

Revolutions Across Borders: Jacksonian America and the Canadian Rebellion edited by Maxime Dagenais and Julien Mauduit

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Revolutions Across Borders

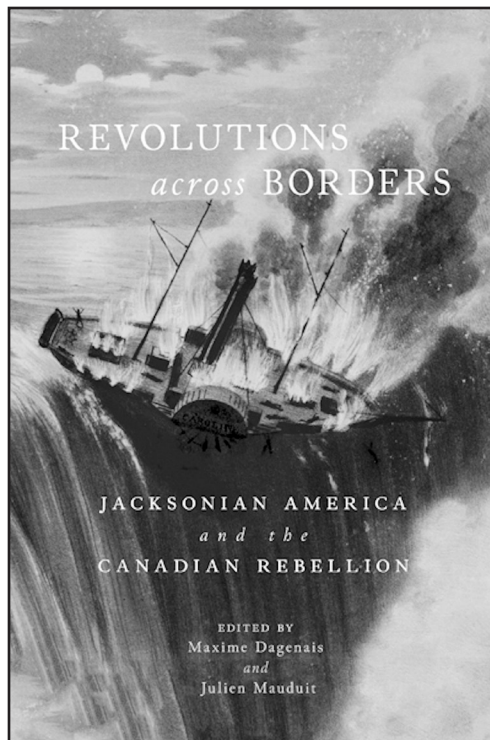
Jacksonian America and the Canadian Rebellion

Edited by Maxime Dagenais
and Julien Mauduit

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's
University Press, 2019. 300 pages. \$34.95
Paper. ISBN 978-0-7735-5665-2
(www.mqup.ca)

For many years, the common view of the 1837-38 Rebellions was that they were of but passing importance, odd blips in the narrative of our evolution towards nationhood. They erupted in Lower and Upper Canada and were soon subdued, leaving a residue of regret and recrimination that, in time, faded. Meanwhile, south of the border, the Canadian rebellions aroused editorial vigour and prompted political unease at the time, but this interest was soon pushed aside by the more pressing passions and perils of pre-Civil War America. With this volume, ten scholars collectively call for a reconsideration, a re-writing of the history. Following the lead of American historian Allan Taylor and others, they insist that, in mid-century America, the Canadian-US border was not a barrier—economically, politically, ideologically, or socially. In those days, there was no wall.

The book opens with a Foreword by Ruth Dunley, an independent scholar who introduces Abram Daniel Smith, an Ohio supporter of the Canadian rebellion, later a Wisconsin maverick Civil War jurist. Dunley has spent two decades tracking Smith—“who he was, and why—or if—he matters.” She tells the story—*sans* source notes or bibliography—of “a forgotten man on both sides of the border” (vii). He perhaps will continue to be forgotten. Co-



editor Maxime Dagenais’ Introduction summarizes the Canadian Rebellion/Jacksonian America connections that are the theme of this whole volume. Note “Rebellion” not “Rebellions,” a nod to the notion, proposed some years back by Alan Greer, that the Lower and Upper Canada outbreaks be treated as a combined, single effort. Nonetheless, throughout this volume, the two are largely treated separately, but not equally—more Upper than Lower Canadian. Also, the essays gathered here focus more on the American (rather than Canadian) “major social, political, and economic changes taking place” (9). This Introduction offers a clear and useful summary of the continuing Rebellion of 1838—the cross-border armed invasions of Canada, manned largely (but not entirely) by sympathetic American volunteers.

The book’s main body has three sec-

tions. The first, "Economic Concerns," consists of two essays. In the first, "Patriots No More: The Political Economy of Anglo-American Rapprochement, 1825-1846," Jason M. Opal offers a helpful reminder that American attitudes toward Great Britain markedly changed in the course of events between the close of the War of 1812 and the outbreak of the Canadian rebellions. In the second, "Bank War in Lower Canada: The Rebellion and the Market Revolution," Robert Richard would have us view the rebellions—in this essay, the Lower Canada Rebellion—less as an ideological nationalistic narrative and more as a consequence of the 1837 capitalistic economic upheavals in the whole of North America.

The second section, "Alternative Republics," contains three essays. In "The Lure of a Canadian Republic: Americans, the Patriot War and Upper Canada as Political, Social and Economic Alternatives, 1837-1840," Thomas Richards Jr. tells of the Rebellion's attraction to Americans. The "Patriot War" (the 1838 drama south of the border) with its multiple battles (all failures) rallied thousands to the Canadian cause. Some "2,000 Americans fought... against the British... another 2,000 bore arms but never had a chance to fight." Meanwhile, "thousands more Americans joined the secret Hunters' Lodges organizations." And "along the northern border... tens of thousands" more were passively supportive of Patriot actions. Yet few American historians have studied the Patriot War and those who have, have paid little attention to "reasons why so many Americans staked their futures on the cause of a Canadian republic" (92-3). Richards thus firmly places the War within the context of American migration and expansion in the mid-nineteenth century. In the essay "Bald Eagle over Canada: Dr. Samuel Underhill

and the Patriot Rebellion of 1837-1838," Andrew Bonthius relates the career of an American journalist who became an ardent supporter of the Canadian cause. A thoughtful idealist, at times an erratic enthusiast, Underhill filled the columns of his publications with news and views of the passions of the period. Bonthius is rightly admired for his 2003 study linking Mackenzie and the American political movement "Locofocoism." Here he continues to press his point: the "Patriot Rebellion" is best understood if viewed "within the larger context of the cross-border radical agrarian, anti-bank Locofoco convulsions of the times" (160). (The *Bald Eagle* was, by the way, but one of a number of 1838 Patriot Hunter newspapers—including one put out by Mackenzie's son James.) The last essay in this section is "'The Road Not Taken': Duncombe on Republican Currency: Joint Stock Democracy, Civic Republicanism, and Free Banking" by Albert Schrauwers, a York University economic anthropologist much admired for his books and articles on Upper Canada. Here he focuses on the life and thought of a single individual: the leader of the rebels in western Upper Canada. Schrauwers concentrates more on Duncombe's ideas than on his actions. A prominent doctor and medical instructor, an active Mason, a legislator promoting reform in prisons, lunatic asylums and educational institutions, Duncombe also ardently advocated economic reform through "Republican Free Banking."

The third section, "Continental Impact," presents two more essays. In "John L. O'Sullivan's 'Canadian Moment': The *Democratic Review* and the Canadian Rebellions," Louis-Georges Harvey considers the *Democratic Review*, a widely-read monthly literary as well political journal financed by the Democratic party of Martin Van Buren. In several articles published

during the first year-and-a-half of his journal, editor O'Sullivan described in detail and cogently commented on the "Canadian Question." He viewed the instigators of the Rebellion as the clear ideological descendants of the founders of the American republic. They were thus deserving active support—in the cause of the liberty of a free people—but not as way to expand the United States. (Yet, this same O'Sullivan coined the American phrase "manifest destiny" a few years later while advocating the annexation of Texas.) In the last essay, "Canadian Interference in American Politics: The 1840 Presidential Election," Julien Mauduit carefully canvasses the contest between Van Buren and Harrison, between Whigs and Democrats. He views "the 1840 election through a Canadian lens"—a perspective rarely considered by historians on either side of the border. It is an intriguing notion: that active Canadians and Canadian sympathizers might effectively influence the outcome of an American

election. The volume is brought to a close with an Afterword: "'The Practicability of Annexing Canada': Or, the Manifest Destiny of Canada, According to the United States" by Amy S. Greenberg. The oft-quoted "manifest destiny" phrase is here used to describe how and why Canada was *not* annexed by the US in mid-nineteenth^h century. It thus adds another reminder of the value of considering the Rebellion in a larger American context.

As a whole, this compendium of cross-border studies in the 1838 (second stage) Canadian Rebellion, is indeed much to be admired. Alas, a comprehensive scholarly work on these incursions and their abiding importance to the whole of North America has yet to be published. Until that day, we can only hope that other scholars—encouraged perhaps by this fine volume—will offer their own related studies. The making of a new mosaic will require many tiles.

Chris Raible, Creemore, Ontario

The Constant Liberal

Pierre Trudeau, Organized Labour, and the Canadian Social Democratic Left

By Christo Aivalis

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018. 278 pages. \$34.95 Paper. ISBN: 9780774837149. \$89.95 Hardcover.
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Canada's fifteenth prime minister has inspired numerous works. It is protocol when writing about Pierre Elliott Trudeau to acknowledge the abundance of the body of work about him, a body that spans over fifty years. Trudeau was the subject of my own honours history graduating essay, and since completing my undergraduate degree a decade ago yet more books about him have been published, including two titled

Trudeaumania. So, it is with great interest that I read *The Constant Liberal*, Christo Aivalis's contribution to a crowded field. As Aivalis notes, "Early works on Trudeau, written while he was still governing, delved into his systems, policies, affiliations, controversies, and public image. Works written from his retirement to his passing gained greater historical focus yet lacked sufficient distance from his times" (ix).