state-controlled militias mobilised into active federal service) and regular army troops patrolled the border.⁴² 'The deeper the expedition penetrated, the more Mexicans suspected that the dreaded *Yanquis* were bent on conquest', John Milton Cooper, Jr. notes. These suspicions led to a series of clashes between US troops and governmental forces, including a firefight in Carrizal on 21 June 1916.⁴³ In the wake of this clash Wilson prepared a request for congressional authority to occupy northern Mexico, which he subsequently abandoned upon learning that American soldiers had fired first. This was the closest the two countries had come to war since the Mexican-American War of 1846–8.

In contrast to American reluctance to enter the European war, Wilson faced strong pressure from some cabinet officials and Congress to go to war with

Mexico in 1916. Realising that formal hostilities would lead to a lengthy war, Wilson and Carranza agreed instead to appoint a mediation commission that paved the way for the withdrawal of US troops on 5 February 1917. In 1916, Wilson ran for re-election with the campaign slogan, 'He kept us out of war.' Most historians equate the phrase with Wilson's handling of the *Lusitania* crisis, but Democrats campaigning for Wilson gave equal weight to Mexico during their stump speeches.⁴⁴ Wilson offered many reasons for wanting to avoid a border war, including suspicions that those pushing for armed intervention really wanted improved access to Mexican oil, which British and American business interests had long vied to control. Wilson also knew that having half a million troops bogged down in Mexico would severely hamper the creation of an American expeditionary force if the United States went to war with Germany. 'Germany is anxious to have us at war with Mexico, so that our minds and our energies will be taken off the great war across the sea', Wilson told his personal secretary.⁴⁵

The Mexican punitive expedition failed in its stated goal of capturing Villa, but 'its real purpose was a display of the power of the United States', Secretary of War Newton Baker asserted.⁴⁶ The US military, under-strength and under-equipped in comparison to the European armies fighting along the Western Front, gained important experience fighting its first sustained campaign since the 1898 Spanish-American War. The invasion's commander, Brigadier General John J. Pershing, would go on to lead the wartime army, carrying the lessons learned from Mexico to France. The incursion gave the army its first test mobilising National Guard troops and readying them for combat, along with practice mounting the surveillance and logistics needed to maintain an army on the move. None of this went particularly well or smoothly in Mexico, a harbinger of the challenges ahead. These problems helped preparedness advocates win some funding to enlarge, reorganise and modernise the nation's military in the days leading up to America's entry into the First World War. Those determined to avoid any involvement in the European war had steadfastly opposed preparedness as one step removed from intervention. The armed clash with Mexico, however, allowed the preparedness faction to argue that the nation needed a stronger military to protect its borders.⁴⁷

41 James A. Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904–1923* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

42 War Department, *Annual Reports 1916*, 3 vols. (US Government Printing Office, 1916), vol. 1, pp. 13, 23, 189–91.

43 Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson*, p. 320.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 322.

45 N. G. Levin, *Woodrow Wilson and World Politics: America's Response to War and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 311.

46 War Department, *Annual Reports, 1917*, 3 vols. (US Government Printing Office, 1917), vol. 1, p. 10.

47 Russell Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), p. 348.

The National Defense Act of 1916 increased the size of the peacetime army and federal supervision of state troops, and laid the groundwork for federal mobilisation of the economy – measures designed with the European war in mind. Visions of men going into battle without enough machine guns or flying airplanes that routinely crashed (as in Mexico), prompted Congress to appropriate more money for both.

Viewing the Zimmermann Telegram within the context of Mexican rebel border raids, the San Diego plan and armed clashes between US and Mexican troops, helps illuminate Germany's decision to send the telegram, and the subsequent US outrage. The Zimmermann Telegram proposed that Mexico ally with Germany to recoup territory lost in the mid nineteenth century, if Germany and the United States went to war. 'Mexico's hatred for America is well-founded and old', German Foreign Minister, Arthur Zimmermann, assured his German colleagues, citing the American military's recent poor performance chasing Villa to predict a long, drawn-out war between Mexico and the United States that would keep American troops tied down in North America.⁴⁸ Zimmermann's enthusiastic endorsement of this proposed German-Mexican alliance represented a complete change of heart. Only a year earlier he had rejected Mexico's offer to house German U-boat bases to avoid a rupture in US-German relations. In January 1917, however, Zimmermann believed that the German decision to resume unconditional submarine warfare would be likely to bring the United States into the war. By sending the secret telegram, Zimmermann inadvertently played a major role in ensuring American belligerency once the British intercepted, decoded and then passed the telegram on to the American government. The telegram's publication in March 1917 unified a previously divided American public in favour of war with Germany. 'The note had its greatest impact in precisely those areas of the United States where isolationism and thus opposition to U.S. involvement in the war were particularly strong: the Southwest', writes Friedrich Katz; border states where the recent troubles with Mexico loomed the largest.⁴⁹

The aftershocks of the Zimmermann Telegram went beyond prompting US entry into the war. Within North America the note threatened further damage to US-Mexican relations, as Carranza hedged on his response. Publicly denying that he had ever received the telegram, Carranza privately contemplated the likelihood of another American invasion, what kind of

48 Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States and the Mexican Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 351.
49 *Ibid.*, p. 361.

military aid Germany could reasonably give and his advisers' assessment that the proposal was unworkable. On 14 April 1917, eight days after the United States declared war on Germany, Carranza told the German ambassador to Mexico that he intended to remain neutral.

As Wilson wanted, Mexico adopted a new constitution in 1917 that allowed for universal suffrage and land reform. But Carranza also moved to reassert national control over Mexican natural resources, especially oil and minerals. His government imposed higher taxes, required landowners to get official approval before selling land to foreigners and added a constitution clause that conferred ownership of all underground resources to the nation rather than the landowner. These measures had little immediate effect. The Mexican government made no effort to enforce this constitutional clause, and foreign warships ensured that oil fields along the Gulf coast continued to produce record amounts of oil for the Allied war effort. Reports that the Americans were seriously considering a limited occupation of Mexican oil fields, the ban on American loans to Mexico and a US embargo on arms, food and gold, however, prompted Carranza to continue ongoing, if fruitless, conversations with German officials for the rest of the war about a possible alliance. In the spring of 1919, the possibility of war between the United States and Mexico loomed once again. American oil interests and some members of Wilson's administration began plotting a coup with Carranza's opponents, all the while pressuring Wilson to break diplomatic relations. Coinciding with the incapacitating stroke that rendered Wilson bed-ridden for months, these plans went nowhere. The drumbeat of criticism in the press and Congress nonetheless strained relations with Carranza until his eventual overthrow by the military in the spring of 1920.⁵⁰

The North American origins of Wilsonianism

The United States had long seen the Monroe Doctrine (an 1823 pronouncement by President James Monroe that the Western Hemisphere was off-limits to future colonisation by other world powers) as a commitment to guarantee the sovereignty of newly independent nations throughout the Western Hemisphere. Wilson's predecessors had already enlarged the scope of the Monroe Doctrine to include the 1904 Roosevelt Corollary (which justified US regional policing to prevent 'wrongdoing') and strengthen the US regional economic presence through dollar diplomacy. Wilson now attempted to apply

50 Mark T. Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions: Woodrow Wilson in the Western Hemisphere, 1913-1921* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1986), pp. 147-9, 152-3.

the principles of the Monroe Doctrine globally. The wording of Wilson's famous 'Peace without Victory' speech of 1917, which proposed a negotiated settlement to the world war, explicitly presented the American experience in the Western Hemisphere as a model for future international relations. 'I am proposing . . .', Wilson stated, 'that the nations should with one accord adopt the doctrine of President Monroe as the doctrine of the world: that no nation should seek to extend its polity over any other nation or people, but that every people should be left free to determine its own polity, its own way of development, unhindered, unthreatened, unafraid, the little along with the powerful.'

Wilson's willingness to intervene militarily to make Mexico and the Caribbean 'safe for democracy' served as a 'rehearsal for preparing the nation for the grand task of global reconstruction' that Wilson would attempt once the United States entered the world war, Akira Iriye argues.⁵¹ Many of the ideals that Wilson would go on to trumpet through his 1918 Fourteen Points address and at the Versailles peace negotiations, he initially proposed to improve US relations with its southern neighbour. Hoping to teach Mexicans 'to elect good men', Wilson floated a proposal for a Pan-American Pact that would allow the United States to work in concert with Argentina, Chile and Brazil to promote democracy, settle disputes and guarantee borders within the Western Hemisphere. 'Although nothing came of the Pan-American pact, its provisions contained language and ideas that Wilson would use in the Covenant of the League of Nations', Cooper notes.⁵² The limits that Wilson imposed on regional interventions and his attempt to devise a method of collective security to handle disputes within the Western Hemisphere revealed that, 'in the Wilsonian way of war, the limits of force were equal in importance to the power of force', asserts Frederick S. Calhoun.⁵³

Wilson ultimately failed to convince isolationists within the United States (who clung to the Monroe Doctrine as a way to limit US involvement in world affairs) that the time had come for active participation in the League of Nations. His opponents argued that joining the League of Nations would threaten US regional dominance and embroil the nation in 'entangling alliances' that would lead to involvement in future European wars. The desire to

define its own foreign policy unilaterally and to continue relying on North America's physical distance from Europe to maintain diplomatic and political independence, ultimately prevailed over Wilson's suggestion that the United States take on more formal responsibility as the world's guardian of democracy and humanity. Participation in the world war thus only reaffirmed America's view of itself as a North American nation.

Conclusion

The war noticeably amplified American influence within the Western Hemisphere and the increased integration of North American economies and politics. The trend towards regional integration under the leadership of the United States did not go unchallenged. In 1919, Mexican President Carranza vocally disputed Wilson's claim that the Monroe Doctrine benefited nations seeking to determine their own futures. Instead, he assailed the policy as extending the imperial reach of the United States within the Western Hemisphere by imposing 'upon independent nations a protectorate status which they do not ask for and which they do not require'.⁵⁴ Carranza instead proposed pan-Hispanic cooperation to curb US hegemony in the region, foreshadowing future ideological disputes over whether America was a 'good neighbour' or 'imperialist' in the Western Hemisphere. Carranza unsuccessfully urged smaller and weaker Central American nations to join together to prevent the United States from intervening unilaterally in their domestic affairs. He had better luck fostering a strong sense of Mexican nationalism built upon a legacy of wartime tension with the United States.

Canada's embrace of imperial nationhood revealed its commitment to evolve as a nation within, rather than in opposition to, the British Empire. The centrality of the memory of the First World War within Canada helped reinforce its sense of solidarity with other Dominions whose national identities became inextricably linked to their battlefield experiences. No sense of shared wartime sacrifice bound the United States and Canada together in the post-war period. Instead, the memory of the war took quite different trajectories on each side of the border. The decentralised way in which American communities commemorated the war prevented any unifying collective memory of the war from taking root. The absence of a national monument to the war in Washington, DC, stands in notable contrast to the dominating presence of the Peace Tower and

⁵¹ Akira Iriye, *The Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations*, vol. III: *The Globalizing of America, 1913–1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 37–8.

⁵² Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson*, p. 246.

⁵³ Frederick S. Calhoun, *Power and Principle: Armed Intervention in Wilsonian Foreign Policy* (Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), p. 251.

⁵⁴ Gilderhus, *Pan American Visions*, p. 146.

the National War Memorial in Ottawa. These sites of memory strengthened Canada's cultural identification with the British Empire, a relationship which bestowed economic benefits as well. The 1932 Ottawa Conference, for instance, established a five-year privileged trading relationship among Britain and its Dominions at the height of the Great Depression (much to America's irritation).

Overall, however, the war accelerated the coordination of the American and Canadian diplomatic goals and domestic policies, strengthening bilateral relations between the two nations. To the south, the war unsettled US–Mexican relations, ultimately prompting the United States to use force to assert its economic, political and military dominance. Whether the process was rocky as in the case of US–Mexican relations or relatively smooth as between the United States and Canada, the economic and political integration of North America was one of the key global legacies of the First World War.