

# Constructing and Enforcing the “Medicine Line”: A Comparative Analysis of Indian Policy on the North American Frontier

Pierre M. Atlas

Department of Political Science, Marian University, Indianapolis, IN, USA

## ABSTRACT

The national self-images of the United States and Canada have been shaped, in part, by their contrasting histories and mythologies of westward expansion and nation-building. Those narratives are most distinct with regard to government policies toward aboriginal peoples on either side of the 49th parallel, what Indians called “the medicine line.” The purpose of this article is two fold: (1) to specify and develop a three-part conceptual framework (consisting of the Turnerian discourse, the Lipset Thesis, and Borderlands Studies) for examining the history of the North American frontier and (2) utilizing a wide range of scholarly literature, to apply that framework in a comparative analysis of national policies toward Indians and First Nations in the post–Civil War/post–Confederation period on the Great Plains and Prairies. Several explanatory factors for cross-national difference will be identified and examined, including variance in geography and geology; demography, demographic trends, and political pressures in each country; the types of national political institutions and their impact on policymaking; and the types of forces deployed in the West (the Mounties and the US Army).

## KEYWORDS

First nations; American Indians; frontier; Mounties; borderlands

## Introduction

The national self-images of the United States and Canada, with their rival narratives, iconography, and conceptualizations of the proper relationship between government and society, have been shaped in part by their contrasting histories and mythologies of westward expansion and nation-building. Americans glory in tales of a “Wild West” filled with marauding Indians and gunfights, while Canadians proudly reply with their own narrative of a more civilized, “Mild West,” stressing “Peace, Order, and Good Government” on the prairies. The icon of the American West is the lone, armed cowboy (who, when romanticized as an outlaw, stands *against* government), while Canada’s western (and national) icon is the red-coated Mountie, the physical embodiment of an honorable and powerful central government. The contrasting narratives of western expansion and nation-building, and their binary images of a “Wild” or “Mild” West, are perhaps most distinct when it comes to the two countries’ approaches to their

aboriginal peoples—beginning with the fact that there were no Indian wars in Canada. Indeed, Indians themselves called the 49th parallel the “medicine line,” in recognition of the contrasting realities created by government policies on either side of the international border.<sup>1</sup>

How can we explain the stark differences in policy toward American Indians and Canada’s First Nations?<sup>2</sup> The purpose of this article is two fold: (1) to specify and develop a three-part conceptual framework (consisting of the Turnerian discourse, the Lipset Thesis, and Borderlands Studies) for studying the North American frontier that could be utilized in the fields of comparative politics, Canadian Studies or North American Studies and (2) utilizing a wide range of scholarly literature, to apply that framework in a comparative analysis of national policies toward indigenous people of the Great Plains and Canadian Prairies (and in the Alberta–Montana borderlands in particular) in the post–Civil War/post–Confederation period. As will be seen, the three approaches are on occasion complementary and, together, can help provide a greater understanding of the topic at hand. This article is part of a larger research project that will examine the history, mythology, and political legacy of the North American frontier.

### Three conceptual approaches

#### *The Turnerian discourse*

Any discussion of the historiography of the American West must begin with Frederick Jackson Turner’s “Frontier Thesis,” first articulated in his seminal 1893 essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” Turner’s thesis framed America’s understanding of its past, and of the West in particular, for generations to come—not only for historians but also for popular culture and even American politics. In his introduction to Turner’s collected works, John Mack Faragher (1994, 1) offers a sweeping assessment of the scholar’s influence: “Turner’s essay is the single most influential piece of writing in the history of American history.” Turner’s thesis, beginning with “The Significance of the Frontier” and not only bolstered but also modified by his later writings, has spurred over a century of historiographical discourse and criticism. Turner may have argued that the frontier ended in 1890, but his thesis continues to generate scholarship and debate well into the twenty-first century.

The history—and the uniqueness—of the United States, Turner asserted, could best be understood (indeed, perhaps *only* be understood) through the lens of its westward expansion. Turner presents a compelling albeit mono-causal argument for American Exceptionalism: the very process of frontier expansion and the westward movement of “civilization,” he asserted, made the United States—with its republican and democratic values, its individualism, egalitarianism, and social mobility—empirically distinct from all its historical predecessors as well as its contemporaries. “Up to our own day,” began his famous 1893 essay, “American history has been in large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward *explain* America’s development” (Turner 1994a, 31; emphasis added). With this opening statement, Turner articulated key elements of his causal argument: the abundance of “free land” and the ever-expanding (and ultimately shrinking) frontier. “These free lands,” Turner wrote in a

later essay, “promoted individualism, economic equality, freedom to rise, democracy. ... In a word, then, free lands meant free opportunities. Their existence has differentiated the American democracy” from all others (1994b, 92). Significantly, Turner’s project ignored Canada and any parallels between American and Canadian westward expansion, including the impact of an abundance of “free land” for settlers on the Canadian prairies.

For Turner, the post-Civil War trans-Mississippi West (the American geographic focus of this article) was not substantially different from earlier American frontiers. His “frontier” was not a single or specific geographic region of the country—for the frontier line had moved ever westward from the time of the pilgrims—but rather was a process of social, political, and economic development and transformation that created and defined the American character, the nation, and its history. In a key passage in his original essay, Turner (1994a) asserts that this frontier dynamic, beginning with the earliest days of America’s colonial settlement, was cyclical and rejuvenating. It produced

a recurrence of the process of evolution in each western area reached in the process of expansion. Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. (32)

This transformative frontier process, argued Turner, created “a new product that is American.” Indeed, with the frontier, *America* became American. In his 1903 essay, “Contributions of the West to American Democracy,” Turner more specifically suggested that the frontier process shaped America’s political development: “the wind of democracy blew strongly from the West,” inspiring the more established eastern states to liberalize their constitutions and enhance the egalitarian nature of democracy (1994b, 85).<sup>3</sup> America’s frontier democracy, Turner asserted, was accompanied by a suspicion and even hostility toward government. “The frontier is productive of individualism,” he wrote in 1893, and this individualism was “anti-social. It produces antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control. The tax-gatherer is viewed as a representative of oppression” (Turner 1994a, 53). He returned to this point in the 1903 essay: “The Westerner defended himself and resented governmental restrictions” (1994b, 86). The frontier also functioned as America’s social and political melting pot, assimilating all newcomers into an identifiably American “race” of people. Furthermore, Turner argued in several essays, because the frontier offered an equality of opportunity not found in the eastern cities and provided the downtrodden with the ability to move ever westward geographically and upward socially, it served as a socioeconomic “safety valve” or a “gate of escape,” which in turn helped explain why socialism never really took hold in the United States. The danger for America lied in the fact that, according to the 1890 census, the frontier had “closed”—and with it, Turner feared, the rejuvenating process that kept America young and exceptional.<sup>4</sup>

Turner’s thesis, including its pivotal concept of “free land,” ignored or marginalized Indians. Any cultural or legal claims that America’s indigenous populations may have had over the lands opened to white settlement are neither addressed nor are the histories of any specific tribes. In his seminal 1893 paper (presented to the American Historical

Association three years after the massacre at Wounded Knee, which signaled the climax of the Plains Indians Wars), Turner defined the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” and observed that, “The Indian was a common danger, demanding united action” (1994a, 32, 41). Other than passages of this sort, Indians remain largely absent in Turner’s narrative and analysis of America’s westward expansion.

Several aspects of Turner’s Frontier Thesis have been challenged by a body of scholarship collectively known as the New Western History, which first emerged in the late 1980s with Patricia Nelson Limerick’s (1987) *Legacy of Conquest*. New Western historians reject Turner’s key assertion that the frontier “ended” in 1890, and instead view and study the West—or, the region’s many “wests”—as evolving to this day. The New Western History seeks to address the glaring “absences” in Turner’s historiography—the narratives and historical record of Indians and also nonwhite and non-male settlers, for example—and points out that the creation and distribution of “free land,” so critical to Turner’s thesis, was actually made possible by governmental actions such as the 1862 Homestead Act and the provision of security by the military (Limerick 1987, 1992; Limerick, Milner and Rankin 1991; Malone 1991; Nugent 1991, 1994; Robbins 1991; White 1991; Cronon, Miles, and Gitlin 1992; Faragher 1992, 1993; and, 1994; Milner, Butler, and Lewis 1997; Hine and Faragher 2000, 2007; West 1991, 2012). Along with Limerick’s *Legacy*, Richard White’s (1991) masterful revision of traditional Western historiography, *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, is an early seminal work in the New Western History, one that challenged Turner on several fronts: White details the long-standing and extensive role of the federal government in western development; the West’s economic dependence on investors from the East (and Europe) for capital; the role of large corporations (beginning with railroads and mining interests) in the consolidation of the West; and the cultural destruction wrought by US Indian policy. Whereas Turner’s formulation has long fed the western mythology of “rugged individualism” in a lawless (and government-less) “Wild West”—what Richard Slotkin (1998) calls “The Myth of the Frontier”—White and other New Western historians debunk large chunks of that mythology.

Despite the extensive and specific critiques, however, the New Western History’s wide-ranging body of mostly late-twentieth century scholarship follows the basic Turnerian narrative structure of a linear, developmental progression from East to West, and like Turner, the majority of these scholars focus exclusively on the history of the American West and have little or nothing to say about Canada (or any other country that experienced frontier development).<sup>5</sup> Granted, many of its authors question Turner’s definition of the western “frontier” and view it as a diverse geographic, ecological, and cultural “place” rather than as a transformative “process.” Nevertheless, the New Western History engages Turner in a closed loop of critical discourse; much of its scholarly product is a direct and self-conscious response to Turner and, like Turner, presents a dichotomy of the American West and East. Thus, for the purposes of this comparative study, I include Turner and the New Western History in a common conceptual framework, what I call the “Turnerian discourse.”

### **The Lipset thesis**

The American political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset, in a body of work beginning in the 1960s and most fully articulated in his 1990 book, *Continental Divide*, posits that the

differences between the United States and Canada were forged at the two countries' *points of origin* (Lipset 1968, 1990, 1991, 2000, 2001). Lipset articulates a historical and sociological process of "loading the dice" that *temporally predates* Turner's thesis of frontier development. America, Lipset argues, was founded as a "revolutionary society" that stressed the values of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."<sup>6</sup> Canada, on the other hand, was created as the "counter-revolutionary society" that, from its birth, enshrined the British-sourced values of "Peace, Order, and Good Government."<sup>7</sup> Lipset posits that values, culture, and political institutions shaped, and were shaped by, the two countries' divergent developmental trajectories from the very outset.<sup>8</sup>

Lipset, echoing some of Turner's imagery (but not his causal analysis), presents the United States as libertarian, individualistic, and deeply suspicious of government, while he argues that Canadian identity and political culture were infused, from its origins, by the Toryism of the American Loyalists who fled north during and after the Revolution.<sup>9</sup> The Lipset Thesis rejects Turner's fundamental assertion that the continual and cyclical process of moving westward into a frontier of "free land" is what made America unique, or that the "wind of democracy" blew from West to East. Instead, America's classical liberal values and institutions dated to the founding of the republic, and they *went west* with the frontier. As for Canada, the legacy of its "counter-revolutionary" national origins continues to influence the nation's political culture: Canada "remains more respectful of authority, more willing to use the state, and more supportive of a group basis of rights than its neighbor. ... The Revolution and the subsequent migration north by those opposed to the values it embedded loaded the dice toward more conservative postures in Canada than the United States" (Lipset 1990, 3, 17).<sup>10</sup>

The cultural and structural distinctions that Lipset identifies (even if he sometimes overstates or exaggerates them) have long been empirically verifiable.<sup>11</sup> The far more extensive role of the national government in the Canadian economy and society—from the moment of that nation's founding as the Dominion of Canada in 1867—has been largely accepted by the Canadian populace in the name of the best interests of society. Peace, Order, and Good Government is not just a slogan, but has been shorthand for a different orientation and worldview from its neighbor to the south for the past 150 years. As Gerald Friesen (2004) puts it,

Even casual students of Canadian life are aware of the greater role of the state in the Canadian economy. ... Canada has been much affected in recent decades by European currents of state capitalism, trade unionism, and social democracy. Canada's partial rejection of the iron law of the marketplace contrasts with American practice and American ideology. In the generation after 1945, Canada articulated a distinctive North American version of the just society. (58–59)

I include within the Lipset Thesis scholarship that either directly supports Seymour Martin Lipset's core assertions or logically fits within a "Lipsetian" conceptual framework that stresses (1) fundamental cultural and structural differences dating to the two countries' points of origin, or (2) the continuity of "eastern" or national values and institutions as the country developed westward (rather than the West representing something entirely new and distinct from the East, as Turner argued). Thus, Canadian "metropolitanism," developed by Harold Innis (beginning with his 1930 work, *The Fur Trade in Canada*) and refined by J.M.S. Careless could be included within this framework.

Rather than separating East from West, as does the Turnerian discourse, Innis and Careless argue that the federal government in Ottawa and the economic centers of Toronto and Montreal comprised the *metropolitan core* that financed, facilitated, and directed westward development and expansion, with the West as the *hinterland*.<sup>12</sup> “Behind the rise of the frontier, hinterland or region in Canada” wrote Careless, “lay the power of the metropolis, which ultimately disposed of their resource harvest, strongly fostered their expansion, and widely controlled their very existence” (Careless 1979, 99). This “metropolitan–hinterland” relationship was symbiotic: the hinterland, with its temporary frontiers, provided “staple goods” and natural resources for the nation and its metropolitan center (including “regional metropolises” like Edmonton or Winnipeg), while demand in the core set prices and also supplied the necessary finished goods and technology to enable the hinterland/frontier to develop (Careless 1979).

The metropolitan approach stands in glaring contrast to Turner’s Frontier Thesis, where the rejuvenating process of westering makes the East essentially “obsolete.” As Worster (2004, 27) puts it, “the Canadians could find none of Turner’s multiple new beginnings in the wilderness; instead, they saw development as a straight-forward march, controlled and directed by metropolitan forces far removed from the interior.” Innis profoundly shaped Canadian historiography of the West in another manner as well, by recognizing the unique impact of Canada’s multiethnic and linguistic origins (English, French, aboriginal, and “mixed blood”) on its later development (Kaye 2001; Francis 2006). This aspect of metropolitanism supports Canada’s self-image as a multicultural “mosaic” of distinct groups and justifies a “group rights” discourse that is largely absent in the more individualistic United States (with its own metaphor of the assimilationist “melting pot”).

I also include within the Lipset Thesis the Canadian political theorist Gad Horowitz (1966), who noted the influence of British Toryism (and socialism) on Canadian political culture: for Horowitz, British, and Anglo-Canadian values of community, social order, and governmental intervention in the economy for the common good—or “Red Toryism”—are essential for understanding Canada’s uniqueness. More recent scholarship has also noted the British influence in the development of (English) Canadian society and culture, including in higher education.<sup>13</sup> Gerard Boychuk (2008), in his comparative study of health care in the United States and Canada, suggests that from the time of their respective foundings, the United States has struggled with questions of race, while Canada was faced with the challenges of multicultural and linguistic division. He posits that the “politics of race in the United States” and the “politics of territorial integration in Canada” are the primary explanatory factors for US–Canadian divergence in health-care policy. Dawson (1998), Johnson and Graybill (2010), Fanning (2012), Elofson (2015), and Jennings (2015) all note that the English (particularly, Ontario) Canadian elite *went west* along with the immigrants (and that the English elite also filled ranks of the Mounties and the large-scale cattle ranching enterprises in Southern Alberta), thus bringing their English Canadian values and “rigid Victorian class structure” *with them* to the frontier.<sup>14</sup> All of these scholars fit within the broad “Lipsetian” approach, in that they stress basic, even “primordial” cultural and structural differences between the United States and Canada; these foundational distinctions, asserts the Lipset Thesis, traveled westward, shaping and constraining the policy options, and trajectories of the two nations’ development.

## ***Borderlands studies***

A third approach to examining North American frontier development and outcomes is Borderlands Studies. In contradistinction to the Lipset Thesis, this approach is about sameness, not difference: it stresses similarity across the socially constructed boundaries that separate countries and the development of new and unique borderlands cultures that are distinguishable from the broader, national cultures. While the bulk of North American Borderlands scholarship focuses on the US–Mexican border, an increasing number of works examine the US–Canadian borderlands and particularly the western region of the 49th parallel (Higham and Thacker 2004, 2006; McManus 2004, 2005; Evans 2006; Johnson and Graybill 2010).<sup>15</sup> Turner’s Frontier Thesis is about “process,” and the New Western History is about “place.” These two approaches, from within the academic discipline of History, comprise what I call the Turnerian discourse. The Borderlands Studies approach is about *both* process (the intermingling and blurring of lines and people) *and* place (geographically and topographically specific borderland regions and “border cultures” of North America from Mexico to Canada). Borderlands Studies benefits from and builds upon the advances of the New Western History, but unlike that earlier scholarship, it is explicitly comparative and multidisciplinary, incorporating the conceptual and methodological diversity of History, Political Science, Sociology, Geography, Cultural Studies, and other academic disciplines. Borderlands Studies are infused with post-modern assumptions about gender, class, ethnicity, and the social construction of identity.

A key assertion of the Borderlands approach is captured in the title of a two-volume collection of comparative essays on the North American frontier edited by C.L. Higham and Robert Thacker (2004; 2006): *One West, Two Myths*. In many ways, Borderlands scholars assert, the American and Canadian Wests *have more in common with each other than either has with the more eastern regions in their respective countries*. This is in direct contrast to the Lipset Thesis, which asserts that fundamental national differences *moved westward* or that Canada’s metropolitan core directed and controlled the development of the hinterland.

Rather than assuming fundamental differences between countries, the Borderlands approach examines the *interconnectedness* and even *interdependence* of people. In her study of the nineteenth-century Alberta–Montana borderlands, for example, Sheila McManus (2005, xii) posits that this region “was home to interconnected communities, economics, and ecologies that could not be divided simply by proclaiming that a linear boundary ran through them.” The Indian borderlands culture of Alberta–Montana was shaped in large measure by the bison (whose great herds paid no mind to international boundary lines) as Indians on either side, such as the Blackfoot, followed the herds across the 49th parallel during hunting season; the extinction of the bison and diseases like smallpox and tuberculosis transcended the border and devastated numerous tribes, with long-lasting social, political, and economic ramifications (Daschuk 2013; Dempsey 2015). There were white settler borderlands cultures as well, such as cattle ranching in Montana and Southern Alberta, and they regularly interacted with Indians on either side, sometimes in conflict but often in economically interdependent collaboration (Elofson 2015; Jennings 2015). The “artificialness” of the border was noted by Wallace Stegner



(2000) in *Wolf Willow*, his semiautobiographical work on growing up in the US–Canadian borderlands in the early twentieth century:

The 49th parallel ran directly through my childhood, dividing me in two. ... We could not be remarkably impressed with the physical differences between Canada and the United States, for our lives slopped over the international boundary every summer day. ... We ignored the international boundary in ways and to degrees that would have been impossible if it had not been a line almost completely artificial. (81–83)

In their critical review of Borderlands Studies, Hamalainen and Truett (2011, 349) suggest that “borderlands scholars have turned American history into a Manichean interplay of states and borderlands. Borderlands history is everything that state-centered histories are not.” Isern and Shepard (2006, xxxii), writing of the 49th parallel, seemingly confirm Hamalainen and Truett’s observations when asserting that Borderlands Studies “presupposes that the border has agency in history and that it forms border cultures and constitutes its own historical themes distinct from, and perhaps subversive of, national cultures.” This is an important assertion, but it should not be overstated: for that border, what Indians recognized as the “medicine line,” did in fact separate two countries, two sets of laws, and two distinct qualities of life for indigenous peoples.

When it comes to the western history (and mythology) of Canada and the United States, two great divides have cleaved the “borderlands cultures” of the 49th parallel. First, while the “Law of the Gun” was a much celebrated—if exaggerated—characteristic of the American frontier, it was allowed no legitimate place on the Canadian Prairies under the domain of the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP)<sup>16</sup> (Elofson 2015; Jennings 2015; McClean 2015; Somerset 2015).<sup>17</sup> Second, the post-Civil War American Indian frontier was characterized in large measure by physical violence and warfare between whites and Indians, whereas Canada’s counterpart was not. Yes, border cultures and localized social and economic interactions are powerful forces. But so are the institutions of the state. Borderlands Studies tend to privilege the former at the expense of the latter. A political science rejoinder from an earlier era (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 1985) may be appropriate here: perhaps it is time, once again, to “bring the state back in.”

Carol Higham suggests that, “The study of the West in Canada and the United States provides a unique laboratory for comparison” and presents the “perfect opportunity” to test various theories of western development and nation-building (Higham 2004, xii, xiv). As with the parable of the blind men and the elephant, no single conceptual approach can explain everything. As will be seen, each of the three approaches identified here—the Turnerian discourse, the Lipset Thesis, and Borderlands Studies—will have some utility for examining history as well as mythology across the 49th parallel.

## Indian policies on the North American frontier

One of the most profound differences between the United States and Canada’s western histories concerns the policies toward their respective indigenous peoples. These divergent histories in turn helped fuel the frontier mythologies of America’s “Wild West” and, especially, Canada’s “Mild West.” John Mack Faragher (1992, 103–104) juxtaposes America’s “frontier of exclusion” with Canada’s “frontier of inclusion,” and Elliott West



(2004, 10) observes that Canada was “friendlier and more sensitive” than the United States when it came to the treatment of its aboriginal peoples. Although Canada’s First Nations today enjoy constitutionally recognized group rights,<sup>18</sup> it must be acknowledged that, when removed from a comparative context with the United States, Canada’s history vis-à-vis its Plains Indians does not seem so sensitive or inclusive. McManus notes that the United States and Canada were both “colonial nations with comparable cultural agendas and a shared belief in their right to displace the aboriginal peoples of the continent” (2005, 181). Policies of neglect and the deliberate withholding of rations to the point of starvation; forced assimilation and other draconian aspects of Canada’s Indian Act; and decades of abuse of First Nations children in residential schools (recently unearthed by Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission), all serve as reminders that, even in Canada, indigenous populations have long been marginalized and mistreated by the government and civilians who enjoyed their trust and were ostensibly acting in their best interests (Daschuk 2013; Brock 2014; Curry and Galloway 2015; Dempsey 2015; King 2015). Nevertheless, any observer of North American history would notice significant distinctions between American and Canadian treatment of aboriginal people on the western frontier, beginning with the fact that there were no Indian wars or massacres of Indians in Canada.

In seeking to explain Canada’s more tempered and less physically violent and destructive nineteenth-century Indian policies, a self-congratulatory “national character” argument will not suffice. Indeed, as Jill St. Germain (2001, 43) notes, “The Dominion government had no more regard for Indian culture, Indian government, or even Indian responsibility than its American counterpart.” Although British and Canadian officials did reject, from the outset, violent American-style military action as a policy option and some officials (particularly Mounties) believed Indians should be treated “fairly,” there are important causal factors beyond the realm of Canada’s moral or national character that help account for divergence in the two nations’ approaches to Indians in the post-1865/1867 Great Plains and Prairies. These factors, to be addressed in turn, include significant variance in geography and geology; demography, demographic trends and political pressures in each country; the types of national political institutions (parliamentary versus presidential systems) and their impact on policymaking; and the types of forces deployed in the West (the Mounties versus the US Army).

### ***The Laurentian shield and the developmental time lag***

Unlike the United States, Canada did not experience a “moving frontier” from the time of its founding—a process that, in the United States, was accompanied by conflictual and often violent interactions with aboriginal people. That Canada’s westward development did not mimic America’s Turnerian trajectory was not a deliberate policy choice on Canada’s part, however. Rather, Canada’s settlement of newly acquired lands in the Northwest Territories was constrained by the geophysical obstacle of the Precambrian Laurentian Shield, also known as the Canadian Shield: a vast stretch of land encompassing more than half of Canada’s territory and consisting of igneous rock and a very thin top soil. The area of the Shield was rich in natural minerals but made farming in the nineteenth-century prohibitive. As Paul Sharp (1955) explains, due to the natural impediment of the Shield,

the continuity of the frontier experience was broken, save in the fur trade. This shield comprised a barrier that forced westward-moving Canadian pioneers southward into the American states of the Old Northwest. When roads and railways finally pierced the Shield, *the settlers of the Canadian plains came as easterners, innocent of the influence of a continuous frontier environment. Thus they established institutions possessing a sophistication unfamiliar to plainsmen south of the boundary.* (371; emphasis added)

Put differently, western Canadian development was more Lipsetian than Turnerian: British North American (and English Canadian) values, culture, and institutions were transplanted relatively intact to the West once the Shield was penetrated. Critical to any comparative study of North American nation-building is the sixteen-year gap between the acquisition of Rupert's Land (today's Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba)<sup>19</sup> from Hudson's Bay Company in 1869 and the arrival of large numbers of white settlers in the Northwest Territories following the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) in 1885. Fortuitously, the geophysical barrier and the logistical obstacles it created gave Ottawa much-needed time to address its "Indian Question," put down two Riel rebellions, and develop its national policy for settling the Prairies (Bothwell 2006; McKenna 2006; Graybill 2007; Fanning 2012). The United States, on the other hand, "did not have this luxury of space and time" (McManus 2005, 61). Lipset identifies several elements of the causal chain linking Canada's developmental time lag to its relatively more peaceful and orderly frontier reality:

Law and order in the form of the centrally controlled North-West Mounted Police moved into the frontier before and along with the settlers. This contributed to the establishment of a much greater tradition of respect for the institutions of law and order on the Canadian frontier, as compared with the American, meant the absence of vigilante activity in Canada, and enabled Canada to avoid the Indian wars which were occurring south of the border, since the Canadian government kept its word to the Indians and the Mounties prevented "renegade whites" from upsetting the Indians. (Lipset 1968, 10)

### ***Demography, demographic pressures, and the "Indian Question"***

The two countries faced different demographic realities in the nineteenth century: America's population was growing much faster than Canada's.<sup>20</sup> On the American frontier, a seemingly endless stream of settlers, taking full advantage of the Homestead Act of 1862 and driven by post-Civil War socioeconomic pressures and dreams of a rejuvenating "fresh start" on the Plains, was lobbying Washington for more assistance and military protection from the Indians upon whose land they were often encroaching. They pressured the federal government to take harsh retaliatory action against Indian raids or the stealing of livestock, and to have treaties with Indians rejected and reservations reduced in size. In Canada on the other hand, prior to the completion of the CPR in 1885, there were relatively few newcomers in the Northwest Territories: cattle ranchers who, after 1881, were granted 100,000 acre leases by the federal government for a penny an acre (Glenbow Museum exhibit), and some hearty homesteaders acquiring land via the Dominion Lands Act of 1872, Canada's equivalent of the Homestead Act (McManus 2005, 39; Bothwell 2006, 232). Once the CPR was completed, spanning the Laurentian Shield and connecting Central Canada with British Columbia, Ottawa

(and the CPR) had to actively seek out and incentivize immigrants to choose Canada over the United States; they offered “free land” and various subsidies in order to populate the vast and largely barren Northwest Territories (McManus 2004, 124–125; Bothwell 2006, 231–232).

St. Germain (2001, 43) cites “the absence of settler pressure in Canada” as one explanatory factor for Canada’s exclusive reliance on negotiated treaties to acquire Indian lands—making American-style military campaigns unnecessary. Canada’s Indian population was much smaller than that of the United States, the land area and physical distance between whites and Indians was much larger in Canada, and the major immigration waves did not hit the Canadian prairies until the early twentieth century—decades after the First Nations had been subjugated on reserves by Ottawa. Thus, there was no violent, large-scale head-on collision between Canadian settlers and First Nations (such as the Cree or Blackfoot), as had occurred to the south with the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Kiowa, and others. In 1877, US Secretary of the Interior Carl Shurz, commenting on the lack of violence north of the border, noted, perhaps enviously, that the majority of Canada’s Indian population in the West “occupy an immense area almost untouched by settlements of whites. ... The line dividing the Indians and the whites can be easily controlled by a well-organized body of police, who maintain peace and order” (quoted in McManus 2005, 62). The Dominion’s more peaceful record of Indian relations, posits Utley, is “explained less by enlightened Canadian policies than by the vastness of the land in relation to Indian and white population” (2003, 260–261).

The two countries differed in how they conceived the “Indian Question.” In Canada, Indians and the reserve system came to be seen as an “economic burden” on Ottawa, while south of the border, US policymakers saw their Indians “as a natural obstacle” to frontier development that had to be overcome and subdued, “akin to the Rocky Mountains” (St. Germain 2001, 10–11). The primary goal of Canada’s seven Numbered Treaties (negotiated between 1871 and 1877) was to secure for the Dominion full title and claim to Indian land in the Northwest Territories, at the cheapest possible price (St. Germain 2001; Daschuk 2013; Dempsey 2015). Daschuk convincingly demonstrates that the stinginess of the Canadian Government, especially after the Conservatives’ return to power in 1878 under the leadership of John A. MacDonald, led to brazen (and demographically devastating) policies of reducing or withholding rations on the Cree and Blackfoot reserves during periods of famine following the disappearance of the bison. Dempsey (2015, 176) calls the government of this era “unfeeling and budget-conscious.”

In sum, emigrants from Canada’s eastern provinces and Europe, upon their orderly and government-directed arrival on the Prairies after 1885, encountered a largely pacified, dependent, and often demoralized Indian population living on (often far away) reserves, with law and order firmly in the hands of the NWMP. This was not the situation on the American frontier, where a more aggressive (and armed) individualism often forced the government’s hand. “In the United States, settlers did not wait for the government to clear title to the land. They just took it” (St. Germain 2001, 7). Overcoming the tensions resulting from white settlers seizing lands that Washington had earlier promised to Indians via treaties often required the deployment of the US Army.

### *Institutional and cultural differences*

When analyzing the policies that helped construct the “medicine line,” any comparison of the raucous, messy and often corrupt, patronage-driven American political system of the late-nineteenth century to its more staid, elitist and professional Anglo-Canadian counterpart will tend to support the Lipset Thesis. Samek notes that “Canadians firmly believed in government from the top-down rather than from the grassroots. In the United States, Indian policy had to conform, in many ways, to the wishes of the electorate, especially the aggressive frontier population” (Samek 1987, 31). All policing of Canada’s Northwest Territories—for ranchers, settlers, and Indians alike—was carried out by the Mounted Police; they were the sole civilian legal (and “military”) authority on the Canadian Prairies. The American approach was more decentralized. There was no federal police force on the frontier; in Montana Territory as in other parts of the West, local judges and sheriffs were popularly elected (and often corrupt), and Montanans and their territorial legislature were not shy about resisting federal actions.<sup>21</sup> Washington, for its part, was not interested in exerting control over all aspects of Indian policy: law enforcement and the meting out of justice on US Indian reservations was placed in the hands of tribal police and tribal courts (which had no parallel on the Canadian reserves, where the Mounties enforced law promulgated in Ottawa) (Samek 1987). Although there was a vibrant Blackfoot border culture and common language that transcended the arbitrarily drawn 49th parallel separating Montana and Alberta, when it came to both treaty-making and formal policies on American reservations and Canadian reserves, such cultures were cleaved in two by the rival sovereign governments.<sup>22</sup>

Indian policy in the United States was always heavily politicized, with ongoing and often debilitating power struggles in Washington between the legislative and executive branches and between the House and Senate (not possible in Canada’s parliamentary system, where most First Nations policy was made by the prime minister and the cabinet). The pluralist American constitutional system with its separation of powers, checks and balances, federalism and nineteenth-century political patronage produced a patchwork of often incoherent and contradictory policies that were accompanied by corruption and incompetence (Samek 1987; White 1991; St. Germain 2001; Utley 2003). After Congress put an end to treaty-making in 1871, intense political conflicts erupted between civilian agencies of the federal government aligned with church groups wanting to “civilize” and Christianize the Indians in what they called a “Peace Policy,” and the War Department—supported and encouraged by westerners who demanded aggressive, even violent action—which sought a military solution to the Indian Question.<sup>23</sup> Utley notes with irony that, “Virtually every major war of the two decades after Appomattox was fought to force Indians onto newly created reservations or to make them go back to reservations from which they had fled. Not surprisingly, warfare characterized the Peace Policy” (2003, 161).

The Lipset Thesis and its “metropolitan” corollary find empirical support in the Canadian policy process. While American policymakers were continuously modifying and experimenting with Indian policy during the nineteenth century, sometimes to the point of creating chaos, Canada’s Indian policies reflected its more efficient parliamentary system that fused executive and legislative functions, and its more effective and comparatively less corrupt civil service. Canada’s First Nations policy was shaped and

directed from the political center (Ottawa), with “the North-West Mounted Police [serving] as an instrument of metropolitan authority throughout the new domain” (Careless 1979, 103). The all-encompassing and draconian Indian Act of 1876, which set Canada’s First Nations policy for decades to come, was a shining example of what a well-oiled, majoritarian parliamentary system could accomplish, and represented “a consolidation of laws that has no parallel in the United States” (LaDow 2004, 73). Canadian officials, operating in a British-influenced culture where slow, evolutionary change was more likely to be lauded than condemned, were far more resistant to new ideas. Ottawa’s rejection of American-style tribal self-policing “illustrated the Canadian fear of innovation and experimentation” (Samek 1987, 165); the director of Canada’s Indian Department proudly noted in 1913 that, “The keynote of our policy is caution and prudence” (quoted in Samek 1987, 23). As Lipset might have predicted, North American Indian policy developed along divergent trajectories in part not only due to structural and institutional differences between presidential and parliamentary systems but also due to cultural differences between a raucous, “revolutionary,” and a more conservative, “counter-revolutionary” society.

### ***Communal versus individual property***

Both countries’ national governments (and their often well-meaning “reformers”) sought to “Christianize” and “civilize” their respective aboriginal people and convert them into farmers on newly reserved tribal lands, but their approaches were noticeably different. Lending support to the Lipset Thesis, Canada in its Numbered Treaties stressed *communal rights* and the best interests of the group as a whole, while the US approach, consistent with a political culture that celebrated and even fetishized individualism and personal property, separated out and privileged individual Indians in the granting of rights and distribution of resources. Treaties designed in Washington DC, distributed land to individuals or small families in order to give Indians a stake in the “family farm.” Stipulations related to farming in the Numbered Treaties, on the other hand, were more likely to allocate resources “to a number of families or to bands than to a single family and never to an individual. ... Unlike the United States, where the individual was the basis for goods allotted, the Canadian treaties stated that all implements and stock would be shared” (St. Germain 2001, 113, 117). Canadian policy also stressed group rights and group identity by prohibiting the sale of even individually owned Indian land located on reserves *without the consent of the tribe or band* (Samek 1987, 178).

An overarching goal of American reformers advocating the “Peace Policy” was to separate individual Indians from their tribal groups and loyalties—to “destroy existing Indian culture” so that they could become “civilized” and assimilated into white society (White 1991, 113). As Richard Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Boarding School put it in 1892, it was necessary to “kill the Indian in him” in order to “save the man” (quoted in Wolfe 2006, 397); Wolfe (2006, 403) calls such policies of forced assimilation and the intentional destruction of indigenous identity “structural genocide.” A key American mechanism for separating Indians from their group identities and turning them into “autonomous individuals” was the 1887 Dawes Act. This federal legislation broke up communal property on Indian reservations into individual allotments that could be sold to outsiders by individual Indians; any parcels left over from the government-directed

allotment process would be put up for sale to whites, in time reducing the Indians' overall landholdings more effectively than had the Indian Wars (Limerick 1987, 197; McManus 2005, 65; Wolfe 2006, 400; Brock 2014, 368). The legislation's author, Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts, justified the policy in uniquely American, libertarian terms: "Selfishness is at the bottom of civilization. Till this people will consent to give up their lands, and divide them among their citizens so that each can own the land he cultivates, they will not make much more progress" (quoted in Hine and Farragher 2000, 379). As Samek (1987, 27) puts it, in the United States, "a society that worshiped private property and self-reliance, communally held reservations were seen as an anomaly. Communalism was thought to be the cause of the Indians' distressing lack of interest in bettering themselves." On the frontier, American classical liberal ideology, with its emphasis on individualism, shaped even the most reform-minded policies. In Canada, a more communitarian political culture seemed to influence the government's First Nations policy with regard to defining property rights.

### ***The militarization of US Indian policy***

Without doubt, the most significant difference between Canadian and American approaches to their aboriginal people was the latter's embrace and even celebration of coercion, aggression, and physical violence against Indians (and also the deliberate destruction of the bison). State aggression and violence on the American Indian frontier did more than anything else to construct and enforce the "medicine line" separating the land ruled by the great father (the president of the United States) and the great mother (Queen Victoria). In Canada's original provinces, indigenous people were not forcibly removed and sent westward, as had been the case in the United States with the Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears in the 1830s. From the earliest days of the republic through the late-nineteenth century, the policy accompanying America's continuous and rapid westward expansion was to move (or remove) Indians from new lands coveted by whites, with most treaties (even if entered into in good faith) later to be violated by the US Government, often accompanied by state violence (Limerick 1987; White 1991; Hine and Farragher 2000, 2007; Wolfe 2006). Ironically, Indian removal policy, despite its horrific human cost, proved to be but a temporary solution to demands for "free land" on the moving frontier: "by the 1840s the majority of American aboriginal people lived in the trans-Mississippi West, where the rapidly expanding United States soon engulfed them" (Samek 1987, 17).

The Plains Indians Wars—which reached up to the Canadian border but did not cross it, and has no parallel in Canadian history—can be said to have begun in 1864 with the Sand Creek massacre and ended with the massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890. At Sand Creek, on November 29, 1864, 700 Colorado cavalrymen under orders to take no prisoners attacked an Arapaho and Cheyenne encampment (ostensibly at peace with the United States), killing nearly 200 Indians—two-thirds of them women and children (White 1991, 96; Kelman 2013, 9–14). Utley (2003) vividly describes that day:

Frantically the Cheyennes fled, seeking cover, as the cavalrymen cut them down. They had no chance to organize resistance, and for several hours after the opening charge the troopers ranged the village and surrounding country, honoring the colonel's intent that

no prisoners be taken. Men, women, children and even infants perished in the orgy of slaughter, their bodies then scalped and barbarously mutilated (92).

A second, similar incident also captures the brutality of US Indian policy on the western frontier. The Washita River massacre occurred in November 1868, when, following Gen. Philip Sheridan's written orders "to destroy their villages and ponies; to kill or hang all warriors, and bring back all women and children" (Powers 2010, 101), Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer led his 7th Cavalry in a raid on a Cheyenne village, killing more than 100 men, capturing more than fifty women and children, burning down all the teepees and their contents, and killing almost 900 Cheyenne horses by cutting their throats to save ammunition (Powers 2010, 101; Utley and Washburn 2002, 223).

Kelman (2013), referencing the nineteenth-century observer George Bent, identifies several factors unique to American history, including racial concerns and the legacy of slavery, and the Civil War, which help explain the intense brutality of the Indian Wars:

This aggression, [Bent] noted, was born in the hothouse of the Civil War, as white racial anxiety ran rampant at the time, fostering paranoia and misapprehensions about monolithic Indian identity. At the same time, the Civil War grew out of a longstanding fight between the North and the South for control of the West. The same struggle gave rise to the Indian Wars, which involved different parties vying for dominance in the same region. Regardless, the Plains Tribes had not formed an alliance until after Sand Creek, Bent said, when memories of the massacre had provided them with a rallying cry, a common cause around which they ultimately had united. (35)

The two US Army generals in charge of crafting America's post-Civil War Indian policies, Philip Sheridan and William T. Sherman, "believed in total war against the entire enemy population [the Plains Indians]—war such as they themselves had visited on the South in 1864–65" (Utley and Washburn 2002, 210). The language and sentiment of what today could be called ethnic cleansing or even genocide—including Sheridan's alleged quip, "the only good Indians I ever saw were dead"—was on occasion operationalized into policy. In the 1860s and 1870s, notes Thomas Powers (2010, 259), the two generals "had spoken often of 'exterminating' the Indians if they did not submit, but the word was used casually, almost as a way of letting off steam." Following Custer's defeat at the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876, however, there was "a sharp new edge to their anger." In correspondence between the two generals on what should be done with the Sioux, Sherman told Sheridan, "Better to remove all to a safe place and then reduce them to a helpless condition" (Powers 2010, 259). Sherman biographer Michael Fellman describes the Indian policy of President Ulysses S. Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan thusly: "These men applied their shared ruthlessness, born of their Civil War experiences, against a people all three despised. ... Sherman's overall policy was never accommodation and compromise, but vigorous war against the Indians [whom he viewed as] a less-than-human and savage race" (quoted in DiLorenzo 2010, 232).

In Frederick Jackson Turner's transformative frontier process—which framed America's western mythology for generations in popular culture, literature, art, and film—Indians are largely ignored, except when portrayed as "savages" standing in the way of progress. Yet, the actual history of the American frontier is in large measure the story of the deliberate decimation of indigenous populations across a vast geography, from the Mexican to Canadian borders. The post-Civil War trans-Mississippi West, and



the Great Plains in particular, was forged by brutal acts of violence including large-scale military campaigns and localized massacres (committed by Indians as well as whites);<sup>24</sup> by broken government promises, forced assimilation, the usurpation and division of tribal lands, and the repression, denigration, and abandonment of Indians on reservations. Historian and former US Interior Secretary Stuart Udall (1999) suggests that the mythological imagery of America's "Wild West" gets it wrong, and that the real source of frontier violence was far less romantic than popular fiction and movies would suggest:

Thus, a startling incongruity of western history is that over the past century those who have reveled in glorifying western violence have concentrated on sideshows of gunplay and ignored the blood and gore on display in the big military tent. If body counts are the key measuring stick, the paramount story of violence in the West can be found not in overblown narratives about gunfighters, outlaws, and vigilantes, but rather in annals relating to the massacres and wanton killings of Indians by units of the United States Army. (68–69)

### ***The Riel rebellions: Canada's frontier anomalies***

The Canadian Government did not always fulfill specific terms of the Numbered Treaties, delayed implementation of commitments, and viewed its Indians paternalistically at best. Daschuk (2013), in what is arguably the most critical recent work on the treatment of First Nations, chronicles a post-Confederation record of incompetence, cynicism, and even deliberate cruelty by government officials, arguing that Ottawa "used food as a means to control the indigenous population. The strategy was cruel but effective" (184). Nevertheless, Canada did not abrogate treaties and use force to retake territory once the land became more valuable—as did the United States in 1874 with the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868, after gold was discovered in the Black Hills and prospectors and settlers had flooded into lands promised to the Sioux. There were no Indian Wars in Canada and no massacres like Sand Creek, Washita River, or Wounded Knee.<sup>25</sup>

The only serious armed conflicts in the Canadian West were the 1869–1870 and 1885 Louis Riel-led rebellions by the mixed-blood, French-speaking Metis (in which relatively small numbers of Indian sympathizers, mostly Cree, participated). The Metis, the descendants of French (as well as British and American) fur traders and their Indian mates, had become "a distinct new aboriginal people" who "differentiated themselves from both Indians and white settlers" (Brown 2012, 294).<sup>26</sup> Led by the fiery and charismatic Louis Riel, they saw the sale of Rupert's Land and the incorporation of that vast territory into the new Dominion of Canada as a threat to their livelihood, culture, and perhaps very existence. The challenge posed by the 1869–1870 Red River Rebellion led by Riel, with his links to the anti-British, Irish Catholic radicals south of the 49th parallel known as Fenians, "forcibly reminded Canadians of the vulnerability of their Northwest to the Americans" (Morton 1998, 7) and was one factor in Ottawa's decision to create the NWMP in 1873.<sup>27</sup> Significantly, the Red River Rebellion ended not in an American-style massacre but with a negotiated settlement: the Dominion created Manitoba as a new province and granted the Metis living there formal recognition as a distinct group.<sup>28</sup>

Riel's larger, eight-week-long 1885 Northwest Rebellion in Saskatchewan was "the only major war of the Canadian West" (Utley 2003, 260). Suppressing it required the use of militia and volunteers in addition to Mounties, a force totaling 8,000 troops (LaDow 2004, 77–79). It is important to note that the two Riel rebellions by the French-speaking Metis

were not “Indian uprisings,” but were viewed at the time through the lens of ongoing political struggle between English and French Canada—even though a few Cree had joined the 1885 effort because the government had reneged on its food security obligations in Treaty Six (LaDow 2004, 77–78; Marquis 2005, 199; Daschuk 2013, 152–155).<sup>29</sup> Samek sums up Canada’s Indian frontier thusly: “If one ignores the two Riel rebellions—which were comparatively tame affairs—Canada, in comparison to the United States, has indeed enjoyed a largely nonviolent contact with her aboriginal peoples” (1987, 4).

### ***Establishing peace, order, and good government on the prairies***

While the United States militarized its Indian policy following the Civil War (and in many ways, fought the Indians as it had fought the Confederacy), Canada approached its First Nations in the Northwest Territories with policemen instead of soldiers. And Indians took notice.<sup>30</sup> From the moment the Mounties arrived in the Northwest Territories in 1874 and drove American whiskey traders from Fort Whoop-Up (modern-day Lethbridge, Alberta) and the other so-called whiskey forts, established law and order, and reached out to various Indian tribes, a relationship of mutual respect and trust was forged that continued even as the government in Ottawa implemented increasingly onerous policies (some of which the Mounties resisted enforcing). As NWMP Commissioner George French noted in the 1870s, “Whenever a constable meets and Indian, he shakes hands and has a friendly talk, where the United States soldier regards an Indian with suspicion, and waves him off” (quoted in Dempsey 2015, 95). Underscoring the overall success of Mountie–Indian relations is the fact that, in the 1870s and 1880s the NWMP never comprised more than about 300 constables in the entire Northwest Territories, whereas to the south, “The Sherman-Sheridan strategy required heavy columns of cavalry and infantry trailing long supply trains in quest of an elusive quarry” (Utley and Washburn 2002, 210).

The Blackfoot’s trustful relationship with the Mounties was reflected in an incident in July 1876 (a month prior to Treaty Six with the Cree and more than a year before the signing of the Blackfoot treaty, Treaty Seven). Following Custer’s defeat in Montana in June (but before Sitting Bull had sought sanctuary in the Northwest Territories), the Sioux sent an emissary to the Blackfoot on the Canadian side of the border, asking if the Blackfoot would be willing to cross over and join the Sioux in fighting the Crow and also the Americans. The Blackfoot rejected this proposal; Dempsey notes this briefly in his study of the Blackfoot treaties (2015, 76). Not described by Dempsey, however, are some telling details surrounding the Blackfoot’s decision. According to the Sessional Papers of the NWMP for 1877 (Canada 1877, 21–22),<sup>31</sup> as relayed by Mounted Police subinspector Cecil Denny who had just visited a Blackfoot camp, a council of Blackfoot chiefs told Denny of the Sioux proposition for a joint campaign on the American side. But more significantly, the Blackfoot informed Denny of an additional Sioux offer: to cross over into Canada and help the Blackfoot fight the Canadians once they had succeeded against the Americans. As related by Denny, the Sioux

also told the Blackfeet [*sic*] that if they would come to help them against the Americans, that after they had killed all the Whites they would come over and join the Blackfeet to

exterminate all the Whites on this side. They [the Sioux] told them that the soldiers [e.g., the Mounties] on this side were weak, and that it would take them but a short time to take any forts that they had built here. (Canada 1877, 22)

The Blackfoot informed Denny that they had rejected this second proposal as well. Then the Mountie relayed the following: his arrival at the Blackfoot camp came just after the Sioux messenger had returned, this time with a reply to the Blackfoot's rejections. The Sioux now threatened to cross into Canada and fight both the whites and the Blackfoot. The Blackfoot leaders, according to Denny, "were in a state of uncertainty, not knowing how to act." Their most respected chief, Crowfoot, turned to Denny and said

"We all see that the day is coming when the buffalo will all be killed, and we shall have nothing more to live on, and then you will come into our camp and see the poor Blackfeet [sic] starving. I know," he said, "that the heart of the [Canadian] White soldier will be sorry for us, and they will tell the great mother who will not let her children starve." He said, "We are getting shut in, the Crees are coming in to our country from the north, and the White men from the south and east, and they are all destroying our means of living; but still, although we plainly see these days coming, we will not join the Sioux against the Whites, but will depend upon you to help us." The Chief then told me that the Blackfeet had told him to tell me that as we [the Canadian government] were willing to help them, in the event of the Sioux attacking them, that they would, in case of being attacked, send two thousand warriors against the Sioux. (Canada 1877, 22)

Denny "thanked them for their offer," promised to relay the message to his superiors, and told Crowfoot that, "as long as they were quiet and peaceable they would always find us their friends and willing to do anything for their good."

This episode, hidden in dusty archives, underscores the level of trust and respect that the Blackfoot had for the Mounties as warfare was occurring on the other side of the border. The Sioux, of course, did not wage war against the Blackfoot or whites in Canada, but instead, led by Sitting Bull, took refuge in Canada after Little Big Horn. Surrendering his tribe to six Mounties, he famously described Canada as "the benevolent 'white mother,'" and the United States as "the evil 'white father'" (LaDow 2004, 73). By the spring of 1877, between 6,000 and 8,000 Sioux were living as refugees north of the border; they were safe from the US Army, but they were placing a debilitating burden on Alberta's ecosystem and its bison herds and causing tensions with the First Nations of the prairies, which the Mounties sought to calm (Dascuk 2013; Dempsey 2015).

Even before the NWMP was formed in 1873, the intent of the national government was to take a decidedly different approach to frontier development and the Indian Question than the United States: it would produce and guarantee Peace, Order, and Good Government on the prairies, for Indians as well as whites. Canada's first Prime Minister, Sr. John A. MacDonald, "wanted to secure [the new territories] for development and white migration, but as peacefully and inexpensively as possible" (Graybill 2007, 15). R.C. Macleod (2000) notes the significance of Anglo-Canadian values and institutions (and Canadian miserliness) in shaping its Indian policy:

It was clear to Prime Minister MacDonald that [westward expansion] would not be done in the American manner of letting government follow settlement. That process, observed by Canadians with critical attention, had produced a lengthy series of wars with native Plains Indians. MacDonald was acutely conscious that in 1869 alone these conflicts cost the US government about \$20 million, one million more than Canada's total budget for that year.

Cold financial calculations were powerfully reinforced by political values. Canadians believed fervently in their moral superiority to Americans. ... *There would be no Wild West in Canada and the NWMP would be the principal instrument for preventing it.* (39; emphasis added)

In addition to facilitating and protecting white settlement, the NWMP provided Indians and their reserves with protection against attacks, squatting, and incursions by whiskey traders, settlers, and ranchers (Nettlebeck and Smandych 2010, 358; Fanning 2012, 517).<sup>32</sup> To achieve the dual goal of protecting both settlers and Indians, the Mounties were armed with legal and police powers unique within Canada and unparalleled by any agency in the United States, civilian or military. Amanda Nettlebeck and Russell Smandych (2010), in their comparative study of mounted police in Australia and Canada, argue that the NWMP's sweeping magisterial powers facilitated nonviolent resolution of conflicts including with Indians. This, they suggest, is an important factor in explaining why Canada had a far better record in its treatment of indigenous people than either the United States or Australia. Utley, the historian of the American military frontier, offers a similar assessment of the Mounties' performance: the NWMP "enjoyed an authority and prestige with the Indians based on justice and fairness. Unlike the US Army, it was a civil constabulary that could deal with individuals as well as tribes. It did not have to go to war with a whole people to enforce order" (Utley 2003, 261). Harring (2005, 120) is not only more critical but also acknowledges the effectiveness of the Mounties: they "served as police, prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner, imposing a form of Canadian law unrecognizable in Ontario or Quebec on the Indians and Metis of the Prairies."

While many settlers in the Canadian West were arguably just as unsympathetic to Indians as were their counterparts south of the border, their hostility was generally not translated into violent action. Supporting the assertion of the Lipset Thesis that eastern, foundational national values moved west, Samek (1987, 33) notes that "those settlers who arrived in the territories brought with them a tradition of respect for 'Queen's law' and a deference to authority, traits that many Americans are proud to note were absent from their frontier population." Jennings (1998) details the bigoted rhetoric aimed at Indians in the newspapers of the nineteenth-century Northwest Territories (what today could easily pass for "hate speech") and credits the Mounties for keeping the most violence-prone Canadian settlers in check, in part by "insulating" them from Indians so that they never had to take the law into their own hands. In the view of some Alberta ranchers, however, the Mounties were more sympathetic to Indians than to whites: "irate ranchers deeply resented the tolerant policy of the police toward cattle-stealing Indians" (Sharp 1973, 373). A review of annual reports from the 1870s and 1880s listing cases tried before the NWMP magistrates indicate the evenhandedness of the Mounties: the majority of crimes brought to book were for the illegal possession or selling of whiskey by whites to Indians; both whites and Indians were brought to trial for horse theft, larceny, and other crimes, and in some instances, whites were arrested and tried for stealing horses from Indians (as well as vice versa).<sup>33</sup> The Mounties, representing the Dominion government, were systematically protecting their First Nations from whites, something unparalleled on the post-Civil War American frontier.

## Conclusion

Margaret Atwood once quipped that, “Canada must be the only country in the world where a policeman is used as a national symbol” (quoted in Lipset 1990, 90). Well into the twenty-first century, the Mounties (particularly those of the nineteenth-century frontier) are still celebrated as a national icon of Peace, Order, and Good Government. Mountie mythology is enshrined in the narrative of Fort Whoop-Up and the Great March West of 1873–1874. A mock-up of the American whiskey traders’ infamous fort, sponsored by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, is a regular school field trip site in modern-day Lethbridge, Alberta (but, ironically, not in the original fort’s actual location).<sup>34</sup> Fort Whoop-Up’s descriptive plaque memorializes the violence and lawlessness created by American intruders and the role of the Mounties in bringing order to the region:

Fort Whoop-Up was the earliest and most notorious of the “whiskey forts” built by Americans on Canadian soil. During the years 1869–74 traders dealing in contraband liquor and firearms so demoralized the Indians that violence and disorder resulted. Lawless conditions here and in other areas hastened the formation of the North West Mounted Police in 1873 to ensure the maintenance of law and order in western Canada.<sup>35</sup>

In his chapter entitled, “Law in a Red Coat,” Wallace Stegner (2000, 100) describes the Mountie as the most “fitting symbol of what made the Canadian West a different West from the American.” In the nineteenth century, the Mounties and the Canadian Government self-consciously and very effectively used America’s violent Indian policy on the other side of the “medicine line” as a way to convince First Nations that life on Canada’s reserves, despite the hardships and loss of independence it would entail, would be a far better option. “Canadians promoted their Indian policy as an intentionally benevolent one—‘humane, just and Christian’—by design. By implication, the American approach was none of those things” (St. Germain 2001, xvii).

Until very recently, Canada’s treatment of its indigenous people was seen as honorable, especially when contrasted with its neighbor to the south. Canada’s actual record, as noted, is more nuanced and flawed; Daschuk (2013) and the recent findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission suggest that, in some ways, it was abysmal. Scholars have challenged or debunked other parts of the Canadian mythology, including just how peaceful were the Prairies or how efficient or effective were the Mounties in their law enforcement efforts (Dawson 1998; Harring 2005; McKenna 2006). Borderlands scholars, for their part, challenge or downplay the sharpness and the impact of the international boundary: for ordinary settlers, including white women in the nineteenth-century Alberta–Montana borderlands, for example, “the border existed only when it was crossed, and whatever national aspirations federal officials had for the region were inconsequential compared to personal and local goals and developments” (McManus 2005, 178).

Yet, when it came to Indian policy, the contrast between Canada and the United States was stark—sometimes brutally stark. Soldiers in blue and Mounties in red (and the governments they represented) offered Indians a clear choice in quality of life, and perhaps in life itself. In her analysis of two centuries of US and Canadian Indian policy, Kathy Brock (2014, 369) concludes that there were significant, “qualitative differences” both in the way Indians were treated and in the two governments themselves, “despite

their common origins” in British North America. For the indigenous populations of the North American West, the “medicine line” was a line of sovereignty that sharply divided the region. Through the process of nation-building, the state became the primary actor on the North American frontier; ultimately, state power trumped borderlands culture.

The Lipset Thesis—with its focus on fundamental cultural and institutional differences between the two countries that began at their points of origin and which shaped and constrained the trajectories of westward development—generally offers greater utility for explaining these particular cross-national distinctions than does Borderlands Studies (even as the latter demonstrates that the reality on the Prairies was more nuanced and interconnected than the Lipsetian approach might suggest). Metropolitanism (which I include in the Lipset Thesis) can help account for the centralized control and direction of Canada’s westward expansion and its more coherent Indian policy. South of the border, Turner’s steamroller of a continuously and rapidly expanding frontier, with settlers with insatiable appetites racing ahead of government (and demanding military action against Indians), also finds some substantiation, even though Turner himself ignored or dismissed the plight of the Indians. Yet clearly, Turner’s “free land” was *not free*—it was obtained at a very high price indeed. The New Western History’s contributions to the Turnerian discourse, particularly its multi-vocal narratives and acknowledgment of the federal government’s critical role in conquering and building the West, often outweigh Turner’s own, more mythological analysis.

Overall, the reality (and the perception) of American frontier lawlessness and genocidal Indian policies, of America’s “Wild West”—which was being constructed contemporaneously with dime novels and Wild West shows—only enhanced British North American skepticism of American liberalism, egalitarianism, and republicanism. The Mounties were created, in part, to ensure that Canada’s western experience would be a far “milder” and orderly one. If the frontier was forging a new, rugged American character in the Turnerian sense, Canadians would have none of it. In Lipsetian terms, the westward development of America’s “revolutionary society” was confirming the merit—and perhaps even the moral superiority—of the Canadian “counter-revolutionary society.”

## Notes

1. Northern Plains Indians, including Sioux, Cree, and the tribes of the Blackfoot nation (Blackfoot, Blood, North, and South Peigans), came to realize that American troops would not cross the international border in pursuit of Indians and that a means to escape physical violence on the American side was to cross into Canadian territory. It was as if this imaginary line on a map exerted magical powers—or “medicine”—that prevented American soldiers from crossing. This phenomenon was recorded as early as 1870 when four years of sporadic conflict between Indians and Montana ranchers, known as the “Blackfoot War,” culminated in the “Baker Massacre.” Following the killing of a Montana rancher, on January 25, 1870, a US Army expedition under the command of Col. Eugene Baker attacked a Blackfoot camp in Montana Territory killing 173 Indians, mostly women and children; it was the wrong camp, as it turned out. In the aftermath of this incident, some Blackfoot, seeking sanctuary, fled to the Canadian Northwest Territories and remained there (Dempsey 2015, 65–66). The most famous crossing of the “medicine line” occurred in 1876, when Sitting Bull led his people to sanctuary in Canada following the Battle of the Little Big Horn. The “medicine line”



worked both ways: in 1885, some Metis and Cree Indians would cross into Montana to escape conflict with the Mounties and Canadian militia during the Northwest Rebellion.

2. Although today's preferred term for Canada's aboriginal people of the Prairies is "First Nations," the term "Indian" was commonly used in the nineteenth century. In this article, I will use "Indians" and "First Nations" interchangeably when referring to Canada's indigenous tribes, and "Indian" when referring to tribes on the American side.
3. Frontier democracy was notable for its greater gender equality compared with the more established East. Wyoming Territory was first to give women the franchise, in 1869, and all western states had given women the right to vote in state elections prior to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.
4. Turner's obsession with the disappearance of the American frontier, a major component of his thesis, becomes incorporated into western mythology, nostalgia, and the narrative structure of dime novels, Wild West shows, western literature, and cinema (Bloodworth 1996). Wrobel (1993), in his historical survey of "frontier anxiety," suggests that the fear of the disappearing frontier shaped American culture for generations, both before and after Turner.
5. White's (1991) 600-page "new history of the American West" does not even list Canada in its index. Three notable exceptions to this general statement about the New Western historians are John Mack Faragher, Walter Nugent, and Elliott West.
6. This phrase is from the United States' first founding document, the Declaration of Independence of 1776.
7. The phrase "Peace, Order, and Good Government" is from the Dominion of Canada's founding document, the British North America Act of 1867. Lipset credited Canadian historian Harold Innis for the term "counter-revolutionary" as way of describing Canada in relation to the United States (Lipset 2001, 99). I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.
8. Lipset's approach offers an entrée for the study of political culture as well as the "new institutionalism" with its emphasis on path dependence (Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Peters 2011). Powell and DiMaggio (1991, 10) suggest that "Institutional arrangements constrain individual behavior by rendering some choices nonviable, precluding particular courses of action, and restraining certain patterns of resource allocation."
9. According to Horowitz (1966), it was *subsequent* British immigration, more than the early American loyalists as Lipset asserts, that made Canada more British, more "Tory," and thus more Canadian. Horowitz notes the critical impact of successive, post-American Revolution waves of British immigration to Canada—almost 1 million between 1815 and 1850—"which soon engulfed the original American Loyalist fragment." Horowitz suggests that these immigrants (who, significantly, chose to relocate to British North America rather than the United States) "brought to it non-liberal ideas which entered into the political culture mix, and which perhaps even reinforced the non-liberal elements present in the original fragment" (Horowitz 1966, 153).
10. By "conservative," Lipset means a Burkean organic conservatism that favored the judgment of elites over the popular masses and maintaining social order over individual liberty. It is a communitarian, statist conservatism, or "Toryism" that infused Canadian political culture at its birth. This is quite distinct from the way the term is used by American conservatives today (Lipset 1990, 35). Horowitz (1966) makes a similar point.
11. Thomas and Biette's (2014) edited volume, *Canada and the United States: Differences that Count*, now in its fourth edition, is one of the leading textbooks in North American Studies. Its various authors explore differences in values and culture, political institutions and governmental regulations, and public and social policies.
12. Elofson's (2015, 2) observation about scholarship on cattle ranching in Southern Alberta exemplifies how metropolitanism fits within the Lipset Thesis, where foundational, eastern values, and structures shaped the West: "Canadian ranching historians have tended to



employ a metropolitan analysis that stresses the predominance of eastern laws, legal agencies and culture.”

13. As Neil McLaughlin (2004) observes, English Canada (as opposed to Quebec) “developed from loyalist communities who rejected the American Revolution, preferring ties to colonial Britain rather than joining the forces of mass democracy of the thirteen colonies to their south. As a consequence of this history, Anglo-Canadian universities have always had a British flavor to them, something that can be seen in terms of faculty hiring, university governance, and culture as well as the intellectual orientation of Canadian institutions of higher education.”
14. The Mounties included few French Canadians in their ranks, most of the early settlers in the Northwest Territories (today’s Saskatchewan and Alberta) were of Anglo-Canadian stock, and later emigrants were predominantly from Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe as well as Asia. As Thomas (1975, 74) observes, “Most westerners rejected the idea that the bi-cultural pact upon which the nation was founded in 1867 extended to the west.” With the notable exception of the semi-indigenous Metis, the Northwest Territories—the Canadian geographic focus of this article—were settled and developed under the hegemony of English Canada.
15. The classic US–Canada Borderlands works are Paul Sharp’s 1955 *Whoop-Up Country* and Wallace Stegner’s 1962 *Wolf Willow*. For a critical review of the development of Borderlands scholarship, from Herbert Eugene Bolton in the 1920s to the twenty-first century, see Hamalainen and Truett (2011).
16. The North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1920 when the organization was transformed into a federal police force. The historic focus of this article predates this change.
17. I address this subject in my article “Of Lawless Frontiers and Peaceable Kingdoms: The Legacy of Myth, Government, and Guns in the North American West,” presented at the Western Social Science Association conference, Reno, NV, April 13–16, 2016.
18. Canada formally recognizes and grants group rights and protections to several Aboriginal people in its Constitution of 1982: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (Brock 2014, 366; Berdahl and Gibbins 2014, 47). There is no such parallel legal status for the more than 500 registered Indian tribes (or any other groups, for that matter) in the United States.
19. Manitoba became a province in 1870. Alberta and Saskatchewan comprised the Northwest Territories until gaining separate provincial status in 1905. Pre-1905 Alberta and Saskatchewan constitute the primary (Canadian) geographical focus of this article.
20. Between 1845 and 1850, the United States doubled in size with the acquisition of Mexican lands, the Texas republic, and the Oregon Territory. In 1870, the total population of Canada was 3.63 million, compared to the U.S. population that year of 38.56 million. By 1900, the Canadian population had increased to just 5.31 million, compared to the US population of 76.21 million (US Census Bureau and Statistics Canada data). Put differently, in 1870, the US population was just over ten times that of Canada’s, while by 1900 it had grown to more than fourteen times that of Canada’s. More specifically, between 1861 and 1880, more than 5 million immigrants came to the United States—about 4.3 million from Europe and 537,000 from Canada and Newfoundland (McManus 2004, 125). “By comparison, the total immigration to Canada between 1867 and 1892 was about 1.5 million, although many of these were only passing through on their way to the United States” (McManus 2004, 125).
21. In 1868, Montanans rejected—and forced the abandonment of—a proposed federal treaty with the Blackfoot, and in 1874 they successfully lobbied Washington to reduce the size of the Blackfoot reservation, opening more land to white settlement (Dempsey 2015, 50–52). American antipathy toward governmental control is a point stressed by both Turner and Lipset; where they differ is in the origins of that antipathy. Lipset argues that it dates back to the Revolution, while Turner sees it as resistance by rugged individuals on the frontier. They both may be correct.

22. Tribal nomenclature substantiates the distinctions constructed by the political division at the international border: today the term "Blackfoot" is used in Canada, while on the American side, these Indians are called (and call themselves) "Blackfeet."
23. The Interior Department argued that the best approach to the Indians was to "conquer with kindness." The War Department countered, saying the policy should be "conquer, *then* kindness" (St. Germain 2001, 20).
24. In just one region of Montana in the years after 1860, there were more than thirty massacres of whites committed by Indians (McKenna 2006, 95).
25. The battle (or massacre) at Wounded Knee, where the 7th Cavalry killed more than 200 Lakota Sioux men, women, and children, ended the controversial and subversive, millennialist movement among Plains Indians centered on the Ghost Dance. Daschuk notes that, despite attempts by American Indians to spread the movement to Canada, it did not take hold north of the border. Mounties disarmed all Indians coming over from Montana and the Ghost Dance was banned in the Northwest Territories. "There were no uprisings on Canadian reserves ... [and] Canadian Indians never came close to acting out against the situation [of mass starvation and disease] in the same radical fashion as their American cousins in the 1890s" (2013, 172). Interestingly, Daschuk does not ask (or answer) why this was the case. Despite the draconian aspects of Canadian policy that Daschuk enumerates, the First Nations of the prairies fully understood that the plight of Indians south of the "medicine line" was far worse, and they trusted and enjoyed good relations with the Mounties whom they believed would protect them.
26. The Blackfoot viewed the Metis as an enemy, and one of their primary demands in negotiating Treaty Seven in 1877 was that the Canadian Government force the Metis (as well as the Cree) off of Blackfoot land and hunting grounds; the government refused to do so (Dempsey 2015).
27. The first Riel rebellion and other tensions with the Metis; Fenian agitation from the American side of the border; the illegal American "forts" established on the Canadian side to sell whiskey to First Nations and the subsequent murder of Canadian Assiniboine Indians by American whiskey traders in the "Cypress Hills massacre"; and an overarching concern for American expansionism were all factors in the decision to create the Mounties in 1873 and send them west on the "Great March" (Sharp 1973; Morton 1998; Macleod 2000; McKenna 2006; Daschuk 2013; Dempsey 2015).
28. The Manitoba Act of 1870 provided legal recognition to the Metis "'language' (French), 'religion' (Catholic), and 'rights' (to use the land in keeping with their Aboriginal title)" (LaDow 2004, 74–75). Canada's political response to this first Riel rebellion lends support to the Lipset Thesis: the Metis, referred to as "half breeds" in the Manitoba Act (Thomas 1975, 77–79), were granted *group rights*, a concept largely alien in American political culture. While there were Metis on the Montana side of the border, "the American government gave no recognition or rights to the Metis as a separate people" (Ens 2006, 139). Canada's failure to live up to promises made to the Metis in the Manitoba Act was one catalyst for the 1885 Northwest Rebellion (Anastakis 2015, 46–47).
29. Following the rebellion, Riel was hanged and "appropriated as a martyr to the French–Canadian cause" by the Quebec press, which was highly critical of Ottawa's heavy-handedness toward the French-speaking and Catholic Metis (Dawson 1998, 26). Although some Cree (and also some American Sioux living in Canada) participated in the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, the Blackfoot (who viewed the Cree and the Metis as their enemies) did not join, in part because the government supplied extra rations to placate them; Blackfoot chiefs even tried to prevent the rebellion (McManus 2005, 66, 81). As for the Cree themselves, Daschuk (2013, 152–155) argues that they were not really joining a "Metis rebellion," but rather took the opportunity to exact revenge on particular government officials who had severely mistreated them or abused their women on the reserve; the Cree deliberately spared Mounties because the policemen had treated them "humanely." Classifying the 1885 events as some sort of Indian uprising would be highly inaccurate.
30. The "medicine line" was also a "color line." The Mountie's scarlet coat, in contradistinction to US Army blue, was a deliberate choice, "designed to remind the Indians of a British

tradition of law with which some of the older ones had already had experience” (McKenna 2006, 91). Wallace Stegner puts the contrast marked by the 49th parallel most boldly in *Wolf Willow*: “One of the most visible aspects of the international boundary was that it was a color line: blue below, red above, blue for treachery and un-kept promises, red for protection and the straight tongue” (2000, 101). The tables were turned briefly following the 1885 Northwest Rebellion, which only further reified the international boundary and its “medicinal” powers for aboriginal people: this time, hundreds of Metis and Canadian Indians “fled south to escape persecution” (Ens 2006, 151).

31. The following passages are taken from the North-West Mounted Police Sessional Papers, 1877 (reviewed by the author in the Glenbow Museum archives, Calgary, AB, March 2016).
32. When the Mounties first arrived in the Northwest Territory, their primary law enforcement concerns were halting the illegal trafficking of whiskey to Indians from south of the border and keeping the settlers in check; Indian crimes against settlers were quite rare (Sharp 1973; Marquis 2005). The record of Mountie success in protecting Indians and combatting the whiskey trade was extolled by Canadian negotiators in 1877 as a selling point to the Blackfoot for Treaty Seven; Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot, and Blood Chief Medicine Calf noted that the Mounties’ trustworthiness, and particularly Col. Macleod’s personal integrity, were key factors in their decision to support the treaty (St. Germain 2001, 66; Dempsey 2015, 99–102). Medicine Calf told the Canadian negotiators: “The Great Mother sent Stamixotokon (Col. McCleod) and the Police to put an end to the traffic in fire water. Before the arrival of the Police, when I laid my head down at night, every sound frightened me; my sleep was broken; now I can sleep sound and am not afraid” (quoted in Dempsey 2015, 101).
33. Author’s review of Sessional Papers of the North-West Mounted Police, Glenbow Museum archives, Calgary, AB, March 2016.
34. I would like to thank Sheila McManus of the University of Lethbridge for pointing this out (conversation, Lethbridge, AB, March 10, 2016).
35. Narratives and material displays celebrating the Mounties’ provision of Peace, Order, and Good Government can be found in various exhibits at the historic Fort Macleod and Fort Calgary, and in Calgary’s Glenbow Museum. For younger audiences, Mountie mythology is inculcated in a comic book for sale at Fort Calgary’s gift shop: *The March on Fort Whoop-Up: The Making of the Legendary Royal Canadian Mounted Police* (Brouwer 2007). Cultural icons are often commercialized, and the Mountie is no exception. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police has a store in a posh shopping district of Vancouver, where one can purchase the iconic tan Stetson campaign hat, books, apparel, home décor, jewelry, and toys all with a Mountie motif. “The Mountie Shop: The Official Retailer of the RCMP” also sells Mountie paraphernalia to a global clientele on its website. As in the United States with everything cowboy and western, Canada’s frontier mythology has been commodified and marketed.

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## Notes on contributor

*Pierre M. Atlas* is professor of Political Science and director of The Richard G. Lugar Franciscan Center for Global Studies at Marian University in Indianapolis.

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