

## National Histories, International Engagements: Can-Am Conference, Montréal: Summer of 2006

This summer, "National Histories, International Engagements" promises to provide Canadian and U.S. historians with unique opportunities to share their ongoing research and explore the potential of cross-border and cross-cultural studies. The conference, the annual meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR) will be held, 20 to 23 of July at the University of Montreal. Featuring the work of scholars from Europe and the United Kingdom as well as Canada and the United States, this year's program reflects the growing interest in the American republic's northern and southern borderlands and in the Atlantic World between 1776 and 1860. A variety of sessions aim to complicate narratives that are contained (and constrained) by the parameters of the nation-state. Many either place U.S. and Canadian histories in transnational perspective or use separate, nation-based studies to compare the two.

Certainly, these concerns are central to the recent work of SHEAR's current President, Alan Taylor, professor of history at the University of California at Davis. Taylor is well known for his books, including *The American Colonies* and the Pulitzer Prize-winning *William Cooper's Town*. His latest book, *The Divided Ground: Indians Settlers, and the Northern Borderland of the American Revolution* (Knopf, 2006) examines the relationships between societies on either side of the Niagara River by situating the American Revolution amidst struggles over property, sovereignty, and national boundaries. Focusing on the intersection of nation-making in the United States, the consolidation of British imperial authority in Canada, and the destruction of the Iroquoia, Taylor brings new sophistication to our understanding of the connections between Canadian and American histories; he also illuminates the contradictory, often tragic relationship between the realms of high politics on the one hand and lived experience on the other. Taylor's Presidential Address will surely build upon the themes set out in *The Divided Ground*. In a talk titled "The Spirit of 1798: Ireland, Canada, and the United States," he will examine the legacy of the rebellion of 1798 in Ireland for relations between the American republic and the British empire, paying particular attention to their strained relationship culminating in the War of 1812-14. "I hope the address will illuminate the usefulness of writing a history of the early republic that attends to transatlantic and trans-continental relationships," Taylor explained.

As the remarkably large number of strong conference submissions suggests, Taylor is not alone in recognizing the potential of projects that transcend national boundaries

and that pay special attention to the relationship between the U.S. and Canada. A number of sessions will focus on precisely this issue. Given the constraints of space, a few examples will have to suffice: Prof. John G. Reid, St Mary's University, will convene a session of study prospectuses in which five noted historians will outline opportunities for cross-border studies of Northeastern North America in the wake of the Revolutionary crisis. Including presentations on Loyalists, Native Americans, African Americans, political cultures, and cross-border interaction, this session aims to provoke conversations that will spark fresh approaches to cross-border and cross-cultural study. A session organized by Prof. Timothy J. Shannon, Gettysburg College, will raise new questions about the meaning of nationality by considering the experiences of the Iroquois in the decades following the American Revolution. Through studies that compare U.S. and Canadian reservations and that explore the "special relationship" between the Oneida and the French, this session seeks to illuminate the responses of culturally-linked communities confronted with new geopolitical boundaries as well as their attempts to forge new commercial and diplomatic relations in an unstable international context. Nineteenth-century filibusters, in which U.S. adventurers attempted to conquer and "liberate" Canada following the rebellions of 1837-38, are the subject of a panel organized by David S. Shields, University of South Carolina. Historians and literary critics will contextualize this fascinating and much-neglected topic by treating it as a problem of diplomacy and governance; tracing the abolitionist critique of filibustering; and deconstructing the hyper-masculinity that propelled the rhetoric and culture of filibusters. Still other scholars have turned to cultural and literary history, rather than diplomacy and politics, in order to explore the relationship between Canada and the U.S.. For example, Molly McCarthy, Wellesley College, has convened a session on the personal writing of nineteenth-century emigrants on both sides of the border. Diaries and letter journals helped migrants establish a sense of home and the participants in this session will draw our attention to the ways in which notions of "home" inscribed these documents complicated and competed with notions of Canadian and U.S. national identity.

Canadian historians, especially those whose research and teaching encompasses the Atlantic World, will also be interested in the Thursday Evening Plenary, which opens the conference. Setting the tone for the conference, a variety of scholars will discuss their own attempts to bring an international focus to bear on traditionally national

histories: Steven Hackel, Oregon State University and author of *Children of Coyote, Missionaries of St. Francis*, will address the significance of the Spanish borderlands. Clare Lyons, University of Maryland and author of *Sex Among the Rabble*, will speak on transatlantic sexual cultures. Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, University of Paris VII-Denis Diderot and author of the prize-winning *Nationalist Ferment: the Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy, 1789-1812*, will discuss the importance of foreign relations in the construction of national identity at home and abroad. James Sidbury, University of Texas and author of *Ploughshares into Swords*, will discuss his forthcoming book which focuses on African American conceptions of Africa in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Ashli White, Stony Brook University, will present her research on the experiences of black and white refugees from Saint-Domingue in the United States. This outstanding session will be moderated by Dr. Margaret Conrad, who holds the Canada Research Chair in Atlantic Canada Studies at the University of New Brunswick and is currently president of the Canadian Historical Association. Conrad is well known as the coauthor *Atlantic Canada: A Region in the Making* and as the author of numerous other studies in Canadian history. The plenary will be organized to allow ample time for audience questions, comments and discussion. The conference organizers hope that issues raised by all of the plenary participants, including the speakers and audience members, will serve as a springboard for discussions that will enliven the conference as a whole.

That said, SHEAR has always reflected the wide-ranging interests that mark our field. And SHEAR 2006 will be no exception, notwithstanding the strong emphasis on international and transnational themes that distinguishes this year's program. Conference participants can attend sessions highlighting the research of senior and junior scholars and advanced graduate students on the social and construction of race; slavery and abolition; legal history; maritime culture; gender history; material and visual culture; political economy; politics and civic culture; religion and reform; economic history and labour history.

Moreover, among U.S. historians, SHEAR has well-deserved reputation for collegiality and conviviality. Year after year, conversations and exchanges that begin during panels spill over into the hallways only to continue through receptions and shared meals. SHEAR is also known for the warm reception that senior scholars extend to junior scholars and graduate students. As conference regulars will tell you, it is difficult to imagine a friendlier environment for working on challenging and contentious intellectual problems. So please mark your calendars and plan to visit Montréal, and SHEAR, in July! Detailed information about the program, registration, and housing can be obtained at [www.shear.org](http://www.shear.org).

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