

3. Neighbors and Allies: *United States-Canada Relations Under Franklin D. Roosevelt and Canada*

“I read in a newspaper that I was to be received with all the honors customarily rendered to a foreign ruler. I am grateful for the honors; but something within me rebelled at that word ‘foreign.’ I say this because when I have been in Canada, I have never heard a Canadian refer to an American as a ‘foreigner.’ He is just an ‘American.’ And, in the same way, in the United States, Canadians are not ‘foreigners,’ they are just ‘Canadians.’ This simple little distinction illustrates to me better than anything else the relationship between our two countries.”

—Franklin D. Roosevelt, Quebec City, 1936

Franklin D. Roosevelt was a true friend of Canada. FDR’s interest in a Canadian government that was emerging from the shadow of the British Crown, his willingness to work with Canada as an equal during World War II, and his great personal friendship with Liberal Canadian prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King all helped set in place an infrastructure for continental cooperation that in many respects still governs the relationship between the two countries today.

FDR was the first U.S. president to address the Canadian Parliament and people of Canada. He visited Canada more often than any other president in American history. FDR and Prime Minister King corresponded frequently, and in the ten years in which their leadership overlapped, they held face-to-face meetings no less than eighteen times. King was a regular visitor at the White House and Hyde Park, and he was one of the few foreign leaders to visit FDR at his second home, the “Little White House” in Warm Springs, Georgia.

The strength of this personal relationship between the two leaders is reflected in the many agreements and understandings achieved while they held office, including the Canada-United States reciprocal trade agreement of 1935, which reduced tariffs between the two nations, and a broader tripartite trade agreement between Canada, Great Britain, and the United States reached three years later.

Mutual defense was as pressing an issue for the two leaders as trade. In the summer of 1938, with war looming, FDR announced that the people of the United States would not stand “idly by” if Canadian soil were threatened. In August



Louis St. Laurent, Canadian foreign minister, signs the United Nations Charter at the San Francisco Conference, June 26, 1945. Canada, a strong supporter of the UN, was active in the work of drafting its charter. UN Photo/McLain

1940, after the fall of France, FDR and King signed the Ogdensburg Agreement, which established a Permanent Joint Board on Defense. The Canadian Royal Navy helped protect shipping in the Atlantic in the early years of the war, and Canadian forces would play an important role in the Allied invasions of Italy and France.

Like the United States, Canada also ramped up its war production to play a key role in supplying the British government with the materials it needed to carry on the fight against the Nazis. In April 1941, after U.S. passage of the Lend-Lease Act promising to supply war aid as needed to the British, King and FDR signed the Hyde Park Declaration, which coordinated the two countries' economies for war mobilization. Canada also participated in numerous joint boards and committees during the Second World War. Canada, the United States, and Britain were the only countries represented on the policy committee that oversaw the top-secret Manhattan Project to develop the atomic bomb.

In addition, Canada and King helped facilitate what British prime minister Winston Churchill would call the "special relationship" that developed between Great Britain and the United States during these years. King, for example, was the initial force behind the much-celebrated visit by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to the United States in 1939. Two of the most significant wartime summit meetings between Churchill and FDR were held in Canada, at the Quebec City conferences of September 1943 and 1944. Canada also worked closely with the United States in drafting the United Nations Charter in April 1945.

Indeed, from the start, Canada participated actively in the United Nations, FDR's brainchild. After FDR's death, the Canadians played a key role in founding UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in 1945 and in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948. In the latter case, Professor John Humphrey of Montreal's McGill University joined Eleanor Roosevelt in putting together the document that ER called the "Magna Carta for all mankind."



It is no exaggeration to say that FDR and King transformed the relationship between their two countries and that Canada, during these critical years, emerged from its status as a dominion of Great Britain to become a fully sovereign state and partner of the United States. Perhaps the greatest symbol of this new relationship was the January 12, 1944, accreditation of the Honorable Leighton McCarthy as the first Canadian ambassador to the United States—indeed, the first true ambassador of Canada accredited to any nation in the world.

The relationship between Canada and the United States is marked by a history of friendship and cooperation unique in the world. No two countries share more extensive social, economic, military, and cultural ties—ties that were expanded and strengthened by FDR.

Top: From left to right: William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canadian prime minister; Franklin D. Roosevelt; Winston Churchill, British prime minister; and the Earl of Athlone, then governor general of Canada, a representative of the British monarch in Canada. Hosted by the Canadians in Quebec City, the leaders were gathered for the August 1943 Quebec Conference in which they discussed preparations for an invasion of France. Imperial War Museum (TR1347)

Above, left: King George VI of Britain (in a dark suit) tours Mount Vernon, the historic Virginia home of George Washington, with Franklin D. Roosevelt, June 9, 1939. Canadian prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King did much to arrange the royal visit to America, the first ever by a reigning British monarch. FDRL

Above, right: Franklin D. Roosevelt at the White House signing of a trade agreement with Great Britain and Canada, November 17, 1938. LOC