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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear delegates,

My name is Brian Jiang, and it is with great excitement that I assume the role of Director of the Oregon Question at Alberta Model United Nations 2024. Along with me for this captivating journey, your dias team comprises my fellow chair: Nicholas Woo from Burnaby North Secondary School. We extend our warmest wishes amidst the cold weather to all delegates attending the Oregon Question.

My introduction to the non-spectator sport of Model United Nations in the halls of CAIMUN 2022 marked the beginning of my humble journey. Beginning as a reserved delegate in a considerably vast committee room, I have evolved into a seasoned delegate, and now a staff member. Through these experiences I can affirm that Model United Nations has instigated personal growth and positive change within me, shaping me into becoming a well-rounded individual. Many delegates fear the pressure of speaking in front of a crowd - whether online or not - and it is through Model UN, through collaboration with fellow delegates, through courage, delegates grow. Not only the skills you gain through debate, but the people you meet that change you forever. Model United Nations functions as a simulation of the real world in addition to providing a forum for discussion and debate. This is a unique chance for you, the delegates, to assume the role of diplomats and international leaders. It is an area where concepts come together, answers are looked for, and To solve urgent global issues, concessions are made. I want to encourage each of you to embrace the spirit of cooperation and diplomacy as we come together for the Alberta Model United Nations 2023.

The complex and diverse issues on our agenda necessitate your creative problem-solving, thorough investigation, and steadfast dedication to finding common ground. I hope that you will be involved in more than just passionate discussions during this conference; I want you to make genuine connections with other participants. Take advantage of this chance to learn from each other, respect different viewpoints, and collaborate peacefully to create a society that is more wealthy and peaceful. Make it known that Model UN is about more than just winning awards; it's also about developing oneself, becoming aware of the world, and working towards a better tomorrow. I implore you to rise to the challenges that lie ahead and let this experience fuel your potential to become future leaders and agents of change.

Whether you have questions please do not hesitate to reach out to me at brianjiang08@gmail.com. Once again, I extend a warm welcome to the Oregon Question, and I eagerly anticipate witnessing your invaluable contributions to our collective mission of advancing global peace and security

Warm Regards

Brian Jiang
Director, The Oregon Question, ABMUN 2024



TOPIC OVERVIEW

After the discovery of the New World, European powers have scrambled to establish footholds on the new continent, and to assert control over the riches it promises. Sailing across the Atlantic, explorers and pioneers charted the eastern shores of the North American continent. The trading of furs kickstarted the economy of the distant colonies, and soon, the promise of bountiful opportunities and cheap land drew settlers to seek out the new land. Through decades and centuries, outposts turned into settlements, and settlements into cities and colonies.

But with the increasing stakes on the new continent, conflict becomes an inevitability. European expansionism only aggravated disputes, as every entrance to a new frontier brought with it quarrels over land and resources. With no precedent to provide a basis for civilised arbitration, such conflicts are often only absolved when one side backs down or otherwise forced to do so through intimidation or war.

Oregon, deemed by European colonialists as the *“last corner of the earth left free for the occupation of a civilised race”*. It would seem, however, that there is very much a lack of a civilised way to determine the ownership of the territory. Both Britain and the United States lay claims to overlapping territories, and neither are willing to concede. It is a difficult impasse, one that has been dusted off and re-examined many times through decades, but in the absence of a consensus, no border could be established, and the disputed territory remains suspended in the limbo status of Joint Occupation.

However, the issue could not be set aside forever. In the United States, the prominence of expansionism, tied with shifting political climate, turned the spotlight out west, onto Oregon. America is no longer content with sharing the territory with Britain.

As the dispute grows intense and increasingly polarised, some are even calling for war. With no solutions on hand, it will be up to the esteemed statesmen and diplomats of this committee to find a solution to this conflict.



HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Early History and Colonisation:

The earliest reported visitation by outside civilizations to the Pacific Northwest was in 458 A.D., by a voyage headed by Chinese monk, Hwui Shan. The expedition recorded descriptions about native population which they had encountered. However, they did not lay claim to any of the territories.

In 1513, Spanish explorer Vasco Nunez de Balboa traversed the Panama isthmus and discovered the Pacific Ocean. Thereby, Balboa, treading knee deep into the water of the sea, raised a standard decorated with the image of the Virgin Mary, and claimed all land adjoined to the ocean for the Spanish Crown. The gesture that marked the beginning of European colonial endeavour in the region.

In 1579, Francis Drake sailed to the water off the coast of what is now Oregon and California, making landfall momentarily at Cape Arago. He dubbed the territory as Nova Albion and claimed it for the English Crown. In 1592, Greek mariner Juan de Fuca, sailing on behalf of the Spanish crown, traversed what is today the Strait of Juan de Fuca. In 1728 and 1741, Danish Vitus Bering was dispatched by Peter the Great to man the exploration to the coast of what is now Alaska and the Pacific Northwest. Between 1790 and 1793, Robert Gray pioneered American exploration of the region.

The chief appeal of the Pacific Northwest was its rich prospect as a new frontier of the fur trade. European exploration, although largely limited to the immediate coast, recorded an abundance of animals such as the Californian sea lion, North American beaver, and Northern fur seal. The maritime fur trade formulated the economic foundation of European presence in the Pacific Northwest, and would be a matter of fierce contention between powers of the region for the centuries that followed.

Colonisation:

Spain:

Spain had ambitious yet ambiguous claims over the entirety of the Pacific Northwest. By the 1700s, faced with contending claims to the region by both Russian and the loitering presence of British fur trading vessels, Spain established the colony of Santa Cruz de Nuca on the western coast of what is now Vancouver Island in 1789. Almost immediately, a crisis erupted when the outpost's commander, Jose Esteban Martínez, acted to seize several British vessels in the area. In response, Britain and its Dutch ally mobilised their navies, as did Spain and its ally France. The crisis was ultimately resolved in a series of negotiations from 1790 to 1795, collectively known as the Nootka Convention. Spain was forced to renounce much of its claims to the region. By 1795, Santa Cruz de Nuca was abandoned, bringing to an end a short spell of Spanish colonial presence in the Pacific Northwest.

Russia:

The Russian-American Company was created in 1799, and was entrusted with the monopoly to oversee the fur trade on the Pacific coast. Expeditions were organised to establish a permanent colony in what is now the states of Washington and Oregon. However, two successive failed voyages brought an end to Russian colonial endeavours in the areas of Puget Sound and the



Columbia River. A Russian settlement, Fort Ross, was established in Alta California, as well as in the Northern reaches of the Pacific coast.

British/American Presence:

Pacific Fur Company:

The Pacific Fur Company (PFC) was an American fur trading company under the ownership of John Jacob Astor. In 1811, the PFC founded the trading outpost of Fort Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River, being the first to do so and before its British counterpart and competitor: the North West Company. The PFC and the Russian-American Company, due to their mutual interest in barring the expansion of British fur companies into the Pacific Northwest coast, entered into a beneficial agreement, where the latter would supply the former with provisions.

In 1811, the Company ship, *Tonquin*, was attacked by the Tla-o-qui-aht First Nation and sunk off the coast of Clayoquot Sound as a result, taking with it much of the year's trading goods. The eruption of the War of 1812 made the PFC—an American company—a target for the British Navy posted on the Pacific. Concerns over the company's security led to its sale to the North West Company in 1814.

In 1813, a group of PFC employees traveling overland from Fort Astoria to St. Louis discovered the South Pass through the Rocky Mountains. In the 1840s, it would be one of the main routes used by American settlers to reach the Oregon territories.

Hudson's Bay Company/North West Company:

The Hudson's Bay Company was the predominant British fur trading company on the North American continent since 1670. Granted with monopoly over the entirety of Rupert's Land, it served as the de-facto governing authority over some 3,861,400 square kilometres of territory.

The North West Company was founded in 1779 in a bid to undermine the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly on the fur trade. By 1787 the NWC had expanded greatly after merging with several rival firms, and possessed some two-thousand employees in all.

However, it was not easy to compete with the behemoth that was the Hudson's Bay Company, which held a virtual monopoly over the trapping of furs in the entirety of Rupert's Land. The NWC attempted to persuade the British Parliament to reconsider the monopoly granted to the HBC, but it proved a fruitless endeavour. Instead, the NWC's operated along the west coast beyond the Rockies, and as far north as Great Bear Lake. The company was also extensively active in the United States, operating in American territories of what is today Midwest of Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin. In 1796, the NWC opened an office in New York City. This, as well as business partnership with a certain John Jacob Astor, allowed the NWC to avoid the British East India Company's monopoly and sell goods to China. Through the 1790s, names such as Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson, and Simon Fraser explored the reaches of Canada's west on behalf of the NWC, from the Arctic Ocean to the Strait of Georgia.

By the onset of the War of 1812, the NWC was facing numerous crises. Already by 1810, overhunting was critically endangering the population of fur-bearing animals, in particular the North American Beaver. Hostility with America meant that the NWC was no longer able to trade



across borders. All the while, competition with the Hudson's Bay Company intensified. The epicentre of the simmering belligerence between the two companies was at the newly founded colony at Red River. In 1808, the Hudson's Bay Company ceded some 300 000 square kilometres of land to Lord Selkirk, a major shareholder in the company. Selkirk sought to populate the area with Irish and Scots who were living in harsh conditions in Britain. The territories of the Red River Colony were already inhabited by indigenous tribes, as well as Metis. There was extensive commerce between the native inhabitants and both the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. In particular, the trade of Pemmican was imperative to the North West Company's operation, as compared to the Hudson's Bay Company, which was mostly supplied by goods from Europe.

In 1814, Governor MacDonell of the Red River Colony, backed by the Hudson's Bay Company, issued a proclamation forbidding the sale of Pemmican to parties outside of the Colony. The decision sparked a series of violent confrontations between factions of the two companies, collectively known as the Pemmican War. Alarmed by the violence between the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company, the British government intervened and forced the merger of the NWC into the HBC in 1821.

The HBC inherited the many NWC trading forts, including the Columbia Fur District, carved out by NWC from the 1790s onwards. The HBC now controlled the fur trade on the Pacific Northwestern coast with a virtual monopoly, from the Arctic Ocean to what is today the state of Oregon, Washington, and California. Operation of the HBC in the area was headquartered first at Fort Astoria, renamed Fort George after the NWC takeover during the War of 1812, and later at Fort Vancouver, on the north banks of the Columbia River. The HBC claim to the region was largely ostensible, as the Anglo-American Convention of 1818 did not reach a conclusive consensus on the ownership of the Columbia District, or the Oregon Country as known by Americans. Instead, the region was assigned for Joint-Occupation. However, the HBC in Columbia District, administered by Chief Factor John McLoughlin, upheld a policy discouraging American settlement in the region, notably north of the Columbia River.

Royal Navy:

British North America was a distant corner of the empire. The chief vessel through which Britain projected influence and maintained hold over its vast colonial territories was the formidable armada of the British Navy.

In the 19th century, the Royal Navy was the premiere fighting force on the world's ocean. In 1842, the Royal Navy possessed a total of some 271 ships. Of this were 19 ships-of-the-line, 34 frigates, 69 steam-vessels, 112 brigs and sloops, 11 flag and receiving-ships, 7 troop-ships, 3 Royal yachts, 1 store-ship, 1 hospital-ship, 1 gunnery-ship, 11 tenders and lighters, and 2 navy transports. The British Navy established the Pacific Station in 1826 which was based at Valparaíso, Chile. In 1842, the Royal Navy deployed in the area of North American and the West Indies a total of 30 ships: 1 ship-of-the-line, 5 frigates, 5 steamers, 14 brigs and sloops, 3 surveying ships, and 2 receiving ships.



ROAD TO CONFLICT

Contemporary Events: War of 1812

As the European continent was embroiled in the bloody affair of the Napoleonic Wars, America, although far away from the conflict and neutral, was not exempt from the collateral impact of the European conflict.

As a response to Napoleon's Continental System, Britain enacted the Orders in Council—a series of policies forbidding trade with France. In the aftermath of the intensifying commercial warfare waged between European powers, over seven-hundred American ships were seized between 1804 and 1807 by either side as both sides attempted to blockade trade by the other. The British Navy, faced with a shortage of sailors to man its growing wartime navy, would board neutral American ships and seize individuals whom it claims to be deserters or British citizens. However, many American citizens were falsely impressed into the Royal Navy. An exasperated public sentiment against Britain, coupled with expansionist motives and the belief that the war will end quickly in victory, fueled the call for war.

And war indeed it will be. But it was far from the one-sided affair that the Americans envisioned. After more than two and a half years of fighting, a U.S. raid into York and a British invasion against Washington D.C., both sides were exhausted and eager for peace.

The Treaty of Ghent, ratified in 1815, brought about an end to the war. In the treaty, both sides agreed to revert the border back to the pre-war status. Negotiations also began to establish a permanent border in the west, as the United States had recently acquired large tracts of land out west in the Louisiana Purchase; furthermore, American ambition for western expansion was invigorated after the defeat of Tecumseh's confederacy in the War of 1812, which was the main organised effort by indigenous groups to resist American expansion.

The Treaty of 1818 established the modern U.S. – Canada border at the 49th parallel north from the Lake of the Woods in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west. However, no agreement could be made on how the territories beyond the Rocky Mountains would be divided. The Americans pressed for the continuation of the border at 49th parallel north all the way to the Pacific coast. The British however refused to surrender control over the Columbia River and the surrounding Oregon Country, as it was an invaluable asset to the HBC fur trade in the west. Faced with an impasse, both sides agreed for the Oregon Country to be jointly occupied by the British and the Americans for ten years before the issue was to be reexamined.

In 1824, negotiations regarding the border west of the Rocky Mountains retarted. American delegate Richard Rush proposed a temporary border to be established along the 49th parallel. The British rejected the offer, proposing instead for a continuation of the border at the 49th parallel north until it meets the Columbia River, at which point the border would follow the course of the river to the coast. HBC Governor Pelly was even proposing for a border along both the Snake and Columbia River, which would push the British territory further south and east. With the British insisting on control over the Columbia



River and the Americans unyielding on its desire for a border at the 49th parallel, negotiations were at another roadblock.

The 1824 negotiations ended inconclusively, and the decision was made to extend the status quo of joint-occupation indefinitely. A clause was added that any unilateral decision to pull out of the joint-occupation agreement would require a one year notice.

American Expansion: Oregon Trail

There were growing stakes in the dispute over the Oregon Country. Previously a territory sparsely settled, save by those of fur trading companies, the region's importance, especially in the United States, was growing as the sensation of American westwards expansion arrived at the foot of the Rockies.

The Oregon Trail, as it came to be known, was first nothing more than a network of routes and passages pioneered and used by fur traders and mountain men to navigate the Rocky Mountains. In 1839, a group of eighteen staunch American nationalists, known as the Peoria Party, set out to settle the Oregon Country and claim it for the United States. It was the first time American settlers reached Oregon with the goal of settlement. Through the early 1840s, sporadic groups of American settlers seeking to move west opened up the route through the Rockies and into Idaho, California, and Oregon.

The Great Migration of 1843 saw some seven-hundred to one-thousand American migrants move into the Oregon Country. It was the first, mass wave of American immigration into the region, and the first to traverse the treacherous Oregon Trail on wagons. In order to let their wagon train pass, the group cleared paths through thick forests and paved roads through hostile terrains. This, along with later endeavours such as the construction of the Barlow Road in 1846, opened up the Oregon Trail to wagon traffic.

American Activities:

American colonial efforts:

Despite the phenomena of American westward expansion, political interest in the Oregon Country remained insignificant. Congress's interest in the region was largely economical, as the Hudson's Bay Company was viewed as a threat and competitor to American fur trade in the west.

Calls to colonise the Oregon Country had been appealed to Congress as early as 1820 by Virginian representative John Floyd, who presented the economical benefits of the fur trade and possibly open trade to China and Japan. Floyd made ambitious claims which included the annexation of all territories west of the Rockies up to 54°40 north. It failed to elicit support from fellow Congressmen.

During the Tyler presidency, further negotiations were undertaken with the British over the issue of a border in the Oregon Country. The negotiations appeared to be making progress, as the British appeared willing to cede the Olympic Peninsula as an enclave to the Americans.

The negotiation would ultimately fall short, however. The chief American negotiator in the issue, Secretary of State Daniel Webster, resigned due to souring relationship with President John Tyler.



negotiations. Tyler also claimed in the State of the Union address of 1843 that “the entire region of country lying on the Pacific and embraced within 42° and 54°40’ of north latitude” belonged to the United States, wildly contradicting the proposals presented in the negotiations.

Mexican-American War:

While political interest in colonising the Oregon Country was muted, the same could not be said about the contemporary conflict down south.

Mexico had become independent from Spain in 1821, and inherited much of Spain’s colonial possession on the North American continent. Its territory encompassed much of what is today Southwestern United States, including the modern day territories of California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado. The United States had acute interest in acquiring the northern Mexican territories, and efforts had been made to purchase territories.

The core of the contention was Texas, where the Mexican government had permitted American immigrants to settle. By 1829, the American settlers in the area outnumbered hispanic settlers. The Mexican government sought to close off American immigration by abolishing slavery, reinstating property taxes and tariffs to American goods.

In 1834, the regime changed in Mexico, and the new conservative government sought to consolidate central control. To the government, this involved defeating the independence movement that had been growing in the American-dominated Texas. However, the Texans managed to defeat the Mexican army and capture General and President Antonio López de Santa Anna, whom they forced to sign a treaty recognizing Texan independence. The Mexican government refused to ratify the treaty, however, Texan independence was recognized by the United States, Britain, and France.

Most Texans wanted to join the United States. However, there was significant resistance to admitting Texas into the Union, notably from the Whig Party and northern abolitionists, as it would upset the balance of power between northern free states and southern slave states. Because of this, control over territories in the Pacific Northwest became increasingly important politically as a way to counterbalance the growing number of southern slave states.

The issue of Texas was a major point of contention in the election of 1844. In order to capitalise on the expansionist sentiments and to placate northern fear of an imbalance between slave states and free states if Texas was allowed to join, Democratic presidential candidate James K. Polk took a hard stance in support of American claims over the Pacific Northwest, and the annexation of the Oregon Country in its entirety. Polk won in the election against the Whig Party candidate, Henry Clay, largely because Clay took a stance against expansion into Texas.



INSTIGATION OF CRISIS:

Polk's inauguration speech in 1845 was inflamed with fiery language defending the U.S.'s claim to the whole of the Oregon Country as "clear and unquestionable". Expansionist outlets clamoured for the administration to make good on its promises, and some war hawks in Congress were even calling for war against Britain rather than to accept a compromise.

By 1846, Polk, backed by Congress, had given Britain the one year notice that it would be pulling out of the Joint Occupation agreement over Oregon Country.

CLAIMS AND MOTIVES:

British Claim:

At its extreme, British territorial claims over the Oregon Country covered its entirety. However in reality, faced with contesting U.S. claims, this was never seriously considered. Instead, the best case scenario pitched by British negotiators was for a border along the Columbia River.

British claim over the Oregon Country is less rigid and aggressive as American territorial assertion in the region. The British diplomatic agenda of the time, headed by the Earl of Aberdeen, sought to maintain amiable relations with the United States, which was a major economic partner. Furthermore, the value of the southerly territories of the Oregon Country was of diminishing importance to the fur trade. The influx of American settlers into the area has crowded up the fur trade, and by 1843, the HBC was seeking to relocate from Fort Vancouver to Fort Victoria on Vancouver Island, both as a more defensible position and for easier access to the more lucrative fur trade in North Caledonia.

The government's interest in avoiding a direct clash with the Americans in the Pacific Northwest, coupled with lessening economic significance, makes the British the moderating faction in this issue. A diplomatic end to the dispute is viewed as desirable for Britain, and it has shown willingness to make reasonable concessions.

American Claim:

American claim over the Oregon Country was represented by the slogan "*54° 40' or Fight*". The slogan, popularised by expansionist sentiments of the age and adopted by politicians, called for the annexation of the entire region west of the Rockies, from the 42° to the 54°40' parallel, an area that today encompasses the states of Oregon and Washington, as well as all of British Columbia south of the Alaska panhandle.

To members of the American delegation, there is a significant stake in securing an American victory in the Oregon Dispute. Politically, Polk and the Democrats used the Oregon question to pander to expansionist sentiments and placate northern paranoia. There was strong expectation from the public for the administration to act on its promises. At the same time, control over the Oregon Country is also of



tangible importance. Notably, control over regions within the Oregon Country such as the Olympic peninsula and Vancouver Island would provide the United States with deep water seaports on the Pacific coast—something that it yet lacks, as all other suitable ports are located within the Mexican province of Alta California.

Despite drastic calls by certain members of government for the use of force in the dispute, the battleground remains predominantly on the negotiation table, as neither side is willing to commit to such an escalation recklessly. The most rational course of action for the United States to take in regards to the Oregon question is to pressure diplomatically for concessions that would fulfil its political and substantial expectations.

PORTFOLIO

British:

British Government:

The main objective of British Government delegates is to safeguard British interest at large. In the scope of the Oregon Question, this means preventing an escalation that could cause the dispute to spill over into a wider and costly conflict. Delegates of the British Government need to carefully weigh the impacts that their decisions have on the conflict at hand as well as the greater interest at stake.

Sir Robert Peel: British Prime Minister

- Power to veto public directives made by all except by delegates of the Hudson's Bay Company

George Hamilton-Gordon, Earl of Aberdeen: British Foreign Secretary

Richard Pakenham: British Envoy to the U.S.

Edward Smith-Stanley: Secretary of State for War and the Colonies

British Military:

Delegates representing the

Thomas Hamilton: First Lord of the Admiralty

- Head of the Admiralty
- Authority of command over all Royal Navy vessels

George Seymour: R.A of British Navy, Commander-in-Chief of Pacific Station

- Power to privately mobilise all naval vessels posted at the Pacific Station

Province of Canada:

For the delegates of the Province of Canada, the conflict is one that is much closer at hand. However the dispute is to be resolved, Canada will bear the weight of its consequences. Thus, it is imperative for delegates of this faction to take initiative and sway the crisis in such fashion as to favour Canada. In doing so, delegates need to strike a fine balance in this conflict; it neither wants to provoke a war against the United States, nor does it want to affirm American expansionist ideologies and warmongering conducts by making significant concessions.



Charles Metcalfe: Governor General of the Province of Canada

William Henry Draper: Joint Premier of the Province of Canada (West)

Denis-Benjamin Viger: Joint Premier of the Province of Canada (East)

Hudson's Bay Company:

James Douglas: Chief Factor of HBC

John McLoughlin: Superintendent of HBC

- In charge of all company interest west of the Rockies

John Pelly: Governor of HBC

Sir George Simpson: Governor-in-Chief of Rupert's Land

- Governmental authority over Rupert's Land

American:

American Government:

James K. Polk: President of the United States

George M. Dallas: Vice President of the United States

James Buchanan: Secretary of State

William L. Marcy: Secretary of War

John Y. Mason: Attorney General

Louis McLane: United States Minister to the United Kingdom

Daniel Webster: United States Senator from Massachusetts

John C. Calhoun: United States Senator from South Carolina

Thomas Hart Benton: United States Senator from Missouri

American Military:

George Bancroft: Secretary of the Navy

Winfield Scott: Commanding General of the U.S. Army

William Selby Harney: Colonel of US Army

George Pickett: Captain of US Army



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