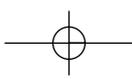
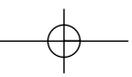
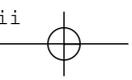
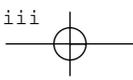


Contesting Clio's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History







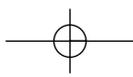
Contesting Clio's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History

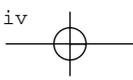
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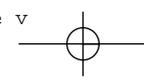
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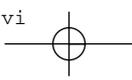
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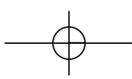
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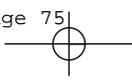
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Chapter 4

Canadian Progress and the British Connection: Why Canadian Historians Seeking the Middle Road Should Give 2½ Cheers for the British Empire

Andrew Smith

On a visit to London in July 2006, Prime Minister Stephen Harper extolled the positive aspects of British imperialism and declared that the 'actions of the British Empire' in Canada 'were largely benign and occasionally brilliant'. Conceding that no part of the world has been unscarred by the 'excesses of empires', he suggested that we discard the currently fashionable view that 'colonialism' was inherently bad. In his speech, Harper traced many features of Canadian society back to Britain. These included a belief in private enterprise, a relatively humane Aboriginal policy and a glorious military heritage that has often involved close cooperation with our American 'cousins'.¹

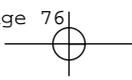
Although they came from a politician rather than an academic, Harper's comments help to frame the scholarly debates surveyed in this chapter and to show their political significance. Some academics suggest that the British impact on Canada was generally negative and perhaps something of which British people and their descendents should feel ashamed. Another perspective stresses the positive and calls on us to reject what one Australian historian has labelled the 'black armband' view of the colonial past.² My own view is that Harper's view of British imperialism is closer to the truth than the opinions voiced by many Canadian historians. British imperialism brought significant benefits to Canada which are sometimes obscured by the tendency of Canadian historians to focus on the negative aspects of their nation's history. By most statistical measures, Canada is one of the world's most successful countries.³ It is possible to dismiss

¹ 'Address by the Prime Minister at the Canada-UK Chamber of Commerce', Prime Minister's Office Listserv, 14 July 2006. I would like to thank David Cannadine, Ged Martin, and J. Andrew Ross for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

² G. Blainey, 'Drawing Up a Balance Sheet of Our History', *Quadrant*, vol. 37, no.7-8 (1993), pp. 10-15.

³ Canada has the sixth highest entry on the Human Development Index. See United Nations Development Programme, *2006 Human Development Report* (New York, 2006).



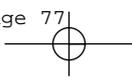


statistical indicators such as the Human Development Index as value-laden and culturally specific. Perhaps many Canadian historians will incline to this view. But the ability of Canada to attract immigrants of varied cultural backgrounds suggests that these rankings of countries do indeed reflect reality. In a sense, everyone who gets on a plane to immigrate to Canada or Australia is voting with their feet in favour of nineteenth-century British imperialism.

Understanding how Canada became a success story ought to be a major research focus of the Canadian historical profession. For reasons that include an understandable desire to document their country's shortcomings, Canadian historians have neglected the important task of explaining the reasons for Canada's relative success. Although there is plenty of room to debate the relative importance of other factors, any credible explanation for Canada's success must acknowledge the significant role played by Britain. The great unwritten work of Canadian history is entitled: 'How a land with severe winters became a prosperous and stable G7 country'. If such a book were ever written, it is probable that Britain and its institutions would feature prominently in the first few chapters. This chapter will survey several frameworks for understanding the history of the British Empire and will suggest that Canadian historians can draw on these theories to help explain Canada's achievements.

Much is at stake in the scholarly debate on how we should view Britain's role in Canadian history. Whether we regard the British legacy in Canada as largely positive or largely negative has implications that extend far beyond the comparatively trivial question of whether to retain Canada's current head of state. At issue are our conceptions of social and economic progress, our views of Canada's place in a globalised world and our understandings of the nature of empire. By 'empire', I refer not merely to the British Empire or to the American Empire, but to empire as a generic concept that includes any globe-spanning system of power, trade and allegiance.

This chapter seeks to defend the basic idea that Britain's impact on Canada was largely positive while showing that there are several possible intellectual routes by which one can arrive at this position. It also argues that if Canadian historians are to arrive at a balanced view of the impact of British imperialism, they will need to reconnect with political and economic theory. The chapter begins with an assessment of the recent scholarship on Canada and the British World. It argues that Canadian historians need to engage with the various interpretive frameworks for understanding empire's legacies that have recently been advanced by social scientists. The available frameworks range from Marxian world-systems theory to the New Institutional Economics to the latest ways of thinking about economic culture. No single interpretive framework can fully describe the Anglo-Canadian connection. However, if taken together, these



competing frameworks can guide future research on Britain's relationship with the lands that became Canada. The makers of these overarching theories would also benefit from engagement by Canadian historians because Canada's past provides a vast amount of empirical data for testing, refining and, if necessary, falsifying general statements about the nature of imperialism.

Assessing the impact of British imperialism in Canada requires us to think about two separate but related issues. First, we need to consider the ways in which British imperialism contributed to the emergence of the Canadian nation-state (the obvious counterfactual alternative being absorption into the United States). Luckily, military and political historians have written extensively on such topics as the War of 1812 and the Alaska boundary dispute. Indeed, the British Empire is central to the major meta-narratives in Canadian constitutional and diplomatic history (e.g., colony to nation, empire to umpire).⁴ Anyone remotely familiar with Canadian political and military history knows that Britain played a crucial role in laying the foundations of a separate nation on the northern half of the North American continent. The second, and perhaps more interesting, set of questions relates to the internal life of the polity that was cobbled together in the nineteenth century from what remained of Britain's North American Empire. Unfortunately, the impact of the British connection on the evolution of Canadian society has been the object of much less study. Perhaps this is because the rise of social history after 1970 coincided with a decreasing level of interest in the role of Britain in Canadian history.

Saying that the British Empire had a positive impact on Canada is understandably controversial. Today, few would try to justify the dispossession of indigenous peoples by land-hungry settlers. Recent comparative histories have underscored the fact that the experiences of Canadian First Nations were part of a global pattern of oppression by the British that manifested itself on other continents, including Australia.⁵ Moreover, the British and their descendents mistreated people of other European ethnicities (the Acadian deportation comes to mind). Indeed, we are increasingly aware of the costs that empire imposed even on Canadians of British descent. Today, few would suggest that Canada's national interest was at stake in the First World War or that the sending of Canadian conscripts to the trenches of Flanders was one of the country's proudest moments. Nevertheless, all of these negatives need to be weighed against the many good things that Britain did for Canada.

⁴ N. Hillmer and J.L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World to the 1990s* (Toronto, 1994).

⁵ K.S. Coates, *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples: Struggle and Survival* (London, 2004); J.C. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900* (Kingston, 2003).



*The Historiography of Canada and the British World:
Strengths and Limitations*

Evaluating the thesis that the British Empire laid the foundations for Canada's subsequent success is complicated by the many lacunae in the historiography. These lacunae are a function of the fact most historians lost interest in the imperial dimensions of Canadian history around 1960. In his 1993 presidential lecture to the Canadian Historical Association, Phillip Buckner bemoaned the estrangement of Canadian history from British imperial history. Buckner condemned the fact that Canada had largely disappeared from the historical writing in Britain on the history of empire. Whereas the constitutional evolution of Canada and the other colonies of settlement had once dominated historical writing on the British Empire, the 1960s and 1970s had witnessed a shift in focus to the British imperial experience in Africa and India.⁶ Buckner called for Canada to be reintegrated into the story as told in Britain. At the same time, he appealed to Canadian historians 'to place the imperial experience back where it belongs, at the centre of nineteenth-century Canadian history'. Buckner was not calling for a return to the days when constitutional history was king, but he was asking historians to investigate Britain's manifold impact on Canada's politics, economy and society.⁷

Buckner's remarks came after several decades in which the British role in Canadian history had been largely ignored. The most obvious reason for the de-emphasis of the British connection by historians was English Canada's redefinition of itself after 1945. During the formative years of the Baby Boom generation, Canada shed many symbols of its British heritage, including the Red Ensign.⁸ The increasing irrelevance of Britain to Canada was especially pronounced in the economic sphere: after 1963, the British option ceased to be seriously considered by Canadian policymakers seeking to limit trade dependence on the United States.⁹ The lack of interest in Britain's role in Canadian history was also a function of the shifting interests of historians. During the

⁶ One imperial historian who swam against this current was Ged Martin at the University of Edinburgh.

⁷ Later printed in P.A. Buckner, 'Whatever Happened to the British Empire?' *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1993), pp. 3–32.

⁸ J.E. Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945–71* (Vancouver, 2006).

⁹ B.W. Muirhead, *The Development of Postwar Canadian Trade Policy: the Failure of the Anglo-European Option* (Kingston, 1992), pp. 163–177. Perhaps the academic debate over the precise causes of British economic decline that raged in this period made it difficult for historians to envision the days of British economic supremacy. D. Edgerton, 'The Decline of Declinism', *Business History Review*, vol. 71, no.2 (1997), pp. 201–6.

heyday of narrative political history, debates about the nature of the British impact on Canada had preoccupied Canadian historians, as Anglophile scholars¹⁰ clashed with those who stressed the need for Canadian autonomy from Britain.¹¹ Because they eschewed broad narratives, the newer forms of history that came to the fore in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., women's history, gay history, labour history) refrained from making broad 'macro' statements about the British impact on Canada, although they illuminated particular facets of this topic (e.g., the social history of British sailors in Canadian ports).¹² Similarly, while the 'cliometric revolution' in Canadian economic history illuminated particular aspects of the Anglo-Canadian relationship, it did not produce any grand statements about whether Canada's close association with Britain fostered or hindered Canada's overall economic development.¹³

One historian who ventured to make general statements was Jack Granatstein. In 1988, he argued that Britain's economic decline in the twentieth century made Canada's drift into the American sphere virtually inevitable. His aim was to defend the conduct of the Liberal governments that had presided over Canada's deeper integration into the continental economy after 1945. Granatstein, however, did not grapple with the question of how this diplomatic reorientation influenced the internal life of the country.¹⁴ He might have looked at questions of business culture, secularisation and social policy. Indeed, aside from the First Nations historians who argued that European colonialism was immoral and unjustified,¹⁵ few historians after 1970 made broad generalisations about the British impact on Canadian society. Quebec academic historians de-emphasised the Conquest by stressing that French Canada was a 'normal' western society. As a result, the British impact on French Canada's social structure, a topic once debated vigorously by historians of eighteenth-century Canada, became less central.¹⁶

¹⁰ D. Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada, 1939–1957* (Toronto, 1976); W.L. Morton, *The Kingdom of Canada* (Toronto, 1963).

¹¹ A.R.M. Lower, *Colony to Nation: a History of Canada* (Toronto, 1946); R.D. Francis, 'Historical perspective on Britain: the ideas of Canadian historians Frank H. Underhill and Arthur R.M. Lower', in P. Buckner and R.D. Francis (eds.), *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration and Identity* (Vancouver, 2006), pp. 309–21.

¹² J. Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto, 1982).

¹³ Perhaps this is because cliometric economic history was focused on points of detail, such as charting the annual fluctuations in Canada's balance of payments. The field of economic history was revolutionised in the 1960s, when the older qualitative approach was supplanted by a much more quantitative approach known as cliometrics. T.J.O. Dick and J.E. Floyd, *Canada and the Gold Standard: Balance-of-Payments Adjustment, 1871–1913* (Cambridge, 1992).

¹⁴ J.L. Granatstein, *How Britain's Weakness Forced Canada into the Arms of the United States* (Toronto, 1989).

¹⁵ K.S. Coates, *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples: Struggle and Survival* (London, 2004).

¹⁶ R. Rudin, *Making History in Twentieth-Century Quebec* (Toronto, 1997), pp. 171–218.

But since 1993, historians on both sides of the Atlantic appear to have heeded Buckner's call to action. The British World conferences have helped to refocus attention on the comparative histories of the so-called 'White Dominions'.¹⁷ The Canadian experience figures prominently in a recent study of the development of the 'imperial press system' by Simon J. Potter, a historian based in Ireland.¹⁸ David Cannadine considers Canada in his examination of British attempts to replicate parts of their class system in the settlement colonies.¹⁹ Canada and the other self-governing colonies are emphasised in Andrew Thompson's study of the empire's impact on British society.²⁰ Bernard Porter has argued that ordinary Britons interacted mainly with the colonies of settlement and the United States, rather than with Britain's tropical empire. Porter thereby critiques the recent generation of British imperial historians who have focused on the tropical empire as the key to understanding the emergence of Britain's national identity.²¹ He also targets postcolonialist historians such as Catherine Hall as particularly prone to exaggerate the importance of the non-white empire to the British.²²

British imperial historians' re-engagement with Canada has been mirrored by developments within the Canadian historical community. Carman Miller's work on Canada and the Boer War has helped to revive interest in Canadian imperialism.²³ The evolution of Canada's honours system has also received attention from Christopher McCreery and others.²⁴ The older literature on Canadian imperialism ignored the topic of gender.²⁵ This lacuna has been remedied by

¹⁷ Buckner and Francis (eds.), *Canada and the British World*.

¹⁸ S.J. Potter, *News and the British World: the Emergence of an Imperial Press System, 1876–1922* (Oxford, 2003), p. 121.

¹⁹ D. Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British saw their Empire* (Oxford, 2001).

²⁰ A. Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back: the Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the mid-Nineteenth Century* (London, 2005), p. 3.

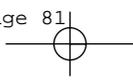
²¹ B. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 70–2.

²² C. Hall, K. McClelland and J. Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000); C. Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge, 2002); B. Ashcraft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: the Key Concepts* (London, 2000).

²³ Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Kingston, 1993).

²⁴ C. McCreery, *The Canadian Honours System* (Toronto, 2005); J. Andrew Ross, 'All this Fuss and Feathers: Plutocrats, Politicians and Changing Canadian Attitudes to Titular Honours', in Colin Coates (ed.), *Majesty in Canada: Essays on the Role of Royalty* (Toronto, 2006), pp. 119–41.

²⁵ C. Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867–1914* (Toronto, 1970); H.B. Neatby, 'Laurier and Imperialism', in H. Blair Neatby (ed.), *Imperial Relations in the Age of Laurier* (Toronto, 1969), pp. 1–9.



Katie Pickles' study of the IODE²⁶ and Mark Moss's monograph on masculinity and militarism in pre-1914 Ontario.²⁷ Adele Perry has connected the culture of empire to another fundamental issue in Canadian history, namely, native-newcomer relations.²⁸ In the last decade or so, our understanding of the British impact on Canada has become much richer. As a result, we are now in a somewhat better position to assess whether the impact of the British Empire on Canada was largely positive or largely negative.

Problems with the Post-1993 British World Literature

The flurry of literature on the Anglo-Canadian relationship is both encouraging and frustrating. While it is encouraging that historians are again thinking about the relationship between Britain and Canada, the British world literature has some severe limitations. One of them is that the choice of topics by social historians has skewed our understanding of the British Empire's impact on Canada by over-emphasising its negative features. For instance, Mark Moss has shown that imperialism and militarism were linked to a particularly regressive conception of masculinity. Adele Perry has studied the decidedly negative impact of empire on natives. These studies are valuable. But there is another side to the story and so far no one has investigated whether British imperialism made Canadians more democratic or entrepreneurial than they would otherwise have been. Indeed, the post-1993 British world historiography has left political, economic and constitutional themes largely untouched. For instance, the place of Canada in British geopolitical strategy has been largely ignored by British world historians.²⁹ Just before the First World War, the influential British geographer Halford Mackinder declared that the economic centre of the British Empire would lie in Canada rather than in London in a generation.³⁰ The fact that such

²⁶ K. Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Manchester, 2002).

²⁷ M. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Don Mills, 2001).

²⁸ A. Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto, 2001).

²⁹ The subject was, however, considered in the 1990s by J. Beeler, 'Steam, Strategy and Schurman: Imperial Defence in the Post-Crimean Era, 1856–1905', in Greg Kennedy and Keith Neilson (eds.), *Far-Flung-Lines: Essays on Imperial Defence in Honour of Donald Mackenzie Schurman* (London, 1996), pp. 27–54.

³⁰ H. Mackinder, 'Geographical Conditions Affecting the British Empire: I. The British Islands', *Geographical Journal* no. 33 (1909) pp. 462–76, 474.



predictions were made at the time is surely worthy of our consideration, as are the many economic bonds that linked Canada and Britain in this era. However, aside from Gregory Marchildon's brilliant study of Max Aitken's financial career,³¹ the recent historiography has essentially ignored the economic aspects of the British world and has focused on the subjective identities of contemporaries. More attention could have been paid to how the 'imagined communities' of the past influenced and were influenced by flows of labour, capital and consumer goods.³²

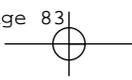
In addition, British world scholars have not really wrestled with the question of the extent to which the 'British world' included the United States. Thinking about this issue is crucial if we are to separate Britain's impact on North America as a whole from Britain's influence on Canada. The historical literature of the 1950s was marked by a tension between Donald Creighton's emphasis on Britain's rivalry with the United States and the more inclusive Atlanticism of Winston Churchill's 'English-speaking peoples'.³³ Historians of our generation need to think about whether the Canada-US border marked the boundary of the British world as an imagined community. Evidence both for and against this hypothesis can be found.

A more important difficulty with the recent literature is that historians of Canada are still failing to draw on interpretive frameworks that could add a comparative perspective and highlight the empire's beneficent aspects. Historians are right to be sceptical of grand theories of global history, but if we are to understand the impact of the British Empire on Canada, we should at least consider whether any of these frameworks is useful. However, deciding which paradigm is most suitable for Canadian historians is complicated because scholars of international renown have advanced several competing frameworks for understanding empire. In the next section of the chapter, I will sketch each framework or 'lens' and then suggest how it might be applied to the practical task of writing Canadian history. The scholars of chief importance include defenders of empire such as Deepak Lal and Niall Ferguson; the human rights scholar Michael Ignatieff; students of empire's relationship to race, class, and ethnicity; neo-classical economists who criticise empire; and scholars who discuss the

³¹ G.P. Marchildon, *Profits and Politics: Beaverbrook and the Gilded Age of Canadian Finance* (Toronto, 1996).

³² That identities influence economic behaviour is acknowledged in C. Tait, 'Brushes, Budgets, and Butter: Canadian Culture and Identity at the British Empire Exhibition, 1924–25', in Buckner and Francis (eds.), *Canada and the British World*, pp. 234–349.

³³ W. Churchill, *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* (Toronto, 1956–58). Churchill's emphasis on Anglo-Saxon fraternal unity has recently been revived by the popular historian A. Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900* (London, 2006).



relationship between culture and economic performance. None of these lenses gives us a perfect view, but all have some merit. Moreover, all of these lenses allow us to see the positive aspects of the British Empire and suggest that Canadian historians should re-evaluate their generally negative views of British imperialism.

Lenses for Viewing the History of Empire

Thinking about the Anglo-Canadian relationship requires us to consider why Britain became the world's dominant power by 1815. This question in turn forces us to think about competing causal explanations for European global hegemony. Before we can begin to make moral or other evaluations about the British or European impact on Canada, we should understand the processes by which Europeans acquired global power. Some academics believe that the rise of the west was simply an accident of biology or global meteorology, a matter of microbes or climate change. In their eyes, had a few natural variables been different, other continents might have colonised Europe rather than vice versa.³⁴

The theories that underscore the importance of natural forces are useful because they help to problematise what was once regarded as common sense, namely, that western dominance was the result of functionally superior economic and social institutions. The advantages of western institutions versus non-western institutions in a given epoch are matters that needs to be proven or disproved with evidence, not simply assumed, and Alfred Crosby and Jared Diamond are right to challenge ethnocentric notions of cultural superiority. But while many historians are willing to concede that fortuitous natural factors played a role in the global rise of Britain, few are willing to attribute everything to social exogenous variables, be they smallpox epidemics or England's large coal deposits. Even Marx's so-called materialist theory of history recognised that non-material factors such as ideologies and political structures played an important role in history.³⁵ The thesis that western dominance may have been partly due to superior institutions is certainly considered by Ernest Jones, the widely respected author of *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies, and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*. Jones tells the rags-to-riches tale of how a minor extension of the Eurasian continent was able to rise to global economic and

³⁴ A.W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge, 1986); J. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York, 1997); G. Stokes, 'The Fates of Human Societies: A Review of Recent Macrohistories', *American Historical Review*, vol. 106, no. 2 (2001), pp. 508-25.

³⁵ G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: a Defense* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 364-88.



cultural dominance by 1900. Jones's argument incorporates socially exogenous factors such as climate change and epidemics, but he maintains that post-medieval Europe's political institutions were also part of the explanation.³⁶

If Jones's argument that Europe's rise to global dominance was a function of superior political institutions is correct, it lends credence to the view advanced by other scholars that European imperialism benefited people living in overseas colonies by allowing for the diffusion of those institutions. Let us consider the arguments of those who stress the merits of European imperialisms (including the imperialism of the British Empire). Perhaps the strongest defender of empire is Deepak Lal. His main targets are Marxian scholars who argue that empire enriches the colonisers at the expense of the colonised and liberals who say that empire hurts both the imperialist country and the territories it governs. The account of empire provided by Marxian historians such as Immanuel Wallerstein will also be familiar to many readers. Wallerstein and his followers assert that colonialism was instrumental in the creation of a global economic system consisting of an exploiting core and periphery of commodity producing regions.³⁷ The liberal critique of empire has a long pedigree: as early as the middle of the eighteenth century, people in Britain were arguing that the acquisition of overseas colonies harmed Britain itself.³⁸ Lal maintains that both camps are wrong and that imperialism confers benefits all round, to the colonised as well as the colonisers. Lal argues not that the rulers of empires are more benevolent than the rulers of small states but that large polities are beneficent because they achieve political stability. They do so, according to him, by eliminating local conflicts, which, in turn, promotes security of the person, long-distance commerce, and durable property rights. Lal regards all empires as functional, but suggests that the empires established by western peoples offered their residents more benefits than non-western empires. Lal singles out the British and American Empires as particularly praiseworthy in this regard.³⁹

Lal's interpretation suggests that British (and later American) imperialism has benefited people living in what is now Canada. There is certainly some plausibility to what Lal is saying about the advantages of large polities versus small

³⁶ E. Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economies, and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*, 3rd edition (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 104–26.

³⁷ I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1974); K. Pommeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, 2000); A. Gunder Frank, *Reorient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley, 1998).

³⁸ E. Rothschild, 'Global Commerce and the Question of Sovereignty in the Eighteenth Century Provinces', *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Apr. 2004), pp. 3–25, 21.

³⁹ D. Lal, *In Praise of Empires: Globalization and Order* (London, 2004).

ones. Canadian exporters, missionaries and travellers have been major beneficiaries of the two liberal empires Lal describes. Moreover, Canada is itself large enough to be considered a form of empire: the efforts of Sir John A. Macdonald and others to build a transcontinental Dominion that rivalled the United States produced a political unit that dwarfed both the pre-Contact Aboriginal polities and the separate colonies that joined Confederation. The imperial and sub-imperial projects pursued in the past confer benefits on ordinary people today. For instance, thanks to the ambitions of Macdonald and his contemporaries, it is now possible to travel across Canada without showing a passport or changing money. Most people would say that this mobility is a good thing.

Lal's analysis is, however, not wholly convincing because he glosses over the substantial differences between the many empires he surveys. Even the two English-speaking powers he considers exhibited major differences. The British Empire included vast territories that were formally British as well as extensive spheres of influence. The American reluctance to admit the reality of empire has made the United States unwilling to annex its overseas territories, even de facto colonies such as Guantanamo Bay.⁴⁰ Moreover, if we accept Lal's premise that bigger polities are better, then Britain's efforts to build up the Dominion of Canada as a rival to the United States appear somewhat retrogressive. If Lal's 'bigger is better' philosophy is correct, then Goldwin Smith's proposal for a single North American nation was more progressive than the nationalism of Sir John A. Macdonald. Another problem with Lal's analysis is that he fails to come to grips with the convincing argument that the existence of many small polities can be ultimately beneficial. For example, Ernest Jones has argued that Europe's political fragmentation contributed to its ability to catch up and eventually surpass China in the spheres of commerce, seafaring, and general technological prowess. Medieval Europe's failure to acquire a central ruling authority analogous to China's Emperor was crucial, he says, because the benefits of commercial and technical competition outweighed the costs of fragmentation (which included intermittent warfare and intra-European trade barriers).⁴¹ Lal does not really consider the downsides of empires and if we are to arrive at a more balanced view of the British Empire's costs and benefits, we need to turn to other interpretative frameworks.

Niall Ferguson's more sophisticated defence of empire takes some of the possible rejoinders to Lal into account. The British Empire described by Ferguson combined vast scale with polyarchic diversity, with the colonial mini-Parliaments

⁴⁰ American and British imperialism are compared in C.S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and its Predecessors* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006) and B. Porter, *Empire and Super-Empire: Britain, America and the World* (New Haven, 2006), pp. 103–6. Porter's work is informed by J. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (Oxford, 1951).

⁴¹ Jones, *The European Miracle*, pp. 104–126.

ensuring a degree of local autonomy not seen in the far-flung dominions of Habsburg Spain. Ferguson's framework is more believable than that of Lal because he firmly distinguishes liberal empires (chiefly Victorian Britain and the twentieth-century United States) from the pre-liberal empires that characterised human history before 1800. Ferguson also separates the pre-1800 British Empire from the Second British Empire. He does not rehabilitate the former but does argue that the empire of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries enhanced the interests of the human race as a whole and increased total world product.⁴²

Ferguson uses the history of abolitionism to make a general point about Britain's transition from an empire of oppression to an empire of liberalism: he shows that the British went from dealing in slaves to suppressing slavery within a few decades. In 1807, Parliament banned the shipment of new slaves across the Atlantic in British vessels. Abolitionist lobby groups won subsequent victories, forcing white colonists in the Caribbean to free their human property, sending the Royal Navy to interdict foreign slaving ships and eventually suppressing slavery in the interior of Africa.⁴³ Ferguson argues that liberty in a broader sense was also advanced by the British Empire after 1800, maintaining that important freedoms were implanted in both the neo-British societies of the Dominions and in the countries of the tropical empire. He links this shift in empire's outcomes to changes within the metropole, most notably gradual democratisation and the progressive extension of economic liberty.

By the Victorian period, Britain had a two-party system, an advanced capitalist economy, an active press and a vibrant civil society. These are features shared with the United States, the country that succeeded the British Empire as the global hegemon between 1914 and 1945.⁴⁴ Ferguson argues that the American Empire has promoted liberty in much the same way as the British Empire. In fact, he wants the United States to become even more imperialist and bemoans the American tendency to abandon imperial projects whenever costs escalate. Appealing to the Americans' sense of enlightened self-interest, Ferguson argues that the British Empire was a positive-sum game that benefited Britain and her colonies. Paul Kennedy argued in the 1980s that great powers decline when 'imperial over-stretch' overburdens their economies.⁴⁵ Ferguson replies that the

⁴² That is, the total size of the world economy. The growth of the world economy and the fluctuating shares of it enjoyed by different countries is discussed in A. Maddison, *Contours of the World Economy, 1–2030 AD: Essays in Macro-Economic History* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 379–82.

⁴³ N. Ferguson, *Empire: the Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York, 2003), pp. 177–8.

⁴⁴ N. Ferguson, *Colossus: the Price of America's Empire* (New York, 2004), pp. 185–7, 279.

⁴⁵ P. Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, 1987).

real problem with the American Empire is ‘under-stretch,’ with too much butter and not enough guns. He says that implanting liberal democracy overseas pays long-term dividends for both the imperialist power and the overseas colonies.

Ferguson’s upbeat view of empire relies heavily on concepts taken from the New Institutional Economics (NIE), a school of thought that holds that a strong state willing to protect individual rights rather than simply *laissez-faire* is the prerequisite for capitalist industrial development. The NIE emerged in the 1970s in reaction to the limitations of the narrowly quantitative economic history that flourished in the 1960s.⁴⁶ Convinced that fortuitous natural endowments were of secondary importance in explaining national differences in per capita wealth, Douglass C. North and Mancur Olson asked economic historians to look at the political and legal institutions that were, in their eyes, the real foundations of development.⁴⁷ North and Olson argued that Europe, and particularly Britain, prospered because they were the first countries to evolve the type of institutions, particularly more secure property rights, that promoted faster technological progress and economic growth.⁴⁸

Ferguson’s institutional analysis is helpful in answering a major question of historical causation: why was the British Empire able to overtake the other European overseas empires between 1700 and 1815? Stuart England was a second-rate power and historians have long sought to explain how ‘England’s apprenticeship’ in the seventeenth century gave way to the *Pax Britannica*—‘Workshop of the World’ era of the nineteenth.⁴⁹ Moreover, Ferguson’s emphasis on the liberalism of the Victorian Empire is consistent with Ian McKay’s thesis that the Canadian project of building a transcontinental British Dominion was fundamentally about advancing the ideology of liberal individualism and private property.⁵⁰ Canadian historians who see McKay’s ‘liberal order’ concept as a

⁴⁶ D.C. North, ‘Beyond the New Economic History’, *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 34 no.1 (1974), pp. 1–7; D.C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge, 1990); O.E. Williamson, ‘The New Institutional Economics: Taking Stock, Looking Ahead’, *Journal of Economic Literature*, vol. 38 no. 3 (2000), pp. 595–613.

⁴⁷ M. Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation and Social Rigidities* (New Haven, 1982); J. Bradford De Long, ‘Overstrong Against Thyself: War, the State, and Growth in Europe on the Eve of the Industrial Revolution’, in Mancur Olson and Satu Kahkonen (eds.), *A Not So Dismal Science: a Broader View of Economics and Societies* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 138–67.

⁴⁸ D.C. North and B.R. Weingast, ‘Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 49, no. 4 (1989), pp. 803–32.

⁴⁹ C. Wilson, *England’s Apprenticeship, 1603–1763* (London, 1965).

⁵⁰ I. McKay, ‘The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History’, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 81, no. 3 (2000), pp. 617–45.

plausible interpretive framework for Canadian history will probably agree with Ferguson's description of the British Empire even if they reject his neo-liberal value assessments and normative statements.

Ferguson's interpretation has weaknesses as well as strengths. A major problem with his account of empire is that he discounts human rights abuses by the two liberal empires as regrettable but isolated incidences. Many First Nations historians would regard the very process of seizing territory as inherently immoral, regardless of the colonisers' behaviour on subordinate *ius in bello* issues such as the treatment of prisoners. Moreover, Ferguson's emphasis on the continuities and affinities between British and American imperialism will not ring true for many Canadians: did not British and American troops fight on Canadian soil? One can dismiss the war of 1812 as something that happened before Britain and the United States became fully liberal or fully democratic (if they ever did), but it nevertheless problematises Ferguson's notion of Anglo-American amity and the related concept of the liberal democratic peace.⁵¹

Furthermore, a close examination of the historical record tends to falsify Ferguson's thesis that the British Empire promoted globalisation and freer markets. In reality, the British Empire promoted a form of regulated, semi-protectionist capitalism. It is certainly true that British imperialism opened parts of the non-western world to the global economy. Something similar happened in the early stages of Canadian history, but in post-Responsible Government Canada, as in Australasia, membership of the British Empire was eminently compatible with American-style tariffs. Protectionist tariffs are the antithesis of economic liberalism and globalisation. Indeed, the Canadians who complained the most about the end of British mercantilism in the 1840s were later among the strongest proponents of a national policy.⁵² Sir John A. Macdonald's Anglophilia did not extend to the classical political economy of Ricardo and Mill.⁵³ The British preferential tariff Canada introduced in 1897 exacerbated Anglo-German tensions and contributed to the collapse of the liberal trade regime in pre-war Europe.⁵⁴ And in the interwar and post-1945 periods, imperialist sentiment in Canada reinforced the Commonwealth-wide tendency towards collectivism and

⁵¹ The democratic peace theory that clearly informs Ferguson's work has been the subject of a devastating critique by J. Gowa, *Ballots and Bullets: the Elusive Democratic Peace* (Princeton, NJ, 1999).

⁵² D. McCalla, entry for Isaac Buchanan in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto, 1966) vol. 11, pp.125–31.

⁵³ C.D.W. Goodwin *Canadian Economic Thought: The Political Economy of a Developing Nation, 1814–1914* (Durham, North Carolina, 1961), pp. 55–8, 64, 111, 126.

⁵⁴ P. Kennedy, *The Rise of Anglo-German Antagonism, 1860–1914* (London, 1980), pp. 262–4, 291, 302, 319.

protectionism exemplified by the Ottawa Economic Conference.⁵⁵ The heyday of the British Commonwealth also saw the establishment of the (state-owned) Canadian Broadcasting Corporation⁵⁶ and Diefenbaker's *dirigiste* trade diversion strategy.⁵⁷ Perhaps 'liberal imperialism' is a true oxymoron, destined from the start to collapse under the weight of its inherent self-contradiction.⁵⁸

The evidence that the British Empire encouraged Canadians to adopt statist-interventionist economic policies calls into question Ferguson's argument that British imperialism advanced the causes of economic liberalism and free markets. But liberalism is much more than an economic philosophy: it is a belief system with implications for a host of non-economic issues, such as the treatment of minorities and the rights of the accused in criminal matters. Perhaps the most plausible arguments in defence of the British Empire are those that revolve around non-economic matters. These arguments are the focus of the next section.

Empire and Human Rights

It is clear that Ferguson's interpretive framework has major flaws insofar as it attempts to describe the economic aspects of the British Empire. But a somewhat more plausible defence of liberal empire has been advanced by Michael Ignatieff. Ignatieff argues that societies lucky enough to have evolved advanced codes of human rights have a duty to spread liberal values such as security of the person, religious tolerance and gender equality. He argues that war and governance by outsiders are sometimes the only means of protecting the human rights of individuals living in other cultures. He suggests that if we are to avoid the pitfall of moral relativism, we must sometimes adopt a quasi-imperialist way of thinking. Ignatieff defines himself as a qualified admirer of the British Empire and argues that British imperialism sometimes advanced the cause of human rights.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ F. McKenzie, *Redefining the Bonds of Commonwealth, 1939-1948: The Politics of Preference* (London, 2002).

⁵⁶ M. Vipond, 'The Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission in the 1930s: how Canada's first public broadcaster negotiated "Britishness"', in Buckner and Francis (eds.), *Canada and the British World*, pp. 270-87.

⁵⁷ T. Rooth, 'Britain, Europe, and Diefenbaker's trade diversion proposals, 1957-58', in Phillip Buckner (ed.), *Canada and the End of Empire* (Vancouver, 2005), pp. 117-32.

⁵⁸ The idea that 'liberal imperialism' is oxymoronic is bolstered by the fact that libertarians (i.e., consistent classical liberals) such as those of the Cato Institute are among the most fierce critics of America's Empire.

⁵⁹ M. Ignatieff, *Empire Lite: Nation-building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London, 2003), pp. 4, 86-90, 114, 120, 122.

For Canadian historians, Ignatieff's 'values imperialism' raises a number of important theoretical questions. Until recently, Canadian policy towards Aboriginals was frankly assimilationist and aimed at the extinction of native languages. Although Tom Flanagan of the University of Calgary has recently attempted to extrapolate a justification for 'cultural imperialism' out of values imperialism,⁶⁰ this is certainly not Ignatieff's agenda. Ignatieff does not attempt to justify attempts to impose Christianity and the English language on Canada's First Nations. But Ignatieff's theory of universal human rights can be used to justify other British actions or policies in Canada. For instance, Barry Gough has shown that the heavy guns of the Royal Navy were crucial in suppressing slavery in the Aboriginal communities of British Columbia.⁶¹ Ignatieff's framework suggests that, in this context, British naval power promoted human rights. Ian K. Steele's research on Iroquois treatment of prisoners during the Seven Years' War has shown that the contemporary European code of warfare was very much a cultural construct.⁶² Eighteenth-century European ideas regarding the treatment of prisoners of war were much closer to the values embodied in modern international law than those of the First Nations of that period. Ignatieff's framework therefore suggests that the establishment of Euro-Canadian hegemony in eastern North America was a positive development from a human rights point of view.

Of course, one can share Ignatieff's belief that liberal values are of universal validity while rejecting his view that liberal empire is an efficient means of promoting human rights. Some critics of today's liberal imperialism use quantitative analysis to test whether liberal imperialism fulfils its humanitarian promises.⁶³ Canadian historians can borrow this approach. They should also consider where the ideas of pre-Contact Aboriginals were, in some spheres, more 'advanced' than those of the Europeans. Establishing a methodology for assessing the humanitarian costs and benefits of British colonialism in Canada is a topic far outside the remit of this chapter. However, a recent work by David Abernethy provides some guidelines for how this might be done without the debate degenerating into the competitive accumulation of anecdotal data.⁶⁴

Ignatieff's belief that the British Empire may have advanced human rights in some instances raises the complex question of the connection between racism and imperialism. Many Canadian historians will incline to the view that Canada's

⁶⁰ T. Flanagan, *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (Kingston, 2000), pp. 8–9, 197.

⁶¹ B.M. Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846–90* (Vancouver, 1984), pp. 85–94.

⁶² I.K. Steele, *Betrayals: Fort William Henry and the Massacre* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 110–13.

⁶³ B. Ibrahim Al-Rubeyi, 'Mortality Before and After the Invasion of Iraq in 2003', *The Lancet*, vol. 364, issue 9448 (2006), pp. 1834–5.

⁶⁴ D.B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415–1980* (New Haven, 2000), pp. 363–408.

membership in the Empire-Commonwealth reinforced WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) supremacy within Canada. But we should consider whether countervailing tendencies were at work. Britain's concessions to French Catholics after 1760 enraged the rabid Protestants of New England and suggest that the arch-imperialists in London were more tolerant than the local Anglo-Saxons.⁶⁵ Slavery was abolished by legislation in the British Empire a generation before the Civil War in the United States. Although there were very few black slaves living in British North America in the 1830s, there is certainly something to be said in favour of an empire capable of and willing to extirpate an entrenched economic system. Moreover, London sometimes tried to restrain the greed of white settlers throughout its far-flung empire: the reaction of whites in the Thirteen Colonies to the Royal Proclamation of 1763 had parallels in Australia and southern Africa.⁶⁶ In addition, the Aboriginal rights acknowledged by the 1763 proclamation became entrenched in Canada's constitution precisely because Canada remained part of the empire after 1776.⁶⁷

It is well known that Canada barred immigration by non-white British subjects at a time when it aggressively recruited immigrants in the British Isles.⁶⁸ But there is also evidence that the British government tried to discourage Canada and the empire's other dominions from passing racist immigration laws. At the 1897 Colonial Conference, Joseph Chamberlain declared that racial equality and colour-blindness were fundamental traditions of the British Empire. Today, Chamberlain is primarily remembered as a jingoistic imperialist and the architect of the Boer War. But his comments on the immigration laws of Canada and the other dominions have a remarkably modern ring. Speaking at a gathering of colonial premiers, Chamberlain said that colonies were right to make laws against the entry of paupers or those who were demonstrably immoral but that it was wrong to exclude just 'because a man is of a different colour than us'. He asked Wilfrid Laurier and the other delegates 'to bear in mind the traditions of the Empire which makes no distinction in favour of, or against, race or colour'. Chamberlain also said that to exclude by reason of their colour or race, 'all Her Majesty's Indian subjects ... would be an act so offensive to those peoples that it would be most painful, I am quite certain, to Her Majesty to have to sanction it.'⁶⁹

⁶⁵ F.D. Cogliano, *No King, no Popery: anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England* (Westport, Connecticut, 1995), pp. 41–58.

⁶⁶ Weaver, *The Great Land Rush*, pp. 154–6, 353.

⁶⁷ P.W. Hogg, *Constitutional Law of Canada* (Toronto, 2000, student edition), p. 574.

⁶⁸ H. Johnston, *The Voyage of the Komagata Maru: the Sikh Challenge to Canada's Colour Bar* (Delhi, 1979).

⁶⁹ *Proceedings of the Conference Between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Premiers of the Self-Governing Dominions at the Colonial Office, June and July 1897* (London: HMSO, 1897), Cmd. 8596, pp. 12–14.

In the decades after 1945, Canada became a much less racist country. Canada's ties with Britain also became less important in this period. Whether these two sets of phenomena were coincidental is an open question. One hypothesis worth testing is that the declining importance of the Empire–Commonwealth after 1945 and the concurrent worldwide decline in racism were two entirely unrelated phenomena. Because Canada is now home to several ethnic groups that were affected by these processes (natives, whites, not to mention many immigrants from the Indian subcontinent), Canadian historians are ideally placed to study this topic and make a major contribution to global history. The widespread assumption that racism and British imperialism were connected is one that deserves to be debated by Canadian historians rather than accepted uncritically.

The Dollars and Sense of Imperialism

Historians have other assumptions about empire that need to be re-examined. The prevailing view sees empire as a mechanism for transferring wealth from the colonies to the imperial power and suggests that the British Empire made the people of the colonies poorer than they would have been in the absence of empire. But the economics of empire were much more complex than the conventional wisdom allows. Canadian historians seeking to place their country's experience in a global context should pay attention to the debate over the costs and benefits of empire for Britain. The economic critique of imperialism can be traced back to the 1790s when Jeremy Bentham advocated that Britain abandon its remaining North American colonies on the grounds of national self-interest.⁷⁰ Some cliometricians now argue that possessing a colonial empire involved massive overseas expenditure that slowed Britain's economic growth at home. Other historians reject the thesis that the British Empire was a 'waste of money' and stress the commercial benefits of empire.⁷¹ For those of us whose primary interest is the history of Canada, this academic debate is important. For one thing, the tangible evidence of British expenditure in Canada is still visible: a massive amount of British capital was tied up in works such as Halifax's imposing Citadel and Upper Canada's Rideau Canal. Although they did little to benefit taxpayers in Britain, these expenditures stimulated the local economy at an early stage in its development. In this sense, people in present-day Canada benefited from

⁷⁰ D. Winch, 'Bentham on Colonies and Empire', *Utilitas*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1997), pp. 147–54.

⁷¹ L.E. Davis and R.A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Economics of British Imperialism* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 262–79; cf. A. Offer, 'The British Empire, 1870–1914: A Waste of Money?', *Economic History Review*, vol. 46, no. 2 (1993), pp. 215–38.

being part of the British Empire in the same way people in Nunavut benefit from Canadian military expenditure in the region.

In addition to British government expenditure in present-day Canada, we also need to consider the sheer extent of British private investment in Canada. A great deal of capital flowed from Britain to Canada during the life of the empire. At least part of this inflow of money was due to Canada's political status. Until 1914, empire borrowers tended to receive better terms in British capital markets than fully sovereign debtors: Canada was like the Australasian Dominions and unlike the United States in that it financed its development through heavy borrowing in London.⁷² In the eyes of some left nationalist historians, this reliance on London capitalists was plainly a bad thing.⁷³ My own viewpoint is that we need to gather more information before making *ceteris paribus* statements about whether Canada's remaining under the British flag after 1776 helped or harmed its long-term economic prospects: cheap credit can be beneficial or dangerous depending on the circumstances.

Imperial Legacies, Economic Culture and the Homo Economicus Model

Canada's membership of the British Empire facilitated the import of capital from Britain. But Britain did more than send money. It also implanted values that had a significant and positive impact on Canada's long-term economic performance. The concept of economic culture needs to be integrated into our understanding of the British legacy in Canada. In the 1990s, economists⁷⁴ and business historians⁷⁵ began to turn to culture to explain what neo-classical economic theory cannot. David Landes emphasises cultural differences in *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are So Rich and Others are So Poor*, noting that the most prosperous nations in the world are either western or Sinitic in culture.⁷⁶ Gregory J.

⁷² D.C.M. Platt, *Foreign Finance in Continental Europe and the United States, 1815–1870: Quantities, Origins, Functions, and Distributions* (London, 1984), p. 141; I. Stone, *The Global Export of Capital from Great Britain, 1865–1914: A Statistical Survey* (New York, 1999), Tables 1 and 2; L.E. Davis and R.J. Cull, *International Capital Markets and American Economic Growth, 1820–1914* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 1. P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism, 1688–2000*, 2nd ed., (London, 2002), pp. 135–50. See also Raymond E. Dumett (ed.), *Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Imperialism: The New Debate on Empire* (London, 1999).

⁷³ T. Naylor, *Canada in the European Age, 1453–1919* (Montreal, 2006).

⁷⁴ A. Sen, 'How Does Culture Matter?' in Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton (eds.), *Culture and Public Action* (Stanford, 2004), pp.37–58.

⁷⁵ K. Lipartito, 'Culture and the Practice of Business History,' *Business and Economic History*, vol. 24, no.1 (1995), pp. 1–52.

⁷⁶ D.S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are so Rich and Some so Poor* (New York, 1998), pp. 174–9, 343–4.

Clark has advanced a similar argument by suggesting that it was something in eighteenth-century western workplace culture that allowed the west to escape the Malthusian trap that had ensnared all human societies for the previous 100,000 years.⁷⁷ Both writers reject the *homo economicus* assumption that human nature is a universal constant. If cultural differences do help to determine which countries are rich and which are poor, this forces us to re-examine our assessments of the historical processes by which western and, in particular, British culture, was implanted in Canada. After all, if the British Empire laid the cultural foundations of Canada's present-day affluence, there is something to be said for British imperialism.

The best-known proponent of the concept of economic culture is probably Samuel Huntington. Huntington has advanced the highly controversial thesis that the political and economic institutions of the United States are largely the product of the values that British Protestants brought with them to the Thirteen Colonies. He worries that the influx of Spanish-speakers will eventually convert parts of the United States into extensions of Latin America (i.e., violent, poor, and with an alleged Ibero-Catholic tendency towards dictatorships of either the extreme left or the extreme right).⁷⁸ One could argue that Huntington has brought all culturalist interpretations of economic performance into disrepute through his oversimplified and alarmist theories. But Canadian historians ought to consider the far more nuanced framework provided by Lawrence Harrison. Harrison displays a keen awareness of the national differences within the major cultural zones of the western hemisphere and acknowledges the possibility of rapid cultural evolution, using the transformation of Spain over the course of his own academic career as a case in point. But in the final analysis, his interpretation is similar to that of Huntington: North America has outperformed Latin America for cultural reasons.⁷⁹ If Harrison's thesis is right, it has important implications for how we study Canadian political and economic history.

Of course, culturalist or 'neo-Weberian' interpretations for national disparities in wealth are controversial. Proponents of the NIE insist that institutional differences, such as insecure land tenure, provide simpler and therefore better explanations for the gap between North and Latin America.⁸⁰ Stanley Engerman and Kenneth Sokoloff hold that non-cultural factors such as stronger democratic

⁷⁷ G.J. Clark, *A Farewell to Alms: Brief Economic History of the World* (Princeton, 2007), p. 14.

⁷⁸ S.P. Huntington, *Who are We? The Challenges to America's Identity* (New York, 2004), pp. 17–20, 59–62, 158–70.

⁷⁹ L.E. Harrison, *The Pan-American Dream: Do Latin America's Cultural Values Discourage True Partnership with the United States and Canada?* (New York, 1997), pp. 12–14, 36–41, 150–53, 71–2.

⁸⁰ H. de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Elsewhere* (London, 2000), pp. 237–43.

institutions and the early development of mass schooling in North America drove the divergence in economic outcomes north and south of the Rio Grande.⁸¹ Engerman and Sokoloff are very sceptical of cultural explanations, but their own findings point to the importance of political culture in understanding differences in income levels.⁸² 'Legal origins theory' gives us yet another lens for examining the relationship between culture and economic growth. Canadian historians should consider the argument that common-law jurisdictions generally grow faster than civil-law ones because of differences in the values embedded in legal systems.⁸³

Canadian historians seeking to assess Britain's impact on Canada's socio-economic evolution should consider all of these theories in charting their research agendas. One adopter of the culturalist approach to Canadian economic history is Marc Egnal. He argues that the gap in average living standards between New England, French Canada, and the slave-owning South that developed between 1750 and 1850 was partly a function of New England's superior cultural capacity for economic growth.⁸⁴ The great virtue of Egnal's research is that he manages to explore cultural differences without falling into the trap of seeing anglophones and francophones in North America as two monolithic groups. The culturalist approach to comparative economic history is intriguing and raises many questions for historians interested in Canada's relations with the Empire-Commonwealth. Although small in the grand scheme of human cultural diversity, the differences in economic and political culture between Britain and the United States were and remain quite real. These cultural differences influence everything from tort law to employment standards to the role of state in health care. Comparing Canada with the other two societies of what J.B. Brebner called

⁸¹ They also note the vast differences in average living standards between 'Latin American' countries. S. Engerman and K. Sokoloff, 'Factor Endowments, Institutions, and Differential Paths of Growth Among New World Economies: A View from Economic Historians of the United States', in Stephen Haber (ed.), *How Latin America Fell Behind: Essays on the Economic Histories of Brazil and Mexico, 1800-1914* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 260-304. In the terminology of Engerman and Sokoloff, the development of subsidised public schools in North America was a non-cultural factor that drove the continent's economic growth. However, one can quibble with this characterisation of educational systems as non-cultural, since attitudes to schooling are indeed rooted in culture, as are political norms.

⁸² Economic culture (i.e. values that influence individual choices over things like the income-leisure tradeoff) is distinct from political culture (which informs government decisions that indirectly influence the economy). Sen, 'How Does Culture Matter?', pp.37-58.

⁸³ R. La Porta, F. Lopez-de-Silanes, A. Shleifer and R.W. Vishny, 'Law and Finance', *Journal of Political Economy*, vol. 106, no. 6 (1998), pp. 1113-55.

⁸⁴ M. Egnal, *Divergent Paths: How Culture and Institutions Have Shaped North American Growth* (Oxford, 1996), p. vii, 53-4.

the North Atlantic Triangle⁸⁵ would seem to be a good way of investigating the evolution of the country's economic culture. We need to know far more about how membership in the Empire-Commonwealth influenced Canada's economic, political and business cultures in the days before America Inc. became overwhelmingly dominant and Great Britain plc disappeared over the horizon.

Of course, investigating the differences between Canadian and American politico-economic culture is complicated by the debris of yesterday's theories. In the 1960s, Gad Horowitz connected the relative strength of socialism in Canada to the British connection by tracing a genealogy of collectivist ideas back to the United Empire Loyalists. The many critics of Horowitz's thesis regarding the intellectual legacy of the Loyalists were probably right,⁸⁶ especially since the political culture of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain was as least as committed to Dickensian *laissez-faire* as the United States.⁸⁷ But while Britain's drift to the (relative) left came only in the twentieth century, it occurred at a time when Britain still exerted a strong influence on Canadian political culture. As a recent collection of essays makes clear, the Commonwealth relationship was still a very important one for Canadians in the middle of the twentieth century,⁸⁸ the period in which the influence of socialist ideas in Britain was at its very peak. Canadian historians have only recently begun to investigate how the ideology of the Commonwealth influenced Canadian reactions to the rise of social democracy in Britain.⁸⁹

One promising avenue of future archival research is the influence of British role models on the development of the Canadian welfare state. A possible topic related to this theme is the relationship between Tommy Douglas, the so-called 'father of medicare', and Aneurin Bevan, the architect of Britain's National Health Service.⁹⁰ Canadian discussions of British gun control and capital

⁸⁵ J.B. Brebner, *North Atlantic Triangle: the Interplay of Canada, the United States and Great Britain* (New Haven, 1945).

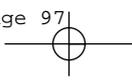
⁸⁶ G Horowitz, 'Conservatism, Liberalism and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation', *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1966), pp. 143-71; J. Ajzenstat and P.J. Smith, 'The "Tory Touch" Thesis: Bad History, Poor Political Science', in Mark Charlton and Paul Barker (ed.), *Crosscurrents, Contemporary Political Issues*, 3rd edition (Toronto, 1998), pp. 84-90.

⁸⁷ E. Wallace, 'The Origin of the Social Welfare State in Canada, 1867-1900', *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1950), pp. 383-93.

⁸⁸ Buckner (ed.), *Canada and the End of Empire*.

⁸⁹ But see J. Naylor, 'Canadian Labour politics and the British model, 1920-50', in Buckner and Francis, *Canada and the British World*, pp. 288-308. On the role of British role models in the construction of the Canadian welfare state, see D. Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*, 3rd edition (Vancouver, 1997), pp. 42-4, 125; G. Gray, *Federalism and Health Policy: the Development of Health Systems in Canada and Australia* (Toronto, 1991), pp. 28, 40.

⁹⁰ Lewis H. Thomas (ed.), *The Making of a Socialist: the Recollections of T.C. Douglas* (Edmonton, 1982), pp. 269-73.



punishment legislation are two other topics that might be studied. If Canada is indeed 'a Northern European welfare state in the worst sense of the term' (to quote Stephen Harper's speech to a gathering of American neo-conservatives in 1997),⁹¹ this may be partly due to the very British connection he so loudly praised in July 2006. The British legacy in Canada does indeed include a culture generally receptive to free enterprise and some of our military traditions. But it also includes approaches to social policy and international law that set Canada apart from the United States.

One suspects that if historians had provided the reading public with a more complete view of the British impact on Canada, Mr Harper might have hesitated to make the statements quoted at the start of this essay. After all, certain features of Canadian society valued by people on the right can be traced to Britain, but so can institutions popular with those on the left. Extending from John Cabot to John Diefenbaker, the Anglo-Canadian special relationship laid down many sedimentary layers. Its sheer complexity requires Canadian historians to draw on multiple interpretive frameworks. The potential rewards for grappling with the comparative literature include the chance to escape from the parochialism inherent in 'national history'.

The existing British World literature provides a good starting point, but historians need to reconnect with socio-economic theory if we are to understand Britain's complex role in the making of Canada. Engaging with the theories surveyed in this chapter would have the incidental effect of increasing the relevance of Canadian historical writing to academics in other disciplines and to the reading public. As the comments by Mr Harper quoted above indicate, non-historians have not forgotten the importance of the British Empire in Canadian history. Although the British impact on Canada was not as positive as some neo-conservatives make out, it was probably much more beneficial than the recent historiography would suggest. I hope that the tentative conclusions provided in this chapter will generate future debate on the British Empire's contribution to the Canadian success story.

⁹¹ CTV News, 'Full Text of Stephen Harper's 1997 Speech', 14 December 2005.

