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THE AMERICAN IMPRINT ON ALBERTA POLITICS

NELSON WISEMAN

Characteristics assigned to America's classical liberal ideology—rugged individualism, market capitalism, egalitarianism in the sense of equality of opportunity, and fierce hostility toward centralized federalism and socialism—are particularly appropriate for fathoming Alberta's political culture. In this article, I contend that Alberta's early American settlers were pivotal in shaping Alberta's political culture and that Albertans have demonstrated a particular affinity for American political ideas and movements. Alberta came to resemble

Key words: political culture, ideology, immigration, populism, religion

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the liberal society in Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*: high status was accorded the self-made man, laissez-faire defined the economic order, and a multiplicity of religious sects competed in the market for salvation.¹ Secondary sources hint at this thesis in their reading of the papers of organizations such as the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) and Alberta's Social Credit Party.² This article teases out its hypothesis from such secondary sources and covers new ground in linking the influence of Americans to Alberta's exceptionalism in Canadian politics, the province where federal and provincial conservative parties have been strongest and where resistance to federal intrusions has been the most vigorous in English Canada. Alberta has been Canada's "maverick" province, more receptive to neoliberalism (or what many term neoconservatism) than the Canadian norm.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: IDEOLOGICAL FRAGMENTATION AND FORMATIVE EVENTS

In Louis Hartz's scheme, the ideological path of a new society is determined at the point of its departure from the mother society.³ From

this perspective, the new society reflects only one slice of the older society's total ideological spectrum. America's liberal Puritan founders, for example, split off from the totality of Britain's broader ideological spectrum, escaped its Old World toryism and its later socialism. The dialectical dance between Old World classical conservatism and upstart revolutionary liberalism eventually produced socialist visions in Europe that were not replicated in the United States because its founding and reigning ideology, liberalism, congealed at America's point of departure from Europe. Lockean liberalism became a national cult—the civil religion—of the United States. In this ken, the collectivism of both toryism and socialism contrasts liberalism's primacy of place for the individual and market competition. English Canada's founders, the Loyalists, were essentially American liberals but were infected with a "tory touch," and embedded in their toryism was the seed for socialism to emerge in Canada later.⁴

This article applies Hartz's theory of ideological fragmentation at the provincial level, to Alberta. It makes no connection, however, between toryism and socialism in Alberta except insofar as the toryism of the larger English Canadian political culture inevitably influenced Alberta. Highlighted are Alberta's Americans as founding settlers and their influential ideas. The argument here also draws on Seymour Lipset's idea that a formative event shapes a new society's political culture and applies the idea at the provincial level. For Lipset, the formative event for both the United States and Canada was the American Revolution as it led directly to the creation of Upper Canada (now Ontario) by America's outcast tories.⁵ The Revolution had no relevance, however, to Alberta's settlement, which came more than a century later. The contention here is that Alberta's political culture congealed in conjunction with the province's formative event at the turn of the twentieth century—the disappearance of good, cheap agricultural land in the United States and the emergence of Alberta and western Saskatchewan as North America's "Last Best West."

In Alberta, liberalism has been hegemonic, its cultural face more American than British. Tory and socialist touches have been more marginal in Alberta's political culture than in English Canadian political culture as a whole. Evidence on the federal partisan level in the 1990s was the undoing of the older federal Progressive Conservative Party, identified by its tory touches, by the Alberta-based neo-liberal Reform Party. At the provincial level, Alberta is notable as the only province west of Quebec where the social democratic NDP (New Democratic Party) has not formed a government.

To be sure, Alberta has not been wholly bereft of tory and socialist tinges in its political culture. As with the rest of English Canada, Alberta represents an ideologically impure liberal fragment. Toryism and socialism in small measure have inevitably leaked into the provincial political culture through Alberta's early connection with British institutions and its continuing cultural ties to the rest of Canada. Toryism in Alberta, however, has always been much weaker than in eastern Canada, and its socialism has been less robust than elsewhere in western Canada.⁶ The first prime minister based in Alberta, R. B. Bennett, had something tory and un-American in his outlook. He became prime minister, however, despite Alberta; his Conservatives captured only a third of the province's votes and only four of its sixteen seats in the 1930 election in which half the national electorate voted Conservative and anti-Americanism was an issue. Loyalist toryism had little purchase in Alberta. Nevertheless, viewed from an American perspective and in comparison to states south of it such as Montana, Idaho, and Utah, the provincial political culture evinces some nonliberal elements.

Connections to the rest of Canada have meant that socialism has also had some presence in Alberta politics. Socialism did not completely fade out in Alberta as it did in the United States, where it appeared as a largely foreign blip at the turn of the twentieth century and soon vanished. British, particularly

Scottish, socialists helped turn Calgary into an early hotbed for labor radicalism; the city served as the birthplace of both the syndicalist One Big Union and the NDP's predecessor, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). Like toryism, however, the socialist touch in Alberta's political culture has always been relatively weak, and socialist fortunes in the province pale in comparison to those in the neighboring provinces.

Some surveys of popular values indicate that Albertans' attitudes on many issues are similar to those of other English Canadians, but many other surveys point to Alberta as an outlier. Certainly, the political behavior of Albertans and their governments has been notably dissimilar in a comparative provincial context. They have often adopted more extreme postures and policy positions at odds with most provinces—on provincial rights, language rights, multiculturalism, medicare, gun control, capital punishment, same-sex marriage, and the environment.⁷ Many of these positions have been more in harmony with neoliberal preferences common in the United States.

ALBERTA'S CHARTER AMERICANS

In the first decade of the twentieth century, when Canada's population grew by 34 percent, Alberta's population grew by a phenomenal 413 percent. The province expanded from 1 to 5 percent of the national population and in several of those years, Americans outnumbered British emigrants to Canada and to Alberta in particular.⁸ Alberta in 1911 was the only province in which the Canadian-born were a minority. Trains from Minnesota brought hundreds of settlers nightly to Regina and from there they connected to the Canadian Pacific Rail line to Alberta. Some American capitalists came to buy land; others came as horse thieves, cattle rustlers, and whiskey smugglers.⁹ They hailed largely from the rural Midwest and Great Plains states and settled overwhelmingly in southern rural Alberta. This region, over-represented in the legislature, drove provincial politics. In contrast, Canada's British immi-

grants were generally urban born and bred and more inclined to support labor-socialist causes as they had in Britain. They headed to politically underrepresented cities such as Calgary, and this lessened their influence in shaping provincial politics.

Manitoba in the 1880s, according to W. L. Morton, represented "the triumph of Ontario democracy," and the 1890s made it "a British and Canadian province" as more Britons arrived.¹⁰ Parallel descriptions of Alberta in the twentieth century's first and second decades could be "the triumph of populist democracy" and "an American and Canadian province." Unlike Manitoba and Saskatchewan where Ontarian settlers were first on the scene after Confederation, the various national groups constituting Alberta's pioneers arrived almost simultaneously. Unlike English Canadian political culture as a whole, which developed over much time and from a variety of sources, Alberta's particular political culture congealed in its formative years and coincided with the American influx.

American homesteaders and their political ideas enjoyed high status in these foundational years, and Canadian authorities specifically sought out Americans for Alberta because of their expertise in ranching and dry farming techniques. Americans constituted a charter immigrant group in Alberta, and while other groups—Ontarians, Britons, and continental Europeans—contributed to molding provincial politics, Americans and their ideas proved exceptionally influential. Most of Alberta's Americans were of British ethnic origins, which reinforced their standing as preferred immigrants. European Americans had lower social status than the ethnically British Americans, but both groups enjoyed higher status than the continental Europeans who arrived directly from the Old World. Saskatchewan, which had the country's greatest concentration of continental Europeans, also had fewer Americans, and fewer immigrants in Saskatchewan had English as a mother tongue than in Alberta.¹¹ The Americans were also quite unlike the British-born labor-socialists who gravitated

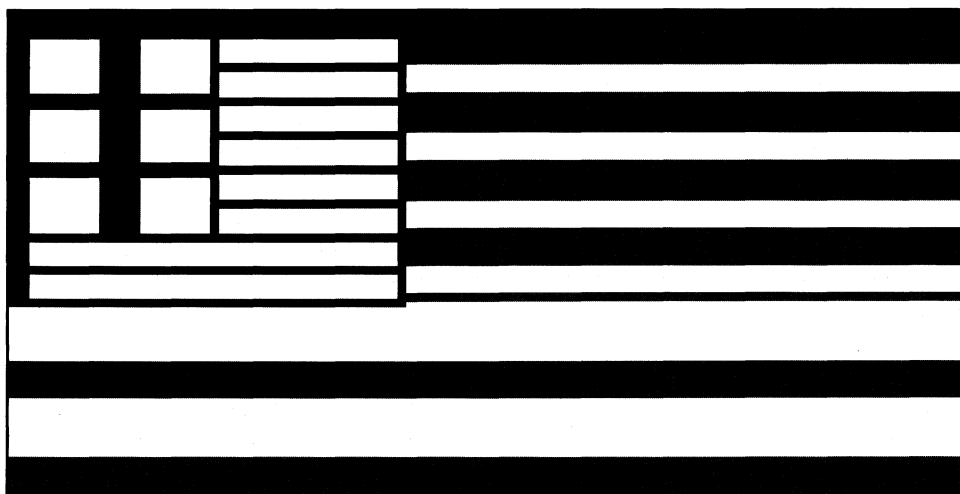


FIG. 1. *The resemblance of the red, white, and blue Lethbridge municipal flag (reproduced in grayscale) to the similarly colored Stars and Stripes symbolizes the American imprint on that city.*

to Calgary and Alberta's mining camps. The contrast between the industrial orientation of the Britons and the agrarian orientation of the Americans was evident among coal miners: only 1 percent of them in the region adjacent to the U.S. border were Americans while 34 percent were British.¹²

The largest group of those of "British" ethnic origins in southern Alberta were Americans. This is significant because, since the First World War, southern Alberta has determined the dominant ideological coloration of Alberta politics. Americans outnumbered Britons in all fifteen of the province's rural census divisions, and half of southern Alberta's farmers were Americans.¹³ Government officials shunted continental European-born farmers into the more northerly districts. Slavs and Germans alone outnumbered the "British" (by "racial" or ethnic, not national, origin) by a ratio of nearly 2-1 in Alberta's northern Victoria district.¹⁴ Ethnic clustering was also apparent at the level of individual towns: those of "British races" made up 77 percent of Medicine Hat (whose environs contained many Americans) while "European races" accounted for 53 percent of those in northerly Vegreville.¹⁵

In 1911, when Americans accounted for only 3 percent of Canada's population, they

constituted 22 percent of Albertans, and Americans comprised 30 percent of Alberta's immigrants between 1900 and 1920. This led an Alberta MP to declare in Parliament that his province "might be regarded as a typical American state."¹⁶ The red, white, and blue municipal flag of Lethbridge palpably symbolizes the American imprint on that city; resembling the Stars and Stripes, it dates to a fort established there by Montanans (see Fig. 1). An example of a quintessentially rural American institution that penetrated Calgary was the rodeo. Its symbol, the cowboy, was an American invention, the product of a western frontier experience quite different from the Canadian experience associated with the law-enforcing Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Calgary became known as "cowtown," home of the Calgary Stampede, "the world's most extravagant celebration of the cowboy" (See Fig. 2).¹⁷ Cowboys and rodeos embedded themselves in Alberta's public iconography, and cowboy hats and boots still serve as staples in the wardrobes of Alberta's politicians.

Alberta's first government, the Liberals, was not elected but appointed by Ottawa and was an offshoot of Ontario's Liberal Party. Initially, Americans such as Henry Wise Wood, the future leader of the UFA, supported

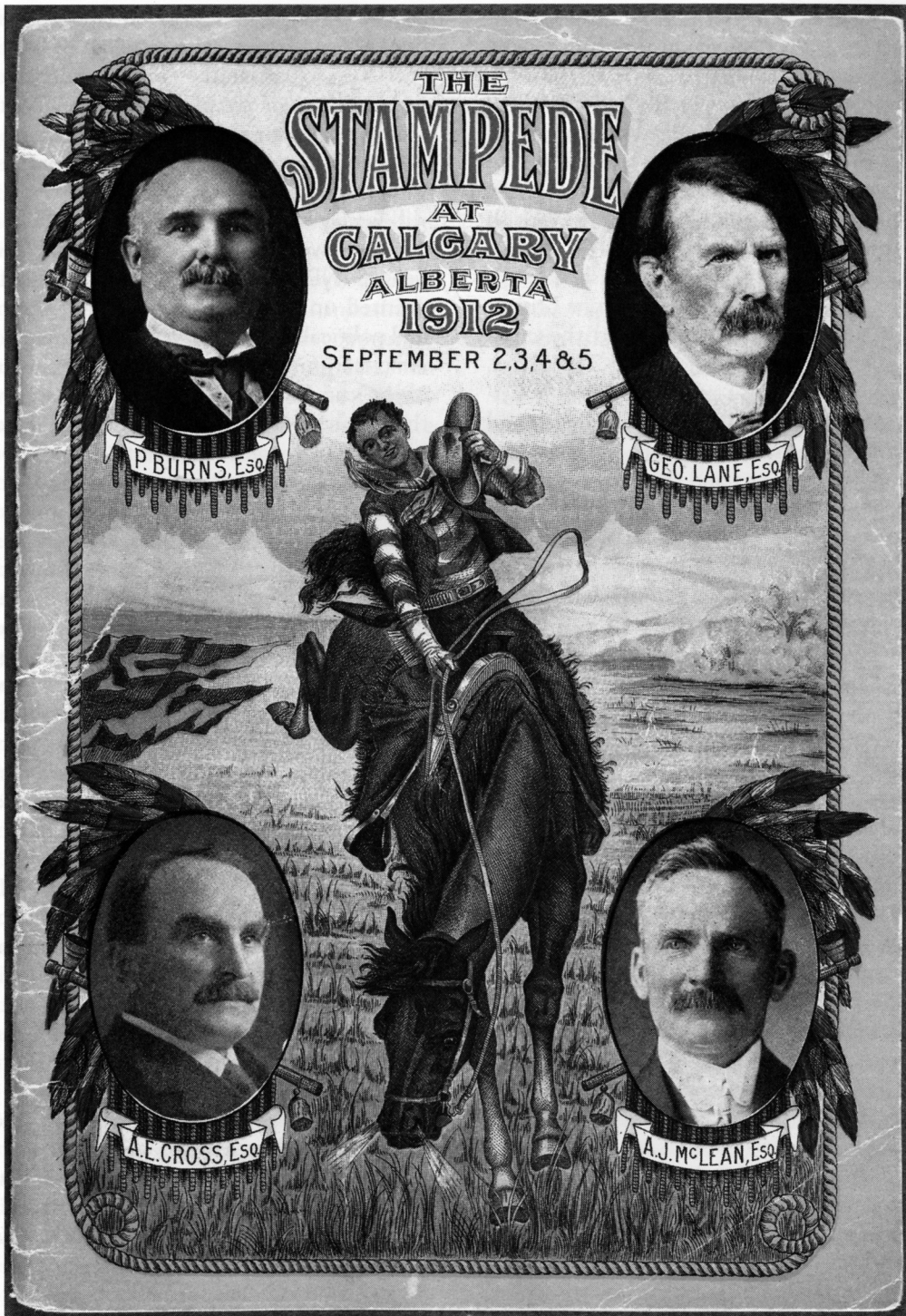


FIG. 2. The program from the 1912 Calgary Stampede exemplifies the influence of the culture of the American West on Alberta's public iconography. Glenbow Archives, NA-604-1.

the Liberals as well. His opposition to launching a third party secured the province for the Liberals until 1921. Britons such as Calgary's labor-socialist MP William Irvine were briefly forces in the city but were always marginal players in the countryside. In contrast to the Marxism of German immigrants that informed urban socialism in the United States, British Fabianism prevailed in Alberta's socialist circles as it did in the rest of English Canada. Calgary's Scottish flavor came from its British-born residents who outnumbered the city's American-born by a 4-1 ratio.¹⁸ The cities, however, counted for relatively little politically: as late as the late 1950s, Calgary and Edmonton together had only ten of the legislature's fifty-seven seats and the British socialist touch in the provincial political culture grew fainter with time.

The *Calgary Herald* described the UFA as "the bosses" of provincial politics long before their election to provincial office in 1921. The organization reflected an American sway: eight of its nineteen executive members were American born, outnumbering the British- or Canadian-born members. American lawyer Aaron Sapiro was pivotal in the formation of the Alberta Wheat Pool, which Wood, the UFA leader from 1916 to 1931, chaired from 1923 to 1937. President of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, Wood had arrived in Alberta as a forty-five-year-old veteran Missouri populist who had participated in the formation of both the Farmers' Alliance and the Populist Party in the United States. Dubbed the "uncrowned king of Alberta" by his biographer, no American has been as prominent in the politics of any other province and no proposed reform in UFA-governed Alberta gained adoption without his sanction.¹⁹

As a political thinker, Wood "can be explained only by reference to his American background," a person "who had toiled and died within the simple and narrow limits of an unreflecting individualism and of Jacksonian democracy." A survey showing American parallels to western Canada's agrarian revolt branded him a "Jeffersonian liberal." Wood

sought to offset the power of industrialists, bankers, and professionals, but he was no socialist. A free-market liberal, he believed in typically American populist fashion that society's problems reflected a malaise in the competitive process, not in capitalism itself: "When we learn to trade right," he opined, "we will largely have learned to live right."²⁰

The easy entry of the populist Non-Partisan League (NPL) into provincial politics in 1916 pointed up the link between demographic and political impact, between Alberta and the American Great Plains. The NPL's muscularity on the Canadian prairies correlated with the numbers of Americans, not with proximity; it was strongest in Alberta and, although Manitoba is geographically adjacent to North Dakota where the NPL governed, it was weakest in that province as Americans constituted only 3 percent of its population. American-anchored southern Alberta returned both successful NPL candidates in the 1917 provincial election, and a telling comment on the power of American models was that the protagonists on both sides of the debate over whether Alberta's farmers ought to enter the political arena used American experiences to buttress their case. One side pointed to the sad end of the People's Party, the other to the NPL's North Dakotan success.

As members of the Grange and the NPL in the United States, many of Alberta's Americans had fought the grain and railroad companies. Some had worked in William Jennings Bryan's presidential campaign of 1896.²¹ What there was of socialist influence in the United States peaked in the new century's first two decades and some collectivist ideas did appear in the NPL's program. They contributed to the creation of the Alberta and Saskatchewan wheat pools and the federal UFA's initial affiliation with the CCF, but the move was unpopular with the UFA membership and Wood refused to endorse it. As socialism went mute in the United States, it faded in Alberta but did not disappear altogether. A revealing bizarre example of the American presence throughout the century was that of a Dakotan who had arrived

in Alberta in a horse-drawn wagon in 1910 and lived to participate in the 1980s in a meeting of the separatist Western Canada Concept Party, which elected a Mormon cowboy and Utah college graduate to the legislature.²²

After the American influx at the turn of the twentieth century, the proportion of Americans among Alberta's immigrants declined steadily. However, their influence and ideas continued to exceed their numbers. They were prominent, for example, in the provincial oil industry: a geologist from a Danish American community discovered the province's largest oil field, and between 1955 and 1970, nine of the Calgary Petroleum Club's fifteen presidents were Americans.²³ American investment in Canada in the 1950s was greatest in Alberta's energy sector, by the early 1960s over 60 percent of the province's oil and gas industries were under American control, and by 1976 American ownership reached 76 percent in the total mining sector.²⁴ Logically, the first direct flights between Canada and America's oil capital, Houston, originated in Calgary. A chronicle of Canada's business establishment in the 1970s noted that in Alberta, "nearly all of the largest companies are headed by Canadian managers of American subsidiaries most of whom receive their daily marching orders via computer print-outs that arrive from Tulsa, Dallas, Phoenix, or New York," and "like their counterparts in the United States, they often held strong right-wing views."²⁵

In the contemporary Conservative parties in Alberta and Ottawa, two Americans have been conspicuous: Tom Flanagan and Ted Morton. Raised in a Republican household, Flanagan directed the new Conservative Party's campaign in the 2004 federal election. He and Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper were among the six intellectuals who had earlier authored a "firewall" letter calling on Alberta's government to insulate itself from federal intrusions.²⁶ Morton, elected as a senator-in-waiting and then to the provincial legislature, contested the provincial Conservative leadership and the premiership in 2007 and became the finance minister. A telling link

to the past was that he performed best in his leadership quest in the same southern districts where the initial American demographic imprint had been strongest.²⁷

Nevertheless, the broader Canadian political culture has swayed Alberta; were it the fifty-first state, even Alberta's American-anchored southern districts would likely vote predominantly for Democrats.²⁸ An example of the Canadian experience influencing Americans like Flanagan is that he cited Edmund Burke, the British theorist whose tory ideas helped to shape Canada, to urge Harper to pursue "moderation," "inclusion," and "incrementalism" as the path to winning over a majority of Canadians to the Conservative Party.²⁹

IDEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL AFFINITY

Americans played a foundational role as Alberta's political culture developed. This accounts for the ideological affinities of Alberta and America's Great Plains politics. Radical populist and liberal-individualist ideas originating in the United States gained wide currency in Alberta's last decade as a territory and first two decades as a province. Albertans, among English Canadians, have been the most receptive, in both their province's formative and later years, to embracing American outlooks. Striking, for example, was the Alberta Conservative Party's endorsement of free trade with the United States in the 1911 federal election, unlike the federal Conservative and sister provincial Conservative parties.³⁰

An early sign of ideological commonality between Alberta's farmers and those in the United States was the UFA motto, "Equity," sported by the American Society of Equity out of which the UFA sprang. The motto starkly contrasted that of the Saskatchewan's Farmers Union of Canada, "Farmers and Workers of the World Unite." One Saskatchewan Farmers Union local in a Ukrainian district recommended affiliation with the Moscow-based Peasant International.³¹ John Irving observed that the social democratic CCF, elected in neighboring Saskatchewan in the

1940s, was anathema to Alberta's farmers for it represented a repudiation of their "rugged individualism," not a term associated with Saskatchewan agrarianism, which Lipset labeled *agrarian socialism*.³²

Alberta populism, like American populism, attracted some socialists but it rejected socialist ideology, and the 1920s wheat pools debate reflected that rejection: Saskatchewan's farmers agitated for a compulsory pool while Alberta's farmers insisted on a voluntary pool driven by free-market principles. Wood deemed a compulsory pool as "a denial for freedom and an attempt to do by compulsion what could be achieved by co-operation."³³ Market-oriented Americans like Wood led Alberta's farmers while the two most permanent officials in the Saskatchewan farmers' movement had been members of England's Independent Labor Party and the Socialist Party of the United States. Three of Saskatchewan's four Americans elected as CCFers in the 1940s had voted for Eugene Debs for president, one as a member of the syndicalist International Workers of the World.³⁴

Alberta's Americans, nurtured on inflationary monetary theories in the United States where the Free Silver and Greenback movements had taken hold in the late nineteenth century, insisted that UFA conventions devote more time to the topic than any other issue. In contrast, other Canadian farm organizations rarely entertained it. UFA Americans such as J. W. Leedy, a former Populist governor of Kansas, and George Bevington, a widely acknowledged monetary expert, were preoccupied as they had been in the United States with land control, transportation issues, and especially money supply.³⁵ The UFA preached, as did the NPL, monetary reform, direct legislation (initiative, referendum, and recall), the single tax, proportional representation, and abolition of Canada's unelected Senate. Many American socialists supported these ideas, but there is little about them that is socialist. The UFA government gave some voice to them, and in later years, provincial Social Credit and Conservative governments echoed some of the ideas as well.

The UFA's emphasis on monetary reform rendered its followers susceptible to conflating those ideas with those of the British-based Social Credit movement. Social Credit in Alberta inherited both the UFA's political base and some of its American-inspired ideas, such as inflating the money supply and the right to recall elected legislators. The transition from a UFA regime to a Social Credit regime in 1935 demonstrated the links between their shared social bases of support and American settlement patterns. Social Credit triumphed resoundingly in southern Alberta (south of Red Deer), capturing over 60 percent of the vote there and it scored easy victories in towns like Cardston and Medicine Hat where the UFA had held sway and where the American imprint was most prominent. In contrast, Social Credit won less than half of northern Alberta's votes and it trailed the Liberals in Edmonton.³⁶ Social Credit initially received support from many radicals, progressives, and socialists disillusioned with the UFA government, but they soon disowned the Social Credit movement.³⁷

Social Credit transformed Alberta's radical populism gradually to become an unabashed standard-bearer for conventional capitalism. It repealed the recall bill it had enacted—then unique in the British Commonwealth—once a move was afoot to recall its premier, William Aberhart.³⁸ UFA premiers Herbert Greenfield, John Brownlee, and Richard Reid had been critical of Aberhart and Social Credit, but Wood had looked benignly upon them: "Aberhardt [sic] won't do no harm."³⁹ A somewhat similar transition occurred when Peter Lougheed's technocratic, modernizing Conservatives captured Social Credit's ideological and popular bases of support in 1971. The shift was consistent with a call by Ernest Manning, Aberhart's successor as premier, for a political realignment with Conservatives and Social Crediters uniting as a broad rightist party to fight the leftist forces of the Liberals and NDP.⁴⁰

The Aberhart government painted the federal government as an oppressive, illegitimate force. It voiced an American republican view of

democracy when it refused to appear before the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations and addressed its brief to “the sovereign people of Canada.” It challenged the legitimacy of Westminster-style parliamentary government as a form of “limited state dictatorship” and proposed “to restore sovereign authority to the people.”⁴¹ A Nebraska-born Social Credit member of the legislative assembly criticized his government for drawing more attention to the 1937 coronation festivities than to Social Credit.⁴² Some Albertans characterized Aberhart as their Abraham Lincoln, oddly, since Lincoln was a federal centralizer.

Where Social Credit and the UFA differed was in their views of leadership and Christianity. Wood had theorized in favor of “group government,” a radical notion of occupational representation in government. He took the idea from a Texan NPL pamphlet and American Mary Follett’s *The New State: Group Organization, the Solution of Popular Government*. Wood had adopted the idea as a tactic designed to facilitate the UFA’s absorption of the NPL. The idea, however, subsequently received summary treatment as the Americans in the UFA accommodated themselves to the parliamentary system. The populist UFA had incorporated a form of grassroots participatory democracy, but Aberhart personally selected Social Credit’s candidates and posited an elitist concept of popular authority: “You don’t have to understand Social Credit to vote for it.” Governing and policy formulation, in his cosmology, were technocratic issues best left to experts; the masses were to approve or disapprove, with elections being essentially plebiscites.⁴³

Albertans, more than other Canadians, perceived a commonality of American and Canadian interests. A survey of Albertan teachers in the 1930s revealed that they expressed “universal” admiration “for the ‘energy, optimism, and efficiency’ of the typical American.” Many described “Great Britain as the mother country and the United States and Canada as offspring . . . so that it is possible to regard the American nation not as a foreign but a kindred

folk.” These views contrasted with the aloofness of Atlantic Canadian teachers vis-à-vis the United States. Their “almost unanimous view” was a “vigorous insistence that there is no good reason why Canadian pupils in schools should have their attention called to events in the United States any more, for example, than to French or German development.”⁴⁴ For Aberhart, the British Commonwealth and the United States were joint forces of the good, acting as “servants of the Lord.”

RELIGION

Religion served as a filament binding Alberta and the United States. Americans brought with them over two dozen evangelical sects, including the Disciples of Christ to which Wood belonged. Theological fundamentalists constituted a “quite exceptional” 20 percent of Alberta’s Protestants, and Americans accounted for “a steady invasion of unorthodox social and religious leaders and associations,” establishing several Bible colleges, some of which still operate.⁴⁵ Most evangelicals were suspicious of “big government,” and the popular weekly fundamentalist “Back to the Bible Hour” radio broadcasts by Aberhart and Manning contributed to shaping aspects of the provincial political culture that amplified American influences. Alberta’s religious milieu proved receptive to Aberhart’s assertion that “the principles of the old line politicians and their henchmen are like those of the men who betrayed the Christ.”⁴⁶

As in the United States, the evangelical gospel—wanting salvation for man and appealing to faith and emotion—took hold in Alberta. It overwhelmed the social gospel, wanting to help man and appealing to reason. Social gospelers left the established church because it was otherworldly; Aberhart and Manning left it because it was too worldly. The evangelicals stressed liturgical formalism, individual salvation, and sermonized about divine retribution while the social gospelers deprecated theological perplexities and preached social justice.⁴⁷ Application of the social gospel in Canada

was essentially British and its followers looked to the British Labour Church; application of evangelical Christianity in Alberta owed everything to American fundamentalist sects. When Social Credit came along, wrapped in eschatological garb by Aberhart looking to a divinely ordained future, most Albertans embraced it. Some hailed Aberhart as “our savior” at Social Credit meetings, which often ended with special prayers for him.⁴⁸

The Latter-day Saints, or Mormon Church, was a notable religious sect in Alberta, and Social Credit was particularly popular in Mormon districts. In the United States, the Mormon Trail ran westward from Illinois across Iowa, Nebraska, and Wyoming to its Utah terminus. Canada’s Mormon Trail ran northward from Utah, through Idaho and Montana, and into in southern Alberta. South of the border, institutional persecution had driven Mormons westward and contributed to their distrust of government, especially federal authority. The prospect of pastures greener than those of Utah and the enticements of the Canadian government, rather than persecution, motivated Mormons to come to Alberta, but they brought their mistrust of government with them. Mormons were Alberta’s first large body of successful farmers, and Brigham Young’s son-in-law founded Alberta’s Mormon capital, Cardston, in 1887. Within three decades, sixteen other Mormon settlements appeared within 100 miles of it.⁴⁹ Young Mormons from Alberta traveled to Salt Lake City’s tabernacle to marry and advertised the province as a destination for settlement.

The Mormon mark on Alberta expressed itself in political leadership and voting behavior. Social Credit’s parliamentary leader, John Blackmore, an Idaho-born Mormon, emigrated to Cardston in 1892, and Solon Low, the Cardston-born son of American immigrants, served as the party’s federal leader between the 1930s and 1950s. Under Cardston’s Nathan Tanner, the minister of Lands and Mines for sixteen years, officials from the Texas Railroad Commission supervised the Alberta oil industry’s regulatory regime, patterning it on their

own.⁵⁰ More influential in the making of oil policy than premier Manning, Tanner retired to serve as a Mormon Church senior elder in Salt Lake City. “The religious-political experiment in Alberta,” observed S. D. Clark, “resembled very closely that tried much earlier in Utah; in both cases, religious separation sought support in political separation, [and] the encroachments of the federal authority were viewed as encroachments of the worldly society.”⁵¹

Alberta’s Social Credit movement was quite unlike Britain’s Social Credit movement. It had a Catholic, cosmopolitan, urban support base, and an atheist, Major Douglas, as its oracle.⁵² Aberhart recruited Douglas to help operationalize Social Credit theory, but Douglas quickly disowned his Albertan acolytes, mystified by their marriage of Christian fundamentalism and monetary reform.⁵³ His departure exposed the tenuous link between British and Alberta Social Credit. Manning’s ascension to the premiership in 1943 after Aberhart’s death becalmed Social Credit. He purged the party of its more radical elements and adopted a fierce antisocialist posture. In the xenophobic climate of the cold war, he foiled efforts to nationalize some private power companies by plebiscite by linking CCF support for the idea with Nazism and communism. His sentiment “public ownership is bad in principle, worse in practice,” had purchase in Alberta as it did in the United States.⁵⁴ Manning also led resistance to both a federal national hospital insurance scheme and a medicare program in the 1950s and 1960s as “socialistic,” entailing compulsion and “welfare state-ism.”⁵⁵

POLICY

Alberta’s populist evolution has had much in common with America’s populist evolution, and both differ from the collectivist bent of Saskatchewan populism. Common to both forms of populism is the notion of “the people” defined by their common cultural roots, geographic location, and their perception of a threat generated by an external power. Alberta

populism constructed that external foe first as “the money power” and then as “big government” while social democratic populists depicted it as “big business” or “corporate capitalism.” Social Credit originally opposed the “big banks” and, like Ralph Klein’s provincial Conservative government in later decades, saw the “people” as “consumers.” Over time, however, Social Credit distanced itself from attacks on financial behemoths and its references to the “Fifty Big Shots of Canada.” By the 1940s, Social Credit had anointed itself as the province’s chief protagonist in the fight against socialism, and Manning went from the premiership in the 1960s to the board of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. By the 1990s Social Credit’s ideological successor, Klein’s Conservatives, embraced privatization and deregulation, adopted the logic of an international market economy, and reframed citizens as “customers.”⁵⁶ They supported, and Alberta’s farmers voted in a plebiscite for, an open, competitive grain-marketing regime while Saskatchewan’s NDP government supported, and its farmers voted for, maintaining a government-run monopoly.⁵⁷

The populist federal Alberta-based Reform Party in the 1990s was anything but opposed to corporate power. Although their policies and those of American Republicans differed, the parties were ideological kin as social conservatives and classical economic liberals believing in limited government, suspicious of a large federal government, and in favor of lower taxes. The Reform program envisaged a Canada reimagined through a universalist American lens. It embraced “universal citizenship” to counter the “politics of recognition” such as granting special status for Quebec or Aboriginals, and it opposed Ottawa’s policies of bilingualism and multiculturalism.⁵⁸ Stephen Harper, speaking for the party, articulated Alberta’s decentralized, populist image of Canada: “We propose measures which will assert the autonomy of all provinces and the power of the people.”⁵⁹

Albertans, more so than Canadians as a whole, have been enamored with American liberal prototypes such as an elected, powerful

Senate, grassroots control over elected officials, the flat tax, provincial equality, and legislators’ review of judicial appointments. Alberta led the Canadian equivalent of America’s “sagebrush rebellion,” the drive by western states at the turn of the 1980s to lessen the federal government’s control of their land and natural resources.⁶⁰ Unlike the provinces that were parties to Canada’s confederation in the nineteenth century, Alberta—created by Ottawa as a province in 1905—did not gain rights to its natural resources until 1930, something Albertans deeply resented as discriminatory. Every Alberta premier since 1980 has attacked the federal government’s national energy policy, which lowered the price of Alberta’s petroleum to other Canadians at the province’s expense. Alberta’s doggedness that decade on constitutional issues led to a constitutional amending formula, as in the United States, that grants no province a veto, and the province kept the federal government out of provincial affairs by insisting on the restriction of Indian land claims.⁶¹

Albertans and their governments have never cared much for Ottawa, the gist of a “firewall” letter coauthored by, among others, Flanagan, Morton, and Harper. The letter proposed a provincial police force to replace the RCMP and a provincial pension plan to supersede the Canada Pension Plan. The upstart Wildrose Alliance Party, whose advisors now include Flanagan, has adopted key components of the letter.⁶² This new party, the most recent manifestation of Alberta’s individualist-liberal, populist predilections, warmly applauded Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin at her first speech to a foreign audience, in Calgary, where she advocated smaller government and fiscal restraint and compared Alaska and Alberta.⁶³ Palin followed George W. Bush, whose first speech abroad was also in Calgary.

Albertans have been the most leery among English Canadians of Ottawa. By a wide margin, Albertans have much more trust and confidence in their provincial government than in the federal government. They believe,

much more so than residents of other provinces do, that they get more for their money from their provincial government than from Ottawa, and they are the least likely among Canadians to think Ottawa delivers value for money. Albertans are also less sympathetic to Ottawa's redistributive equalization policy, which seeks to help provinces provide comparable levels of social services at comparable levels of taxation.⁶⁴

In the realms of foreign, defense, and trade policy, Albertans have been more sympathetic than other Canadians have been to American designs. The Operation Dismantle constitutional case in the 1980s demonstrated the benign Albertan attitude to American cruise missile tests in the province, as none of the twenty-four national, regional, and local groups in the coalition that launched the case was from Alberta.⁶⁵ Later in that decade, Albertans stood out as the Canadians most supportive of free trade with the United States. They were also the most supportive of a U.S. proposal for a free trade area of the Americas in the 1990s, and in 2003, the most supportive of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.⁶⁶

Alberta's cattle and beefpacking industry, by far the largest in Canada, contributed to "the increasing economic integration" between the Alberta and U.S. economies, as shipments to the United States increased tenfold between the 1980s and 1990s. But the evolution of the industry also demonstrated how the Canadian experience had influenced Alberta's American ranchers. Most of their beef was exported to the British and then to the central Canadian market because of the United States' high tariff policy both before and after the 1920s.⁶⁷ Alberta's American farmers also adapted themselves to Canada's system of supply management in agricultural products, although they had often fought it as free traders.

CONCLUSION

In delineating English Canadian political culture, many highlight the values of a

decamped offshoot of revolutionary America, Upper Canada's tory Loyalists. The analysis here has been of a later American offshoot, Alberta's pioneering Americans and their formative imprint on Alberta politics. This analysis underscores the individualist-liberal values of Alberta's settler Americans as a founding ideological fragment. Their values rooted themselves in the province's formative years, and those values continue to define the boundaries of political discourse in Alberta. Favored by rural overrepresentation in the electoral system and their early concentration in southern Alberta, American homesteaders launched a politics of consensus, described as Alberta's ideologically hegemonic quasiparty system.⁶⁸ Americans ingrained in the Albertan psyche an ardent individualist streak on issues of property and provincial rights and a suspicion of centralized authority and of designs crafted in a distant capital where eastern Canadian calculations overshadow Albertan interests. Alberta's American market liberal and anticommunitarian heritage continues to infuse its political ethos.

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