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Review of For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War by Timothy C. Winegard

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A comprehensive study of Canadian First Nations' experiences during the Great War is long overdue, making Timothy C. Winegard's For King and Kanata a welcome addition to the historiography. In a style both engaging and accessible, Winegard tells the individual and collective stories of those Indian men who enlisted to fight for the Crown. His book also focuses on how government policy shaped First Nations' participation in the war effort. Race, for instance, played a determining role. At first, the government banned Indian men from serving. As casualties mounted and pressure from Britain grew, however, Canadian officials began active recruitment on reserves. As casualties mounted and pressure from Britain grew, however, Canadian officials began active recruitment on reserves.

Winegard provides the reader with important historical context. Some First Nations supported the war effort in order to honor historical alliances with Britain dating as far back as the American Revolution. Others hoped participation in the Great War would help win respect, equality, and autonomy for their communities. Support for the war effort was strong among some Great Plains First Nations in western Canada, due in part to recently signed treaties with the British Crown and to the martial values of some communities. Still, other Great Plains Indians pointed to treaty clauses that exempted them from overseas service and conscription.

Winegard tells a compelling story of those who served, became casualties of war, and won decorations for their bravery. He could have done more, however, to acknowledge the ambivalence or outright resistance of many First Nations toward the war effort. His assertion that "the commitment to the war effort on the home front was shared by all Canadians, including Indians" is misleading. Only one very short chapter addresses the war effort at home. In it, Winegard repeats the claims of government officials at the time that the allegedly high level of patriotic fund donations from Indian communities was indicative of a strong enthusiasm for the war effort. Yet he fails to provide a satisfactory explanation as to why the vast majority of First Nations made no donation at all and why the national contribution rate was over thirteen times higher.

Winegard's statistical analysis of Indian enlistment rates is also problematic. For instance, he relies on the official government claim that the enlistment rate among Indian males of age was 35 percent. This, he writes, was "a substantial commitment, ... testimony to the historical and contemporary allegiance of Indians to the British Crown." Recent research published in the Journal of Canadian Studies (Winter 2011), however, established a much lower Indian enlistment rate, below the national average. Winegard criticizes the historiography's "Forgotten Warrior" narrative that has "resurrected the exploits of Indian service men" in order to "ensure that Indian veterans receive acknowledgement for their forgotten sacrifice." Yet his own work evokes this narrative when it emphasizes an abstract loyalty to "King and Country" as a prime motivator for contributing to the war effort of a country that, ultimately, failed to reward First Nations' sacrifice. Instead, Winegard could have placed greater emphasis on the wide array of individ-
ual and community circumstances that drove Indian men into the service. Where the author does distinguish his work from that of previous historians is in pointing out how the international dynamic—the British imperial dynamic especially—affect ed Indian involvement. At the very least, Winegard is correct in arguing that those Indian men who did serve made a valuable contribution to Canada’s war effort.

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