

The American Imprint on Alberta Politics

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Characteristics assigned to America's classical liberal ideology – rugged individualism, market capitalism, egalitarianism in the sense of equality of opportunity, and fierce hostility toward centralized federalism and socialism – are particularly appropriate for fathoming Alberta's distinctive political culture. This paper advances the interrelated arguments that Alberta's early American settlers were pivotal in shaping Alberta's political culture and that Albertans have demonstrated a particular affinity for American political ideas, movements, and policies. Alberta came to resemble the liberal society Tocqueville described in *Democracy in America* where the self-made man was accorded high status, laissez-faire defined the economic order, and a multiplicity of churches and sects competed in the market for salvation.¹ This thesis is contentious: "It is an effort to reinforce current political myths about Alberta political life: myths that have little or no base in the historical record and provide a false/incorrect view of the province," wrote one reader of an earlier draft of this paper. A second reader opined, "the author's thesis is obviously true," but its "execution" was lacking.² This paper outlines its theoretical framework to account for the trajectory of Alberta politics and then focuses on the demographic impact of Alberta's charter group of American settlers and points to some ideological and cultural affinities of Alberta and American politics.

The Theoretical Framework: Ideological Fragmentation and Formative Events

This study draws on Louis Hartz's view of new societies as ideological fragments of older societies in which a new society's ideological path is determined at the point of its departure from the mother country. In Hartz's scheme, the new society reflects only one slice of the older society's total ideological spectrum. His thesis is that America's liberal tradition took root before the American Revolution. The Puritan founders, splitting off from the totality of the British ideological spectrum escaped toryism and therefore also the later socialism of the Old World.³ Gad Horowitz builds on the work of Hartz and focuses on Canada's dual societies, English and French.⁴ The Hartz-Horowitz approach posits that socialism, while influenced by liberalism, also shares with classical conservatism or toryism a conception of the good society as holistic, organic, and collectivist. In this ken, the collectivist ethos of both toryism and socialism contrast with liberalism's primacy of place for the individual and competition. For Horowitz English Canada's founders, the Loyalists, were essentially American liberals but with a "tory touch." Embedded therefore in this toryism was the seed for socialism to emerge in Canada later.

This paper swerves from the Hartz-Horowitz framework in three ways: it applies fragment theory at the provincial level, in this case, Alberta; it bypasses the tory-socialist ideological dialectic by making no connection between toryism and socialism in Alberta except insofar as the toryism of the larger English Canadian political culture inevitably influenced Alberta; and it highlights Alberta's Americans as founding settlers and the influence of their ideas. As in the Hartz-Horowitz framework, certain leaders – Henry Wise Wood, William Aberhart, Ralph Klein – are presented as reflectors of their society's political culture. The argument here also borrows from Seymour Lipset's idea that a formative event contributes to shaping a new society's political culture. As with the Hartz-Horowitz formulation, I apply the formative event concept at the provincial level. For Lipset, the formative event for both the United States and Canada was the

American Revolution.⁵ The contention here is that Alberta's political culture congealed in conjunction with the province's formative event at the turn of the twentieth century. That event was the disappearance of good cheap agricultural land in the U.S. with Alberta and western Saskatchewan serving as North America's "Last Best West."

In neither Horowitz's or Lipset's treatment of English Canada, is there much attention to provinces. Alberta goes unconsidered in both their accounts and both of them have no need to consider the United Farmers of Alberta and Social Credit parties, which governed the province from 1921 until 1971. The argument here is that tory and socialist touches have been significantly more marginal in Alberta's political culture than in English Canadian political culture as a whole. Some evidence on the partisan level is that an Alberta-based conservative party, Reform, undid the older federal Progressive Conservative party identified by its tory touches and that Alberta is the only province east of Quebec in which the social democratic CCF-NDP (Co-operative Commonwealth Federation-New Democratic Party) has failed to form a government.

To be sure, Alberta has not been wholly bereft of tory and socialist tinges in its political culture. As with the rest of English Canada, Alberta is an impure liberal fragment. Toryism and socialism in small measure have inevitably leaked into the provincial political culture through Alberta's early connection with British institutions and its continuing cultural connections with the rest of Canada. Toryism in Alberta however has always been much weaker than in the Maritimes and Ontario and its socialism less robust than elsewhere in western Canada. The first prime minister based in Alberta, R. B. Bennett, had something tory and un-American in his outlook. Born in Loyalist-founded New Brunswick, he retired to England. He became prime minister, however, despite Alberta; his Conservatives captured only a third of the province's votes and only four of its 16 seats in the 1930 election in which half the national electorate voted Conservative and anti-Americanism was an issue. Loyalist toryism had little purchase in Alberta. Nevertheless, viewed from an American perspective and in comparison to states south of it such as Montana, Idaho, and Utah, the provincial political culture evinces some non-liberal elements.

Connections to the rest of Canada have meant that socialism has had some noteworthy presence in Alberta politics. It did not completely fade out as it did in the U.S. where socialism appeared as a largely foreign blip at the turn of the twentieth century and soon vanished. Alberta's British, particularly Scottish, socialists helped turn Calgary into an early hotbed for labour radicalism in the British mould; thousands of the city's workers went out in support of Winnipeg's General Strike and the city served as the birthplace of both the syndicalist One Big Union and the social democratic CCF. Like toryism, however, the socialist touch in Alberta's political culture has always been relatively weak; socialist fortunes in the province pale in comparison to those in the neighbouring provinces.

In Alberta, liberalism has been hegemonic and its cultural face has always been more American than British. This paper reinforces a contemporary popular image of Alberta as more receptive to neoliberalism (or what many term neo-conservatism as opposed to the classical conservatism of the Hartz-Horowitz framework) than the Canadian norm. To be sure, some surveys of popular values indicate that Albertans' attitudes on many issues are similar to those of other English Canadians, but many surveys point to Alberta as an outlier. Certainly, the political behaviour of Albertans and

their governments have been notably dissimilar in a comparative provincial context. Albertans and their governments have often adopted more extreme postures and policy positions at odds with most provinces – on provincial rights, language rights, multiculturalism, medicare, gun control, capital punishment, same-sex marriage, and the environment.⁶ Many of these positions have been more in harmony with neoliberal preferences common in the U.S.

Alberta's Charter Americans

In the first decade of the twentieth century, when Canada's population grew by 34 per cent, Alberta's population grew by a phenomenal 413 per cent. The province expanded from one to five per cent of the national population and in several of those years, Americans outnumbered Britons as emigrants to Canada and to Alberta in particular.⁷ Alberta, in 1911, was the only province in which the Canadian-born were a minority. Trains from St. Paul, Minnesota brought hundreds of settlers nightly to Regina and Moose Jaw; from there they connected to the CPR line to Alberta. Some American capitalists came by special train to buy land; others came as horse thieves, cattle rustlers, and whiskey smugglers.⁸

Alberta's immigrant continental Europeans generally clustered in their settlement patterns as they did elsewhere in Canada, but the American pioneer of British ethnic origins, "still an individual," avoided group settlement (with the exception of the Mormons).⁹ Alberta's Americans hailed largely from the rural Midwest and Great Plains states and they settled overwhelmingly in southern rural Alberta. This region, overrepresented in the legislature, drove provincial politics. In contrast, Canada's British immigrants, generally urban-born and bred, headed to politically underrepresented cities such as Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Calgary. This lessened their political and ideological influence in shaping provincial politics.

Manitoba in the 1880s, according to W. L. Morton, represented "The Triumph of Ontario Democracy" and the 1890s made it "A British and Canadian Province" as more Britons arrived.¹⁰ Parallel descriptions of Alberta in the twentieth century's first and second decades could be "The Triumph of Populist Democracy" and "An American and Canadian Province." Unlike Manitoba and Saskatchewan where Ontarian settlers were first on the scene after Confederation, the various national groups constituting Alberta's pioneers arrived almost simultaneously. And unlike English Canadian political culture as a whole, which developed over much time and from a variety of sources, Alberta's particular political culture congealed in its formative years, coinciding with the American influx. American homesteaders, eagerly recruited by officialdom, struck roots, enjoyed high status, and their ideas germinated and blossomed in these foundational years. Americans constituted a charter immigrant group in Alberta. Although other groups – Ontarians, Britons, continental Europeans – contributed to moulding provincial politics, Americans and their ideas proved exceptionally influential.

Most of Alberta's Americans were of British ethnic origins, reinforcing their standing as preferred immigrants.¹¹ Saskatchewan had fewer Americans and fewer Americans of British ethnic origins. Both provinces' Americans included European Americans, but Saskatchewan had more of them and fewer of them had English as their mother tongue.¹² European Americans had lower social and political status than the ethnically British Americans but both groups enjoyed higher status than the continental

Europeans arriving directly from the Old World, some less than a half-century removed from Russia's semi-feudal serfdom. The Americans were also quite unlike the British-born who gravitated to Calgary and were more likely to carry with them the labour-socialist outlook then prominent in Britain.

The Americans settled disproportionately in southern Alberta while government officials shunted continental European-born farmers into the more northerly and more agriculturally marginal districts. In the northern Victoria district for example, Slavs and Germans alone outnumbered the "British" (by 'racial' or ethnic, not national origin) by a ratio of nearly 2-1. In contrast, nearly three-quarters of Americans in the Calgary district were "British."¹³ Ethnic clustering was also evident at the level of individual towns: those of "British Races" made up 77 per cent of Medicine Hat (whose environs contained many Americans) while "European Races" accounted for 53 per cent of those in northerly Vegreville with Ukrainians alone outnumbering each of the English, Scottish, and Irish "races" respectively.¹⁴ These distributions are significant because, since the First World War, southern Alberta has determined the dominant ideological colouration of Alberta politics and the largest group of those of "British" ethnic origins in southern Alberta were Americans, not Britons.

In 1911, when Americans accounted for only 3 per cent of Canada's population they constituted 22 per cent of Albertans. They comprised 30 per cent of Alberta's immigrants between 1900 and 1920, leading an Alberta MP to declare in Parliament that his province "might be regarded as a typical American state."¹⁵ By 1921, there were more British-born Albertans than American-born ones, but the Americans outnumbered Britons in all 15 of the province's rural census divisions and about half of southern Alberta's farmers were Americans.¹⁶ Lethbridge's municipal flag symbolizes the American imprint on that city; closely resembling the Stars and Stripes, it dates to a fort established there by Montanans. The contrast between the industrial orientation of the Britons and the agrarian orientation of the Americans was evident among coalminers: in 1919, only one per cent of them in the Crow's Nest Pass region adjacent to the U.S. border were Americans while 34 per cent were Britons.¹⁷

The presence of both fewer British-born farmers and fewer European Americans in Alberta compared to Saskatchewan tilted politics in the two provinces in different directions. Both provinces' first governments, appointed by Wilfrid Laurier, were Liberal and offshoots of Ontario and its Liberal party. Americans such as Henry Wise Wood, who had contested a Liberal nomination upon becoming a citizen in 1911, supported the Liberals as well; it was Wood's opposition to the UFA launching a third party that secured Alberta for the Liberals until 1921. What reveals the different ideological orientations of the continental-born Europeans and the Americans is that the Europeans outnumbered the Americans in only three of the province's rural census divisions, all in the northeast, and these districts provided the strongest opposition (outside of the cities) to the UFA and Social Credit parties, both of which voiced strong liberal-individualist sentiments.¹⁸ In Saskatchewan, it was the shift of large numbers of the European-born and their descendants from the Liberals to the CCF in the 1940s that catapulted the CCF to power

Britons, such as Calgary's labour-socialist MP William Irvine, were briefly potent forces in the city but they were always marginal players in the countryside. In contrast to the Marxism of German immigrants that informed urban socialism in the U.S., British

Fabianism prevailed in socialist circles in Alberta as in the rest of English Canada. Calgary's early Scottish flavour came from its British-born residents who outnumbered the city's American-born by a 4-1 ratio.¹⁹ The Alberta CCF's British face lingered into the 1940s with four of its five MLAs British-born. The cities however counted for relatively little politically: as late as the late 1950s, Calgary and Edmonton together had only 10 of the legislature's 57 seats. The British socialist touch in the provincial political culture grew fainter with time. What sustained it were its links with social democratic forces in the rest of English Canada.

By the end of the First World War, southern Alberta's largely rural, populist, and American-influenced political culture infused and overpowered other regions of the province. An example of a quintessentially rural American institution that penetrated Calgary was the rodeo. Its symbol, the cowboy, was an American invention, the product of a western frontier experience quite different from the Canadian experience associated with the law-enforcing Mountie. Calgary became "cowtown," home of the Stampede, "the world's most extravagant celebration of the cowboy."²⁰ Cowboys and rodeos embedded themselves in Alberta's public iconography with cowboy hats and boots still serving as staples in the wardrobes of Alberta's politicians.

Even before the UFA's election to office in 1921, the *Calgary Herald* described them as "the bosses" of provincial politics. The organization's composition reflected the American sway: eight of its 19 executive members were American-born, outnumbering the British- or Canadian-born members. Henry Wise Wood, the UFA leader from 1916 to 1931, chair of the Alberta Wheat Pool from 1923 to 1937, and president of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, had arrived in Alberta as a 45 year-old veteran Missouri populist who had participated in the formation of both the Farmers' Alliance and the Populist Party in the U.S. Dubbed the "uncrowned king of Alberta" by his biographer, no American has been as prominent or influential in the politics of any other province and no proposed reform in UFA-governed Alberta gained adoption without his sanction.²¹ His control of Alberta politics in the 1920s was not less than Aberhart's control in the 1930s.

As a political thinker, tory historian W. L. Morton noted, Wood "can be explained only by reference to his American background," a person "who had toiled and died within the simple and narrow limits of an unreflecting individualism and of Jacksonian democracy." Paul Sharp's survey showing American parallels to western Canada's agrarian revolt branded him a "Jeffersonian liberal." Wood sought to offset the growing power of industrialists, bankers, and professionals, but he was no socialist. A free market liberal, he believed in typically American populist fashion, that society's problems reflected a malaise in the competitive process, not in capitalism itself: "When we learn to trade right," he opined, "we will largely have learned to live right."²²

The easy entry of the populist Non-Partisan League into provincial politics in 1916 pointed up the link between demographic and political impact and between Alberta and the American Great Plains. The NPL's relative muscularity on the Canadian prairies correlated with the numbers of Americans rather than with proximity; it was strongest in Alberta and weakest in tory-touched Manitoba where Americans constituted only 3 per cent of the population though it is geographically adjacent to North Dakota where the NPL governed. Two of the NPL's four candidates in Alberta's 1917 election were successful, both in the American-anchored south. A telling comment on the power of

American models was that the protagonists on both sides of the debate over whether Alberta's farmers ought to enter the political arena used American experiences to buttress their case; one side pointed to the sad end of the People's party, the other to the NPL's North Dakotan success.

As members of the Grange and the Non-Partisan League in the U.S., many of Alberta's Americans had fought the grain and railroad companies. Some had worked in William Jennings Bryan's presidential campaign of 1896.²³ What there was of socialist influence in the U.S. was at its peak in the new century's first two decades and some collectivist ideas did appear in the NPL's program and contributed to the creation of the Alberta and Saskatchewan wheat pools. This orientation also expressed itself in the federal UFA's initial affiliation with the CCF but the move was unpopular with the provincial UFA membership and Wood refused to endorse it or the CCF. As socialism went mute in the U.S., it faded in Alberta but did not disappear altogether.

UFA Americans such as J. W. Leedy, a former Populist governor of Kansas, and George Bevington, a widely acknowledged monetary expert, were preoccupied as they had been in the U.S. with land control, transportation issues, and especially money supply.²⁴ These issues resonated in Alberta whose natural resources Ottawa controlled until 1930. The UFA preached, as did the NPL, monetary reform, direct legislation (initiative, referendum, and recall), the single tax, proportional representation, and abolition of the unelected Senate. Many American socialists supported these ideas but there is little about them that is socialist. The UFA government gave some voice to them and in later years, Social Credit and Conservative governments echoed some as well.

After the American influx at the turn of the twentieth century, the proportion of Americans among Alberta's immigrants declined steadily. However, even in a context of relatively few American-born Albertans, their influence and ideas continued to exceed their numbers. Americans were prominent, for example, as executives and senior managers in the provincial oil industry: a geologist from a Danish American community in the province discovered the province's largest oil field and, between 1955 and 1970, nine of the Calgary Petroleum Club's 15 presidents were Americans.²⁵ Peter C. Newman's chronicle of Canada's business establishment in the 1970s noted that, in Alberta, "Nearly all of the largest companies are headed by Canadian managers of American subsidiaries most of whom receive their daily marching orders via computer printouts that arrive from Tulsa, Dallas, Phoenix, or New York." As for their ideological outlooks: "Like their counterparts in the United States, they often held strong right-wing views."²⁶ Logically, the first non-stop flights between Canada and America's oil capital, Houston, originated in Calgary. A bizarrely revealing example of the American presence throughout the century was that of a Dakotan who had arrived in Alberta in a horse drawn wagon in 1910 and lived to participate in the 1980s in a meeting of the separatist Western Canada Concept, which elected a Mormon cowboy and Utah college graduate as an MLA.²⁷

In the contemporary Conservative parties in Alberta and Ottawa, two Americans have been conspicuous: Tom Flanagan and Ted Morton. Their conservatism is entirely devoid of toryism. Raised in a Republican household, a fellow of the market-oriented Fraser Institute, Flanagan directed the federal Conservative campaign in the 2004 election. He and Stephen Harper were among the six intellectuals who had earlier authored a "firewall" letter calling on Alberta's government to insulate itself from federal

intrusions.²⁸ Morton, elected as a Senator-in-waiting and then as an MLA, contested the Conservative party leadership and the premiership in 2007 and became the provincial finance minister. A telling link between past and present was that Morton performed best in his quest for the leadership in the same rural southern districts where the initial American demographic imprint had been strongest.²⁹

Ideological and Cultural Affinity

Americans played a foundational role in casting Alberta's ideological die as the provincial political culture congealed. Ideological affinities of Alberta and America's Great Plains politics abounded. Radical populist, liberal-individualist ideas originating in the U.S. gained wide currency in Alberta's last decade as a territory and first two decades as a province. Albertans, among English Canadians, have been the most receptive, in both their province's formative and later years to embracing American outlooks. A sign of ideological commonality between farmers in Alberta and the United States was the UFA motto, "Equity," sported by the American Society of Equity out of which the UFA sprang. The motto starkly contrasted that of the Saskatchewan-based Farmers Union of Canada, "Farmers and Workers of the World Unite."³⁰ John Irving observed that the social democratic CCF, elected in neighbouring Saskatchewan in the 1940s, was at the time anathema to Alberta's farmers for it represented a repudiation of their "rugged individualism," not a term associated with Saskatchewan agrarianism which Lipset labelled *Agrarian Socialism*.³¹

The UFA's high regard for American practices piqued influential *Manitoba Free Press* Liberal editor John W. Dafoe, an Ontarian of Loyalist stock. He chastised the UFA urging it to be "Canadian and British in spirit as well as name."³² Also striking was the Alberta Conservative party's endorsement of free trade with the U.S. in the 1911 federal election, unlike the federal Conservative and its sister provincial Conservative parties.³³ The Alberta party's platform included direct legislation, denounced by Manitoba's Conservative premier Sir Rodmond Roblin as "A Socialistic and Un-British Plan."³⁴

Alberta populism, like American populism, attracted some socialists but it rejected socialist ideology. The 1920s wheat pools debate reflected that rejection: Saskatchewan's farmers agitated for a compulsory pool while Alberta's farmers insisted on a voluntary pool driven by free trade market principles. Where E. A. Partridge of the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) looked upon a compulsory pool as a transitional vehicle in building a socialist society, Wood deemed a compulsory pool as "a denial for freedom and an attempt to do by compulsion what could be achieved by co-operation."³⁵

Alberta's Americans, nurtured on inflationary monetary theories in the U.S. where the Free Silver and Greenback movements had taken hold in the late nineteenth century, insisted that UFA conventions devote more time to the topic than any other issue. Meanwhile, farm organizations in the rest of Canada rarely entertained it. Conflicting views on money and banking held by Alberta's Progressives on the one hand and the Progressives from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Ontario on the other signified the ideological policy discord among the federal Progressives and contributed to their demise. The UFA's emphasis on monetary reform rendered its followers susceptible to conflating those ideas with those of the British-based Social Credit movement. Social Credit in Alberta inherited both the UFA's political base and some of its American-

inspired ideas, such as inflating the money supply and the right to recall MLAs. Perhaps surprisingly, Social Credit initially received support from many radicals, progressives, socialists and other leftists disillusioned with the UFA government, but they soon became disillusioned with and disowned the Social Credit movement.³⁶

The transition from a UFA regime to a Social Credit regime demonstrated the links between their shared social bases of support and initial American settlement patterns. Social Credit in 1935 triumphed resoundingly in southern Alberta (south of Red Deer), capturing over 60 per cent of the vote there. It glided to easy victories in towns like Cardston and Medicine Hat where the UFA had held sway and where the American imprint was most prominent. (In Saskatchewan also, the two Social Credit MPs in the 1930s hailed from districts where American pioneers were most numerous). In contrast, Social Credit won less than half of northern Alberta's votes and in Edmonton, one of the province's least American locales, it trailed the Liberals garnering just over a third of voters.³⁷

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

The new Aberhart government, painting the federal government as oppressive and an illegitimate force, voiced an American republican view of democracy when it refused to appear before the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations and addressed its brief to “the Sovereign People of Canada.”⁴¹ Challenging the legitimacy of Westminster style parliamentary government, Social Credit argued that it was a form of “limited state dictatorship” and proposed, “to restore sovereign authority to the people” (as if it had once resided there and been usurped).⁴² A Nebraska-born Social Credit MLA criticized the provincial Speech from the Throne for drawing more attention to the 1937 coronation festivities than to Social Credit.⁴³

Where Social Credit differed from the UFA was in its view of leadership and the status it assigned to Christianity. Wood had theorized in favour of “group government,” a radical un-liberal notion of occupational representation in government. He took the idea from a Texan NPL pamphlet and drew on the thinking of American Mary Follett's *The New State: Group Organization, the Solution of Popular Government*. Nothing however came of the idea. Wood had adopted it as “a tactical device” designed to facilitate the UFA's absorption of the NPL and the idea subsequently received summary treatment. The populist UFA had incorporated a form of grassroots participatory democracy, but Aberhart personally selected Social Credit's candidates and posited an elitist concept of popular authority: “You don't have to understand Social Credit to vote for it.” Governing and policy formulation, in his cosmology, was a technocratic issue

best left in the hands of experts; the role of the masses was to approve or disapprove, with elections being essentially plebiscites.⁴⁴

Albertans perceived a commonality of American and Canadian interests even as more of the population became Canadian-born. Consider the attitudes of Albertan and Maritime teachers in the 1930s: The Albertans expressed “universal” admiration “for the ‘energy, optimism, and efficiency’ of the typical American.” Many described “Great Britain as the mother country and the United States and Canada as offspring...so that it is possible to regard the American nation not as a foreign but a kindred folk.” For Aberhart, the British Commonwealth and the U.S. were joint forces of the good acting as “servants of the Lord.” Contrast that with Maritimers’ aloofness vis-à-vis the U.S. Their “almost unanimous view” was a “vigorous insistence that there is no good reason why Canadian pupils in schools should have their attention called to events in the United States any more, for example, than to French or German development.”⁴⁵ Maritimers would not have described their premier as their Abraham Lincoln, a term sometimes used by Social Crediters to characterize Aberhart, oddly, since Lincoln was a federal centralizer.

Religion served as a filament binding Alberta and the U.S. Americans brought with them over two dozen evangelical sects, including the Disciples of Christ to which Wood belonged, and they established several Bible colleges some of which continue to operate. W. E. Mann notes that theological fundamentalists constituted a “quite exceptional” 20 per cent of the province’s Protestants and that the American influx produced “a steady invasion of unorthodox social and religious leaders and associations.”⁴⁶ While most evangelicals were suspicious of “big government,” the social gospel as expressed by Alberta’s Yorkshire-born United Church clergyman Norman Priestley, the CCF’s national secretary and Social Credit’s foremost critic, underscored centralized economic planning. Donald Smiley, whose father was an Albertan United Church minister, noted that the United Church – with its highly trained pastorate, humanitarian ethic, social gospel antecedents, and substantial lay participation – was the main casualty of the fundamentalist “Back to the Bible Hour” broadcasts by Aberhart and Manning.⁴⁷ The program served as a political intervention of sorts that contributed to shaping aspects of the provincial political culture that amplified American influences.

As in the United States, the evangelical gospel – wanting salvation for man and appealing to faith and emotion – took hold in Alberta. It overwhelmed the social gospel – wanting to help man and appealing to reason. Social gossellers like J. S. Woodsworth and William Irvine left the established church because it was otherworldly; Aberhart and Manning left it because it was too worldly. The evangelicals stressed liturgical formalism, individual salvation, and sermonized about divine retribution while the social gossellers deprecated theological perplexities, saw society in organic terms, and preached social justice.⁴⁸ Application of the social gospel in Canada was essentially British and its followers looked to the British Labour Church; application of evangelical Christianity in Alberta owed everything to the fundamentalist sects of the U. S. When Social Credit came along, wrapped in eschatological garb by Aberhart looking to a divinely ordained future, most Albertans embraced it. Some Social Crediters hailed Aberhart as “Our Saviour” at party meetings, which often ended with enthusiasts insisting on special prayers for him.⁴⁹ Alberta’s religious milieu proved receptive to Aberhart’s assertion that “The principles of the old line politicians and their henchmen are like those of the men who betrayed the Christ.”⁵⁰

The Mormon Church of Latter Day Saints was a notable religious sect in Alberta and Social Credit was particularly popular in Mormon districts. In the United States, the Mormon Trail ran westward from Illinois across Iowa, Nebraska, and Wyoming to its terminus in Utah. Canada's Mormon Trail ran northward from Utah, across Idaho and Montana, and terminated in southern Alberta. Mormons were Alberta's first large body of successful farmers, a role played in Manitoba and Saskatchewan by the tory-touched liberal Ontarians. Brigham Young's son-in-law founded Alberta's Mormon capital, Cardston, in 1887 and within three decades, 16 other Mormon settlements appeared within 100 miles of it.⁵¹ Alberta's Mormon youth travelled to Salt Lake City's tabernacle to marry and advertised Alberta there as a destination for settlement.

The Mormon mark on Alberta expressed itself in political leadership and voting behaviour. Social Credit's parliamentary house leader, John Blackmore, an Idaho-born Mormon, emigrated to Cardston in 1892 while Solon Low, the Cardston-born son of American immigrants, served as the party's federal leader between the 1930s and 1950s. Under Nathan Tanner, Cardston's MLA and the Minister of Lands and Mines for 16 years, officials from the Texas Railroad Commission and other American agencies supervised the Alberta oil industry's regulatory regime, patterning it on their own model.⁵² More influential in the making of oil policy than Manning, Tanner went on to serve as a Mormon Church senior Elder in Salt Lake City. S. D. Clark noted the connection between Alberta Social Credit and U.S. Mormonism: "It was not without significance that some of the more prominent members of the Social Credit Government belonged to the Mormon church in southern Alberta. The religious-political experiment in Alberta," he observed, "resembled very closely that tried much earlier in Utah; in both cases, religious separation sought support in political separation, the encroachments of the federal authority were viewed as encroachments of the worldly society."⁵³

The Social Credit movement in Alberta was quite unlike Britain's Social Credit movement, which had a Catholic, cosmopolitan, urban support base, and an atheist, Major Douglas, as its oracle.⁵⁴ Aberhart recruited Douglas to help operationalize Social Credit theory, but Douglas quickly disowned his Albertan acolytes, mystified by their marriage of Christian fundamentalism and monetary reform.⁵⁵ His departure exposed the tenuous link between British and Alberta Social Credit. Some Albertan Social Crediters however took from Douglas a conspiracy theory that associated finance capitalism with an international Jewish cabal.

The exercise of power and Manning's ascension to the premiership in 1943 after Aberhart's death becalmed Social Credit. Manning purged the party of its more radical elements and adopted a fierce anti-socialist and then Cold Warrior posture. In the xenophobic climate of the Cold War, he foiled efforts to bring some private power companies under public ownership by plebiscite by linking CCF support for the idea with Nazism and communism: "public ownership is bad in principle, worse in practice." That sentiment had purchase in Alberta and there is reason to believe that a majority of Albertans agreed with him.⁵⁶

Alberta's liberal-individualist populist evolution has had much in common with America's populist evolution. Both differ from the more prevalent collectivist bent of Saskatchewan populism. Common to both forms of populism is the notion of "the people" defined by their common cultural roots, geographic location, and their perception of an impending threat or crisis generated by an external power. Albertan populism

however, as expressed by Social Credit and the Alberta-led federal Reform and Canadian Alliance parties, constructed that external foe first as “the money power” and then as “big government” while social democratic populists depicted it as “big business” or “corporate capitalism.” Alberta resisted both a federally legislated national hospital insurance scheme in the 1950s and a national medicare program of the 1960s as “socialistic,” entailing compulsion and representing “welfare state-ism.”⁵⁷ Social Credit originally opposed the “big banks” and, like Ralph Klein’s Conservatives in later decades, saw the “people” as “consumers.” Over time, however, Social Credit distanced itself from attacks on financial behemoths – the “Fifty Big Shots of Canada” – a position it had once shared with socialists like CCFer Irvine who had earlier toyed with Social Credit monetary schemes. By the 1940s, Social Credit anointed itself as the province’s chief protagonist in the fight against socialism and by the 1960s Manning went from the premiership to a board directorship of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. Klein’s Conservatives, enthusiastically championing globalization, embraced privatization and deregulation, adopted the logic of an international market economy, and often reframed citizens as “customers.”⁵⁸

As a self-proclaimed populist party, the Alberta-based Reform/Alliance party was anything but opposed to corporate power. Although the policies of Preston Manning’s Reformers and those of American Republicans differed, the parties were ideological kin as social conservatives and classical economic liberals suspicious of a large federal government. The Reform party’s program in the 1990s envisaged a Canada re-imagined through a universalist American lens. It embraced “universal citizenship” to counter the “politics of recognition” such as special status for Quebec or Aboriginals and it opposed policies of bilingualism and multiculturalism.⁵⁹ It believed, as many Americans do, in limited government and lower taxes. Stephen Harper, speaking for the party, articulated Alberta’s decentralized, populist image of Canada: “We propose measures which will assert the autonomy of all provinces and the power of the people.”⁶⁰

Albertans, more so than Canadians as a whole, have been enamoured with American liberal prototypes such as a Triple-E Senate, grass-roots control over elected officials, the flat tax, the principle of provincial equality, and legislators’ review of judicial appointments. Only Alberta’s legislature has struck a specific committee to study Senate reform and the Alberta-based Canada West Foundation continues to pursue the idea.⁶¹ Alberta led the Canadian equivalent of America’s “sagebrush rebellion” – the drive by western states at the turn of the 1980s to lessen a distant federal government’s control of their land and natural resources.⁶² Alberta’s doggedness on the constitutional equality of provinces led to a constitutional amending formula, as in the United States, that grants no province a veto.⁶³

Albertans and their governments have never cared much for Ottawa; that is the gist of the “firewall” letter co-authored by, among others, Flanagan, Morton, and Harper. It proposed a provincial police force to replace the RCMP and an Alberta pension plan to supersede the Canada Pension Plan. The upstart Wildrose Alliance party, whose advisors now include Flanagan, has adopted key components of the letter such as income tax collection by the province and a provincial pension plan.⁶⁴ This new party, representing the most recent manifestation of Alberta’s individualist-liberal, populist predilections, warmly applauded Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin after her first speech to a foreign audience, in Calgary, in which she advocated smaller government and

fiscal restraint and compared Alaska and Alberta. “[T]he themes she [Palin] was talking about,” enthused Wildrose leader Danielle Smith, “resonate just as much with Albertans as they are [sic] with average Americans. Free enterprise, the respect for the individual, the fact that we need limited government.”⁶⁵ Palin followed George W. Bush whose first speech abroad was also in Calgary.

Like Americans who designed their constitution to ensure that state power trumps federal power, Albertans have been leery, the most leery among English Canadians, of Ottawa’s efforts. By a wide margin, Albertans have much more trust and confidence in their provincial government than in the federal government to do a good job in carrying out its responsibilities. They believe, more so than residents of any other province including Quebec, that they get the most for their money from their provincial government and they are the least likely among Canadians to think Ottawa delivers value for money. They are also the least supportive of the redistributive federal equalization policy.⁶⁶ Such orientations have impelled Edmonton to fight Ottawa.

In the realms of foreign, defence, and trade policy, Albertans have also been more sympathetic than other Canadians to American designs. The *Operation Dismantle* case demonstrated the benign Albertan attitude to American cruise missile tests in the province.⁶⁷ A coalition of 24 national, regional, and local groups including the Canadian Union of Public Employees, the B.C. Voice of Women, the Ontario Federation of Labour, and local groups ranging from Montreal to Muskoka and Thunder Bay to Alberni fought the tests in court, but not one group was from Alberta. Albertans stood out in the 1980s as more supportive than other Canadians of free trade with the U.S.; in the 1990s, they were the most supportive of the U.S. proposal for a Free Trade Area of the Americas; and in 2003, the most supportive of the U.S. invasion of Iraq.⁶⁸

In delineating English Canadian political culture, many highlight the values of a decamped offshoot of revolutionary America, Upper Canada’s Loyalists. The analysis here has been of a later American offshoot, Alberta’s pioneering Americans and their formative imprint on Alberta politics. It underscores the individualist-liberal values of Alberta’s settler Americans as a founding ideological fragment. Those values congealed in the province’s formative years and they continue to define the parameters of political discourse in Alberta. Favoured by rural overrepresentation in the electoral system and their early concentration in southern rural Alberta, American homesteaders launched a politics of consensus, what C. B. Macpherson has described as Alberta’s ideologically hegemonic quasi-party system.⁶⁹ They ingrained in the Albertan psyche an ardent individualist streak on issues of property, provincial rights, and suspicion of centralized authority, of designs crafted in a distant capital where central Canadian calculations overshadow Albertan interests. Alberta’s American market liberal and anti-communitarian heritage continues to infuse its political ethos.

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² Reviews for the *Journal of Canadian Studies*.

³ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1955).

⁴ Louis Hartz, et al, *The Founding of New Societies* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1964), and Gad Horowitz, "Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1966), pp. 143-71.

⁵ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Revolution and Counterrevolution: Change and Persistence in Social Structures*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1988), Chap. 2.

⁶ On language: after R. v. Mercure, [1988] 1 S.C.R. 234, Saskatchewan translated many of its statutes into French, but Alberta did not. On medicare: Malcolm G. Taylor, *Health Insurance and Canadian Public Policy: The Seven Decisions that Created the Canadian Health Insurance System* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), Chap. 4 and pp. 338-40. On guns: Albertans, more so than residents of other provinces, believe that Canadians should have the right to bear arms, Ekos poll, Nov. 18, 2009, at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/pdf/ekosdata-tables-nov18.pdf>. Accessed Feb. 5, 2010. On capital punishment: Albertans, more so than residents of other provinces, endorse it, "Canadians support new stand on clemency, poll", at <http://www.canada.com/topics/news/national/story.html?id=dfc55242-ee80-47b8-a134-867ebe85cd65&k=71463>. Accessed Feb. 5, 2010. On same-sex marriage: Albertans are least supportive, Brian Laghi, "Gay unions split country, poll shows," *Globe and Mail*, June 14, 2003, and Angus Reid Poll, June 7, 1996, at http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_marz.htm Accessed Feb. 5, 2010. On the environment: Alberta's government adopted the American position and led the charge in Canada against the Kyoto Protocol.

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⁸ Dirk Hoerder, *Creating Societies: Immigrant Lives in Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), p. 141.

⁹ Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1970), p. 282.

¹⁰ W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967 [orig. pub. 1957]), Chaps. 9 and 10.

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¹² R. H. Coats and M. C. MacLean, *The American-Born in Canada: A Statistical Interpretation* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1943), Table XLVI, p. 124.

¹³ *Census of Canada, 1911* (Ottawa: Bureau of Statistics, 1913), vol. 2 Tables XIV and VIII, pp. 373 and 332-3.

¹⁴ *Census of Canada, 1921* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1924), vol. 1, Table 27, pp. 522-33.

¹⁵ Canada, Bureau of Statistics, *Origin, Birthplace, Nationality and Language of the Canadian People: a Census Study Based on the Census of 1921 and Supplementary Data* (Ottawa: The Bureau, 1929), Table 46, p. 99; Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), p. 67; and quoted in Karel Denis Bicha, *The American Farmer and the Canadian West, 1896-1914* (Lawrence, KS.: Coronado Press, 1968), p. 130.

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