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Jeremy Black, MBE

Professor of History, University of Exeter

MAKING BRITISH NORTH AMERICA: THE WAR OF 1812 RECONSIDERED

Chairman: **Robin Sears**

President, The Empire Club of Canada

Head Table Guests

M.J. Perry, Vice-President and Owner, Mr. Discount Ltd., and Director, The Empire Club of Canada; Serena Goldring, Student, The Bishop Strachan School; Capt. The Reverend Don McLean Aitchison, Chaplain, Trinity College School, and Chaplain, 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; Blake Goldring, Chairman and CEO, AGF Management Limited; Councillor Michael Thompson, Chair of Toronto's Economic Development and Culture Committee, Vice-Chair of the Toronto Police Services Board, and the City Councillor representing Ward 37, Scarborough Centre; and Verity Sylvester, Managing Director, CV Management, and Past President, The Empire Club of Canada.

Introduction by M.J. Perry

When given the honour of introducing Professor Black, I asked for his official biography and found it to be so short it did not come close to reflecting the accomplishments of the man. To give you just

an introduction to what he has done would use up all the time assigned for him to speak.

Currently he is Professor of History at the University of Exeter and 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, followed by postgraduate work at Oxford. He taught at Durham, eventually as professor, arriving to teach in Exeter in 1996. He has lectured extensively in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, and the USA, where he has held visiting chairs at West Point, Texas Christian University, and Stillman College. A past Council member of the Royal Historical Society, Black is a Senior Fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute. He was appointed to the Order of 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, the International History Review, and History Today and was editor of Archives.

In his spare time he has authored over 100 books, with a specialty in eighteenth-century British politics and international relations. I thought I should read one of his more recent works "Flames and Water: The War of 1812" in preparation for this event and found that it is sold out not only at my local book store but at Chapters. Quite an accomplishment for an academic. I came to realize that I should not have been surprised when I read one of his peer reviews which described him as innovative in the world of history, and another used the phrase "verging on Radical." These comments tell me that we are in for an exciting and enjoyable discourse.

I give you Professor Black.

His most recent book is "Flame and Water: The War of 1812." Recent publications include "The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon" (2009), University of Oklahoma Press; "The Great War and the Making of the Modern World" (2011), Continuum International Publishing Group and "Fighting for America: The Struggle for Mastery in North America 1519–1871" (2011), Indiana University Press.

Jeremy Black

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming along to listen. The speaker can always speak, but if there is nobody in the audience, it always is fruitless. 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 is Sarah's third. 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. Take a pat on the back. I'd like to say thank you to my friend, Blake Goldring, who's been responsible for actually arranging this visit for me.

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. What I want to do is to use the War of 1812 to both feature and focus on its importance, but also show different ways that we can look at military history and the development of North America. In essence, I always think it's a good idea to say at the outset what one's going to be saying, and then people who don't want to listen can, as it were, think 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 would 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.

What I want to start off with is to explain that there are two different ways you can look at history. The classic way, particularly because of the influence of Marxist thought, even on people who in no way are Marxist, people who often in some respects are conservatives, is to argue that there are deep and immutable forces in history often linked to economics or geography or other such factors and in which, as it were, results are likely predictable, almost inevitable.

If you take that viewpoint, which is not the viewpoint I take, in a sense there is very little that individuals or groups or generations can do to affect 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. I think if you look at the history of North America, particularly the history of North America from 1754, which is as you all know, when hostilities started in the Ohio River Valley, right up to 1871 when Britain and the United States signed the Treaty of Washington, this, in effect, settled the North America question with two strong, independent states, Canada and the United States, each secure in its own borders.

If you actually look at that period, you can repeatedly see how individual generations, individual groups, individual armies, and particular generals made a difference. 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 developments of those countries.

For some of the people of the older generation here and for the younger people thinking about their parents or their grandparents, what people did in 1940, for example, both what Canadians did and what Brits did, was of extraordinary importance to the development of the world. 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.

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 is certain it is going to win.

The grievances were one that is linked to Canada and one that is linked to the British Navy. The one linked to Canada was a view among Americans, particularly those known as the War Hawks, who were particularly strong in the western and southern states. This view among many American politicians was that the British presence in Canada and the activities of those people who lived in Canada, both, as it were, servants of the British state, but also independent agencies within it, were stirring up in their view Native Americans, what we would now call First Nations, in order to resist American expansionism, particularly American expansionism in the areas of what are now Indiana and Illinois. The view was voiced very strongly, particularly by Henry Clay, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and in order to deal with, as it were, 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 trade as it would wish to trade, particularly with the continent of Europe.

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 Czar 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 still 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, that that's going to lead to the overthrow of Napoleonic France.

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, in an invasion of Russia confident of victory. The Americans are confident that Napoleon is going to win as well. They have an envoy that travels with Napoleon. They're absolutely confident. 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 remolded. 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 twentieth-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.

At that point, you start to realize the weakness of the idea that inevitability is the key force in history. Britain is weak. Britain cannot spare significant forces to go to North America. In fact, the British are to send no signifi-

cant reinforcements to North America until 1814. The garrison in Canada and the Canadians are, as it were, 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.

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. 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 in 1867, British politicians and Canadian politicians—it's a crucial background to Canadian Confederation—were convinced that there was the danger that they didn't think it was inevitable. 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, for Confederation.

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, mounted in Canada than they had believed would be the case. 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 of Moscow, outside Moscow, and that is going to be it.

From then on, as it were, the French Empire gradually implodes in 1813 and 1814, and the Americans are on the wrong side. 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'd 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.

Do you know, in a sense, the Americans had won? Two inconvenient things happened, of course. The garrison in Québec mounted a better defence than had been anticipated and, of course, eventually the ice melted in the St. Lawrence and a relief force got up there. What it had shown is that it should be possible for the Americans to rapidly move to the St. Lawrence Valley and to be successful. 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, because they've expanded westwards, 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. There are more Americans. They actually have with their state militias, less so with the Army because the Army is quite small, but with their state militias, considerable experience of operating under arms and in the case of the western states of fighting

Native Americans, of course, or as you would call them, First Nations.

By rights, the Americans should have won. 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. Consider 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 and not the United States and most of you don't probably have concealed weapons with which you can shoot me if I irritate you, let me tell you that a Winchester is a repeating rifle. In other words, it has greater range and fire. It has greater range, greater 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 would know that, alas, the man with the Winchester is up against Clint Eastwood and Clint Eastwood, of course, actually beats the man with the Winchester.

The point about 1812 is that in 1812, 1813, and 1814, a very well conducted defence, 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. In my book I go through the details of the defence, but in 1812 itself, forces based in Canada mount what we would call an active forward defence on the Western axis near Detroit, doing extremely well. There are very effective operations around Queenston and the Niagara Peninsula that also do 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. The major contrast is, again, unexpected.

The major contrast is that essentially Canada acts in a united fashion. 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, what was then called the Democratic Republicans, is gung-ho for war. 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 feed Canada. The state militias of two of these states in New England refuse to cross the state lines. The key point here is that the Federalists' strength is concentrated in New England, which of course, is going to be very, very important in supporting any advance up the Lake Champlain corridor.

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.

The contrast is very clear if you turn to Canada. 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 discussed how they can best obstruct the war effort, and some of the hotheads discussed separatism from the United States.

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 proto-nation, 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. In particular, there is no dissidence in Québec that might have been expected; in fact, the exact opposite occurs. In Québec, there is considerable opposition to the idea of being conquered by

Americans and being brought into the American Imperium. Indeed, you can find across what becomes Canada a much stronger rejection of America in 1812–14 than had been the position in 1775–6, and there's a number of reasons for that.

Another good reason is, of course, particularly in Ontario, that many of the inhabitants of Ontario are either themselves or the sons of people that had 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. There is a very strong, popular response. That's the key point.

The key point here is that the British garrison is small. 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 from the vision of the British North America that the Americans had sought to pursue both in 1775, and were seeking to pursue again in 1812.

I also happen to think that's a very important element. Obviously it was something I was talking about earlier to the pastor. It is unfortunate that so many countries have their original, as it were, foundation moment in war, but nevertheless, that is the case. 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 is 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 providing a ballast for the generations after the war.

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. 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 of the Missouri state line and, of course, eventually moving up to Civil War.

For Canada, the War of 1812 is a formative moment. It's also a formative moment in the relationship between the British Empire, Britain if you like, and Canada because in a sense, as you well know, Canada is the first area of the British Empire to which Dominion status is extended, which essentially means self-government. 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 garrisoned positions—Halifax in the East and Esquimalt on Vancouver Island in the West—the two naval bases important to the naval logic of British power.

Essentially, they trust the Canadians to run their own defence. They trust the Canadians to run their own policies. 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. You have to remember that however much something might seem inevitable, it didn't seem inevitable at the time. The British hadn't conceived of Dominion status to offer the Americans in the 1770s. They hadn't got that idea in their head as a way to deal at that stage with the terrible problems with Ireland. In a way, it is Canada that is the great political and constitutional experiment. 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 proto-country, what becomes their own country.

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 method of constitutional and political arrangement with Australia, the method of constitutional and political arrangement with New Zealand, with South Africa, and, in fact, eventually with Ireland.

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. Small events you might think of as small acorns. Well, they weren't small acorns. They were seen at the time as significant.

My time is running out. I would just like to make one or two other points, and then I would be very, very happy to take questions. As I said, obviously there's many other things that we could talk about.

What other particular points do I think are relevant? 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 isn't really a good treaty until 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. Then, of course, there's 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.

In each case, you can look at the British military planning. They're there in the archives, both the Army planning and the Naval planning and it's interesting. 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 defence of Canada in the 1840s, is having to adapt to how to be able to defend Canada in the new context of the steamship and then how they are 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. That element is interesting.

For me, it's always interesting. 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. Often what isn't mentioned is as interesting as what is mentioned. The key thing about what isn't mentioned is 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 had not been able to agree on this. What in effect they'd agreed on was 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 to and had been easy to agree to because fundamentally there weren't very many whites there and essentially they had all been run by the Native Americans.

This becomes an impossibility as American settlement west of the Rockies grows, as American expansionism in a sense of manifest destiny grows, and President Polk fights the election on a "55-40 Or We'll Fight" 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. In other

words, British Columbia, Vancouver Island, Oregon and Washington were all going to be American. There was serious war planning. The British mobilized the Pacific squadron. They sent lots of troops across the Atlantic to Canada, etc., etc., etc., etc. Then again, there is serious war planning at the end of 1861, the beginning of 1862 and late in '62, and the beginning of '63, when Britain and America drifts very close to war in each case.

What is striking is what is not mentioned in the documents. At 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 defence. 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 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 regularly had to assume a large amount of disaffection in Scotland, in Ireland, and maybe in parts of England.

I think this is something that's worth thinking about. The War of 1812, the destiny of North America in many senses, rested in the hands of the 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. This is a moment of Canadian history, which it does well for you to think about.

Several years ago I was very fortunate to be invited by Blake to address the annual dinner at the Royal Regiment of Canada and to be guest of honour. 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. The toast

remains the same. The toast is “Friendship Across the Ocean.”

Question

You did not mention anything about 1805 and I’d just like to ask what the influence of 1805 was on the War of 1812.

Jeremy Black

You’re thinking of the Battle of Trafalgar, I take it.

Question

Absolutely.

Jeremy Black

Well, obviously, I didn’t mention 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 inflicts one of the most decisive naval victories in world history. The only ones I think to probably rank with it in modern times are 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. There was no other naval victory that was so impressive in that period.

Clearly, it’s very significant. 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 had the second-largest Navy in the world—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.

Clearly the British needed to do well. Britain had another problem—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. They have a tiny army, a really small army. Unless you can take out the French Navy, you're in dead trouble. The British followed a high-risk strategy during the war. I'm using the analogies with World War II deliberately because a) I've written a couple of books on World War II and it interests me, but b) because actually strategic problems do not change in history. The technology changes, but the strategic problem doesn't change. The key strategic problem was how far do you focus all your forces on home defence 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?

The British took a risk strategy. The reason they took a 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. One of the reasons they have to win these naval victories is that if they don't, there is the risk that they're going to be invaded. Of course, the other example, and 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, Belgian and Dutch allies. A large number of troops had been fortunately evacuated from Dunkirk and further west, but they'd left almost all their material and their equipment behind. They were in a total mess.

Obviously, as you know, one of the key moments of Canada's importance in world history is that the Strategic Reserve Defence Force in southern England at the time when the Germans are threatening Operation Sea Lion is the Canadian First Division, absolutely crucial. The fact that it doesn't fight doesn't mean it's not crucial. It's crucial because it would've been there to fight had the Germans landed. The second point is, of course, the British have their Navy. There's been a controversy

recently as to whether we've overplayed the role of the Air Force and underplayed the role of the Navy. The Navy in 1940 is there ultimately to ensure that there's going to be such heavy costs to any invasion that people are going to be deterred from making it.

In 1805, Britain has a great naval victory; they're the last of a sequence because they'd, of course, already won Camperdown and the Battle of the Nile. They have naval superiority, which means that in 1812 their large field army is not defending Britain; it is in Spain and Portugal. 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. If you look at the British Empire as a whole, the way the British Empire works militarily in fundamental terms, this is simplifying it, is 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.

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, are part of it, but also increasingly important are the militia of supportive colonies.

I promise not to be so long next time.

Question

Well, I guess it was during this war that about 14 to 18 ships came across this lake from Sacket's Harbor. Zebulon Pike was leading the whole contingent. Of course, they got to Sunnyside Beach and then came near where the Princess Gates are here in Toronto. Zebulon Pike was blown to smithereens and sent back to Sacket's Harbor.

There's a very small cemetery there today. There is not much indication of anything there. Last weekend I was down in Lewiston. After the Americans came across the Niagara River at 3:00 o'clock in the morning, they were soundly defeated there. If you cross 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 in the difference as to how Canadians view the war and Americans view the war?

Jeremy Black

That's an interesting question. There is a difference and there is a similarity. 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. They have less interest in it than the War of Independence or the Civil War, which obviously they are obsessed about.

The similarity—and there is a similarity—is that the Canadians, the Americans and the Brits are not too different from everybody else in the world. They dwell on their successes, which is a bit of a surprise. If you were to go, as I have done, to Baltimore, you will find that Fort McHenry is a national site and an enormous thing is made of the defence against the British bombardment. There's an enormous display of the flag and all the rest of it. If you were 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. If it's done badly, people get empowered through a sense of historicized grievance. One can see that, for example—it's not my business to make critical remarks—some countries create a very false and distorted account of their past in which

they have always been victimized by somebody else, so therefore, they are apparently entitled to brutalize other people.

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 America, both of which remain very potent today.

Part of the joy of Canadian history is that you've never had to do that. I know, as I said, in the 1830s and the 1860s, there were internal fights, but an astonishingly low rate by world standards. 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.

What I think is less attractive is the difference between the American 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 Cree were completely brutalized, and had the most astonishingly high casualties, and large-scale violence against women and children. This is a very major contrast with the Canadian experience, which again is much, much more benign in world historical terms. That's nothing to do with the British. The British having played a role, the British encouraged people to respect the law, but if you think about it, the Canadians had a much more benign response than another famous British colony—Australia. 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. I'm delighted that you shouldn't be surprised if other people focus in their own way, slightly differently.

Question

You touched earlier in your comments about the loyalty of our citizenry and the clergy. I've read a number of different works. While that was important, the Americans took it for granted. When they came here, they either harassed or intimidated our citizenry and that had a greater impact. One of the American generals, when they came through Windsor, actually issued a decree that any of our soldiers or citizens fighting beside Aborigines loyal to the Crown could face dire circumstances. That had a greater impact than the perceived loyalty of our citizenry and the clergy.

Jeremy Black

I think there's no doubt at all that there was a certain degree of brutality. Obviously, we're standing here in Toronto. You hardly need me to tell you that the Americans did not always behave as they should have.

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. Think about what might have happened.

Let us say the Americans had done better in Ontario, alright? 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 can explain how from that they were going to get on and govern and conquer Nova Scotia. By the spring of 1814, Paris has been conquered and Napoleon has fallen. What happens then? Well, 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 had been conquered by either 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 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 been re-conquered by the British. Canada remains an independent territory because with the cooperation of British elements here and a broad basis of Canadian domestic support, the Americans are kept out. That, I think, is what's particularly important about the war. In the end, 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 had abdicated. In fact, the Americans sought negotiations with the British via the Russians from the winter of 1812–13.

The key difference is that it's not necessary to re-conquer 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 until these people go back to the status quo antebellum, the territorial situation before the war. That would have been the easiest and quickest way for the British to re-conquer Canada. I think, in terms—taking up the gentleman's point—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 from that of America simply because of what happened with Napoleon and the British Navy and British Forces. I think it's actually very important to emphasize the role of how it developed.

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—okay, 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've been very, very different if, quite frankly, those countries had just been sort of subject to the French and eventually had got their independence because the Russians or the Prussians, or the Austrians had beaten Napoleon.

Identity does play a role. You sung 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. I think you can trace that back a lot further in history than you can for many other places that became independent of Empire.

The appreciation of the meeting was expressed by Blake Goldring, Chairman and CEO, AGF Management Limited.

