A Matter of Survival: 
The Development of Anti-Americanism in 19th Century Canada

Nathan Ince

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ABSTRACT
Canadian leaders today would certainly refer to the United States as one of their most important allies. But anti-American sentiment in Canada has a long history. This paper examines the evolution of anti-Americanism in Canada from 1812 to 1891, and puts forward the argument that the origins of Canadian anti-Americanism has its roots as a survival mechanism, used by Canadians as an idea to rally behind when facing threats, both economic and militarily, from a much larger and powerful republic to the south. Whether it was during the war of 1812, or the Fenian raids decades later, anti-American sentiment among Canadians was an expression of Canada’s desire to remain independent from the United States when facing threats, real or perceived, to its sovereignty. As a young country, lacking a true national consciousness, anti-Americanism was also used to remedy this, differentiating what it was to be a Canadian from American. The anti-American sentiment from this period raises important questions for the present.

RÉSUMÉ
Les politiciens canadiens d’aujourd’hui font souvent référence aux Américains comme à leurs alliés les plus importants. Pourtant, des sentiments anti-américains ont une longue histoire au Canada. Cet article analyse l’évolution de ce sentiment entre 1812 et 1891, et soutient que l’anti-américanisme canadien a ses origines dans un mécanisme de survie. Que ce soit pendant la guerre de 1812 ou les raids Fenians, l’anti-américanisme a toujours été une façon d’exprimer le désir du Canada de rester indépendant des États-Unis face aux menaces, perçues ou réelles, en regard de sa souveraineté. Dans un pays jeune sans conscience nationale développée, l’anti-américanisme a permis aux Canadiens de se différencier à défaut de se définir. L’anti-américanisme de cette période soulève plusieurs questions encore importantes dans notre monde contemporain.

KEYWORDS
Anti-americanism
Introduction

That anti-Americanism exists in Canada cannot be disputed. One needs only to gauge the reaction of a room upon hearing the last letter of the alphabet pronounced as “Zee.” Eyebrows are raised even as opinions are lowered; certain listeners can’t help but note that, here, we say “Zed.” In Canada, even a letter of the alphabet can be anti-American. Frank Underhill, the noted Canadian historian, once remarked that in Canada resided the “the first anti-American, the model anti-American, the archetypal anti-American, and the ideal anti-American as he exists in the mind of God.”1 As to the prevalence and consistency of anti-American sentiment in Canada, there are few who disagree. Rather, it is the nature of this anti-Americanism which is the subject of debate. Where did it come from? Is it a positive or a negative force? How does it define this country?

There are those who see anti-Americanism as a remnant of the self-serving politics of 19th century elites, as a political tool to manipulate the masses, and ultimately as a bad habit to kick. Rudyard Griffiths, founder of the Dominion Institute, describes it as “knee-jerk and unproductive,” stating that Canada needs to be freed from “the intellectual straitjacket of anti-Americanism.”2 Others, such as American thinker Seymour Lipset, consider Canada’s anti-Americanism as an important and inseparable part of Canada’s identity, a sentiment expressed by Canadian journalist Blair Fraser when he writes “without at least a touch of anti-Americanism, Canada would have no reason to exist.”3 Canada, as a country created out of a rejection of the American Revolution, exists through the merit of not being America.

The reality is that Canada’s anti-Americanism is much too complicated to be defined in such absolute terms. To understand its true nature, one must begin with a consideration of its origins in the years around Confederation. These were the years of the Fenian raids, the Red River Rebellion, and the building of the CPR; it was during this time that the country took on its modern form. Canada still deals with the consequences of this period every time issues relating to bilingualism or regionalism

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3 Seymour Martin Lipset, Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada. (Routledge: New York, 1990), 53
surface. It is no surprise, then, that these dynamic years were central to the development of anti-Americanism in Canada. While this era in Canadian history was a time of spectacular national growth, it was also a time of uncertainty. The new Dominion feared absorption into the leviathan republic to the south, a republic which had long had designs on Canada. It was in response to this threat that Canada’s fear of America developed into distrust, prejudice, and, in many cases, a complete rejection of American ideals, values, and standards. This denunciation of America, this anti-Americanism, originated as a means of ensuring national survival. It was neither the spontaneous creation of counter-revolution, nor the product of self-serving elites, but the slow accumulation of national consciousness. Now, for better or for worse, it has evolved to become a fixture in the country.

In this paper, the evolution of anti-Americanism in Canada from 1812 to 1891 will be explored through examining the historical record, as it is by tracing its development during this period that one is best able to understand the origins of Canadian anti-Americanism as a survival mechanism. From the mobilization against the military invasions of British North America before Canada was even a country, to the cries that free trade would lead to continental integration, anti-Americanism started as the expression of Canada’s desire to remain independent from the US when faced with threats, real or perceived, to its sovereignty. By comparing the varied manifestations of anti-Americanism during Canada’s early years, from the Fathers of Confederation to the Canada Firsters, the common thread becomes apparent. Such sentiment was fuelled by the desire for a strong and independent Canada. It is by studying anti-Americanism as a strategy through which Canada has tried to defend and enrich its nationhood that we will best be able to understand its persistency to this day, and the reasons why it may persist far beyond the foreseeable future.

The Genesis of Anti-Americanism

Defeated and expelled, the Loyalists came trudging out of the forests of New York and into the canon of Canadian myth. While they remain controversial, vilified as often as celebrated, there is little dissent as to their importance. It is from them we claim our long tradition of anti-Americanism. To be sure, the original francophone inhabitants of New France, the Canadiens, had their own share of problems with the

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4 While the fear of absorption into the United States has generally been an Anglophone fear, a measured yet limited Francophone perspective is considered as well within this analysis.
colonials of Massachusetts and New York soon to be known as Americans; as recently as 1776 a Continental army had besieged Quebec City, but it is with the arrival of the Loyalists that the seeds of a deep-set, pervasive, and powerful anti-Americanism were sown.

While the myth would later go that all the immigrants coming to the loyal colonies in the aftermath of 1783 were highly aristocratic, extremely conservative, and fundamentally anti-American, the Loyalists were, in truth, a rag-tag bunch. Among their number were natives, ex-slaves, and veterans. Most were small-scale farmers, hardly the conservative elites of the counter-revolution they are sometimes cut out to be. Their political views were as varied as their backgrounds. There was certainly resentment of America among the Loyalists, but establishing a new life in the wilderness took precedence over political squabbles. Many settlers followed the Loyalists north in the years between 1783 and 1812, drawn by cheap land in Upper Canada, but they were even less inclined to anti-Americanism. This influx of immigrants from the newly established United States was such that, by 1812, it was easier to speak of pro-American rather than anti-American sentiment in Upper Canada. The feeling in the British colonies was believed to be so rebellious that, when war broke out between Britain and America in 1812, all the American armies intended to do was set foot on Canadian soil, and have the populace greet them with open arms. In the words of the former president Thomas Jefferson, it was to be “a mere matter of marching.”

**At Queenston Heights and Lundy’s Lane**

Despite all the histories written since, this was almost the case. At the start of the War of 1812, the population of Upper Canada was largely indifferent. Many were open collaborators and several were hung for treason. When the American General Hull issued a proclamation with the intent of inciting rebellion in the Canadas, he pointed out that “…many of your fathers fought for the freedom and independence we [Americans] now enjoy.” He was right; it was estimated that four-fifths of the

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5 Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists, The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of a Useable Past* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1997), 15
6 Knowles, 18
7 Granatstein, 18
8 Pierre Berton, *The Invasion of Canada*, (McClelland and Stewart Limited: Toronto, 1980), 15
10 Berton, *The Invasion of Canada*, 129
population of Upper Canada were American born.\textsuperscript{11} General Isaac Brock, the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, responded to Hull’s proclamation with one of his own: “Our enemies have indeed said that they can subdue the country by a proclamation, but it is our part to prove to them that they are sadly mistaken,”\textsuperscript{12} but he knew he would have a hard time keeping the population loyal. There was, as of yet, little anti-American sentiment to rally the citizens of Canada to the defence of the country.

America’s war against Canada changed all this. If much of the population had been pro-American before the outbreak of hostilities, American atrocities committed against Canadians during the war left a legacy of bitterness. John Strachan, reflecting on the villages the Americans had put to the torch, prayed the Americans would not make another visit to York as they had earlier in the war, or “every house will be in flames and they shall say of York what was said of Troy, \textit{Firmus}.”\textsuperscript{13} Open conflict drove a wedge between the two countries. After the war, immigration policy to Canada was reversed; Americans were no longer welcome. Instead, British subjects would be given preferred immigration status.\textsuperscript{14} Moreover, the War of 1812 came to be viewed as a direct conflict between republic and monarchy, in the same manner as the Revolution. The failure of the former and the perceived victory of the latter meant that now, whether Loyalist in origin or not, many citizens of Canada came to consciously identify with anti-Americanism. The myth was started that, during the War of 1812, the Republic had been thrust back into the waters of the Niagara by the proud sons of the Loyalists. Canadian militias, descended from committed monarchists, had secured this victory of \textit{peace, order, and good government} over \textit{life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness}.\textsuperscript{15} The tradition of using anti-Americanism as a shield to defend Canada had been born. It would become a long tradition indeed.

\textbf{The Catalyst of Confederation}

More than a few of the men who gathered in Quebec City in January of 1865 to debate the merits of a newly proposed inter-colonial scheme were anti-Americans. The celebrated Quebec politician and one-time \textit{Patriote}, George-Étienne Cartier, was

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Robin Neill, \textit{The End of the National Policy: Canadian Economic Development 1500-1990}, (Departments of Economics and History, Carleton University: Ottawa, 1992), 169
\item \textsuperscript{12} George F.G. Stanley, \textit{The War of 1812: Land Operations}, (McGraw-Hill Company: Toronto, 1983), 53
\item \textsuperscript{13} J.L.H. Henderson, \textit{John Strachan: Documents and Opinions}, (McClelland and Stewart Limited: Toronto, 1969), 49
\item \textsuperscript{14} Stanley, 410
\item \textsuperscript{15} Stanley, 411
\end{itemize}
among them. “Either we must obtain British American Confederation, or be absorbed in an American Confederation,” he beseeched the house. The celebrated orator of Confederation, Darcy McGee, put it even more bluntly. “The acquisition of Canada was the first ambition of the American Confederacy and never ceased to be so.”

As the colonial delegates debated, they knew that the relations between their imperial overlord and the Republic were nearing the breaking point. John A. MacDonald, the most renowned of all the fathers, allowed himself a moment of optimism as he told the house, “I believe that the common sense of the two nations will prevent a war. Still,” he added, “we cannot trust to probabilities.” It was their duty to ensure the survival of a British North America in the face of American aggression.

The events of the previous decades ensured that emotions would be running high. The march to Confederation had begun nearly thirty years ago with the failed uprisings of 1837. The rebellions were largely an attempt to overthrow the British monarchy and replace it with a government more liberal in nature. The failure of the American-inspired rebellions was cast in the same light as the failure of the American army more than twenty years earlier; the Loyalist had once again triumphed over the Republican. By clinging to their colonial institutions, the colonists had once again chosen stability over the imagined perils of American liberty; they had endorsed the survival of a separate political system to the north of America. The political situation in the Canadas had, nonetheless, proven unstable, and it was clear things needed to change. The two colonies of Upper and Lower Canada were united in 1840 and responsible government was granted by 1849. The colony was on its way to becoming a nation.

Crisis came again when, between 1846 and 1849, Great Britain repealed its Corn Laws, a set of protectionist policies which favoured trade between the colonies and the mother country. The result in Canada, where exporters had lost their preferential status, was a severe economic downturn. Faced by potential ruin, some of the merchants of Montreal took a drastic step. A manifesto was circulated among the business elite advocating for the annexation of Canada by the United States to

16 P.B. Waite, Confederation Debates in the Province of Canada: 1865. (McClelland and Stewart Limited: Toronto 1963), 82
17 Waite, 43
18 J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, For Better or For Worse: Canada and the United tates to the 1990s. (Copp Clark Pitman: Toronto, 1991), 15
19 Lipset, 47
20 Neill, 176
gain the economic advantages of such a union. The movement never gained much ground outside of business circles, and the signatories were branded “traitors” by the general public. Annexationists within the government or holding public office were dismissed and within a year the movement was more or less dead.\footnote{David Orchard, \textit{The Fight for Canada: Four Centuries of Resistance to American Expansionism}. (Stoddart Publishing: Toronto, 1993), 41} The calls against selling the nation to the Yanks had won the day. Even with nationalism in its most embryonic form in the Untied Province of Canada, anti-American sentiment was readily mobilized in response to perceived threats from south of the border.

Such threats became even more acute the following decade. The advent of the American Civil War cast a long shadow over the divided British colonies to the north. It did not take long before Great Britain, informally allied with the South, was viewed as an enemy of the Union. The Trent Affair, the seizing of a British vessel by the North on the high seas, brought the two powers near to war, threatening British North America with ruin. Moreover, the St. Albans raid, a bank robbery launched by Confederate agents based in Canada against a Vermont bank, dragged the situation closer to the precipice.\footnote{Granatstein and Hillmer, 2} With the conclusion of the conflict, the victorious Union was left with a massive standing army and a grudge to settle with the British Empire. The colonies to the north could do little but quiver and begin to negotiate greater integration. The fear of extinction was driving together what would one day become the provinces of Canada.

While open war was avoided, American soldiers would nonetheless soon invade Canada in the form of the Fenian Brotherhood. The goal of this militant group of Irish-Americans was Ireland’s independence from England, but their navy being insufficient to cross the Atlantic, they opted instead for an invasion of Canada, hoping the conquest of England’s colonies would bring the British government to its senses. Ominously for Canada, they had the complacent backing of the American government.\footnote{O’Broin, \textit{Fenian Fever: An Anglo-American Dilemma}. (Chatto and Windus: London, 1971), 52} In the early summer of 1866, the Fenians made several attempts at invasion, but all of them were either driven back or aborted.\footnote{Granatstein and Hillmer, 3} Their impact on Canada, however, went far beyond the limited inroads the Brotherhood made. The colonies were petrified. Martial law was imposed, and citizens continued to fear, in the word of Darcy McGee, invasion by “law-less men pretending to remedy the evils of
Ireland.” Fear of America, already wide-spread, gripped all of British North America.

It was in this atmosphere that the delegates converged to discuss Confederation. There were two options before them. And if not Confederation, then, in the words of a Father of Confederation, Etienne-Paschal Taché, “we would be forced into the American Union by violence, and if not by violence, would be placed upon an inclined plane which would carry us there insensibly,” a fate worse than death for any of Her Majesty’s loyal subjects. So the colonies opted for Confederation.

A Country without a Face

The new Dominion was a state without a nationality. French and English, protestant and Catholic, existed as two solitudes in Central Canada. The Maritimes had always related much more to New England than to the Ottawa Valley. Canada was an experiment, and one liable to dissolve at any time. Confederation needed to be strengthened and expanded if it was to survive, and what better tool to lay the foundations of nationhood than one which all peoples of British North America could relate to. Anti-Americanism was to be the principle policy of nation building as the infant Dominion sought to survive and grow in the shadow of America.

The presence of anti-Americanism in Canada during the years around Confederation was as prominent as during any other period in Canada’s history. Yankees were seen as aggressive, forward, and money-driven. In the minds of the new Canadians, all Americans spoke in an inelegant, ungrammatical, style, and their habit of chewing tobacco was reviled. And all the while, fear of an American invasion remained. “Every American Statesman covets Canada. The greed for its acquisition is still on the increase, and God knows where it will end,” wrote John A. MacDonald, expressing a view held by much of the population. In these uncertain years, Canadians were quick to latch onto anything which differentiated the new Dominion from the States.

26 Waite, 19
29 Donald Creighton, John A. MacDonald: The Old Chieftain. (The MacMillan Company of Canada Limited: Toronto, 1955), 55
And what differentiated Canada more clearly from the United States than geography? In the US, the fertile soil offered up its produce to whoever scratched its surface; in Canada, the shield spelled only death for the weak. Or so went the popular conception spread around the new country in the aftermath of Confederation. The Canada First movement was an attempt at uniting all the regions of Canada while defining its people as distinct and superior to those of the States. To the Canada Firsters, Americans were lazy, weak, and essentially effeminate. In contrast, Canadians were the “Northmen of the New World”: strong, stoic, proud, and pure. They were the product of an environment which ensured only humans of a superior nature survived. R. G. Halliburton, one of the principle founders of the Canada First movement, never failed to exalt Canada’s hardy climate: “The cold north wind that rocked the cradle of our race still blows through our forests, and breathes the spirit of liberty into our hearts.” Here was a mythology that all of the new Dominion could share in.

While its boisterous claims may seem the product of a confidence bordering on the absurd, the anti-Americanism of the Canada First movement was the product of deep-set insecurity and fear. In a divided country, not more than a decade old, without common myths, institutions, or even history, there seemed nothing to prevent the union from breaking up, with each part drifting off to become a state of the Republic. It seemed likely Canada’s lack of national consciousness would prove to be its downfall. In the face of this threat, the Canada Firsters turned to environmental determinism, the belief that societies are the product of their environment, to provide a unifying myth, one which presented the “in-group” as a proud and noble race, and the “others” as degenerates. “We are a Northern people,” claimed the prominent Canada Firster, William Foster, “more manly, more real than the weak marrow-bones superstition of an effeminate South.” With its freshly obtained nationhood hanging in the balance, Canada once again turned to anti-Americanism to help ensure its survival.

Into the West

32 Berger, 7
33 Granatstein and Hillmer, 14
34 Berger, 7
The odds in favour of this survival did not look good, however, if the new Dominion was to stay in its current form. Compared to today, the Canada of 1867 was tiny. It consisted of 3.5 million people, mostly drawn out in a skinny line along the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence, prompting Goldwin Smith, the prominent supporter of continental union, to refer to Canada as “an eel-skin of a country.” This was hardly a compliment. The goal of the new Federal Government, headed by MacDonald, was to strengthen Canada by expanding it westwards.

By 1846, the border between the British and American territories in the west of North America had been defined as the 49th parallel. With the two areas thus demarcated, there should have been no grounds for further conflict. “Manifest Destiny,” the idea that the entire western hemisphere was destined to become part of the United States of America, ensured that this was not the case. As America’s once-empty west filled with immigrants, the Republic’s eyes turned northwards. Alaska was purchased in the spring of 1867, and a bill was put before the US Senate late in the same year proposing the acquisition of Rupert’s Land. This could not be suffered by the new Dominion. Canada succeeded in purchasing the territory of the Hudson’s Bay Company, but its claim to the west had yet to be tested.

The Red River uprising was the first hurdle to the Canadian occupation of the west. After the purchase of their lands in November 1869, the Métis of the Red River community, led by Louis Riel, took control of the settlement and opened negotiations with Ottawa regarding Confederation. Not far away, however, loomed the spectre of American annexation. American interests in the region had always been strong, and now the recent unrest was emboldening many to advocate the addition of Manitoba to the republic. As the danger of American expansion became clear, Ottawa knew it had to act, and act quickly. “The United States’ government are resolved to do all they can, short of war, to get possession of the western territory,” wrote Sir John A. MacDonald in desperation, “and we must take immediate and vigorous steps to counteract them.” In the face of a threat from America, the country was roused to action.

This action came first in the form of accelerated talks with Riel. Legislature to allow Manitoba to join Confederation as a province within the North-West Territories

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35 Gwyn 35
36 Granatstein and Hillmer, xiii
37 Orchard 35
38 Orchard, 54
39 Creighton, 55
was put before the house. \(^{40}\) But more was needed. MacDonald, aware of rumours that Fenians were gathering to invade the Red River, declared that “we must be left to the exhibition of force.” \(^{41}\) He was to assert Canada’s claim to the North-West by a demonstration of military power. An unnecessarily large expedition was dispatched west, and Riel fled even before it arrived. \(^{42}\) But the Métis were not the real target; MacDonald wanted to send a clear message to the expansionists lurking south of the border.

The need to pre-empt American expansion was an important consideration in Canada’s occupation of the North-West. Both the rushed acquisition of the Rupert’s Land and the heavy-handed manner in which Ottawa dealt with the Red River Rebellion were driven by a deep distrust, fear, and prejudice of America. This fear of American expansion hastened Manitoba’s entrance into Confederation, the province officially joining Canada in July of 1870. British Columbia followed in 1871, turning what had started only four years previously as a collection of colonies huddling in the shadow of the States into a trans-continental nation. The entire thing, however, could fall apart at any moment. Just as the Canada Firsters were trying to create a cultural identity which could connect all Canadians, a physical link was needed to provide geographical continuity within the massive country. This link would come in the form of a railroad.

**Railway Ties**

The planning and construction of the CPR, perhaps Canada’s most celebrated nation building project, was undertaken to counter American interests in the Canadian west and to ensure the survival of Canada as a trans-continental state. Already in 1870, Sir John A. Macdonald wrote that, if the Canadian gains made during the Red River Rebellion were to be retained, “one of the first things to be done is to show unmistakably our resolve to build the Pacific Railway.” \(^{43}\) To start, the railway was used to tempt B.C., which had both a large American population and vocal annexationist movement, into Confederation. \(^{44}\) But more than this, the railway was meant to be Canada’s primary line in defending the North-West. At the time, hardly a soul moved

\(^{41}\) Creighton, 53
\(^{42}\) Bumsted, 217
\(^{43}\) McDougall, 14
between the Red River and the Rockies, and an uncomfortable number of those who did were American. In 1871, there was little stopping the USA from filling the vacuum. Canada intended to fill it first. To do this, it needed a railway.

Only a distinctly anti-American railway would do. When a group of American railwaymen approached Ottawa with a proposed contract to construct this latest ambition, the offer was dismissed without much consideration. Their proposal of a railway connecting Montreal with the west by traversing American territory south of Lake Superior was unacceptable. Canada needed a fully Canadian route. How was Canada to develop its west if the raw materials of the region were being transported to Minnesota, not Montreal? How was Canada to defend its territory if the transport of its troops depended on American good will? How was Canada to control its national railway if it was in the hands of American businessmen? As George-Étienne Cartier put it, “As long as I live […] never will a damned American company have control of the Pacific.”

In response to all these problems, Canada adopted a very anti-American approach in constructing what was originally an anti-American inspiration. While some of the major contractors building the railway were American, notably Andrew Onderdonk and William Cornelius van Horne, control of the CPR was carefully regulated by the Montreal-based finance group known as the Syndicate, so that control of the company stayed in Canadian hands. The American involvement was, nonetheless, heavily criticised; an American railway superintendent was once referred to as “a low down blasphemous Yankee Fenian.” Regarding the path the CPR was to take, the all-Canadian route was chosen, despite many saying that blasting through the ancient rock and muskeg swamps north of Lake Superior was impossible. The main line through the prairies was built close to the American border to ensure that no American railway companies could build routes into Canada’s prairies to drain produce and settlers away to the south. In Manitoba, it was outright forbidden for any American Company to build a railway south of the CPR main line.

By insisting on an all-Canadian route, by limiting American capital and control in the venture, and by giving the CPR preference over American companies, Canada’s distrust and dislike of America played a major role in the building of the CPR. The

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45 McDougall, 25
46 McDougall, 36
47 Berton, The National Dream, 68
48 Pierre Berton, The Last Spike. (McClelland and Stewart Limited: Toronto, 1972), 96
49 Innis, 174
impetus given to railway building in the west by the threat of American expansion ensured that by 1885, the country was girded by a belt of iron. Anti-Americanism had once again helped to forge the nation.

The Great Wall of Canada

As important as anti-Americanism was in the search for a national identity, the expansion of Confederation, and the building of the CPR, it was to play its most lasting role in the economic development of the fledgling nation. With the repealing of the Corn Laws in 1847, a reciprocity deal had been negotiated between the United States and Canada in 1854. During its 12 years of existence the treaty was controversial on both sides of the border; it was eventually torn up by an angry Union government in the wake of the Civil War tensions. The desire for economic reciprocity amongst the various British colonies in order to replace this US-Canadian treaty was one of the major draws for Confederation. But once it came, British North American union was insufficient to supply Canadians with the degree of prosperity enjoyed by those south of the border. With the economy still lagging far behind that of the States’, many liberals were pushing for a return to reciprocity, or perhaps an extended version of it called “free trade.” There were even some who proposed a commercial union with the United States. Behind all this talk lurked an implicit threat to the Dominion. It was time the shield of anti-Americanism be wielded once more in the defence of Canada.

The shield in question became known as the National Policy. Its aim was the protection of Canadian industries from American imports. At the time of Confederation, Canada’s economy was backward. Even its greatest spokesman of the age was ready to admit this. “We have no manufacturers here,” lamented Sir John A. MacDonald, “Our working people have gone off to the US.” The new National Policy was a set of tariffs designed to discourage the import of manufactured goods from America and encourage the growth of Canadian factories. In a few years, it became synonymous with the survival and growth of Canada. Under the National Policy, Canada not only protected her fledgling manufacturers, but its government

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51 Masters, 131
52 Orchard, 73
53 Gwyn, 31
took a strong stand against America on a number of issues, including the fisheries and the rights of Canadian sealers. In the words of J.L. Granatstein, “This was the politics-and the economics- of survival and competition.”

If the National Policy itself was a sort of implicit anti-Americanism aimed at allowing Canada’s economy to survive and compete, then it soon became the source of a much more violent outbreak. The policy was not universally popular; anyone whose livelihood depended on exports to the United States generally opposed it. When the Liberals, under Laurier, decided to run on a platform of scrapping the National Policy for the federal election of 1891, one of the greatest electoral battles in Canadian history was underway.

It did not take long before the election was branded as a question of Canada’s survival. Reciprocity was presented as treason and the Liberals as traitors bought by Yankee gold. It was claimed that Laurier’s election would mean nothing less than Canada’s annexation. MacDonald and his Conservatives urged the people to keep the Americans at bay and reject reciprocity. “I say there is a deliberate conspiracy,” railed MacDonald while on the election trail, by force, by fraud, or by both, to force Canada into the American Union. This was a powerful appeal to national survival. Not surprisingly, it worked. When the votes were counted, the old leader, the old flag, and the old policy emerged victorious. In the eyes of Canadians, the perceived threat to the country had been defeated, though it would prove a temporary victory. The free trade question would resurface, always accompanied by anti-American sentiment prepared to defend the country, but not always with the same results as in 1891.

**Conclusion: Standing the Test of Time**

After the first few decades of its existence, Canada no longer resembled the country of Confederation. A nascent nationalism, one which held anti-Americanism as a major tenant, was developing inside the country. Canada spanned a continent, thanks to the impetus given to western expansion by the threat of America. The country was linked by the iron road of the CPR to protect these lands from American encroachment, and its economy was growing behind the protective wall of the National Policy, designed specifically to keep the Americans out. In the vibrant years surrounding

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55 Granatstein and Hillmer, 17
56 Orchard, 71
57 Granatstein, 49
58 Creighton, 555
Confederation, the impact of anti-Americanism in ensuring national survival and growth in early Canada was immense.

It was not a reflex quickly outgrown. As the country developed throughout the 20th century, Canada would again and again call upon the tenants of anti-Americanism when the country’s survival appeared to be at stake. The Left-Nationalists of the post-war period were driven on in their attempt to achieve cultural autonomy by the fear of Canada’s cultural absorption into America.59 George Grant wrote Lament for a Nation in 1965 to mourn the death of Canadian nationalism and the inevitable Americanization of Canada. The anti-Americanism which surrounded the FTA and NAFTA debates was motivated by the same fear of economic continentalism which led to Laurier’s defeat in 1891.60 More recent controversies, such as the proposed “New Border Vision,” advocating for more integrated borders and intelligence sharing between the two countries, show that even today anti-Americanism is quickly mobilized when Canada is faced with threats, real or perceived, to the country’s sovereignty.

The persistence of such sentiment in today’s society is an issue of importance. How does the anti-Americanism of MacDonald and the Canada Firsters continue to inform our view of America? Can anti-Americanism continue to be a tool for national survival, or does Canada need to find a means of ensuring unity more suitable to the 21st century? Is Canada’s anti-Americanism simply an out-dated outlook to get rid of? These questions call for answers. The presence of anti-Americanism in present-day Canada is noticeable, and its existence can be explained in part by the anti-Americanism to which we are heir. By knowing our past, we can understand our present. By understanding our present, we might just be able to influence our future. Through examining anti-Americanism as a reflex for national survival, we draw just a little closer to understanding the complexity of Canada.

60 Orchard, 181
Works Cited


