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The Empire Club Presents

Making British North America: The War of 1812 Reconsidered

Head Table:

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Capt The Reverend Don McLean Aitchison, Chaplain, Trinity College School & Chaplin, The 48th Highlands of Canada Port Hope

Dr. Sarah Black,

Sandra Shaul, Project Manager, City of Toronto's Bicentennial Commemoration of the War of 1812

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Professor Jeremy Black MBE, University of Exeter

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Verity Sylvester, Managing Director, CV Management & Past President Empire Club of Canada

Introduction by M.J. Perry, Vice-President & Owner, Mr. Discount Ltd., Director, The Empire Club of Canada

When I was given the honor of introducing Professor Black and I began to do my research, I realized that if I was to list all his accomplishments, I would take all his time to speak, and I don't think you just want to hear that. So I'm going to just highlight those things I found really interesting.

Currently, he is a professor of history at the University of Exeter, and he is highly regarded as a specialist in military history.

He has studied in both camps of the Oxbridge divide by completing his undergraduate studies at Cambridge where he received a Starred First, and the closest Canadian equivalent to that is the gold medal, although in England they're not necessarily awarded each year and this was followed by postgraduate work at Oxford.

He taught at Durham University and eventually became a professor and arrived to teach in Exeter in 1996. He has lectured extensively worldwide including Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand and the USA, where he has held several visiting chairs including West Point.

He's a past council member of the royal Historical Society. Black is a Senior Fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute and was appointed to The Order of the Membership of the British Empire for services to stamp design.

He continues to serve on numerous editorial boards, including the *Journal of Military History*, the *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, *Media History* and the *International History Review*, and he's also involved with *History Today*.

In his spare time, he has authored over 100 books with a specialty in 18th century British politics and international relations. So I thought to prepare for today, I should read his book, *Flames and Water, the War Of 1812*.

I went to my local bookstore, and it was sold out. I went to Chapters and it was sold out. And I thought, "Now how often can an academic say they have a best seller?"

I came to realize, though, that I should not have been surprised that he sold well, because I went in and read some of his peer reviews, and he has been referred to as innovative in the world of history. So, I guess he really can make the old new again, and he is also termed, “verging on the radical,” in the field of history. So these comments tell me we are in for an exciting and enjoyable discourse.

Two things also that stuck out to me though: I just learned he likes detective novels, and he gets very high ratings from his student reviews.

So, with that, I give you professor Black.

Professor Jeremy Black, MBE, University of Exeter

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming along to listen. The speaker can always speak, but if there's nobody in the audience at all, it always is fruitless, so thank you for coming and making this occasion. I would like to say on behalf of my wife, Sarah and myself how pleased we are to be here.

It's my fourth visit to Canada, it's Sara's third, and we've always enjoyed our visits here. Canadians probably don't realize this, but they're some of the most pleasant and courteous people in the world, so take a pat on the back. And I'd like to say thank you to my friend, Blake Goldring, who has been responsible for arranging this visit for me.

Now, history is about two things: it's what happened in the past, and it's how we provide accounts of what happened in the past. And what I want to do is to use the War of 1812 to both feature and focus on its importance, but also on different ways that we can look at military history and the development of North America. And in essence, I always think it's a good idea to say at the outset what one is going to be saying, then people who don't want to listen can be thinking of other things.

What I'm going to argue is that the development of North America was far from inevitable; that the pattern by which what had been British North America was to be split into two independent states, each of which were to reach from ocean to ocean, was far from predictable, and that the War of 1812 was very important in this; and that in that war, Canadians helped to make their own destiny.

Now what I want to start off by though is, as I've said, to explain that there are two different ways you can look at history. Classic way, particularly because of the influence of Marxist thought even on people who in no way are Marxist; people who are often in some respects conservatives, like to argue that there are deep and immutable forces in history often linked to economics or geography, or other such factors, and in which results are likely predictable, almost inevitable. Now, if you take that viewpoint, which is not the viewpoint I take, that in a sense there is very little that individuals or groups or generations can do to effect the lottery of fate.

I don't take that view, I take the view that actually, generations, nations, peoples, and individuals within those can make an enormous difference to their history. And I think if you look at the history of North America, particularly the history of North America from 1754, which is when hostilities started in the Ohio River Valley, right up to 1871, when Britain and the United States signed the treaty of Washington, which in effect settled the North America question with two strong independent states, Canada and the United States being left there, each secure in their own borders. If you actually look at that period, you can repeatedly see how individual generations, individual groups, individual armies, particular generals, made a difference.

And I think that's important in its own right, which is why I'm going to be talking about it, but I also think it's important if we think about the relevance of history to the present day, because what I'm essentially saying is that what we do as individuals, as members of groups, as patriots, as members of nations makes a difference to the development of those countries. For some of the people of the older generation here, and for the younger people, for they're thinking about their parents or their grandparents. What people did in 1940, for example, made an extraordinarily great importance. Both what Canadians did, and what Brits did made an extraordinary importance to the development of the world.

Now, what I'm going to do is to go back to a previous crisis, and I'm going to show how what people did in the 18 teens made a big difference. So let's start in 1812. In 1812, the government of the United States, having debated the matter in Congress, declares war on Britain. Britain does not declare war on the United States; Britain doesn't want to fight the United States. The United States declares war on Britain, and it declares war essentially for two reasons. One, it has a couple of serious grievances, grievances that are very serious to the Americans. And two, it's certain it is going to win.

Now the grievances were one that is linked to Canada and one that is linked to the British Navy; the one linked to Canada was the view among Americans, particularly what were known as the "war hawks," and the war hawks were particularly strong in the western and southern states. The view among many American politicians that the British presence in Canada and the activities of those people who lived in Canada, both servants of the British state, but also independent agencies within it, was stirring up in their view, Native Americans, what we would now call First Nations, in order to resist American expansionism, particularly American expansion in the areas of what are now Indiana and Illinois; and the view was voiced very strongly, particularly by Henry Clay, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, that in order to deal with the serpent of the as they saw it, Native American resistance, they had to smash its lair and its lair was apparently Canada.

Number two was the view that the British Navy was stopping America from trading as they would wish to trade with continent of Europe. Now, why were they bound to win? They were absolutely certain they were going to win. Thomas Jefferson, who had been President wrote to his successor, former Vice-President and ally, the current President James Madison, that he was confident that if war began in 1812, that it would be possible in 1812 to conquer what we would now call Ontario and Québec and to finish off in 1813 by conquering Nova Scotia, particularly the key naval base in Halifax.

Why were they confident? Well, of course, Britain was already fighting a war. That's why Britain was blockading American trade. Britain was fighting a war with Napoleon and that war was going badly. At the beginning of 1812, Napoleon's Europe dominates the whole of the continental landmass west of Russia, and Russia at that stage under Tsar Alexander I is actually an ally of America; it's rather like the situation in Europe in 1940. In fact, Napoleon had fought and successively defeated the Austrians and the Prussians; they are now part of the French system. There is resistance in Portugal and Spain, but nobody believes at that point, that however well that resistance continues, and of course there's a British army under the Duke of Wellington there, nobody actually believes that that's going to lead to the overthrow of Napoleonic France. And indeed, in the summer of 1812, at the very same time that the Americans declare war, Napoleon having broken with Russia leads the largest Army Europe had ever then seen, 600,000 troops, many of them French, but including national contingents from Prussia and Austria, as well as French subjects, forces from Italy and Germany leads them in an invasion of Russia

confident of victory, and the Americans are confident that Napoleon is going to win as well. They have an envoy that travels with Napoleon, they're absolutely confident.

So therefore, it is quite clear what is going to happen, the American forces will invade Canada, Britain is going to be too weak to resist, North America will be remoulded and there's nothing that the British are going to be able to do about it, because once Russia has fallen, then the British are going to have to accept whatever terms Napoleon offers, however strong the Royal Navy is.

Indeed, to offer a 20th century analogy, in the 1960s, the Canadian historian Richard Glover, who clearly was not out to endear himself to the Americans, described America's conduct in 1812 as rather like Mussolini in 1940, when Italy joined in against France and Britain when they appear to have been defeated by Germany. Now, at that point, you start to realize the weakness of the idea that inevitability is the key force in history.

Now, you know, Britain is weak, Britain cannot spare significant forces to go to North America. In fact, the British had to send no significant reinforcements to North America until 1814. The garrison in Canada and the Canadians are on their own. The British, of course, still have a significant Navy, but the first task of the Navy is the protection of home waters. The second task of the Navy is the support of the Duke of Wellington's forces in Portugal and Spain. The third task is the attempt to blockade Napoleonic Europe. Maintaining links across the Atlantic to Canada are important, but it is not the prime task.

So, you would have thought it would have seemed a reasonable option to argue that an inevitable outcome is going to be there. And of course, what one has to bear in mind is that one of the importances of the War of 1812 is it plays directly against and across this track of inevitability. And it reminds me going back, as I said to the outset, how careful we must be when we're looking at the history of North America, from 1754 until 1871, to believe that inevitable outcomes will always occur.

If I might give you a later example of that, in 1865, 1866, and 1867, British politicians and Canadian politicians, it's a crucial background to Canadian Confederation, were convinced that there was the danger, they didn't that they didn't think it was inevitable, but they were convinced that there was the danger that the union having won in 1865 would not do the most remarkable thing that it did do, which was demobilize, but would actually turn north and drive the British out of Canada, which is one of the major reasons of course behind all the pressure for Confederation.

So, we go back to 1812. In 1812, two things happen that the Americans really had not anticipated. Number one, and it plays out right the way through the war, is a much stronger resistance is mounted in Canada than they had believed would be the case. And number two, it gradually dawns on them with growing horror, that they've backed the wrong side in the world war. That actually in a way, Napoleon's vision of the future is to run out in the snows outside Moscow, and that is going to be it. From then on, the French Empire gradually implodes in 1813 and 1814, and the Americans are on the wrong side.

But obviously we are here in Canada, and in a sense, what needs to be spoken of most is the actual situation in North America. The Americans were fairly clear as to what was likely to happen. After all, they had invaded Canada before, they had invaded Canada in 1775. The invasion had been a surprise for the British. It had been a very rapid success in the initial stages. American forces had rapidly moved north on the Lake Champlain corridor, they'd moved into the St. Lawrence. They of course, had

conquered Montréal and they besieged Québec. Another American Expeditionary Force had crossed Maine under Benedict Arnold, quite a considerable feat given the nature of the terrain. And of course, it arrived on the opposite bank to Québec at about the same time as Montgomery's force arrived from Montréal. And you know, in a sense, the Americans had one, two inconvenient things happen. Québec mounted a battle; the garrison in Québec mounted a better defense than had been anticipated. And of course, eventually, the ice melted in the St. Lawrence and a relief for Scott up there. But what he did show is that it should be possible for the Americans to rapidly move to the St. Lawrence Valley and to be successful. And of course, in 1812, they have greater advantages than they'd had in 1775.

In 1812, there isn't a British garrison in Boston to distract American forces. The Americans have a longer border because they've moved, expanded westward, so they have more points of operation, more axes of attack on Canada, particularly from Detroit, for example. And of course, from the Niagara Peninsula, neither of which had been axes of attack in 1775. And there are more Americans, and they actually have with their state militias, less so with the armies; the army is quite small, but with their state militias, they have considerable experience of operating under arms. And in the West, the case of the western states of fighting Native Americans, of course, or as you would call them, First Nations. So by rights, the Americans should have won. And you know, there is an account of military history, an account I've spent much of my life trying to contest which argues that the big battalions usually win or, you know, Stalin's famous remark, "How many divisions has the Pope got?" Or to take a more popular example, the Clint Eastwood character, who says to Clint Eastwood that the man with the Winchester always wins.

Since we are now in Canada, not the United States and most of you don't probably have concealed weapons that you can shoot me with if you irritate me, let me tell you that a Winchester is a repeating rifle. In other words, it has greater range and fire as greater range credit firepower, greater fire rate than the weapon it's up against, which was a Colt revolver, and therefore obviously, the man with the Winchester always should win. Actually, if you've watched the film, you will know that a last the man with the Winchester is up against Clint Eastwood. And Clint Eastwood, of course, actually beats the man with Winchester, but my point about 1812.

But what about 1812, is that in 1812 1813, and 1814, a very well conducted defense, particularly in the Niagara River area, helps to form and cause enormous problems for the Americans. I haven't got the time here, and it's not my business; I've done it in my book, to go through the details of the defense, but in 1812, itself, forces based in Canada mount what we would call an active forward defense on the western axis near Detroit, doing extremely well. There are very effective operations around Queenston, in the Niagara Peninsula, that also does very, very well, and the American direct thrust up the Lake Champlain axis is stopped.

Of course, it's weakened as well by the fact that there is a major contrast between what happens in Canada and what happens in America. And the major contrast is again, unexpected. The major contrast is that essentially, Canada acts in a united fashion. And the people who act in a disunited fashion are the Americans.

There had of course been a vote for war in Congress, and the governing party that was then called the Democratic Republicans. The governing party is gung-ho for war, but the opposition, the Federalists are against the war, they voted against it. They believe it's wrong, they want to go on trading with Britain. In

fact, they sell Britain grain during the war, which helps to be used to feed Canada, and the state militias of two of these states in New England refused to cross the state lines. And the key point here is that Federalist's strength is concentrated in New England, and it's New England, which of course, is going to be very, very important in supporting any advance up the Lake Champlain corridor. So although the Americans do stage three advances in each successive year up that corridor, they do not develop the force dynamic that they should have done and that they really required to break through.

Now, the contrast is very clear if you turn to Canada. Whereas in America, the Federalists are actively intriguing against the war, they're selling grain to the British, by the end of 1814, they actually have a meeting of Federalist politicians and state governors at Hartford, Connecticut, the so called Hartford Convention, in which they certainly discuss how they can best obstruct the war effort, and some of the hotheads discussed separatism from the United States.

So, whilst that is all going on in America, weakening the American war effort in Canada, on the other hand, you have the complete reverse; you have a situation where a set of colonies, a protonation, whatever term you wish to use, and obviously, these terms are controversial in Canadian history, operates in a much more united fashion than people had anticipated. And in particular, there is not the dissidence in Québec that might have been expected, in fact, the exact opposite. In Québec, there is considerable opposition to the idea of being conquered by Americans and being brought into the American Imperium. And indeed, you can find across what becomes Canada, a much stronger rejection of America, in 1812-14 than had been the period position in 1775-6, and there's a number of reasons for that.

Another good reason is, of course, particularly in Ontario, many of the inhabitants of Ontario are either themselves or the sons of people that have emigrated or been expelled from America as Loyalists, as a result of the War of Independence. They had not appreciated losing their land, they had not appreciated being beaten up, the clergy among them had not appreciated being thrown out, some of them being tarred and feathered, and there is a very strong popular response. And that's the key point. The key point here is that the British garrison is small, and it could not have held on for any length of time, in the absence of important popular support, which is popular support manifested in a willingness to fight for their vision of their future, a very different vision to the vision of the British North America that the Americans had sought to pursue both in 1775, and was seeking to pursue again in 1812.

Now, I happen to think that's a very important element. And obviously, it's something I was talking about earlier to the pastor. It's unfortunate that so many countries have their original moment, their foundation moment in war. But nevertheless, that is the case. And it's the War of 1812 is very, very important in the Canadian context, more important in the Canadian context than it is for either the British or the Americans, although it's significant for both of them, precisely because you get an experience of a common threat, and you get a united response to it that is much more powerful and potent than might have been envisaged, and that then looks forward to provide a ballast for the generations after the war.

Now, I'm not an idiot, I'm aware that there were tensions in post-1815 Canada. We know, of course, there's the Fenian movement; we know there's disaffection, including a certain degree of violence in the late 1830s. But the interesting thing is, there is nothing that matches the disunion that you see in the

United States, both during that war, and subsequently in the Nullification Crisis, and the controversy over the Missouri State Line, and of course, eventually moving up to the Civil War.

So, for Canada, the War of 1812 is a formative moment. It's also a formative moment in the relationship between the British Empire or Britain, if you like, and Canada, because in a sense, as you will know, Canada is the first area of the British Empire to which Dominion status is extended, which essentially means self-government. And indeed, I mentioned the end of my story is 1871. The key thing that happens in 1871 is that the British actually leave Canada to its own defences; they leave just two garrison positions, Halifax, in the east, and Esquimalt on Vancouver Island in the West, which are the two naval bases so therefore, they're important to the naval logic of British power, but essentially, they trust the Canadians to run their own defense. They trust the Canadians to run their own policies. And in a way this might seem surprising to you. We know that the outcome is always going to be; Dominion status, eventual independence and the end of Empire. That is as we know what is going to happen, but you have to remember that however much something might seem inevitable, it didn't seem inevitable at the time.

The British hadn't been in a position, they hadn't conceived of Dominion status to offer the Americans in the 1770's. They hadn't got that idea in their head as a way to deal at that stage with the terrible problems with Ireland. And in a way it is Canada that is the great political and constitutional experiment. And it's a political and constitutional experiment that rests for the Empire, on a sense of political trust, and on the military ability of Canadians to discharge their own roles in defending their own protcountry, what becomes their own country. So again, the War of 1812 is important, not just for the development of Canadian nationalism, it's also the Canadian identity.

It's also important for a new Imperial partnership between Britain and its Empire in North America, an Imperial Partnership, which is then to serve as the model for how the British develop the methods of constitutional political arrangement with Australia, the method of constitutional and political arrangement with New Zealand, with South Africa and in fact, eventually with Ireland; and that is significant. That is a significant moment in world history, because the ability of empires to dissolve without complete chaos, without war, without rebellion, without revolution was something that had never happened prior to the way in which the British Empire developed in the 19th century. And again, small events, you might think, small acorns, well they're not small acorns, they were seen at the time as significant.

Now my time is running out, so I would just like to make one or two other points, then would be very, very happy to take questions. But as I said, obviously, there's many other things that we could talk about. What other particular points do I think are relevant? We're looking forward from the War of 1812. It's worth bearing in mind that repeatedly after 1815, there were war panics on the Canada-America frontier; there wasn't a really a good treaty till 1842 for the eastern section of the frontier, then in the 1840s, there's the possibility of war over the Oregon Question; then, of course, as you may know, at the very end of the 1850s, there's a near war over islands between Vancouver and what is now the state of Washington. And then of course, there is the real risk of war, which is threatened by the Americans twice during the Civil War, and then again, after the Civil War is over.

Now, in each case, you can look at the British military planning there in the archives, both the army planning and the naval planning. And it's interesting. Now, military planning is interesting, not just

because of what it tells you about how people conceive of their own military strength and how they see themselves as adapting to new challenges. And there are important new challenges the British war planning for Canada, the defense of Canada in the 1840s, is having to adapt to how they're going to best be able to defend Canada in the new context of the steamship, and then how they best going to be able to defend Canada in the new context by which American forces can use railways to mobilize troops and their supplies much more rapidly than they did in 1812.

So that element is interesting. But for me, it's always interesting. And you know, military figures are generally very clever when they do staff work, but it's not their job to be producing documents that make sense to nonmilitary figures. And often what isn't mentioned, is as interesting as what is mentioned. The key thing about what isn't mentioned is that when the British had to look at a real serious crisis, the Oregon Question may seem very dull to you, but essentially, there was no agreed frontier west of the Rockies. The British and the Americans not been able to agree this and was in effect, they agreed as a condominium, a joint sort of ownership over the modern states of Oregon and Washington, and then the modern province of British Columbia. That's what had been agreed, and it'd be easy to agree when, of course, fundamentally, there weren't very many whites there, and essentially, they'd all been run by the Native Americans. But this becomes an impossibility as American settlement west of the Rockies grows, as American expansionism in the sense of Manifest Destiny grows, and President Polk fights the election, essentially on telling the American electorate that he will go to war if the boundary of America is not what is now the limits for the southern boundary of Alaska. Alaska was then Russian, so in other words, British Columbia, Vancouver Island, Oregon and Washington were all going to be American and there was serious war planning. I mean, the British mobilized the Pacific Squadron, they send lots of troops across the Atlantic to Canada, etc, etc, etc, etc.

And then again, there is serious war planning at the end of 1861, beginning of 1862 and late in 62, beginning of 63 when Britain and America, the union drifts very close to war in each case. Now what is striking is what is not mentioned in the documents; in no stage in the documents is there any sense on the part of the British military planners that the Canadians will do anything other than fight in their own defense. There is a strong sense that Canada is going to be loyal to itself and loyal to the Empire, and there is no sense that anybody apart from a few Fenians might actually cooperate with the Americans.

It is truly impressive that, because that's not the commonality of military planning in that period, when in fact, for example, the British in the 18th century had had to think about the possibility of French or Spanish invasions on behalf of the Jacobites of the British Isles, they had regularly had to assume a large amount of disaffection in Scotland, in Ireland, and maybe in parts of England. So, I think this is something that's worth thinking about; that the War of 1812, the destiny of North America, in many senses rested in the hands of Canadians of the past, and they made their own destiny.

Obviously, the role that the British took was significant, the role that the Royal Navy in particular took was very significant. But this is a moment of Canadian history, which is as well for you to think about. Now, several years ago, I was very fortunate to be invited by Blake to address the annual dinner of the Royal Regiment of Canada, and to be guest of honor. And at the end, I gave a toast, which is not usual, people from the podium don't usually give a toast. But I'd like to do the same because the years past, but the toast remains the same. And the toast is friendship across the ocean.

Robin Sears

Don't you just love a great teacher who can make history sing? Boy, that was really fabulous. We have time for some questions.

Questions & Answers

Q: Yes, I just like to ask you, you did not mention anything about 1805. And I just like to ask what the influence of 1805 was on the War of 1812?

JB: You're thinking of the Battle of Trafalgar I take it?

Q: Yeah.

JB: Well, obviously I didn't mention lots of lots of things. Just to remind you, in 1805 the British Navy under Admiral Lord Nelson engages the French and Spanish navies which have sailed out of Cadiz and inflict one of the most decisive naval victories in world history. The only one I think, to probably rank with it in modern times, the Japanese victory over the Russians at Tsushima in 1905, and the American victories over the Japanese at Midway in 42, and Philippine Sea in 44. So there was no other naval victory that was so impressive in that period. Clearly, it's very significant. I mean, Britain had the largest Navy in the world. But as a result of French land successes France had coerced into its system or conquered France or the second largest Navy in the world. The French had coerced into or conquered the Dutch and the Spaniards, the Spaniards had the third largest Navy in the world. And the Dutch, depending upon your point of view had either the fourth or the fifth.

So clearly, the British needed to do well, and Britain had a particular other problem -that the British population was then relatively modest. There hadn't been the enormous population growth that's to come in the 19th century, linked to industrialization, and of course, one of the products of which is the large-scale immigration to Canada. And Britain didn't have conscription. They did have the press gang to help with the Navy, but they didn't have conscription. So they have a tiny army, a really small army. And unless you can take out the French Navy, you're in dead trouble. And the British followed a high-risk strategy during the war. .

You know, I'm using the analogies with World War Two deliberately a) because I've written a couple of books on World War Two and it interests me, but b) because actually strategic problems do not change in history. The technology changes, but the strategy, the strategic problem doesn't change. And the key strategic problem was how far do you focus all your forces on home defense? And how far do you take a risk strategy and send your troops abroad, risking their defeat or risking the other side going for your home country?

Now, the British took a risk strategy. The reason they took the risk strategy is they're part of an alliance. They want to keep their allies in the war, and they want to pursue attacks on detached French colonies and so on. So, one of the real problems is one of the reasons they have to win these naval victories is that if they don't, there is the risk that they are going to be invaded. And of course, the other example, and you know, I've referred to it already, is 1940. In 1940, the British had taken the risk strategy and it had gone disastrously wrong. The British had sent the British Expeditionary Force to the continent, it had been badly defeated with its French and Belgium and Dutch allies. A large number of troops have been

fortunately evacuated from Dunkirk, and further west, but they'd left almost all their material their equipment behind, and they were in a total mess.

Now, obviously, as you know, one of the key moments of Canada's importance in world history is the Strategic Reserve Defence Force in southern England. At the time, when the Germans are threatening Operation Sea Lion, the Canadian First Division is absolutely crucial. And the fact that it doesn't fight doesn't mean it's not crucial. It's crucial because it would have been there to fight had the Germans landed.

But the second point is, of course, the British have their Navy. You know, there's been quite a lot of controversy in reads recently as to whether we've overplayed the role of the Air Force and underplayed the role of the Navy. But the Navy in 1940 is there, ultimately, to ensure that there is going to be such heavy costs to any invasion, that people are going to be deterred from making it.

So in 1805, Britain has a great naval victory, the last of a sequence because they of course already won glorious first of June, Camperdown and the Battle of the Nile. They have naval superiority, which means that in 1812, they're able to have their large Field Army is not defending Britain, it's in Spain and Portugal. But what they can't do is send a large force to North America, because they just don't have the manpower, they simply do not have it. And if you look at the British Empire as a whole, the way the British Empire works militarily, in fundamental terms, it works on Britain providing what is the cutting edge, high octane industrial technological side, which in that period meant the Navy. By let's say, the 1950s, it meant the atomic bomber force, then resting on the fact that elsewhere you'll get units of British regulars allied with local forces. So, in India, the British conquer India, essentially with Indians; there are British regiments as well, but it wouldn't have worked unless a lot of Indians had been willing to serve with the British in North America, it's a more complex Alliance pattern, because Native Americans or First Nations, as you call it, a part of it, but also increasingly important are the militia of supportive colonies. I promise not to be so long next time.

Q: I guess it was during this war that about 14-18 ships came across this lake from Sackets Harbour, and General Pike was leading the whole contingent and of course, they got the Sunnyside beach and then came near where the Princess Gates are here in Toronto and General Pike was blown to smithereens and sent back to Sackets Harbour. There's a very small cemetery there today. There is not much indication of anything there. Last weekend, I was down in Lewiston, and after the Americans came across the Niagara River at three o'clock in the morning, they were soundly defeated there. If you crossed the Niagara River today to Lewiston, you won't see any mention really of the War of 1812. It's very difficult to find, what is your perception and the difference as to how Canadians view the war, and Americans view the war?

JB: Well, that's an interesting question. I mean, there is a difference, and there is a similarity, and we are all human, so this is not any criticism at all. The difference is obviously that the Americans don't dwell on what went wrong, and they have less interest in it than the War of Independence, or the Civil War, which obviously they're obsessed about, but here is a similarity, and the Canadians, the Americans, and the Brits are not too different here to everybody else in the world. They dwell on their successes, which is a bit of a surprise, so that if you were to go to as I have done to Baltimore, you will find that Fort McHenry is a national site. And an enormous thing is made of the defense against the British bombardment, and there's an enormous display of the flag and all the rest of it. If you're to go to New

Orleans, they don't make much of the battlefield in New Orleans, but they're very proud of the fact that Andrew Jackson stopped the British attack on New Orleans.

I think that there's a more substantive point that you're getting at here, which is that in a way, history both unites us and divides us. It's both an important source of identity, and if it's done badly, it is a curse, because if it's done badly, people get empowered through a sense of historicized grievance. One can see that, for example, in some countries that create a very false and distorted account of their past in which they have always been victimized by somebody else, so therefore, they're apparently entitled to brutalize other people.

So, in the case of North America, of course, the American anxiety, the American crisis of identity rests on the Civil War, when large numbers of Americans fought and killed each other, for views of a different identity of American vote, both of which remain very potent today.

Now, part of the joy of Canadian history is that you've never had to do that. You know, I know, as I said, in the 1830s, in the 1860s, there was, of course, the Métis uprising, there was a certain degree of internal violence, but an astonishingly low rate by world standards. So, part of your joy is that essentially, differences have largely been conducted politically, most obviously, of course, the Québec Question.

It's not really surprising that Americans are so much more focused on the Civil War. Where I think it is less attractive is the way in which the Americans treatment of the indigenous population and the Canadian treatment of the indigenous population. There seems to be a fundamental lack of awareness on the part of most Americans, that people like the Cherokee or the Creek were completely brutalized; they had the most astonishingly high casualties, large scale violence against women and children, and there there is a very major contrast with the Canadian experience, which again, is much, much more benign in world historical terms.

And that's nothing to do with the British. I mean, the British played a role, the British encouraged people to respect law. But if you think about it, the Canadians had a much more benign response than another famous British colonies set into Dominion, which is Australia. So, there was something particular about Canadian culture or the role of political circumstances, that meant that Canada has had a more benign history, which is great and delighted. But you shouldn't be surprised if other people focus in their own way slightly differently, sir.

Q: Professor, I just wanted to ask, you touched earlier on your comments about the loyalty of our citizenry and the clergy. And I've read a number of different works. That while that was important, the Americans took it for granted. And when they came here, you know, they either harassed or intimidated our citizenry, and that that had a greater impact. One of the American generals, when they came through Windsor actually issued a decree that any of our soldiers are citizens fighting inside. Any Aboriginals loyal to the crown, can face dire circumstances and that that had a greater impact than the perceived loyalty of our citizenry, citizenry and the clergy?

JB: Well, I think there's no doubt at all that there was a certain degree of brutality. I mean, obviously, we're standing here in Toronto, you don't need me to tell you that the Americans did not always behave as they should have been.

You know, there's several different ways of looking at this. One of the unusual things about this war is we all focus understandably yet again on what happened. But think about it for a second, think about what might have happened had. Let us say, the Americans done better in Ontario. Let us say that there had been some collapse of loyalty in Québec. America had still engaged in a war for the conquest of Canada. I think it's almost inconceivable that you could explain how from that they were going to get on and govern and conquer Nova Scotia. And the other point is that by 1814, remember, I know the Battle of Waterloo is in 1815, that's when Napoleon comes back. By the spring of 1814, Paris has been conquered, and Napoleon has fallen. And what happens then? The Empire strikes back.

The British send a large expeditionary force to North America, so that even if what we call Canada or this part of Canada, even if that had been conquered by the terror, or by an abandonment of loyalty, the British Crown at that point isn't going to give in because it's now got nobody else to fight, and it's, you know, it's in a totally different position from 1812.

The key thing is actually how this dynamic plays out in terms of Canadian identity. Canada doesn't remain an independent and different territory because it's reconquered by the British; Canada remains an independent territory because with the cooperation obviously in leadership of British elements here, but often would resting on essentially a large and broad basis of Canadian domestic support, the Americans are kept out. And that I think, is what's particularly important about the war.

In the end, you know, there's nothing inevitable, I've been arguing against inevitability. But in the end, the Americans were probably going to lose once Napoleon had been beaten by the Russians. In the end, the Americans were probably going to lose once Napoleon abdicated and in fact, the Americans sought negotiations with the British via the Russians from the winter of 1812-13. But the key difference is that it's not necessary to reconquer Canada or even more to force the Americans to divulge Canada by the other alternative, which is the British just anchoring ships in New York Harbor, and just shelling the wretched place in Boston Harbor til these people go back to status quo antebellum, the territorial situation before the war. And that would have been the easiest and quickest way for the British to reconquer Canada.

Now, I think in terms of taking up that gentleman's point, in terms of Canadian public memory, it would have been a much less attractive way to think of Canadian history, to think that that history remains different to that of America simply because of what happens with Napoleon, and the British Navy and British forces, I think it's actually very important to emphasize the role of how it developed. And there is an analogy; the clearest analogy, I suppose, is what was going on in Europe. That the Portuguese and Spaniards, by fighting against the French. The British sent a very important Expeditionary Force, but actually, a lot of that fighting was done by Portuguese, and Spaniards, played a key role in maintaining a sense of identity and national pride, certainly, for the 19th century, which would have been very, very different if quite frankly, those countries just been subject to the French, and eventually it got their independence because the Russians or the Prussians or the Austrians had beaten Napoleon.

So, you know, identity does play a role. I mean, you sang your song about your national anthem at the beginning. That's a very good anthem. It's about how people in Canada have had a sense of separate identity through their own effort. And I think you can trace that back a lot further in history than you can for many other places that became independent of Empire.

Robin Sears

I could stay all afternoon, but we can't. I'd like to call on Blake Goldring to formally thank our speaker. But just before he rises, let me just say something that will make him blush: he's famous as a leader of the Canadian financial services community. He's less well known but should be famous for having created something called the Canada Company, which works to enrich the lives of the men and women and families who serve in the armed forces. Blake.

Note of Appreciation by Blake Goldring, Chairman & CEO, AGF Management Limited

Thank you very much, Mr. President, for that kind comment. Professor Black, fellow head table guests, honored guests today; I have the great honor and pleasure on behalf of all of us here to express our thanks to I think a truly outstanding historian.

I mean, someone had this sweeping grasp of our history, but world history and to make it meaningful for us all today, I think is especially important and something which we have all been enriched by. 1812 really resonates with us all, of course, because had it not been for the British regular forces, the Canadian militia, and our First Nations allies, we would not be holding this lunch today.

And speaking of today, it is the start of Education Month, which is put on by the City of Toronto as part of the Bicentennial commemoration of the War of 1812, as co-chaired, along with myself and Councillor Thompson, an outstanding work and effort has gone on to a superb series of events, and I please recommend you to check out the City of Toronto website and the newspapers for some of those amazing events which really, again, bring our history to life.

It's very fitting then that we would have England's most outstanding scholar, who really is an ambassador in the world of higher learning, who goes and lectures around the world to talk about our issues here.

He is a most prolific published historian. He has 108 books under his belt, and this is just for starters. He's got a lot more a lot more interesting things to say. But the perspective that he shared with us today, about our past, I think, really reminded me personally that, you know, as important as the events were here in North America, it's easy to forget that, really, it was a bit of a sideshow to some incredibly important things that were happening on the other side of the pond.

The other key point that the professor shared, of course, was the inevitability of outcome; that the thought that the Americans would just steamroller into Canada and take over, it didn't happen for some very good reasons, which he shared with us today. About a decade ago, I had the great honor of meeting Sara and Jeremy, I was in a thatched roof 13th century pub, in Milton Keynes village outside of England, and we were talking on a different issue.

That's true, I had a pint of beer at my side, but I was really struck by what he had to say at that time. I was enlightened, I was enriched, and I was in awe. I was in awe because he spoke without a note. And I thought to myself, "Wow, if I could only be a student in his class, someone who can truly bring history to life," it was an amazing thing. And I can think I can say on behalf of us all today, that we may not have a thatched roof, roof over our heads, we do not have a pint of beer at our elbows, but I think we are all enriched.

We are all terribly engaged by what you had to say today. And on behalf of us all, thank you so much Jeremy, for an absolutely outstanding presentation.

Concluding Remarks by Robin Sears

You are the latest in a long line of great speakers, and we have commemorated a number of them in a book we call *Who Said That?* which is our token of appreciation. I think I'd like to say that we'd like to repeat performance. We'll book you again for another turn.

Finally, each one of you should have a list at your seat of upcoming events. I'm pleased to let you know that we have quite an amazing line of speakers already booked for this Fall.

Next Thursday, André Pratte, who is one of the most eloquent Federalists in the Quebec political and media world. He's the editorial chief of *La Presse* newspaper, and will be here to talk about the implications of what happened in Québec on September 4th, I think that's going to be a fascinating lunch. Anne Sado, the president of the George Brown College will be here to talk about her vision of education. And then we have Jeff Lozano, the President and CEO of Rivera on November 2nd at the King Edward Hotel.

I'd like to thank EGF Management for sponsoring our event today and thank Mr. Discount, which I always feel a little peculiar saying, to my friend MJ for sponsoring our student table this afternoon. I'd like to thank the *National Post* as our print media sponsor. This meeting will be carried in aired on Rogers TV, we're grateful to them for their ongoing support.

We're on Twitter and Facebook and as well at Empire club.org. Thank you all for coming.

This meeting is adjourned.