BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES: GEOGRAPHIES AND IDENTITY IN CANADA AND THE U.S.

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ABSTRACT

This article provides an analysis of the migration pathways, settlement patterns, and national identities of American immigrants now residing in Canada. There are currently more U.S.-born residents of Canada than at any time since the Vietnam War, which was the largest politically motivated out-migration of people in the history of the United States. To document and analyze the patterns and related processes that shaped the experiences of this increasingly large group of immigrants in Canada depended on a variety of mixed methods including cartographic analysis, structured and unstructured interviews, focus groups, and survey questionnaires. Following an introductory overview of migration and settlement at the national scale in Canada, the article provides a more in depth provincial level analysis of the related political, socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental processes shaping the American exodus to British Columbia. This province was selected for closer examination because of the relatively large number of Americans living there, its role as an important magnet for U.S. settlement in the early 21st century, and the diverse spatial patterns of Americans residing in various places at different scales in the province (ranging from large metropolitan areas to small towns to remote, more rural locales). Findings reveal that the majority of U.S.-born residents in this province become *Canadianized* very rapidly after their arrival in Canada despite the close proximity of their homeland and the potential ease of maintaining a cross-border network of transnational linkages, relationships, and identities.

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INTRODUCTION

> *There are a lot of great people in the United States of America, but I just see everything going in the wrong direction.*
> (Ralph Appoldt as cited in Walsh 2004, A10).

> *I started planning for this move to Canada the day after Bush was re-elected. There are lots of other Americans living here in Vancouver now and everyone I know just really always wants to be a Canadian .*
> (Kristin, Vancouver, BC, 2008).

Canada has long been a magnet for Americans who are disenfranchised by the politics of their homeland.[1] By 2006, more Americans had migrated to Canada for permanent residency than at any time since the Vietnam War era more than three decades ago (Statistics Canada 2006). At least 10,942 U.S.-born immigrants settled in Canada in 2006 according to the most recent Canadian census—a twenty percent increase over the previous year and almost double the number who arrived in 2000 (Baram 2007; Jedwab 2008). Despite these increasing numbers, and the long history of American migration to Canada, very few prior publications have been published on the migration experiences and shifting identities of this group of immigrants to Canada, especially those who left their homeland during the first decade of the 21st century.[2]

Many of the Americans who now reside north of the 49th parallel were initially attracted to Canada by their rejection of the ultra-conservative political climate that dominated the eight years of the George W. Bush administration in the United States. Others are drawn north by Canada's universal health care system, gay and lesbian rights, employment opportunities, environmental amenities, anti-gun laws, and a search for safety and security, far from the higher crime rates that exist in the United States. Recent polls indicate that Americans between the ages of 18 and 29, in fact, are twice as likely to worry about crime, moral decline, and ethnic conflict as their Canadian counterparts (Adams 2003). The sum total of these differences in political, environmental, and socio-cultural values in Canada is the popular U.S. perception that Canada has become "America idealized' (Gecelovsky 2007, 519).

What processes helped shape the migration pathways and settlement patterns of this relatively large group of immigrants in Canada, especially during the first decade of the 21st century? Do these predominately white *migrants of choice* adopt and embrace Canadian values and Canadian national identities after their resettlement to Canada? Or, conversely, do Americans in Canada construct and maintain a blended transnational identity because of the close proximity of their homeland to their new place of residence and the ease of maintaining cross-border relationships and networks?

This article offers answers to these related questions. It begins by analyzing the primary waves of American migration to Canada from the Loyalists up to the present time. Following this general overview of the migration flows and predominant settlement patterns of U.S.-born migrants in Canada at the national scale, the next section provides a more in depth provincial level analysis of the patterns, experiences, and shifting identities of former Americans in the province of British Columbia. Data from this empirical case study in the Canadian southwest were gathered and analyzed from structured and unstructured interviews and focus group discussions with seventy-eight U.S-born immigrants in B.C., responses gathered and analyzed from over three hundred survey questionnaires, and on-site participant observation between 2006 and 2009 in five 'American-rich' towns and cities in British Columbia. As discussed below, findings from this mixed methods study indicate that a variety of related social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental factors shape the spatial patterns, migration experiences, identities, citizenships, and senses of belonging of this immigrant group in Canada.

FROM LOYALISTS TO LIBERALS: HISTORICAL MIGRATION FLOWS AND SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

Canada's perception as a "place of refuge" for disenfranchised migrants from the United States began in the Revolutionary War-era when "Loyalists" who remained loyal to England decided to leave the renegade new nation (Marshall 2004). These earliest U.S. migrants were later joined by African American slaves who were also seeking refuge from the 1840s to the early 1860s (Winks 1997). Many of these escaping slaves found refuge in churches and homes just across the Canada-U.S. border after being secretly transported there for protection. Following the passage of a strict fugitive slave law in the Compromise of 1850 in the United States, ever larger numbers of African Americans made their way north to seek new and safer lives in Canada. Most ended up in small towns located in southern Ontario and Halifax, Nova Scotia joining other freed and runaway ex-slaves who had congregated there (Mensah 2002).

These earliest U.S. migration pathways into Canada were followed by a larger wave of American settlement

FIGURE 1: Americans in Canada, 1961-2006



during the first decade of the 20th century. This much larger flow of migrants from the United States was dominated by farmers from the interior western states who were in search of available, fertile and affordable land in Canada for their crops and cattle (Harvey 1991). The rich prairie soils, abundant and affordable level land, and active immigrant recruitment efforts by the Canadian government attracted thousands of American agriculturalists across the border. They developed farms in southeastern British Columbia and Canada's prairie provinces with many arriving as part of distinctive religious groups such as the Latter Day Saints and Mennonites.

Harvey categorized the mid-20th century waves of Americans in Canada into four distinctive groups: wilderness seekers, trekkers and adventurers; homesteaders; communitarians; and spiritual seekers (1991). Other Americans came during this time period, filling teaching positions and research and administrative jobs at Canadian colleges and universities in the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, changes in Canadian policies that allowed the expansion of American businesses into Canada attracted other well educated and economically secure American migrants to Canada in the 1970s, with the majority settling in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver (Harvey 1991).

The largest migration wave from the United States to Canada occurred during the Vietnam War years. In the early years of the War, Canada accepted 1,700 American war resistors in 1963 as "landed immigrants" (Hagan 2000). Soon thereafter, the migration stream north of the border expanded exponentially after American involvement in Vietnam intensified in the mid-1960s. Four years later, Canada's Minister of Immigration announced that "American Vietnam draft and military resistors, that is, both 'dodgers' and 'deserters' would be admitted to Canada without regard to their draft or military status" (as quoted in Hagan 2000, 609).

Thereafter, the total number of draft-age migrants from the United States in Canada increased exponentially as the news of this more formalized Canadian policy reached the American media and circulated through underground channels of war resistors (Dickerson 1999). The result was that there were more than 100,000 Americans living in Canada at the end of the Vietnam War (Jones 2005). Thereafter, the former Americans who made up more than 20% of all immigrants to Canada during this time period leveled off to

about 5,000 new arrivals each year (Jones 2005; Kobayashi and Ray 2005, 2).

As summarized on the graph in Figure 1, during the peak of the Vietnam War in the 1970s, 26,541 Americans became legal residents of Canada. From 1974 up to 1998, the numbers held fairly steady except for an increase in 1981 (probably due to the arrival of large numbers of K-12 teachers and professors, economic elites, and entrepreneurs from south of the border by the late 1970s). The population of documented immigrants from the United States has once again been on the rise with a total of 10, 943 by 2006. This most recent period of expansion in the number of ex-Americans in Canada closely corresponds with the years following George W. Bush's election in 2000 and his re-election in late 2004.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MIGRATION, IDENTITY, AND PLACE: AMERICANS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The province of British Columbia was selected as a focus for this article for the following reasons: (1) its location in close proximity to the United States on a shared international border; (2) the long history of migration of people from the United States to selected places in the province; (3) British Columbia has more American immigrants than any province other than Ontario, thereby having a sufficient number of U.S.-born residents for meaningful study; (4) a significant number of immigrants from the United States reside in places that represent a variety of scales (ranging from large metropolitan areas to smaller cities and towns to village-scale settlements), allowing an analysis of U.S. migration, settlement, and identity in a variety of diverse sites.

During the U.S. war in Vietnam, the cities of Toronto and Vancouver emerged as early focal points of American war resistor migrant settlement in Canada (Hardwick 2009, 2010; Jones 2005; Hagan 2000, 2001). Today, at least forty percent of the American men who dodged the military draft and other war resistors of both genders who came during the Vietnam War now reside in British Columbia. Many live in the Vancouver urban area and on Vancouver Island and environs. Others reside in southeastern British Columbia in the rugged Kootenay Mountain region.

Despite common misperceptions that male draft dodgers dominated this migration stream, more women than men left the U.S. for British Columbia and other parts of Canada during this time period and more recently as well (Statistics Canada 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001, 2006; Hagan 2001; Hardwick 2009). Many came on their own as war protestors, civil rights activists, students, and teachers. Others arrived with their families to seek new lives north of the border. As cited earlier (Hardwick and Mansfield, 2009), one of these American migrants in Canada, a sixty-five year old African American woman from Minneapolis who relocated to Vancouver with her husband in the 1970s, reports that:

> We felt that we had made the best possible decision to leave the U.S. considering the politics and existing war. I feel that some of the lifestyle opportunities I/we experienced… in Canada… would not have been available to us as a mixed heritage couple had we been living in the United States.

In recent years, political 'refugees' escaping U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have added to the mix of politically motivated Americans living in Vancouver and other parts of British Columbia. It is estimated that there are now approximately 200 Iraq War deserters in Canada with most residing in Vancouver and Toronto. However, Canada is no longer the open sanctuary it was for war deserters during the Vietnam era. Although the public is generously supportive of this latest group of war deserters being awarded permanent residency in Canada, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has uniformly rejected asylee claims or petitioners from the U.S. military (Kovach 2009). As a result, deserters continue to be deported to the United States where most have received long sentences in military custody (Hardwick 2009).

Along with these politically motivated arrivals from the United States, British Columbia is also an important settlement destination for U.S. retirees and "midlife mavericks" seeking new lives in Canada. Many have settled in Vancouver due to its booming real estate market and cosmopolitan culture, while others have moved to smaller cities and towns on Vancouver Island and the Kootenays in many of the same places that attracted Americans in the past. In addition to these recent war resistors, retirees, and investors from the United States have come several thousand southern Californians who are attracted to Vancouver's thriving film industry and hip cultural scene. Others migrated to British Columbia from the United States as communal farmers, journalists, artists, and academics. As a result, there are now significant clusters of former American citizens in the province with the U.S. Consulate in Vancouver estimating that at least 250,000 American-born residents lived in British Columbia in 2006 (Scandola, 2006).

Data on Canadian identities that was gathered and analyzed for this study revealed a strong sense of Canadian-ness among almost all respondents regardless of the time of their arrival in Canada or their specific

settlement site in British Columbia. The only exception to this dominant finding occurred among retirees since this migrant group predictably expressed a stronger connection with family networks at home, and thereby possessed a less "I am Canadian" identity after resettlement in Canada. However, except for this group, there were literally no differences in responses to questions about the shifting identities of other migrants from Vietnam War resisters to more recent arrivals. Likewise, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and age played very minor roles in differing responses to our questions about the adoption of a Canadian national identity.

The analysis of the perceptions of U.S. immigrants in British Columbia related to their national identity post-migration, is drawn from responses to the following two survey questionnaire questions: (1) *Do you identify yourself as Canadian, American, or both? and* (2) *Are you an American citizen, a Canadian citizen or both? Why?*

RESPONSES TO QUESTION #1: DO YOU IDENTITY YOURSELF AS CANADIAN, AMERICAN, OR BOTH?

All but four of the 300+ survey respondents of all genders, ages, dates of arrival, and places of origin (who were not retirees) claimed a Canadian identity. Some of these new Canadians also claimed a dual American identity, but the majority defined themselves as Canadian and only Canadian with common answers including becoming a "Canadian on the same day I crossed the border."

In contrast, only four of the non-retiree participants in our study reported their identities in a more transnational way, although even in their cases, their blended U.S.-Canadian mixed identities seem to favor Canada. As quoted in a prior publication by the author (Hardwick and Mansfield, 2009), according to Rob: "Sometimes I still feel American, sometimes both. I always say I'm Canadian though." Similarly, Jim reported that he's "a Canadian with extensive American experience but I usually just say that 'I'm a Canadian from Texas.'" A university professor who's lived in Vancouver by choice since the 1960s insists, "I always say I'm a Canadian or a Californian but I never ever say 'American.'"

RESPONSES TO QUESTION #2: ARE YOU AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, A CANADIAN CITIZEN OR BOTH? WHY?

Less than half of the participants in this study retained dual citizenship despite often intense emotional attachments to their new Canadian identity. Others never became Canadian citizens despite most claiming to perceive themselves fully Canadian. This is undoubtedly at least partially due to the deportation fears of migrants who left the United States illegally during the Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan wars. This disconnect between the lack of interest among the majority of American immigrants in becoming Canadian citizens, while, at the same time, expressing a strong desire to declare their Canadian-ness and sense of belonging to Canada may also be explained by the lesser benefits accrued to citizens in Canada as compared to the United States (where there are economic benefits as well as voting rights awarded to immigrants who seek citizenship). According to a U.S. migrant who has lived in Vancouver for more than a decade:

> It just doesn't feel important to me to become an official Canadian citizen, at least not right now. I have a strong sense of belonging here because I share the values, politics, and personal belief system of my Canadian friends and co-workers. I really don't need to become a citizen to prove this to anybody

CONCLUSIONS

Canada has long held utopian appeal for people in the United States because of its more open political system, strong network of government sponsored economic and social systems, and plethora of environmental amenities. The election of George W. Bush to the U.S. presidency nine years ago (and the subsequent ultra-conservative policies that ensued), added momentum to a migration stream northward from the United States that continues till today. Indeed, Canada's universal health care system, gay and lesbian policies, abortion rights, anti-gun laws, opposition to the current Iraq war, ban on capital punishment, and support of multicultural policies mirror many of the values of American liberals who are unsatisfied with political and social systems in their homeland (Lanzendorfer 2004).

Findings from data gathered and analyzed on American migration, settlement, and identity in the province of British Columbia revealed that the majority of these new immigrants construct and maintain distinctive Canadian national identities soon after their arrival north of the U.S.-Canada border. Being and becoming Canadian, in fact, is more important to most than maintaining ties and relationships with their homeland. In an era when most other immigrant groups in North America depend upon a host of *transnational* networks,

relationships, and identities, Americans in Canada are more eager to rapidly give up their connections with home and embrace their new identity as Canadians. This is surprising since Canadians and Americans share the same languages, religious beliefs, cultures, and politics—all factors that should help encourage ongoing transnational connections that continue to link the homeland and hostland of this immigrant group after resettlement.

A second unexpected and seemingly contradictory finding from data reported on in this paper is the decreasing number of Americans who have become Canadian citizens in recent years. Satzewich and Wong (2006) found that while 70 percent of Americans in Canada made the decision to become Canadian citizens in the 1980s, by the late 1990s, the number had dropped dramatically. Compared to a 78 percent Canadian citizenship rate for all immigrants in Canada, a more recent study by Jedwab (2008) revealed that only 56 percent of Americans had become citizens of Canada by 2006. This is especially surprising since Americans in Canada are allowed to hold dual citizenship, a choice which provides them with options to live in "an alternative country in which to live, work, and invest; an additional locus and source of rights, and additional obligations and communal ties" (Schuck 1998, 163).

Becoming a Canadian citizen also requires a significant time commitment. It takes a minimum of five years of residency to apply. In addition, the decision to officially renounce one's American citizenship is very challenging and even more time consuming because of the myriad of paperwork required to complete the process (Steves 2004). As a result, the majority of people interviewed for this study as well as responses listed on our survey questionnaires revealed that the majority of Americans who have relocated to Canada remain American citizens no matter how long they have lived north of the border or how vehemently they express their attachment to now "being a Canadian."

Finally, increasingly strict and stringent Homeland Security-era politics in the United States have tightened down border crossings in recent years. Since 2007, in particular, it has become a very arduous process to return to the United States even if only for family visits, shopping trips, and/or cultural events. These restrictions at the border are eased by proof of American citizenship, thereby encouraging American residents of Canada to hold onto their old political identities (while, at the same time, clinging to their strong attachment and sense of belonging as new "Canadians").

Despite these many challenges, Americans continue to move to Canada in record numbers during this first decade of the 21st century. Despite the more liberal politics in the United States following President Obama's election and the increased cost of housing in Vancouver and other large Canadian cities in recent years, Americans will no doubt continue to migrate to Canada in large numbers. Chief among the factors encouraging this northward flow by retirees, midlife mavericks, and professional class migrants from the United States will be a search for safety and security, cleaner air and water, environmental amenities, and more open and accepting policies for non-traditional lifestyles and the diverse cultures of differing ethnic and racial groups. However, due to the dramatic increase in housing costs in places like Vancouver in recent years (which currently features the highest housing costs in North America), it is predicted that many of these post-Obama-era Americans will settle in Canada's smaller cities and towns or establish their new lives in rural places.

This study of American migration, settlement, and identity in Canada opens the door for additional research about Americans in Canada, especially in francophone Canada. How do the spatial patterns and identities of U.S. immigrants in the city of Montreal, for example, compare to those living in Vancouver, Toronto, or other metropolitan areas located in Anglophone Canada (where U.S.-born migrants share a common language with the majority of local residents)? How does the process of becoming a Canadian and forming a strong sense of attachment to Canada differ in Francophone locales as compared to places in English-speaking Canada? Other related questions on ex-Americans who migrate to Canada in the Obama and post-Obama years are also in need of further exploration. Now that factors shaping the decision to leave the United States for permanent residency in Canada have shifted from being *politically* motivated because of today's more liberal political policies in the United States, will the desire to embrace Canadian values and a strong sense of Canadian-ness among American immigrants be replaced by the adoption of a more integrated transnational identity and the adoption of transnational behaviors among these flexible North American citizens in the future? Answers to these and other questions about the patterns and related processes shaping the experiences of Americans living north of the 49th parallel will go a long way toward casting new light on the larger story of North American immigration, identity, and place.

ENDNOTES

[1] The term "American" is used throughout this article to refer to migrants from the United States who currently reside in Canada. Although this term actually refers to not only residents of the United States, but also to people living in all of the countries south of the U.S. border, since Canadians refer to migrants from the United States as "Americans," it is appropriate for use in the study reported on in this publication.

[2] For exceptions to this shortage of published work on Americans in Canada in the early 21st century, see, for example, Vic Satzewich and Lloyd Wong's important book, *Transnational Identities and Practices in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006); Audrey Kobayashi and Brian Ray's "Placing Americans in Context" published online in early 2005 by the Migration Policy Institute; and two prior publications by the author: Susan W. Hardwick and Ginger Mansfield, Discourse, Identity, and 'Homeland as Other' at the Borderlands" in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (Vol. 99: pp. 383-405, 2009) and "Fuzzy Transnationals: American Settlement and Belonging in Toronto, Halifax, and Vancouver," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (2010). I also gained invaluable insights into the importance of understanding the political, cultural, economic, and environmental dynamics affecting the U.S.-Canada border as related to American immigration and identity in Canada from Heather Nichol's "Resiliency or Change: The Contemporary Canada-U.S. Border" in Geopolitics (Vol. 10: 767-790, 2005) and the results of recent surveys conducted and analyzed by Jack Jedwab.

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