



The
FORGOTTEN
PEACE



Mediation at Niagara Falls, 1914



MICHAEL SMALL

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Mediation at Niagara Falls, 1914

MICHAEL SMALL

University of Ottawa Press

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The University of Ottawa Press acknowledges with gratitude the support extended to its publishing list by Heritage Canada through its Book Publishing Industry Development Program, by the Canada Council for the Arts, by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences through its Aid to Scholarly Publications Program, by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and by the University of Ottawa.

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA CATALOGUING
IN PUBLICATION

Small, Michael, 1958–
The forgotten peace : mediation at Niagara Falls, 1914 /
Michael Small.

(Governance series, 14873052)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-7766-0712-2

1. Niagara Falls Peace Conference (1914).
 2. Mexico—History—Revolution, 1910–1920.
 3. United States—Foreign relations—Mexico.
 4. Mexico—Foreign relations—United States.
- I. Title. II. Series: Governance series (Ottawa, Ont.)

F1234 S62 2009 341.7'30971 C2009-902709-7

UNIVERSITY OF OTTAWA PRESS
542 King Edward Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5
www.uopress.uottawa.ca



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For my parents

*“When It’s Mediation Time in Canada,
In Canada, in Canada
By the good old Falls, we’ll watch and wait,
And Mediate.
When it’s Mediation Time in Canada,
We’ll come here for a rest;
And we’ll pay ten cents to cross the Bridge
Whether going East or West.”*

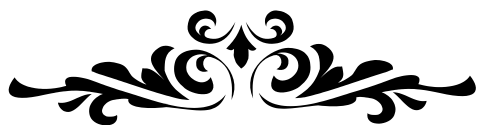
—Parody sung by reporters, May 1914.

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Preface

In the late summer of 1993, I was studying Spanish in Cuernavaca in preparation for a diplomatic assignment to the Canadian Embassy in Mexico City. While reading a general history of the Mexican Revolution by a British writer, Ronald Atkins, I came across a single paragraph that mentioned that after four years of upheaval there was an unsuccessful attempt in the summer of 1914 by three South American powers, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, to mediate an end to Woodrow Wilson's attempt to influence the course of the Revolution by military intervention. A peace conference was convened between the United States and Mexico by these three mediating powers and the location chosen was Niagara Falls, Ontario.



I had never heard of this event and I wondered what the contemporary citizens of Niagara Falls would have made of it. Indeed, over the next three years, while I was involved with Canada's rapidly expanding political relationship with Mexico in the post-NAFTA era, I never heard or read another reference to this unusual early chapter in Canada's relations with Mexico. Nevertheless, this intriguing fact remained stuck in my memory.

Ten years later I was granted the privilege of spending a year as a Fellow of Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. One of the obligations of being a Fellow is to produce a Fellow's paper on any subject of interest to the author. After discarding a few contemporary topics, I decided to try to discover what I could in the stacks of Harvard's magnificent Widener Library about the seemingly forgotten Niagara Falls Peace Conference of 1914. What I found was that, while the conference had been covered in passing in various works of scholarship written during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s dealing with American intervention in the Mexican Revolution, only one monograph had ever been devoted to the subject, written in Spanish by a scholar attached to the Chilean Academy of Diplomatic Relations in 1967. No full-length treatment of the conference had been written in English since 1914. As for Canadian secondary sources covering this event, there were none.

What follows is my attempt to retell the story of the Niagara Falls Peace Conference, using contemporary Canadian and American newspapers, American, British and Mexican diplomatic archives, and all the secondary



sources from North and South America that I could find in Widener Library. I also discovered a remarkable scrapbook of newspaper clippings and cartoons about the conference collected by the Argentine mediator which added a contemporary visual dimension to the record. I have tried to use my diplomatic training to piece together the story from the inside, keeping one eye on the envoys at the conference, who were committed to finding a just peace, while keeping another eye on the principals in the conflict, for whom the conference was but a proxy for securing victory by other means.

The story itself is a case study of the limits of third-party mediation, which should speak to aspiring modern mediators. More intriguingly, it casts some light from history on topics of intense current debate, such as the rights and wrongs of military intervention to restore democracy in a country under dictatorship, and the unexpected consequences that such interventions can generate.

Finally, for Canadian readers the story of this conference fills in a forgotten chapter in our relations with the United States and Mexico. It should spark some reflections on our current place in the world, since no peace effort quite like it has ever been attempted, before or since, on Canadian soil.

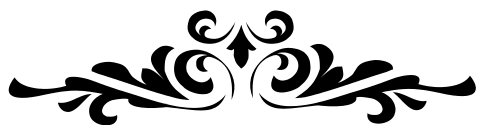
I would like to thank the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade for granting me the opportunity to do this research while serving as a Fellow at Harvard University from 2003 to 2004. I would also like to thank the Fellows Program of the Weatherhead



Center at Harvard, notably the Fellow's Program Director, Kathleen Molony, and the former Director of the Weatherhead Center, Professor Jorge Dominguez, for all the support they gave me while I was a Fellow at the Center, and for their helpful comments on the paper after I submitted it. I would also like to thank the research assistant provided by the Weatherhead Center, Jackie Shull, then a Harvard College senior, who gave me invaluable assistance in tracking down obscure key sources, in particular the archives of images on microfilm. The original draft has subsequently benefited from the encouragement and advice of Professor Robert Bothwell of the University of Toronto. This study would never have been published without the constant support for the project by the University of Ottawa Press. I would like to thank all those who have worked on it at the Press, in particular my editor, Alex Anderson. The judgments contained in this book represent entirely my own personal views and do not reflect the views or positions of the Government of Canada.

Michael Small

Ottawa



Chapter 1

Breaking news

Readers of the *Toronto Globe* opening their newspapers on the morning of Friday, April 24, 1914 would have been alarmed to read the following headline stretching across the page: "Declaration of War Against Mexico Expected." Different reports from the Canadian Press covered facets of the crisis that had been triggered by the unexpected occupation of the Mexican port of Veracruz by U.S. Marines two days before. The Mexican and American governments had expelled each other's *Chargés d'Affaires* and had severed all diplomatic channels between them. British and German naval vessels off the port of Tampico were asked by the U.S. Navy to help in rescuing 1,200 American oil workers there from enraged Mexican mobs. In Ottawa, Senator Poirier

asked if there were plans to send the Canadian ships *Niobe* and *Rainbow* to Mexico to protect the rights and property of Canadian citizens. Meanwhile, *The Globe* helpfully provided its readers with a map outlining the two possible routes available for a march by U.S. troops from Veracruz to Mexico City over the same terrain crossed by the troops of General Winfield Scott sixty-seven years earlier. *The Globe* noted ominously that “a few men with dynamite could destroy the bridges over deep gorges on both roads and thereby greatly embarrass the march of the invaders. The country along both lines offers many advantages for stubborn resistance.”¹

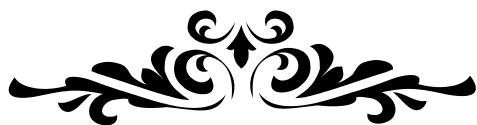
Contrary to expectations, the United States did not follow its occupation of Veracruz with a declaration of war. Instead, the next day there was a surprise announcement that three South American governments, the “A.B.C. powers” of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, had offered their good offices to mediate a resolution to the conflict between the United States and Mexico. The U.S. Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, accepted the offer at once and the Mexican dictator, General Victoriano Huerta, agreed a few days later. Envoys were named and a location was announced by the mediators. The parties had agreed that the next scene in the long-running drama of the Mexican Revolution would be staged in Niagara Falls, Ontario.

The Niagara Falls Peace Conference of 1914 represented an ephemeral high point in the nascent

¹ *The Globe* (Toronto), April 24, 1914.



Pan-American movement. For a few brief weeks it appeared as if the three most prominent countries in South America could find a peaceful resolution to the abortive American military intervention in the internal affairs of its disorderly southern neighbour. For Canadians, the conference provided an unexpected spectacle on their doorstep, combining high diplomacy and low intrigue around the gardens and cataracts of Canada's most famous natural attraction. If the results of the conference were fleeting and Canada's political contribution to the outcome was negligible, the fact that it took place at all merits mention in the history of Canada's relations with its two North American neighbours. This study reconstructs what did and did not happen at Niagara Falls in May and June 1914, and suggests why readers today might find points of interest in a failed peace conference that took place in Canada more than ninety years ago.



Chapter 2

Prelude to intervention

The Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920 was the cataclysmic event in that nation’s modern history. Successive waves of rebellion transformed a corrupt and backward dictatorship, heavily dependent on foreign capital, into a modern, centralized state committed to a nationalist, populist program of economic development. Given the extensive foreign investment from the United States, Britain, Canada, and various European countries in Mexico’s railways, mines, and oilfields, and the many foreign nationals who came to Mexico to manage these investments, there was a strong international interest from the outset in the outcome of the Revolution. Aided by the telegraph, regular shipping connections and a network of resident “special

correspondents,” newspapers across the United States and Canada provided constant coverage of the progress of the Revolution, focusing on political and military developments among the Mexican factions and dramatic stories about the fates of individual expatriates who became caught up in the conflict. Images of the major Mexican revolutionary figures became well-known to North American newspaper readers from frequent cartoons and caricatures. What seems a distant, foreign event to us today was daily news for the educated public of North America in 1914. For example, *The Globe* carried at least one story about Mexico and often several, most days of the week in the period between late April and early July 1914. The coverage of Mexico in leading American newspapers such as the *New York Times* was even more extensive.¹

This story is populated by more than its fair share of memorable characters, but five in particular stand out. On the American side, the two principal actors were the standard bearers of the Democratic Party which had successfully recaptured the White House in a three-way race in the presidential election of 1912. The first was Woodrow Wilson, the only professional academic to become President of the United States, whose meteoric political career began when he left Princeton University to become Governor of New Jersey in 1910. Within two years he won the Democratic Party’s nomination and

¹ See the collection compiled by the Argentine diplomat Rómulo S. Naón (1914), a selection of which is reproduced in Appendix I.

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Composed in Adobe Jenson Pro 11 on 15

The paper used in this publication is
Roland Opaque Bright White 60lb

PRINTED AND BOUND IN CANADA

The front cover and spine show the flags of
Mexico, the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Chile,
and Canada as they were in 1914.