

Sovereignty at the border: A Historical Perspective

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This paper explores the concept of sovereignty and its relationship to debates over immigration, empire, federalism, and globalization in the Canadian-American Pacific borderlands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite its venerable genealogy in political, philosophical, and legal discourse, sovereignty was always historically contingent, contested, and unstable. This paper will offer ways to think historically about the role, exercise, and contestation of sovereignty in borderland spaces by addressing the following questions: how did sovereignty facilitate mobility and globalization in this region during this period, and how did it facilitate border-making and immobility? How was sovereignty historically challenged, redefined, and/or consolidated in the inherently fluid and dynamic borderlands of the Pacific North? How did the overlapping and often contradictory forces of empire, state-building, border-making, and global capitalism complicate the question of sovereignty in the region? What individuals, groups, and institutions were instrumental in defining sovereignty in the Canadian-American Pacific borderlands? This paper will conclude that we must historicize the exercise and influence of sovereignty in order to fully understand its contemporary meaning, application, and implications.