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978-1-107-01493-0 - Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War

Timothy C. Winegard

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## Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War

This pioneering comparative history of the participation of indigenous peoples of the British empire in the First World War is based upon archival research in four continents. It provides the first comprehensive examination, and comparison, of how indigenous peoples of Canada, Australia, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa experienced the Great War. The participation of indigenes was an extension of their ongoing effort to shape and alter their social and political realities, their resistance to cultural assimilation or segregation, and their desire to attain equality through service and sacrifice. While the dominions discouraged indigenous participation at the outbreak of war, by late 1915 the imperial government demanded their inclusion to meet the pragmatic need for military manpower. Indigenous peoples responded with patriotism and enthusiasm both on the battlefield and the home front and shared equally in the horrors and burdens of the First World War.

TIMOTHY C. WINEGARD is a Lecturer in the Department of First Nations Studies at the University of Western Ontario and a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of History at the University of Waterloo, Ontario. His books include *Oka: A Convergence of Cultures and the Canadian Forces* (2008) and *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (2011).

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Timothy C. Winegard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Contents

---

<i>List of figures</i>	page viii
<i>List of maps</i>	x
<i>List of tables</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
<i>Note on the text</i>	xiii
Introduction	1
1 Colonization and the settler state	13
2 Racial constructs and martial theories	34
3 Precedents of military pragmatism	45
4 Dominion defence acts	60
5 1914: Subjugated spectators	68
6 1915–1916: King and country call	97
7 1917–1918: All the King's men	149
8 Indigenous soldiers	189
9 The home front	218
10 Peace with prejudice	229
Conclusion	256
<i>Bibliography</i>	271
<i>Index</i>	301

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01493-0 - Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War

Timothy C. Winegard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Figures

---

- |  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| 6.1 The Maori Pioneer Battalion welcoming Prime Minister William F. Massey and Sir Joseph G. Ward with a <i>haka</i> at Bois-de-Warnimont, France, June 1918. (G-13282-1/2, RNZRSA Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.) | <i>page</i> 101 |
| 6.2 Maori diggers at Malta, May 1915. (PA Coll-7171-57, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.)  | 103             |
| 6.3 'The Spirit of his Fathers': from the <i>New Zealand Observer</i> , Christmas Issue December 1915. (A-312-1-088, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.)   | 111             |
| 6.4 Cree Indian recruits from File Hills, Saskatchewan, October 1915. (Glenbow Museum Archives, NA-3454-41.)   | 117             |
| 6.5 Legion of Frontiersman, John Shiwak, 1911. (Royal Canadian Legion, Happy Valley, Labrador.)  | 132             |
| 6.6 'A Question of Color: Too Dark for the Light Horse'. ( <i>The Bulletin</i> , 31 August 1916.)  | 134             |
| 6.7 Recruits of the South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916. (National Library of Scotland, X.35055.)   | 144             |
| 7.1 Onondaga Private Tom Longboat of the Six Nations Reserve buying a 'trench paper', June 1917. (Library and Archives Canada, PA-001479.)   | 153             |
| 7.2 Prime Minister William F. Massey and Sir Joseph G. Ward inspecting the Maori Pioneer Battalion at Bois-de-Warnimont, France, June 1918. (G-13288-1/2, RNZRSA Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.)                   | 160             |
| 7.3 'Smiling and Warm: Members of the SANLC Enjoy Some Down-time', February 1917. (National Library of Scotland, X.35049.)   | 177             |
| 7.4 Two members of the SANLC 'greasing' their feet, February 1917. (National Library of Scotland, X.35057.)  | 180             |

viii



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01493-0 - Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War

Timothy C. Winegard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

List of figures	ix
7.5 General Jan C. Smuts inspecting a unit of the SANLC in France, 1918. (National Library of Scotland, D.1158.)	184
8.1 Private Douglas Grant with Australian, Private Harry Avery, and an unidentified British soldier. (Australian War Memorial, PO1692.001.)	195
8.2 Blood Indian recruits of the 191st Battalion, CEF, Macleod, Alberta, 1916. (Glenbow Museum Archives, NA-2164-1.)	197
8.3 An Indian soldier of the CEF Forestry Corps, <i>c.</i> 1917–18. (Library and Archives Canada, PA-129639.)	203
8.4 Members of the Maori Pioneer Battalion having formal afternoon tea, with King George V looking on from the back-left wall, <i>c.</i> 1917. (G-1567-1/1, HJ Schmidt Collection, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.)	211
8.5 Lance-Corporal Charles T. Blackman, 1917 and 1918. (Australian War Memorial, RC06621/RC06622.)	213–14
9.1 Moo-che-we-in-es Canadian Patriotic Fund poster, <i>c.</i> 1917. (Library and Archives Canada, C-098670.)	221
9.2 ‘Canadian Patriotic Indian Chiefs’, <i>c.</i> 1915–16. (Library and Archives Canada, PA-030224.)	223
10.1 Stoney Indians at Armistice Day celebration, High River, Alberta, 1918. (Glenbow Museum Archives, NA-1395-1.)	233

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01493-0 - Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War

Timothy C. Winegard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Maps

---

1 The Western Front, 1914–18	<i>page</i> xv
2 Indian nations of Canada and Newfoundland	xvi
3 Maori <i>Iwi</i> (tribes) of New Zealand	xvii
4 The 1913 South African Natives Land Act: distribution of lands and ethnicity	xviii

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Timothy C. Winegard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Tables

---

2.1 Dominion non-indigenous and indigenous populations	<i>page</i> 38
6.1 Known Indian enlistments, November 1916	129
7.1 SANLC native enlistment rates, June 1917 and January 1918	171
8.1 Dominion indigenes: political and military reliability against roles and units	190
9.1 Indian patriotic donations	222
10.1 SANLC native casualties	230
10.2 Known state enlistments and Aboriginal populations	231
10.3 Dominion First World War statistics	234
10.4 Indian land sold or confiscated under the Soldier Settlement Act	239
11.1 Indigenous service in the world wars	264

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-01493-0 - Indigenous Peoples of the British Dominions and the First World War

Timothy C. Winegard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Camlachie, Ontario

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Timothy C. Winegard

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## Note on the text

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This comparison will detail the participation of the indigenous populations of the five British Dominions – Canada, Australia, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa – during the First World War. Any author investigating aspects of indigenous history must, if by peer scrutiny alone, delineate approaches to descriptive nouns and chronological representations. Given the multiplicity of indigenous nations within the respective Dominions, they did not represent monolithic, homogenous entities. Many indigenous peoples felt a stronger affiliation to clans than to either their nations or their indigenous collective (unknown prior to European contact). Moreover, enduring animosities still existed between traditional enemies. Therefore, grouping them as Aboriginal Australians, for example, is seemingly specious. Fundamentally, however, based on the dominant policies of Dominion and imperial governments, this generalization is not only unavoidable, but is also representative of trans-national themes, and is indicative of the social and political environments in all Dominions and the United Kingdom during the years of, and surrounding, the First World War.

Indigenous nations or groupings will be explored when they are important to the arguments or are imperative to understanding regional policies and decisions. Given the multitude of indigenous dialects within five diverse Dominions, the use of indigenous languages will be kept to a minimum unless central to explanation. For example, the Maori word for non-Maori peoples is *Pakeha*. This word will be used to describe non-Maori New Zealanders, as it was adopted into New Zealand society. In general, however, European terminology will be used, not out of ignorance or thoughtlessness; rather, to enhance readability and, more importantly, to adhere to contemporary convention.

As a rule, this work adopts the language present in the contemporary documents and bureaucratic discourses, although many of the terms used, such as kaffir or half-caste, are now deemed derogatory and politically incorrect. The term indigenous represents those peoples present in the Dominions prior to contact. Indian will be used to describe those

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Timothy C. Winegard

Frontmatter

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xiv Note on the text

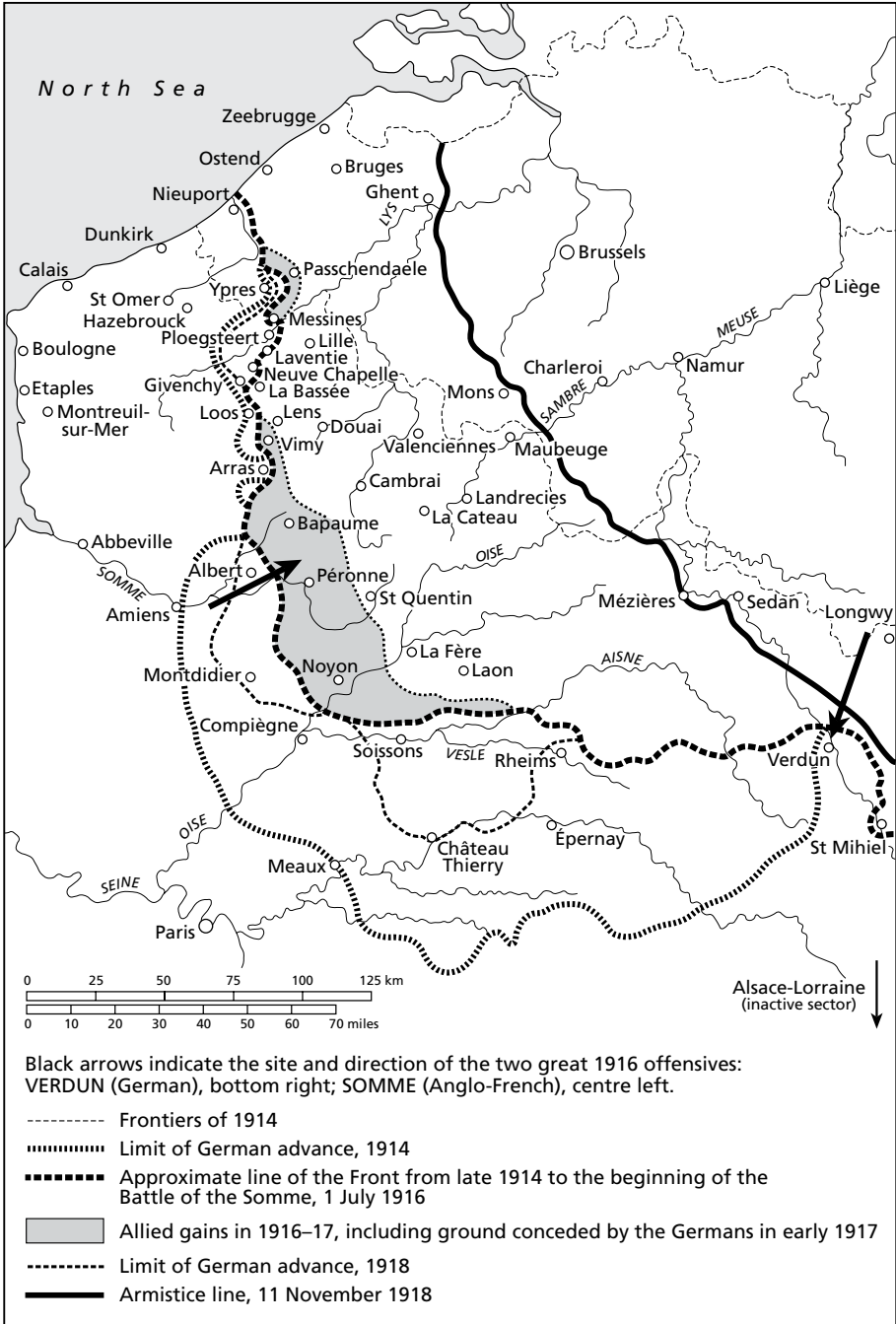
indigenes of North America. The term Eskimo will embody the peoples of Arctic Canada and Newfoundland-Labrador. Métis will be used to describe a distinct people of European and Indian lineage. Indigenous Australians will be referred to as Aborigines, and at times as full-blood or half-caste, as this differentiation was paramount in Australian policy and practice. Indigenous South Africans will be referred to as black (or native) and coloured, as the Union of South Africa afforded different freedoms and management to these groupings. Lastly, the New Zealand Maori will be identified as such.<sup>1</sup>

The use of these labels, which many associate with subjugation, dishonour and Eurocentric ideology, is not a concession to their negative connections; rather, it is an attempt to relate accurately the contemporary attitudes, opinions and legal arrangements represented in these words by the societies, peoples and decrees which used them. To employ more current words or phrasings, or to surround in quotation marks to affirm the flawed construction of a label, is to impart a consciousness to policy makers and populations that did not exist at the time in which this history takes place.

Defining settlers from the British Isles is also challenging. Many considered themselves Scottish, Irish, Welsh or English. Conversely, settlers in the Dominions from the British Isles felt strong connections to the metropole and shared many of the same cultural and societal values and increasingly identified themselves with being British. Hence, in most instances, the term British will describe settlers from the British Isles.

Lastly, the term contact represents the first encounters between indigenous peoples and Europeans. This is not to impart that indigenous nations do not have, based on archaeological evidence, oral traditions and scientific theory, lengthy records of terrestrial occupation and socio-cultural evolution prior to the arrival of Europeans. Contact infers that indigenous peoples underwent an unavoidable cataclysmic crisis, unparalleled in their known previous histories, due to the introduction of disease and the adoption of killing potential through the use of European weapon systems. By the dawn of the twentieth century, indigenous populations, save for those of South Africa, were moribund, due to deadly disease, warfare, and contact with peoples of differing genetic dispositions and viral immunities.

<sup>1</sup> Although the Maori Contingent of the First World War was officially designated the 'Native Contingent', it is more commonly known as the 'Maori Contingent', and will be referred to as such. The term native was not officially, and legally, replaced with Maori until 1947.



Map 1 The Western Front, 1914-18.

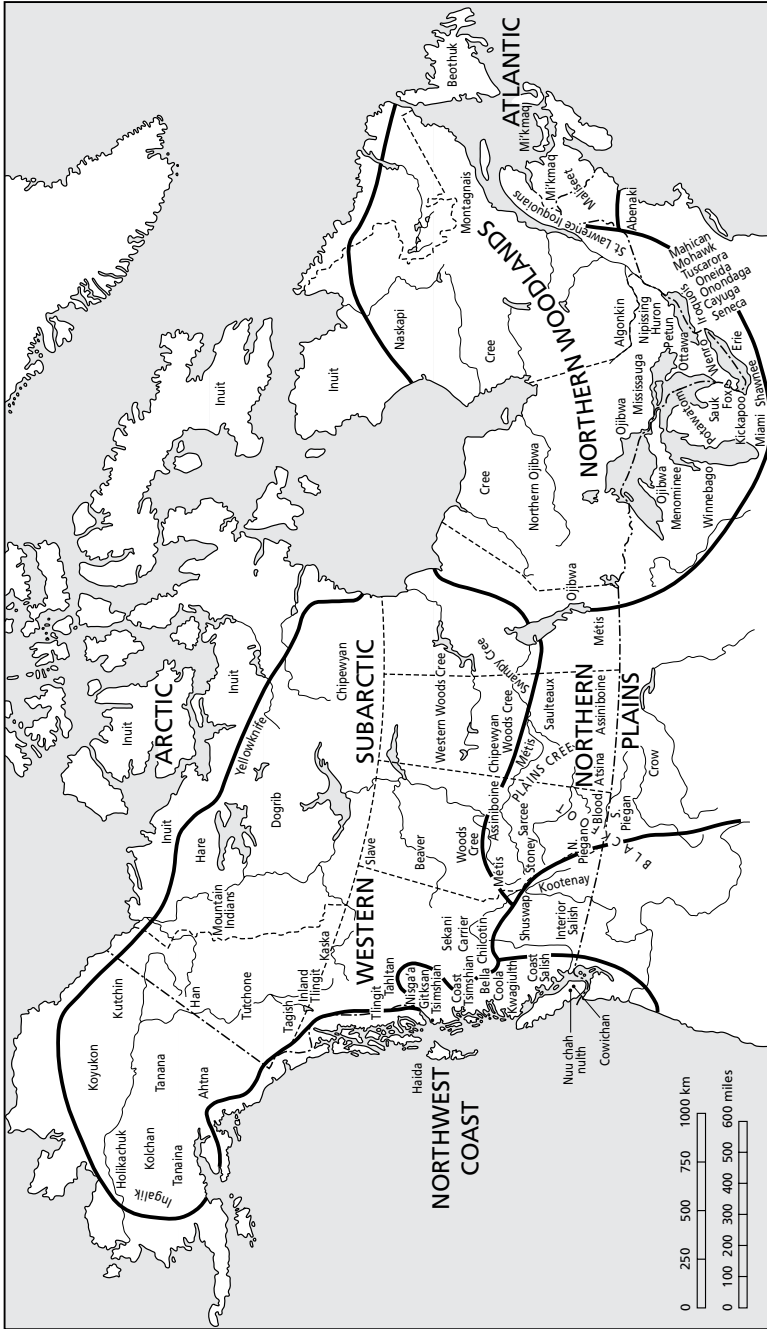
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Map 2 Indian nations of Canada and Newfoundland.



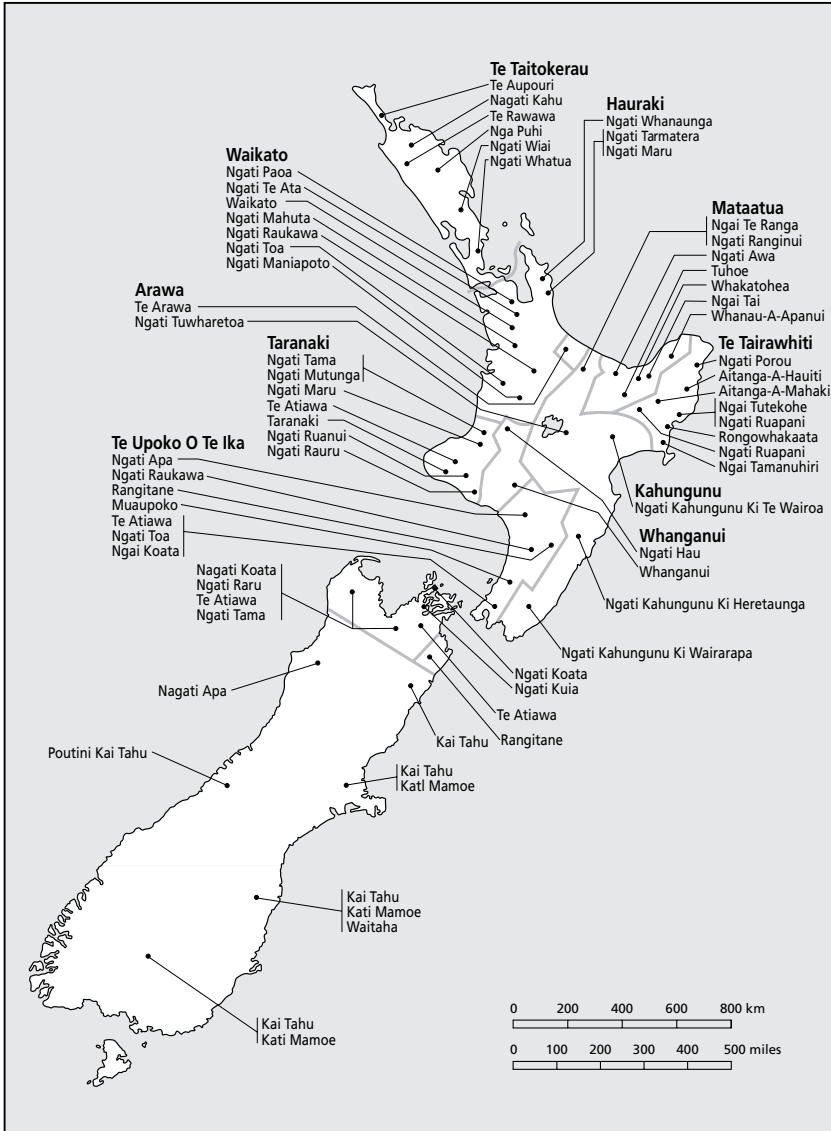
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Map 3 Maori *Iwi* (tribes) of New Zealand.

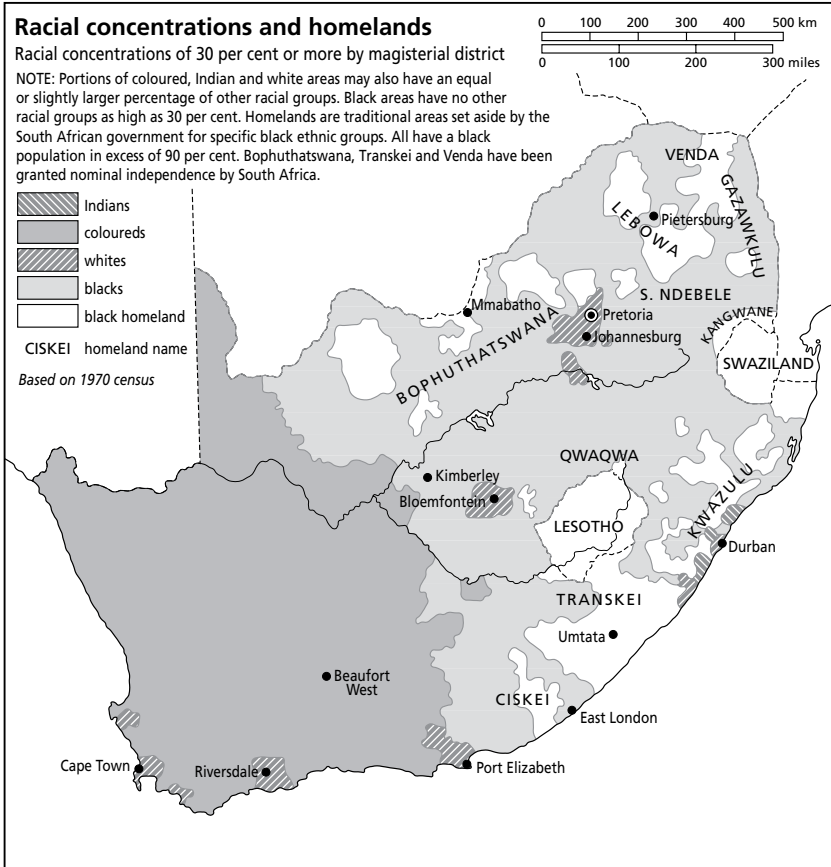
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Map 4 The 1913 South African Natives Land Act: distribution of lands and ethnicity.