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**Canada's Undecided Future: The Discourse on Unrestricted Reciprocity and Annexation in Quebec,
1887-1893**

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**Canada's Undecided Future:
The Discourse on Unrestricted Reciprocity and Annexation in Quebec,
1887-1893**

By: Aaron W. Boyes

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the MA degree in History

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Abstract

Canada's Undecided Future: The Discourse on Unrestricted Reciprocity and Annexation in Quebec, 1887-1893

Aaron W. Boyes

Professor Michael D. Behiels

August 2010

This study examines the third, and final, moment in which the prospect of annexation to the United States was addressed in the province of Quebec between 1887 and 1893. During the period under examination, the Dominion of Canada experienced a surge in discussion regarding its political future. Four 'options' emerged that garnered considerable public attention: maintenance of the status quo, Canadian independence, Imperial Federation and annexation to the United States.

Unlike other studies where this final movement for annexation is merely discussed as a chapter in a larger study or as a small aspect of a broader idea, the movement for annexation will be explored as the focal point. Issues that are addressed include the origins of the movement, the impact of the 1891 federal election, and the rise and fall of annexationist sentiment. Where possible, the divisions between the majority French-Canadian community and the minority British-Canadian community have been highlighted to provide as much insight into the movement as possible. Primary documents compose the majority of the sources consulted as secondary material on this topic, although excellent, remains rather limited in scope and number.

Whereas this topic has been seen as a continuation of the two previous movements for annexation (1849-1850, 1867-1871), the author argues that this third moment, although carrying similarities, was in fact a distinct period in which the prospect of annexation was discussed. Also, unlike in the period between 1849 and 1850, there did

not appear to be an organized 'movement' for the annexation of Canada in Quebec between 1887 and 1893. The main reasons for this were the lack of communication and cooperation between annexationists and the lack of popularity annexation garnered amongst the majority of Quebec's population. Despite the lack of an organized 'movement' for annexation, this topic remains a fascinating period in Quebec's rich history, as well as exploring Canada's political destiny and Canadian-American relations at the end of the nineteenth century.

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Aaron W. Boyes
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August, 2010

Contents

Abstract		i
Acknowledgements		iii
Table of contents		iv
Introduction		1
Chapter One:	Origins of the Annexation Movement: 1887-1891	25
Chapter Two:	The 1891 Federal Election and the rise of Annexationism	51
Chapter Three:	The Public Response to Annexation, 1891-1892	77
Chapter Four:	The Apex of Annexationism, 1893	102
Conclusion		126
Bibliography		134

Introduction

The idea of political union with the United States was not a new phenomenon at the end of the nineteenth century in Quebec. In fact, roots of this ideology are evident throughout the Lower Canada rebellions of 1837-1838. During the rebellions, the radical faction of the Patriote Movement wanted to end the political connection with the mother country in British North America. Many Patriotes, such as Louis-Joseph Papineau, were republicans at heart who looked south to the United States and its republican ideals and system of government with fondness. Republicanism was very attractive for many young French Canadians who would expound upon this ideology through the Institut canadien and the Rouge party.¹

The first vestiges of annexation as a proper and semi-organized movement – this must be used in the loosest sense – occurred in 1849 in Montreal. The origins date back to 1846 when the United Kingdom revoked its preferential trade policy with its overseas colonies, placing the colonies on the same trading terms as every other nation.² Fear quickly set in amongst the Lower Canadian business community that this repeal of preferential trade would lead to an economic depression and financial ruin. Nowhere was the fear more prominent than on the island of Montreal, British North America's economic centre of trade and commerce. The inhabitants of Montreal and the surrounding region looked immediately for alternative options to save their businesses. By 1849, one solution came to the forefront and attracted considerable attention: annexation to the United States.

¹For a more detailed history of the origins of the *Rouges* movement in Quebec during the nineteenth century, see Jean-Paul Bernard's *Les Rouges: Libéralisme, Nationalisme, et Anticléricalisme au milieu du XIXe siècle* (Montréal: Les presses de l'Université du Québec, 1971).

²Donald F. Warner, *The Idea of Continental Union: The Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960) 4.

The Annexation Movement of 1849-1850 is a well documented event of history in Quebec as demonstrated by the historiography covering the topic.³ This is a period that does not need to be mentioned here at length. However, a brief account of the main points of the movement is required to provide background information to better understand what occurred during the re-emergence of annexationism between 1887 and 1893. An important point is that annexation was accepted as a legitimate option by many English- and French-speaking Canadians, however, for different reasons.⁴ The British-Canadian community, unhappy with its minority status, feared that its influence would disappear within the larger French-Canadian community. In order to avoid assimilation and economic ruin, some British Canadians looked to the United States as their saviour. A small portion of republican-minded French Canadians also desired annexation to ensure their cultural survival in North America. Whereas the British Canadian annexationists believed that annexation would allow an expanded American community to assimilate the French-Canadian minority community, some French Canadians believed that within the American Republic, where liberty is a fundamental value, they would be free to promote their culture without assimilation pressures from the American English-speaking majority. In October 1849, after months of simmering beneath the surface, an Annexation Association was created by a group of British and French Canadian citizens of Montreal. Their guiding document, *The Annexation Manifesto*, was published in numerous papers in Montreal and elsewhere. The Manifesto outlined the grievances that the people of the

³C.D. Allin and George M. Jones, *Preferential Trade and Reciprocity* (Toronto: The Musson Book Co., Limited, 1912), Paul-André Dubé, *Crise annexionniste à Québec, 1848-1850* (MA Thesis, Université Laval, 1978), Lester B. Shippee, *Canadian-American Relations, 1849-1874* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), Jean-Paul Bernard's, *Les Rouges*

⁴Between 1841 and 1867, the province of Quebec was part of the United Province of Canada. For the purpose of this paper, any reference to Quebec is to simplify the terminology.

city had with the government of the Canadas. The Manifesto's conclusion declared that it was the desire of the Annexation Association to seek a peaceful separation upon equitable terms from the United Kingdom and union with the United States.⁵ The document was signed mainly by Conservative, British-Canadian businessmen, but a sizeable number of French Canadians also made their mark. Some of those who signed the *Manifesto* included future Canadian Prime Minister J.J. Abbott, Member of Parliament from Sherbrooke A.T. Galt, and numerous, prominent businessmen including John Redpath and members of the Molson family. French Canadian signatories included Louis-Joseph Papineau and Antoine-Aimé Dorion. Their signatures on that infamous document would come back to haunt many of them later in life.

The movement of 1849-1850, however, disappeared from the political scene just as quickly as it appeared. By 1850 the economy of the colony of the Canadas had stabilized and a depression was avoided.⁶ The majority of the signatories of the *Annexation Manifesto* were fearful of their immediate economic ruin and they did not have broader, long-term political implications in mind. Some who signed the *Manifesto* genuinely wanted to see the colony of the Canadas annexed to the United States, but they were a very small minority. In Hugh Keenleyside's words, "the Annexation Movement of 1849 was merely one of the growing pains of Canadian evolution. It was based on no fundamental hostility to the British connection, or on any compelling and persistent desire for union with the United States."⁷ Once the economy righted itself, talk of

⁵*Annexation Manifesto*, by the Montreal Annexation Association. Cited in the *Montreal Gazette*, 11 October, 1849.

⁶The fears associated with the repeal of Britain's preferential trade did not manifest and, in fact, Canada's economy did not suffer a recession.

⁷Hugh Keenleyside, *Canada and the United States: Some Aspects of the History of the Republic and the Dominion*. (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971) 132.

annexation receded from public discourse, but the idea of continental union lay dormant waiting for something to bring it back to the forefront. Although the movement can be seen as a mere passing phenomenon, it shows that the desire for annexation was not limited to a select few and that this political movement was able to garner momentary advocates and followers. The effectiveness – or ineffectiveness – makes it appear as though annexation was not a serious consideration. This would be a false assertion. As Damien-Claude Bélanger explains, “Annexation, to be sure, was virtually a legitimate political option in nineteenth century Canada.”⁸ This political movement emerged again during key periods in Quebec’s history. In the immediate years following the collapse of the annexation movement of 1849-1850, a new arrangement was established that seemed to set a hopeful precedent in Canadian-American relations.

The year 1854 marked an important time for both the British North American colonies and the United States so far as diplomatic relations were concerned. With preferential trade with England a thing of the past, Canadian producers and businessmen required a new means to ensure their livelihood – they found it in reciprocity with the American Republic. After months of intense negotiations and considerable compromise on the part of both the United Kingdom and the United States, a reciprocity treaty was signed. The treaty was a relief for both Canadian and American producers and businessmen since it resolved numerous longstanding issues, such as the fisheries question, that established the boundaries and regulations for Canadian and American fishermen. More importantly, the treaty also established a list of products that would cross the border free of tariffs. As explained by Lester B. Shippee, “in general, the

⁸Damien-Claude Bélanger, *Pride and Prejudice: Canadian Intellectuals Confront the United States, 1891-1945*. (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 2006) 238.

articles on the free list were natural products of the mine, land, and sea.”⁹ Manufactured goods were not included in this treaty, which would become important in later years particularly during the 1891 Canadian federal election. The treaty had a predetermined life-span of ten years with the possibility of extension should both parties agree. Abrogation of the treaty required twelve months notification.¹⁰ For the next decade, the economy of the Canadas experienced a period of prosperity, a period during which the prospect of annexation was not in the public mind. This, however, was a passing phenomenon.

As early as 1857, American manufacturers and politicians became distraught with the restrictions they faced with the reciprocity treaty.¹¹ Primarily, the American manufacturers and politicians believed that Canadians had acted in bad faith with regards to the terms of the reciprocity treaty. In particular, Americans believed that Canadians were using the revenues from the treaty to build railroads, “not to meet the domestic needs of Canada, but to siphon off the trade of the American west.”¹² Many American statesmen believed that Canada was the sole benefactor and that the United States had not received the same advantages, especially within the manufacturing sector. This sentiment was particularly heightened during the American Civil War (1861-1865). The boom in the economy brought about by the civil war was felt in both Canada and the United States. Yet while American soldiers were dying to preserve the Union, Canadian producers and business elites grew rich. In 1865, the United States government gave the

⁹Lester B. Shippee, *Canadian-American Relations, 1849-1874* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939) 85. For a full and detailed account of the establishment of the 1854 Reciprocity Treaty, see chapters II-V.

¹⁰Shippee, 85.

¹¹Gordon T. Stewart, *The American Response to Canada since 1776* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1992) 64.

¹²Stewart, 64-5.

twelve month abrogation notice that would end the reciprocity treaty. Canadian businessmen and politicians, for their part, scrambled to convince American political leaders that the treaty could, and should, be renewed to the advantage of both nations. The desperate attempts by British and British-Canadian statesmen failed and in 1866 the reciprocity treaty was officially terminated.¹³ The termination of the reciprocity treaty had a huge impact on the politics in British North America, the greatest being the push for Confederation. As a united, cohesive nation, the colonies would have a single economy, one which would help protect their respective interests better than as individual colonies facing a much larger and more powerful American economy.

During the years between 1864 and 1867, as the British North American colonies effectively decided their political, economic, and constitutional future, the prospect of annexation to the United States was once again discussed. This movement had a significantly smaller following in Quebec than in 1849-1850. Yet for the Rouges and British-Canadian manufacturers who advocated annexation it appeared to be as much of a viable solution to their political and economic problems as Confederation. As with the 1849-1850 annexation movement, this period is well documented and analyzed by historians. The main proponents of political union with the United States were once again Rouges politicians and fearful British-Canadian businessmen. Confederation did not seem to address the respective political and economic concerns of either group. For divergent reasons annexation to the United States seemed to be the only answer. But this option was highly criticized by those who advocated and supported a confederation of some or all of the British North American colonies. In 1867, Henry Lacroix, in his pro-Confederation document, *The Present and Future of Canada*, gave much praise to the

¹³For a detailed analysis of this period, see Shippee chapter VIII.

United States, but argued that Canada should have its own national identity. According to Lacroix, “[annexation] makes its appearance from time to time, and serves as the polar star to all shades of opinion whenever anything goes wrong. ... This idea shone more brightly in times of trouble, becoming pale and almost vanishing at other times.”¹⁴ It is clear, here, that annexation merely emerged when times were bad and was not on the minds of people in times of prosperity. As far as it was discussed in comparison to Confederation, Lacroix commented that, “[t]he idea of annexation has never had a definite shape; it has never taken a sufficiently tangible form to assume a place among the vital questions which have by turns seriously occupied public attention.”¹⁵ Lacroix’s pamphlet was originally written and published in French, but as the translator noted, it caused such a stir in its native language that it had to be translated into English. Clearly, the annexationist option was being discussed and debated throughout the Confederation debates, however mostly as a bugbear.

As John A. Macdonald, the leading supporter of Confederation in Canada West, was pushing for the union of the British North American colonies, a young Wilfrid Laurier of Canada East, though not an annexationist, opposed the proposed union because he deemed it too centralizing. These two men would become political rivals over Canada’s political and economic options in the North American continent, one increasingly dominated by a powerful industrializing United States of America. Gustave Lanctot describes well the situation facing the French-Canadian community during the confederation period:

¹⁴Little is known about the life of Henry Lacroix save for the numerous articles he wrote during his lifetime. Further academic research is required into his life.

¹⁵Henry Lacroix, *The Present and Future of Canada* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1867) 11.

A quoi la majorité répondait que la constitution américaine ne reconnaissait ni le français ni les écoles catholiques, témoins la Louisiane défrancisée. De plus, ajoutait-elle, le Québec au lieu de former une province sur sept ne serait que le cinquantième Etat de l'Union, élisant non plus un tiers, mais un vingtième seulement de la députation. Conclusion: l'annexion ne saurait être l'aboutissement de l'épopée canadienne.¹⁶

As Lanctot succinctly described, for a majority of French Canadians Confederation provided more guarantees for the survival and *épanouissement* of the French-Canadian community than annexation to the United States.

Despite the call for annexation, the Confederation plan moved ahead and culminated in the *British North America Act, 1867*, a British statute that sanctioned the creation of Canada out of the merger of three British North American colonies, to be joined by several other colonies in the ensuing years. Unlike the movement of 1849-1850, annexation to the United States was not possible as it did not have the support of the majority of British Canadians or French Canadians in the colony of Canada. Although the movement was doomed to fail like its predecessor, it shows that annexationist sentiments remained. During this movement, both politics and economics played a crucial role, showing that the arguments for continental union had been modified in hopes of success. These arguments continued to evolve throughout the 1870s and 1880s, laying the groundwork for the final period of annexationism in the late nineteenth century.

Although three British North American colonies federated in 1867, as early as 1871 calls for annexation emerged once again. Médéric Lanctot, editor of the Montreal newspaper *L'Union nationale*, charged that Lower Canada [*sic*] should reject the proposed Treaty of Washington (1871), demand independence from Britain, and ask for union with the United States. Lanctot declared:

¹⁶Gustave Lanctot, ed., *Les Canadiens-Français et leurs voisins du sud* (Montréal: Éditions Bernard Valiquette, 1941) 273.

A la veille d'un si grand changement je n'hésite pas à dire qu'avant d'être partisan de l'annexion je suis partisan du progrès, de la liberté politique et de la libre conscience. C'est à ce titre que je me permettrai d'ajouter que l'annexion ne vaudra quelque chose qu'autant que le peuple de notre pays adoptera les idées américaines.¹⁷

The ideas of American liberty and free conscience, such as described by Lanctot, are two concepts that arise frequently in literature and speeches from French Canadian annexationists. These advocates, typically Rouges like Lanctot, desired a clear division of Church and State, as in the American Republic. Lanctot was not the only French-Canadian intellectual who advocated the annexation of Canada in 1871. On 15 March of that year, Hector Fabre gave a conference entitled “Confédération, Indépendance, Annexion”. The conference was sponsored by the Institut canadien – closely linked to the Rouges party of Quebec – and condemned by the Catholic Church for its blatant anti-clericalism and republicanism. During his conference, Fabre condemned Confederation as a British ploy to avoid war with the United States. He argued that Canadian independence was the next logical step and that annexation would follow naturally once the economic invasion by the United States had concluded. Fabre believed that:

les deux tiers de la population française de la Province [de Québec] sont annexionnistes. ...Nous ne différons en réalité que sur la date de l'annexion. Les uns fixent à bientôt, les autres la placent à une époque plus éloignée. Mais, il n'y a pas un homme sensé qui ne pense que ce soit là le sort définitif du pays.¹⁸

Although such arguments against Confederation were present, the vast majority of the people of Quebec, British and French Canadian, appear to have preferred the new constitutional arrangement over the far great unknown of joining the United States.

¹⁷Médéric Lanctot, *Programme indépendant* (1871?) 7-8.

¹⁸Hector Fabre, *Confédération, Indépendance, Annexion: Conférence faite à l'Institut canadien de Québec* (Québec: Imprimé au bureau de l'Évenement, 1871) 31.

The new Dominion of Canada emerged under the guise of great promise and prosperity. Yet, as early as 1869 this outlook turned bleak. The 1870s were marked by a series of ongoing economic depressions, beginning in 1873 when the international economy entered into a recession that lasted effectively until the mid 1890s.¹⁹ Between 1870 and 1879, Quebec entered into what Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby titled “la longue crise.”²⁰ Once again Canadian statesmen looked south to avoid economic devastation. Numerous attempts were made to re-establish a reciprocity treaty along the lines of the 1854 treaty. However, the Americans were simply not interested. Both the Conservative and Liberal parties sought to negotiate a new reciprocity treaty during the 1870s, although neither party succeeded. Conservative leader John A. Macdonald returned to Office as Prime Minister in 1878 – a position he would hold until his death in 1891. The “Old Chieftain”, as he came to be called, developed arguably his most memorable political policy: the National Policy of 1878-79. Under this watershed National Policy, a high tariff was established on all products entering from the United States and elsewhere in hopes of fuelling the troubled Canadian economy by creating the conditions for an expansive industrial sector that would employ a great many Canadians. The National Policy’s other two dimensions involved the completion of the transcontinental railroad to the West Coast and the settling of the Canadian West with hundreds of thousands of immigrants. Both developments would foster the expansion of the industrial economies of Canada’s two central provinces, Ontario and Quebec. When these two later aspects of

¹⁹Charles C. Tansill, *Canadian-American Relations, 1875-1911* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1943) 378-9.

²⁰Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby, *Histoire Économique du Québec, 1851-1896* (Montréal: Éditions Fides, 1971) 88.

Macdonald's National Policy failed to materialize by the late 1890s, political discussions would soon re-emerge concerning reciprocity and annexation with the United States.

Quebec during the 1870s and 1880s faced numerous economic, political, and social challenges. As mentioned previously, Quebec's economy was caught in a prolonged recession which helped to heighten the political and social strain. Many French Canadians believed that Confederation had failed to protect the inherent rights and privileges promised to them under the constitution. The French-Canadian community of Quebec watched with great interest as rebellions broke out in the Red River territory in 1870 and again in 1885 in the North West. The 'racial' prejudice that the Métis experienced hit home for many French Canadians who identified with this community. In 1885, a political bomb exploded as Louis Riel, the famed Métis leader, was executed for his leadership of the Northwest Rebellion of that year. Anglophone/Francophone relations were at an all time low, tension was felt throughout Quebec, and Confederation seemed to have failed. On their own, the economic, political and social tensions likely would have dissipated slowly with time. But within the highly charged and emotional decade of the 1880s, all three dynamics intermixed to create a crisis in Quebec, and indeed throughout Canada. The growing crisis culminated in 1887 with the re-emergence of cries for reciprocity and political union with the United States.

Between 1837 and 1887, Quebec's history was marked with strife and difficulty. Two annexation movements emerged and annexation would be debated again at the end of the century. It is difficult to declare with certainty when a movement based upon a particular political ideology begins and ends. This is due to the fact that political ideas surface into public discourse seemingly without warning and often disappear just as

quickly. As is evident during the period of 1837 to the early 1880s, annexation as a political solution rose and declined several times for different reasons. For the final period, the year 1887 is a good place to begin as the movement for political union had all the ingredients required for Quebecers to debate their future: economic depression, political discord, and social strife. There was not one reason why annexationism returned to the public mind; rather, it was the culmination of numerous factors at the local, provincial, and federal levels. The desire for annexation in Quebec was, thus, also closely tied to the wider movement in the rest of Canada, particularly in Ontario, where numerous proponents of political union made their voices heard.

The study of annexationism in Quebec is multi-faceted due to the complex intermingling of economic, social, and political factors. Importantly, political ideas and ideologies are reflections of economic forces and competing economic interests. Although economics – particularly the political economy of the era – and social aspects are crucial, this study will focus primarily on the political and intellectual aspects of annexationism in Quebec between 1887 and 1893. An important reason for this is that following the 1891 federal election, the economic arguments, particularly the policy of unrestricted reciprocity, was defeated by the Canadian voters. It was John A. Macdonald's shrewd political thinking that effectively shifted the focus of the election from economic considerations to political loyalty. By focusing on the politics and ideologies as influenced by the competing economic considerations, an original viewpoint on annexationism in Quebec will emerge that compliments the existing historical research surrounding this fascinating topic in Quebec and Canadian history.

Also, the debate surrounding the political idea of annexation was deeply rooted in the economic interests of the people. At the end of the nineteenth century in Quebec, freer trade with the United States was greatly desired, particularly amongst the rural French-Canadian population. These people were primarily agriculturalists and natural resource producers who desired greater access to the American market. They did not, however, desire political union, as is evident from the public discourse.

Primarily, this study shows that there was not an annexation movement in Quebec between 1887 and 1893. Unlike previous works that argue a movement was alive, the author shows that annexation to the United States was rejected by a majority of Quebecers – both French and British Canadian – and those who did advocate for annexation did not constitute a cohesive group. Rather, these annexationists had little in common and did not unite their efforts to bring about political union.

At present, the historiography surrounding annexationism in Quebec between 1887 and 1893 is rather limited. Although numerous works – particularly studies on Canadian-American relations of the period and general histories of Canada – discuss this final moment, the majority do not provide explanations for why a movement started or why it ended. These studies also do not seem to agree when the movement itself took place. However, some historians have addressed the annexation movement in a more thorough manner; but even these do not address the movement as experienced in the province of Quebec. Also, studies that have examined annexationism have generally overlooked the Catholic French-Canadian community of Quebec and the primary source material associated with it. This study builds upon the existing material by addressing the

divergent French-Canadian perspectives on annexation and uses many previously unused sources. Overall, this topic remains relatively open for new academic research.

By studying the materials that are available, a debate emerges as to what is the primary factor in causing the rise of annexationism between 1887 and 1893. Indeed, not one factor could be the sole basis for the start of this new movement for political union. Numerous factors merged together to provide the discord necessary for the people of Quebec to question their future. But was it politics, economics, or social issues which brought annexationism to the fore? Donald F. Warner argued that the basis of the movement was essentially economic. Warner noted in his study, *The Idea of Continental Union: The Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States*, that “by 1884, Canada was again slowly sinking into an economic trough, while the United States climbed the road to recovery. This had the usual effect of making the boundary appear to some Canadians to be the great barrier to their prosperity,” and thus “economic distress, as always, was the primary cause for the return of annexationism in the mid 1880s, but other factors contributed.”²¹

It is important to note here that Warner’s study remains the most comprehensive analysis of the three annexation movements during the nineteenth century in Canada and the United States. Warner commented on this fact as part of the preface, stating that “earlier books, dealing primarily with other subjects, have scattered and usually incidental references [to annexationism]. This is the only attempt to focus primarily upon the movement and to carry the story of its career through four and a half decades.”²² However, it must also be noted that Warner’s study was published in 1960 when many

²¹Warner, 175.

²²Warner, v.

studies on Canada were published, focussed on nation-building, such as Donald Creighton's *Canada's First Century* and *Dominion of the North*, or A.R.M. Lower's *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada*. Whereas Creighton and Lower addressed annexation indirectly, mostly through the analysis of the 1891 Federal Election and subsequent debates surrounding reciprocity and commercial union, Warner addressed the annexation movements directly. Warner also touched on one of the most difficult aspects of annexationism that any historian will encounter while studying the topic: personal motivation. It is quite complicated to determine who was and who was not an annexationist. Personal motives can be masked by economic, social, cultural, religious and political factors. Thus, in nineteenth century Canada, as Warner succinctly states, "it was a bold Canadian who proclaimed this sentiment [being in favour of annexation], one willing to face social ostracism and economic boycott."²³

Warner is not alone with the belief that economics played the primary role in the final annexation movement. As part of the Carnegie Endowment's Relations of Canada and the United States series,²⁴ Charles C. Tansill's contribution, *Canadian-American Relations, 1875-1911*, examined the issues facing Canada and the United States from an almost purely economic viewpoint. As Tansill wrote regarding the tough times at the end of the century: "[f]rom the beginning of this period until the last years of the nineteenth century, Canada was seriously handicapped by the Great Depression that checked its industrial development." Due to this factor, "political leaders in Canada realized that intimate economic ties with the United States might lead to eventual annexation, but

²³Warner, vi.

²⁴"From 1936 to 1945, the New York-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Division of Economics and History sponsored a series of twenty-five studies on Canadian-American Relations." Cited in Bélanger, 419.

apparently there was no alternative.”²⁵ Thus, the rise of political discontent, according to Tansill, was based on the hardships faced by Canadians due to the economic depression.

In their thorough study, *Histoire économique du Québec, 1851-1896*, Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby provide an excellent examination of the economic difficulties experienced in Quebec, one which lends credence to the argument that the economic depression was the main factor in the movement for annexation. They outlined how Quebec experienced cycles of economic growth and decline throughout the 1870s and 1880s.²⁶ Most importantly for this topic, Hamelin and Roby outlined the impact that the United States’ economy had on Quebec and offered an ‘end date’ to the annexation movement, although not directly, when they wrote: “[l]a prospérité de l’économie américaine, qui dure jusqu’en 1893, a des effets bénéfiques sur l’économie canadienne en générale, et sur l’économie québécoise en particulier.”²⁷ So long as the American economy was outperforming that of Canada’s, the people of Quebec were impacted directly and they looked to their southern neighbours for help. However, once the U.S. economy began to lag, the people of Quebec turned their attention back to their provincial and national governments, respectively.

Although it is evident that economics played an influential part in the annexation movement of 1887 to 1893, some scholars argue that it was politics that were the primary factors. Robert Craig Brown is one historian who argued that the final annexation movement was settled within the divided political landscape that plagued Quebec throughout the 1880s and 1890s. As Brown argued in his study *Canada’s National Policy, 1883-1900: A study in Canadian-American Relations*, “...in Quebec, serious

²⁵Tansill, xiii.

²⁶Hamelin and Roby, 91-95.

²⁷Hamelin and Roby, 95.

financial difficulties existed but were overshadowed by a renewal of Anglo-French strife over the execution of Louis Riel and the passage of the Jesuits' Estates Act."²⁸ Brown's study is also one of the few works published that addresses the annexation movement between 1887 and 1893 in great detail, although indirectly. The importance that the movement played during the 1891 federal election²⁹ is examined thoroughly. Brown also addressed the fundamental role of English-French tensions in Quebec during this period as being a prime political factor for the rise of annexationism.

Another scholar who argued that the annexation movement was essentially political and ideological is Damien-Claude Bélanger. In his Ph.D. thesis entitled *Pride and Prejudice: Canadian Intellectuals Confront the United States, 1891-1945*, Bélanger studied the movement from its ideological standing. He argued accurately that annexation was "[c]ontinentalism's most radical expression. Articulated by liberal intellectuals who had lost all faith in Confederation, it was an idea born of nineteenth-century despair and depression – its fortunes were invariably tied to some form of economic or political malaise."³⁰ The movement, then, was a mixture of political and economic tensions that spawned the rise of annexationism in late-nineteenth century Quebec. Bélanger focussed his study on leading Canadian intellectuals of the time by examining their political ideologies and reactions to important issues of the times, such as annexation. He argued that, "[i]ndeed, some Victorian intellectuals believed that the solution to Canada's problems lay in continental union. They were undoubtedly marginal figures, but their

²⁸Robert Craig Brown, *Canada's National Policy, 1883-1900: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) 126.

²⁹See Brown, chapters V and VI for a detailed analysis of the 1891 federal election and the impact that annexationist sentiments played therein.

³⁰Bélanger, 51.

ideas were well received in certain circles.”³¹ One’s political alliance played an important role during this final movement. Conservatives tended to support the British connection and Macdonald’s National Policy, which was a drastic change from forty years earlier when the Tory supporters cried out for annexation. In the Liberal camp, the radicals who adhered to the Rouges philosophy were the strongest advocates of political union; they were, however, a small minority. Moderate Liberals, by consequence, were labelled annexationists despite their devotion to the Dominion.

There is another factor that played a large role during the annexation movement in Quebec: nationalism. French-Canadian nationalism – which has been examined in depth elsewhere and is outside the scope of this paper – had a rather large impact on the movement.³² The matter of survival for French Canadians was paramount, particularly when issues such as the Riel Rebellions and the Manitoba Schools Act are considered. French Canadians believed, with some justification, that the constitution of Canada protected their minority rights: religious, cultural, and language rights. Facing the elimination of Catholic rights across Canada, French-Canadian nationalists sought to protect their constitutional guarantees and cultural existence. From this, the debate surrounding the Cultural and Provincial Compact of Confederation emerged. Although the number of French-Canadian annexationists was relatively small, nevertheless some did advocate annexation along nationalist lines. Patrice Dutil wrote a biography on a prominent French Canadian intellectual of the time, Godfroy Langlois, who advocated

³¹Bélanger, 238

³²See A I Silver, *The French Canadian Idea of Confederation, 1864-1900* (Toronto University of Toronto Press, 1982), Ramsay Cook, *Provincial Autonomy, Minority Rights and the Compact Theory* (Ottawa Queen’s Printer, 1969), W L Morton, “Confederation, 1870-1896 the End of the Macdonaldian Constitution and the Return to Duality,” *Readings in Canadian History Post Confederation*, 2nd ed , R Douglas Francis and Donald B Smith, eds , (Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, Limited, 1986)

annexation to the United States based on the failures of Confederation. Langlois was merely one in a group of disgruntled French-Canadian intellectuals who saw their future within the American Republic.³³ Gustave Lanctot edited a collection of essays for the Carnegie Endowment series, titled *Les Canadiens-Français et leur voisins du sud*. Within this volume, the authors explore Canadian-American relations from the French-Canadian perspective. While addressing the issue of annexation, Lanctot offered an explanation as to why French Canadians were unlikely followers of the movement for political union:

Ainsi, de 1867 à 1937, l'annexion aux États-Unis n'a rencontré dans le Québec que de rares partisans. En fait, elle ne fut jamais un véritable facteur dans sa politique. Suggestion d'origine anglo-canadienne datant de 1849, elle est mise de l'avant dans le Québec par les anciens rebelles de 1837, surtout par antipathie britannique. Elle reste, dès lors, un argument idéologique dans les mains d'une faction minoritaire et radicale, n'ayant aucune perspective d'assumer un jour une responsabilité dans la gouvernement. Elle lui sert surtout à critiquer le ministère en opposant la situation canadienne à la démocratie et à la prospérité américaine. La majorité québécoise ne l'a jamais envisagé comme une éventualité possible, mais l'a toujours repoussé instinctivement et consciemment, parce qu'elle répugne à son premier leitmotiv qui est la survivance canadienne-français.³⁴

Clearly for Lanctot, the annexation movement was based along nationalistic lines, which is why it did not receive much support in Quebec.

British-Canadian nationalism was another important reason for the rejection of political union with the United States. These nationalists believed strongly in the ties Canada held with the British Empire. For them, being British was an essential part of their identity that continued to distinguish them from the Americans. Combined, British- and French-Canadian nationalism aligned against any possible merger of Canada and the United States. Donald Warner also addressed the nationalistic aspect of the annexation movement when he argued that “annexationism has stimulated the growth of Canadian

³³Patrice Dutil, *The Devil's Advocate: Godfrey Langlois and the Politics of Liberal Progressivism in Laurier's Quebec* (Montreal-Toronto: Robert Davies Publishing, 1994).

³⁴Gustave Lanctot, 227.

nationalism...”³⁵ However, Warner did not say if this was British-Canadian, French-Canadian or overall Canadian nationalism. His statement, though, was not followed by any sort of explanation, which is a shortfall as it would have been useful to see what sort of Canadian nationalism gained from the failure of the annexation movement.

An important aspect to the annexation movement in Quebec was the existing annexationist sentiments south of the border. In general, the American people were divided on whether or not Canada should be annexed to become a new state – or many states – in the union. During the late nineteenth century there were numerous influential American statesmen who were expansionists and believed wholly in Manifest Destiny. Yet, just as there were expansionists, protectionists also dotted the American political landscape. These men were content to close the border and build the existing economy. There are numerous works that address the American perspective on the annexation movement at the end of the century and help to contrast the movement in Quebec. Primarily, these sources show that the United States was not willing to enter into closer commercial relations with Canada – a new reciprocity treaty for example. Although there was talk within Congress and motions were made for the annexation of Canada, these were few and far between and did not receive much discussion on the House floor. Three works in particular have been most helpful in gauging American opinion towards Canada and annexation: James M. Callahan’s *American Foreign Policy in Canadian Relations*, especially chapter seventeen regarding the years under President Benjamin Harrison (1889-1893);³⁶ Charles S. Campbell’s *The Transformation of American Foreign Relations, 1865-1900*, which provided a fascinating insight into the American world view

³⁵Warner, vii.

³⁶James M. Callahan, *American Foreign Policy in Canadian Relations* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1967).

of the second half of the nineteenth century,³⁷ and Gordon T. Stewart's *The American Response to Canada since 1776*.³⁸

Whether the movement was motivated by economic, political, or social factors, what all these sources seem to agree upon is that a desire for annexation did indeed exist in Quebec and Canada at the end of the nineteenth century. The severity or importance of this movement is where the historiography debate diverges. For scholars such as Warner, Brown, Lanctot and Bélanger, an annexation movement was alive in Quebec between 1887 and 1893. They address this fact by exploring not just the debate surrounding both reciprocity and commercial union, as more general history texts do, but by digging deep into the sources and finding people who advocated for the movement. Intellectuals such as Goldwin Smith – although not a popular figure in Quebec due to his ‘racial’ prejudice –, Jean-Baptiste Rouilliar, Louis-Honoré Fréchette, and Godfroy Langlois openly discussed the prospect of annexation which made news across the province of Quebec.

The newspapers consulted herein do not compose an exhaustive list; yet they provide excellent insights into how people reacted to the prospect of annexation across the province of Quebec. Where possible, the author has provided the newspaper's political affiliation and geographic location. This was done because newspapers in the nineteenth century often received funding from political parties and thus they carried a very real and apparent bias. Also, by noting a paper's geographic location readers will be able to compare any specific regional interests, most importantly the urban-rural divide.

³⁷Charles S. Campbell, *The Transformation of American Foreign Relations, 1865-1900* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976).

³⁸Gordon Stewart, *The American Response to Canada since 1776* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992).

A note on terminology is also required. This study explores annexationism in the province of Quebec. Annexation is a political ideology in which the smaller state, in this case Canada, would be politically incorporated into the larger, the United States. Political union, which was also used as terminology of the era, means essentially the same as annexation; however, it connotes that a political document, such as a treaty, would be established between the two nations: a union based on respect and equality. Also, during the nineteenth century, a movement for 'continental union' emerged. This had the same implications as annexation, but it did not carry the same negative connotations. Many annexationists preferred to be labelled as 'continentalists' to avoid the negative perceptions.

Throughout the 1891 federal election, the terms 'unrestricted reciprocity' and 'commercial union' were used intermittently, particularly by the Conservative party. Unrestricted reciprocity is the free trade on all goods, manufactured and natural, between Canada and the United States. Limited reciprocity, however, is free trade, but on an agreed, limited range of products. Commercial union would be the establishment of a common tariff – a customs union – on all goods entering Canada and the United States. Between the two nations goods would be traded freely, but anything entering either nation from outside those borders would be subject to a pre-determined tariff. In the nineteenth century it was believed, with good reasoning, that the tariff would be established by the government of the United States at Washington. This was due to the fact that the American economy was much larger and stronger than the Canadian counterpart. For some scholars, unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union were synonyms to describe the same thing: the eventual loss of Canadian sovereignty over its

economy. As H. Blair Neatby argued, the “distinction between commercial union and unrestricted reciprocity [...] was rather an artificial one.”³⁹ Donald Creighton wrote along the same lines, declaring: “Unrestricted reciprocity, which was distinguishable from commercial union only by much pretentious hair-splitting, and which, like commercial union, threatened Canadian fiscal autonomy and political independence.”⁴⁰ Charles Tansill went one step further and added annexation to the synonyms used when he argued, “So unrestricted reciprocity, commercial union, or annexation, all labels that could cover the same thing, was back in Canadian politics.”⁴¹ During the 1891 Federal Election, men of the era, particularly Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Richard Cartwright, did not believe that reciprocity and commercial union were synonyms, as the former was purely economic whereas the latter carried political connotations.

Although the economic policies of unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union greatly impact annexationism, they are different and must not be conflated. The former are economic options whereas the latter is also political. Indeed, they are interconnected and can influence the other, but do not necessarily reflect the other. During the 1891 federal election, the Conservative party was successful in making the economic and political aspects indistinguishable which won them the election. However, throughout this study they remain separated.

Finally, any reference to independence here within refers strictly to Canadian independence. The movement for Quebec independence as understood today is largely a twentieth century phenomenon. Doubtless, some had thought of the idea of Quebec

³⁹H. Blair Neatby, *Laurier and a Liberal Quebec: A Study in Political Management* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1973) 47.

⁴⁰Donald Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1955) 489.

⁴¹Tansill, 221.

independence, but it was not extensively debated in political circles. Also, the use of the term Quebecer is meant to encompass the entire population of the province. Distinctions will be made clear when addressing a particular portion of the province's population, such as British or French Canadian; the term 'Québécois' during the nineteenth century referred solely to the inhabitants of Quebec City.

Chapter One: Origins of Annexationism in Quebec, 1887-1891

The decade of the 1880s was a tumultuous time in the history of Quebec and Canada. Beginning in the 1870s, an economic depression began that plagued both the national and provincial economies and English-French strife was at an all time high. As O.D. Skelton summarized, “Confederation had not brought Canadian unity, as twenty years of sectional rivalry and racial differences had only too clearly revealed.”¹ The National Policy, which had been Canada’s policy of economic development since 1879, had seemingly failed to bring prosperity. During the 1870s and 1880s, both the Liberals and Conservatives attempted to achieve a free trade agreement with the United States along the same parameters as the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854. In the west, the rebellions at Red River, led by Louis Riel, had exacerbated the resentment between the minority British-Canadian community and the majority French-Canadian community in Quebec. It was also around this time that the government of Manitoba decided to eliminate publicly-funded Catholic education, raising the alarm across French Canada. The Conservative government of Sir John A. Macdonald, which had been in power since 1867 – save for a brief four year period between 1874 and 1878 – had also seemingly failed to achieve national unity. The federal Liberal party was in need of a new approach if it were to ever win another election, and by 1887, the Liberals started making large steps toward accomplishing the goal of leading the nation once again.

After a third consecutive defeat by the Conservative Party in 1887 – the previous two being in 1878 and 1882 – Liberal leader Edward Blake resigned. The political party

¹O.D. Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. 1 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1965) 108. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the term ‘racial’ was used to describe the two distinct, religious, cultural and linguistic communities: British Canadian and French Canadian. The terms race and racial had yet to take on the strong pejorative connotations that they would during the twentieth century.

needed a new leader, one who could tackle the issues of the era. Blake believed that Wilfrid Laurier was that man. Laurier was hesitant to accept the position as Liberal leader because, amongst other reasons, he was a Catholic French Canadian.² Although he was well known in his native province of Quebec, Laurier was relatively unknown throughout the rest of the Dominion. Eventually, Laurier acquiesced and became the new Liberal chief on 23 June, 1887.³ He quickly began his efforts to win over voters to the Liberal political ideology. On 2 August, 1887, Laurier gave his first public address on national unity. Placing significant attention on the patriotism of French Canadians he declared:

French-Canadians, I ask you one thing, that, while remembering that I, a French-Canadian, have been elected leader of the Liberal party of Canada, you will not lose sight of the fact that the limits of our common country are not confined to the province of Quebec, but that they extend to all the territory of Canada, and that our country is wherever the British flag waves in America. I ask you to remember this in order to remind you that your duty is simply and above all to be Canadians. To be Canadians! That was the object of Confederation in the intention of its authors; the aim and end of Confederation was to bring the different races together, to soften the asperities of their mutual relations and to connect the scattered groups of British subjects.⁴

However, Laurier argued that national unity as outlined by Confederation had failed for which he placed the blame squarely on the Conservative government.⁵

Almost a year after Laurier ascended to the position of party leader, the Liberal party adopted a new platform that its members believed would not only unite Canadians and stabilize the economy, but also bring them back into power. That policy was unrestricted reciprocity with the United States. The main supporters of freer trade with the United States were agriculturalists and natural resource producers. These groups desired expanded access to the much larger U.S. market and it was Laurier's task to win

²Sir John Willison, *Sir Wilfrid Laurier* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1927) 37-9.

³Willison, 39.

⁴Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, Vol. 1, 108-9.

⁵Skelton, 109.

them over to the Liberal cause if he was ever to be elected. In Quebec, the majority of the agriculturalists and natural resource producers lived in rural areas. These voters held the key to the Liberal's political success.

Speaking within the House of Commons, Sir Richard Cartwright, the Liberal lieutenant for Ontario, expressed the Liberal policy in favour of unrestricted reciprocity, making the platform known publicly for the first time. According to Charles Tansill, on 14 March, Cartwright proposed a motion for "full and unrestricted reciprocity" with the United States; it was defeated on 6 April.⁶ Not content with the limited degree of reciprocity that the Conservative party proposed, the Liberals opted for full and complete reciprocity with the American Republic. Laurier explained this decision to Edward Blake in a letter dated 29 March, 1888: "We have adopted Unrestricted Reciprocity. ... We have narrowed the issue to the mere commercial aspect of the question and we intend to keep it strictly to that line. There are political aspects which will spring up, but for the present, it is better to leave them out."⁷ Laurier recognized the political implications associated with unrestricted reciprocity, as did many others in the country, yet he and the Liberals needed a new policy if they were to ever be re-elected. This recognition was stated clearly by Laurier regarding Cartwright's motion of 14 March. According to Robert Craig Brown, Laurier declared in the House of Commons on 5 April, "This is not a question of sentiment. This is a question of duty, and, if you put it in this light, that I have to choose between the duty I owe to England, and the duty I owe to my native land, I stand by my

⁶Charles C. Tansill, *Canadian-American Relations, 1875-1911* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1943) 407-8.

⁷Tansill, 412.

native land.”⁸ The debate surrounding unrestricted reciprocity was central to the rise of annexationism in Quebec.

Yet some French Canadians were not as confident in Canada’s political or economic future as Laurier. As Brown highlighted, Member of Parliament Guillaume Amyot of Bellechasse, Quebec, wrote to Laurier on 5 August, 1887, stating:

Notre prospérité matérielle augmenterait: je le crois. Mais devons-nous nous livrer [sic] ainsi entre les mains des États et abdiquer nos pouvoirs. ... Un Traité de réciprocité serait incontestablement avantageux [sic] aus [sic] États & à nous. Mair [sic] frère Jonathan veut tous ou rien.⁹

Amyot was concerned that Canada would lose its political and economic sovereignty with an unrestricted reciprocity agreement with the United States. This was a common fear in Quebec. Indeed, the material benefits that would follow unrestricted reciprocity seemed quite obvious. The main question, however, was whether or not that material wealth was worth the potential national sacrifice? Quebecers were divided on this issue.

Although the Liberal party became the main proponent of expanded trade relations with the United States, some authors, such as Hugh Keenleyside, Gustave Lanctot, George Denison, and Robert Rumilly, have argued that the rise in the campaign for reciprocity and annexation can be attributed to two prominent men of the era: Goldwin Smith and Erastus Wiman. Smith, a British-born academic and intellectual, is a well known figure in Canadian history. A firm believer in republican ideals and Anglo-Saxon supremacy, Goldwin Smith was a leading advocate of unrestricted reciprocity. He believed that expanded trade relations with the United States would lead to the eventual annexation of Canada. Smith outlined his beliefs in his 1878 study *The Political Destiny*

⁸Robert Craig Brown, *Canada’s National Policy 1883-1900: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) 178.

⁹Brown, 166. Frère Jonathan, or Brother Jonathan, is a characterization of the United States, similar, if not the same as, Uncle Sam.

of *Canada*. Within its pages Smith openly attacked the dependence Canada had on the mother country and was also unyielding in his criticisms of the French-Canadian communities throughout the Dominion. In one particular attack Smith wrote that “the French-Canadians are an un-progressive, religious, submissive, courteous, and, though poor, not unhappy people.”¹⁰ Smith was also an assimilationist. He believed that it was the mission of the Anglo-Saxon people of North America to assimilate the French Canadians and dominate the new world landscape.¹¹ Smith’s ideas, however, were limited almost exclusively to the province of Ontario where his annexationist and assimilationist rhetoric carried considerable influence – though he would have influence in other areas of discussion in Quebec. He was, in fact, the *de facto* leader of the annexation movement in the ‘Loyal Province’. Because of his ‘racist’ attitudes toward the French Canadians, Smith’s opinions were almost outright rejected in Quebec, save for in select British-Canadian communities.

Erastus Wiman was a Canadian-born, American businessman who made his living in New York City. ‘The King of Staten Island’, as he was referred to, was a staunch supporter of expanded trade relations between Canada and the United States. Between 1887 and 1891, Wiman wrote numerous articles and delivered plenty of speeches in favour of unrestricted reciprocity. However, Wiman was also a strong proponent of commercial union, the next step toward full economic integration between Canada and the United States: a policy that made many people uncomfortable. In 1887, Wiman wrote an open letter to J. Redpath Dougall, editor of the *Montreal Witness*, in

¹⁰Goldwin Smith, *The Political Destiny of Canada* (Toronto: Willing & Williamson, 1878) 10-11.

¹¹For more, in-depth information on Goldwin Smith, see Elizabeth Wallace’s *Goldwin Smith: Victorian Liberal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), and Ramsay Cook’s biography of Smith in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online (http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=7075&&PHPSESSID=ig3nggvripomsah7554mvl906).

which he attempted to answer the question, “Does Annexation Follow [reciprocity]?” According to Wiman it did not. The British connection was sacred for Canadians, a fact that Wiman understood well; he was careful to address this point. However, being loyal to Britain, in his opinion, did not mean that Canada could not benefit from closer trade relations with the American Republic. Wiman argued that economic prosperity was the only goal that annexationists desired. Commercial union, he believed, would achieve all the economic advantages while it allowed Canada to maintain the British political connection. Finally, Wiman did not believe that an annexation movement was alive in Canada at this time.¹²

By 1889, however, Wiman changed his opinion regarding the annexation movement. In June he wrote an article in the *North American Review* that argued that offensive policies towards the United States and the move toward imperial federation “have, it is true, created a sentiment in favour of annexation nearly as pronounced as the Tory Manifesto of 1849.”¹³ He continued that, “it is true that this growth of annexation sentiment is denied by super loyalists and subsidized supporters of the present administration, and its existence for any present political purpose is ignored.”¹⁴ Regarding the movement for annexation, Wiman outlined to his American readers that there was one serious barrier to annexing Canada, at least in his opinion, the French-Canadian population. “Perhaps the most serious barrier, however, to the vital change in the political condition of Canada which would follow annexation to the United States,” Wiman wrote, “is the French Canadian element under the dominant influence of the

¹²Erastus Wiman, *Does Annexation Follow? Commercial Union and British Connection. An open letter from Erastus Wiman to Mr. J. Redpath Dougall, Editor of the Montreal “Witness”*. Published in the *Montreal Witness*, 1887.

¹³Erastus Wiman, *What is the Destiny of Canada?* (New York: 1889) 4-5.

¹⁴Wiman, *What is the Destiny of Canada?* 5.

Roman Catholic Church.”¹⁵ To Wiman, Quebec was a backward, uneducated province, as can be seen with his analysis: “The influences of a progressive spirit, greater intelligence, higher forms of education, and freedom of inquiry into the power and influence of the church, would be more dreaded in the Province of Quebec than even a change in the political conditions.”¹⁶ Thus, according to Wiman, Quebec was an unlikely candidate for annexation.

Between 1887 and 1891, annexationist rhetoric was limited. The key factors in the debate were the economic policies of unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union. Wiman, like many other prominent intellectuals of the time, was not an annexationist but preferred to see closer economic ties between Canada and the United States. He believed that a shared economy would bring all the advantages of annexation without the political implications. Wiman’s speeches and writings highlight the predominant trend in the discourse surrounding annexation at this time: that it was publicly discussed as a by-product of unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union, but not as a separate or even viable political option. Political implications would not emerge until the 1891 federal election.¹⁷

Despite his crusade to accomplish commercial union between Canada and the United States, Wiman, like Smith, remained a minor figure in Quebec. The Tory press in *la belle province* labelled him an annexationist and the Rouges followers did not associate with him. Wiman’s influence, in fact, lay south of the border in the United States and to a lesser in extent in Ontario. Thus, with the two leaders for annexation and commercial union, respectively, being confined almost entirely to the debate in Ontario,

¹⁵Wiman, *What is the Destiny of Canada?* 7.

¹⁶Wiman, *What is the Destiny of Canada?* 8.

¹⁷See Chapter Two.

the Quebec annexationists lacked effective leadership to bring about political union.

Gustave Lanctot summarized this point succinctly when he wrote regarding commercial union: “De façon générale l’opinion québécoise [*sic*] battit froid à l’union commerciale.”¹⁸

In 1887 as talk of annexation emerged once again many people did not believe that Quebec could even possess an annexation movement. The reasons for this vary, but are quite similar. Canada’s leading annexationist, Goldwin Smith, once wrote in a letter dated 21 August, 1887, that support for commercial union was making progress in every province except for Quebec. According to Tansill, Smith wrote that the “dominant priesthood opposes everything that is likely to bring the people more into direct contact with the liberalizing forces of the Republic.”¹⁹ As Brown highlighted, Governor General Lord Lansdowne also commented upon the reaction to commercial union when he wrote on 31 October, 1887, that the Province of Quebec,

would not be likely to offer much encouragement to a measure which might have its outcome in the establishment of more intimate political relations between Canada and the United States. The people of Lower Canada [*sic*] are well aware that their annexation...might involve if not their own effacement as a distinct political community at all events the sacrifice of many of the privileges civil and religious assured to them under British connection.²⁰

Lord Lansdowne’s comments more accurately describe the attitudes of the majority francophone Quebecers than the analysis espoused by Smith. Yet, Lansdowne, too, may have been somewhat disconnected with the sentiments of the French-Canadian population. For the majority of French Canadians, the British connection was neither of intimate significance or detriment. Having lived under the British regime for over a

¹⁸Gustave Lanctot, ed., *Les Canadiens-Français et leur voisins du sud* (Montréal: Éditions Bernard Valiquette, 1941) 271.

¹⁹Tansill, 404.

²⁰Brown, 147.

hundred years, it was familiar and safe. Annexation to the United States was an unknown, something that worried many Canadians, not just the French-speaking portion of the population.

Yet, as Donald Warner explained, “for the first time [in 1887] political union began to make significant penetration into the hitherto impermeable French majority.” The reason for this was “not materialism, but conflict with the English [that] fissured this wall of loyalty.”²¹ Thus, no longer were the annexationists of Quebec “confined almost entirely to those English-speaking groups which had formerly been susceptible to the lure of American trade markets.”²² The old argument in favour of annexation was once again used by both linguistic groups: to separate from the other and avoid the threat of assimilation. For British-Canadian annexationists in Quebec, if Canada were to be annexed they would join the vast majority of English-speakers in the United States and the French population would become an insignificant minority. French-Canadian annexationists, on the other hand, saw more autonomy within the American Republic as they would reunite with the some one million francophones of New England to create a separate State in the Union. Annexationist sentiments were most prominent in Montreal and the Eastern Townships, two areas which in the late nineteenth century had sizeable and influential British-Canadian populations. Similarly to the movement in 1849-50, these contradictory sentiments prevented both groups of annexationists from forming a united, organized movement.

Newspapers from across Quebec provide an excellent insight into the discussions surrounding annexation. Some newspapers went so far as stating that there existed a

²¹Donald F. Warner, *The Idea of Continental Union: The Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960) 192.

²²Warner, 192.

“mouvement annexionniste.”²³ However, the majority merely mentioned annexationism within the broader topic of continental trade. Interestingly, too, is the lack of discussion of outright annexation throughout this period. Not until the 1891 federal election was the link between free trade and annexation stressed in the Quebec media. Otherwise, the print media in Quebec focussed solely on the economic difficulties.

For some in the French-Canadian press, annexation was an issue that was addressed but not seriously considered. For example, Jean-Baptiste Rouilliar – who will be mentioned in greater detail in Chapter Four – edited the weekly Liberal paper *Le Patriote* in Sorel which discussed the advantages of commercial union. On 8 November, 1887, Rouilliar argued that “si, donc les États-Unis devenaient un marché pour nos produits et si ce marché pouvait favoriser le développement de nos ressources, l’union commerciale serait d’un avantage immense et incontestable.”²⁴ Although the economic benefits were clear to Rouilliar, he did not support the political implications:

Beaucoup de gens sont sous l’impression que l’Union Commerciale signifie annexion. Bien au contraire; la liberté d’action avec nos voisins par l’Union Commercial, assure le succès de nos affaires, tandis que l’annexion serait la continuation du système restrictif qui ne nous vaut que la gêne et la stagnation des affaires.²⁵

Throughout the years 1888 and 1889, Rouilliar wrote numerous articles arguing that annexation was not necessary. In particular, on 14 February, 1889, Rouilliar published an article entitled “L’avenir du Canada”. Rouilliar stated his stance towards annexation clearly, declaring: “Quoi, devenir Américains un jour? Jamais! On ne nous connaît pas!”²⁶ Interestingly, Rouilliar followed the Conservative cry, despite his liberal

²³*La Patrie*, 12 November, 1887.

²⁴*Le Patriote*, 8 November, 1887.

²⁵*Le Patriote*, 8 November, 1887.

²⁶*Le Patriote*, 14 February, 1889.

ideology, by stating that “Nous considérons aujourd’hui que tout homme qui essaie par un moyen ou par un autre à favoriser l’annexion de notre pays aux États-Unis, est un traître.”²⁷ He concluded his article with the declaration: “En attendant, soyons Canadiens, c’est-à-dire des hommes qui sont les fils des premières race du monde, fiers de leurs histoire, et confiante dans l’avenir. Dieu est avec nous si les méchants sont contre.”²⁸

What is most interesting about Rouilliard’s articles from 1887 to 1889 is that he outright opposed annexation; by 1893, however, he was not only in favour of it, but publicly advocated Quebec’s absorption into the American Republic.²⁹

Another newspaper that opposed annexation in 1887 but supported political union in 1891 was Montreal’s *La Patrie*. This Liberal paper reported on the developments surrounding unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union without addressing the aspect of annexation. On 6 December, 1888, *La Patrie* published an article arguing “Il y a trois alternatives à notre situation actuelle: Fédération Impériale, Annexion, Indépendence.”³⁰ This was the closest discussion about annexation that could be found. The opinions and political statements within *La Patrie* will be discussed at length in Chapter Four; however, it is very important to note that annexationist sentiments evolved over time. This phenomenon will also be seen within the literature published during this final movement.

Although annexation was not discussed in great detail in the newspapers of Quebec, invariably a few articles did appear which addressed the subject thoroughly. For example, in Quebec City, the Liberal paper *Le Canadien* published two lengthy articles

²⁷*Le Patriote*, 14 February, 1889.

²⁸*Le Patriote*, 14 February, 1889.

²⁹See Chapter Four.

³⁰*La Patrie*, 6 December, 1888.

that discussed the numerous aspects of the annexation question. The first appeared on 6 December, 1888, under the title “L’AVENIR ET L’ANNEXION”. It began with an interesting question: “Que devrions-nous chercher dans l’annexion du Canada aux États-Unis?” The article continued:

Evidemment, une situation meilleure, plus favorable que celle que nous occupons actuellement. Si nous n’avions pas lieu d’espérer pouvoir améliorer notre sort, il serait bien inutile, extravagant [*sic*] même, de renoncer à ce que nous avons pour courir après l’incertain. Mais cette situation meilleure, en réalité la trouverions-nous? C’est précisément le point sur lequel il importe de se former une opinion saine et éclairée.³¹

In the author’s opinion, the goal of a national state is to protect and foster the religious, moral, intellectual, and material well being of its citizens. The author of this article questioned whether annexation to the United States would ensure the maintenance of three of the four pillars of a society mentioned previously. “Nous n’ignorons pas,” the author stated, “que les membres des groupes annexionnistes canadiens ont surtout en vue les avantages matériels qui, suivant eux, découleraient certainement de l’union du Canada avec la République américaine.”³² The material benefits were obvious; the political implications, however, were not. The article mentions annexationist groups though, unfortunately, not any specifically. This is curious and raises the question: were there annexationist groups lobbying for political union or was their existence fabricated to stress a point?

Four days later on 10 December, *Le Canadien* published another article on “L’AVENIR ET L’ANNEXION”, this time, however, addressing the issue of *la survivance* of French Canadians. The article outlined that those who believed annexation was a good idea were following an illusion. Providence, he argued, ensured that Quebec did not join

³¹*Le Canadien*, 6 December, 1888.

³²*Le Canadien*, 6 December, 1888.

the United States in 1775-1776 which allowed it to remain French and develop a separate existence. The following excerpt best expresses French Canadian's perception of annexation:

Nous avons aujourd'hui le légitime orgueil d'avoir joué un rôle important dans l'histoire de notre pays et même de ce continent. Avec l'annexion, ce rôle aurait été pour ainsi dire absolument nul. Plus le progrès matériel aurait été rapide et grand, plus vite nous aurions été submergés, et plus tôt nous serions disparus de la scène politique comme élément national distinct.³³

The material benefits that would follow annexation were widely accepted, and embraced by annexationists, but the political impacts could be potentially disastrous.

As is evident from the Quebec media, the political implications associated with unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union were being discussed, although not with consistency. Most interestingly, some who opposed annexation in the late 1880s, such as Rouilliar, would later be staunch proponents of political union. The political, economic, and social atmosphere in Quebec and in the rest of Canada greatly influenced the opinions towards annexation, which will be highlighted in later chapters.

With advocates of political and commercial union such as Smith and Wiman, two men who saw Quebec and the French-Canadian 'race' as an unnatural entity in North America, it is not surprising that the majority of French Canadians remained silent or outright opposed the issue of annexation. Robert Craig Brown's analysis best summarizes this attitude: "Doubts about the movement in Quebec arose from the fact that its chief Canadian proponent [Goldwin Smith] saw in it a means to accomplish the assimilation of French Canada proposed by Lord Durham."³⁴ Lacking support, it was a tough task for pro-annexation supporters in Quebec to convince their fellow inhabitants that annexation

³³*Le Canadien*, 10 December, 1888.

³⁴Brown, 135.

was the best political course to follow. Although it was an up-hill battle, so to speak, it did not stop the fervent annexationists from expressing their ideas.

The political atmosphere in the province of Quebec was also undergoing considerable change, especially due to the troubles at the federal level concerning Anglophone-Francophone relations. Following the execution of Louis Riel in 1885, Honoré Mercier, champion of provincial rights in Quebec, lit the fire of discontent in his province using the English-French discord to create the *Parti national*. The new political party adjusted the Liberal party philosophy into a more emphatically French-Canadian nationalist outlook. As Mercier declared, “je ne viens pas ici comme chef du parti libéral, comme délégué des libéraux, comme libéral moi-même; non, je viens ici comme Canadiens français, ayant ressenti comme vous l’injure faite à notre nationalité.”³⁵ In 1887, Mercier led his new *nationaliste* party to victory in the provincial election. The results of this election would greatly influence the political atmosphere in Quebec during the 1891 federal election particularly amongst the rural French Canadians.

Part of Mercier’s plans to increase the power of Quebec was expressed during the Interprovincial Conference in October, 1887. The Liberal premiers of Ontario, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, as well as the Conservative premier of Manitoba, assembled at Quebec upon Mercier’s invitation to discuss provincial concerns surrounding Confederation. The premiers of British Columbia and Prince Edward Island declined the invitation, as did Prime Minister Macdonald. Although provincial autonomy was the main subject of discussion during the conference, another important aspect emerged from the twenty-six resolutions passed: unrestricted reciprocity with the United States. The premiers in attendance agreed that reciprocity with their southern neighbour

³⁵Robert Rumilly, *Honoré Mercier et son temps*. Tome II (Montréal: Fides, 1975) 313.

was desired and, indeed, necessary for the growth of the Canadian and individual provincial economies. The reason for this was the expanding natural resource market and the provinces owned the natural resources. Mercier was personally a staunch advocate of reciprocity for Quebec. After the conference concluded, the following release was presented to the people:

That having reference to the agitation on the subject of trade relations between the Dominion and the United States, this Inter-Provincial Conference, consisting of representatives of all political parties, desires to record its opinion that unrestricted reciprocity would be of advantage to all the Provinces of the Dominion; that this Conference and the people it represents cherish fervent loyalty to Her Majesty the Queen, and warm attachment to British connection...³⁶

Although Prime Minister Macdonald refused to recognize the conference as legitimate, it experienced some success. It highlighted to Laurier that the majority of the provincial premiers supported his platform of freer trade with the United States. Macdonald could not deny that reciprocity was back into the public mind, and it gained popularity as the years passed.

It is important to note that Quebec was becoming more liberal in its political and economic outlook during this time, parting ways from its more conservative political and economic traditions. Yet to say that with Mercier's leadership Quebec became a liberal province is misleading. As H. Blair Neatby explained, it was only after Mercier's electoral victory, using Riel's death to gain momentum, did Quebec "liberalize".³⁷ However, to state that Quebec had become a liberal province is also an overstatement. The power of the Catholic Church and its ultra-conservative doctrine was still present in the province and it held considerable influence on the Catholic, French-Canadian

³⁶Willison, 144.

³⁷H. Blair Neatby, *Laurier and a Liberal Quebec: A Study in Political Management* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1973) 27.

community. Church leaders always feared losing their influence in Quebec society, which explains why they were so active in politics. This position of the Church was not new to French Canadians. Overall, Quebec was still very much socially conservative while embracing economic and political liberalism.

A large concern for the Church and French-Canadian intellectuals throughout the nineteenth century was the large exodus of French Canadians to the United States. It is estimated that between 1840 and 1930, approximately one million French Canadians immigrated to the United States, mostly to New England. Francophone Quebec was still primarily an agricultural society at the end of the nineteenth century and with the crippling effects of prolonged depressions many farmers had to leave their homeland in search of a better life in the American Republic. Indeed, some French Canadians who left Quebec did so because of the appeal of American institutions, democratic practice, and the idea of personal liberty. However, as Yves Roby explained, the majority were not tricked into leaving by the promises of a better life in the U.S.; they left because they had to.³⁸ The Catholic Church saw this as an affront to God and the French-Canadian nationality as a whole. The United States was seen as a desolate, Godless nation in which immorality ran rampant. Yet those who moved to the United States promised to remain French and Catholic.³⁹ One clergyman decided to investigate this trend of immigration and ensure that French Canadians were, indeed, remaining true to their Catholic faith and national identity.

³⁸Yves Roby, "Émigrés canadiens-français, Franco-Américains de la Nouvelle-Angleterre et images de la société américaine," *Québécois et Américains: La culture québécoise aux XIXe et XXe siècles*, Gérard Bouchard and Yvan Lamonde, eds. (Montréal: Éditions Fides, 1995) 137-8.

³⁹Roby, "Émigrés canadiens-français, Franco-Américains de la Nouvelle-Angleterre et images de la société américaine," 132-5.

In 1891, Father Édouard Hamon, who was born and educated in France, published his study of the situation of French-Canadian immigrants in the United States titled *Les Canadiens-français de la Nouvelle-Angleterre*. Hamon outlined his mission as this:

J'examine ces établissements nouveaux avec sympathie, j'en conviens, en observateur heureux de voir l'Église se développer, et la race française d'Amérique prendre une place de plus large au soleil, mais sans aucun parti pris de vouloir faire prévaloir une théorie quelconque.⁴⁰

Throughout the essay, Hamon focused heavily on the importance of the French language as a means for French Canadians to maintain their national identity. Hamon argued that this, and the practice their religion, were the only ways to successfully retain their identity. This was particularly important because Hamon's study was written at a time when the French language was seen as threatened within the much larger, English-speaking population of the New England states in particular, and the United States as a whole.

Hamon's opinion on the future of the French Canadians is a little ambiguous at times, but becomes clear in the conclusion. First of all, he did not oppose independence for Quebec nor annexation to the United States because in either situation French Canadians would be in control of their destiny. Hamon came to this conclusion by arguing that if Canada were annexed, the United States would become too large a territory to be governed effectively and would have to divide into numerous, smaller republics, one of them being a conglomeration of Quebec and the New England states to form a French-speaking state in North America.⁴¹ Hamon outlined his theory thusly:

⁴⁰Édouard Hamon, *Les Canadiens-français de la Nouvelle-Angleterre* (Québec: N.S. Hardy, Librairie-Éditeur, 1891) xi.

⁴¹Journalist Jules-Paul Tardivel expressed similar ideas to Hamon, arguing that Quebec and the New England states should form their own republic in the north-eastern section of North America.

Deux suppositions semblent possible: ou la province de Québec aura un jour son autonomie, et deviendra un peuple indépendant; ou bien elle s'annexera aux États-Unis. Indépendance ou annexion, voilà deux hypothèses possibles, mais dans l'un ou l'autre cas, les Canadiens ne peuvent, me semble-t-il, qu'y trouver une force nouvelle contre l'assimilation.⁴²

For the majority of the Catholic clergy, however, French-Canadian immigration to the United States was seen as a calamity. It was by providential design that French Canadians were to remain in Quebec and work towards making it a prosperous French-speaking state in North America.

Annexation and immigration were both seen as threats to the French-Canadian 'race' according to the Catholic Church. But as the province continued to liberalize economically and politically, the hold that the Church had over the electorate began to wane. Clearly the Church was a key player in the anti-annexation campaign throughout this period, using its influence to argue against the perceived material benefits. Within Canada, and more importantly in Quebec, French Canadians' morality would be saved whereas in the United States it would be threatened by the inferior public life ruled by consumerism. However, the Church was not as vocal as it had been in the past.

Many intellectuals also saw French-Canadian emigration as a calamity in the nineteenth century. By de-populating Quebec, it appeared as though its provincial power would also decrease as its best and brightest sons and daughters moved south to the United States. This was seen as intellectual annexation of sorts as the population was lured away from their homeland: Quebec, in essence, was being annexed one by one until the majority of the population lived in the New England states.

Father Hamon was not the only person to address the phenomenon of French-Canadian emigration. Honoré Mercier also took up the mission of turning Quebec into

⁴²Hamon, 129.

the true homeland of the French Canadians. As Donald Creighton summarized about Mercier's plans, "Quebec, in his ambitious conception, was to become the strong and prosperous homeland of all the French-speaking peoples of North America. He tried to repatriate the French Canadians who had gone to live in the New England states."⁴³ In another excellent observation, "The Province of Quebec," as A.I. Silver argued, "was seen as the geographical and political expression of the French-Canadian nationality, as a French-Catholic province and the French Canadian homeland."⁴⁴ The characterization of the province of Quebec as the only true homeland of French Canadians was an important aspect of the political and social landscape during the 1880s and 1890s and heavily influenced the annexation movement of that era. In later years, the rallying cry surrounded *nationalité* and *survivance* centred in Quebec.

Reactions to events outside of the province of Quebec also fuelled annexationist sentiments throughout this period. During the 1880s as British and French Canadians struggled to build a national identity together, virulent attacks threatened to permanently split the two linguistic communities. British-Canadian imperialists, such as D'Alton McCarthy, argued venomously that Canada was an English country with English institutions and English laws. By 1889, attacks against the French-Canadian communities became harsher. On 12 July, McCarthy declared in a public speech that:

This is a British country, and the sooner we take in hand our French Canadian fellow subjects and make them British in sentiment and teach them the English language, the less trouble we shall have to prevent. Sooner or later it must be settled. ...Now is the time when the ballot box will decide this great question before

⁴³Donald Creighton, *Canada's First Century, 1867-1967* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1970) 63.

⁴⁴A.I. Silver, *The French Canadian Idea of Confederation, 1864-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 111.

the people; and if that does not supply the remedy in this generation, bayonets will supply it in the next.⁴⁵

It is no surprise that some members of the French-Canadian community supported annexation to the United States after hearing comments such as these. The constitution of Canada, as outlined in the British North America Act, was supposed to protect the French language and the religious rights of the minority community. Instead, after only twenty years of national existence, there were prominent politicians speaking of the desire to assimilate the French-Canadian population – though this was nothing new. Some Quebec newspapers addressed this ‘racial’ intolerance of Orangists like McCarthy. *La Patrie*, the nationalist newspaper from Montreal commented on the distaste of anti-French comments: “if the fanatics of Ontario continue to persecute us, remember that we can find shelter under the be-starred flag of the United States.”⁴⁶ Coupled with the Riel execution, many French Canadians realized “that they would become politically insignificant in the American population,” but “many of the French felt that their religion, language, and laws would be safer in the more tolerant atmosphere of the Republic,” than within the Canadian Dominion.⁴⁷ Ideas such as this would come to the fore in Quebec, particularly following the decision of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council on the Manitoba Schools Question in 1892. A few French-Canadian intellectuals determined that the attacks on the minority French-Canadian communities as their right to French-language Catholic schools funded by the State had gone too far and that only annexation to the United States could solve this problem.⁴⁸

⁴⁵Willison, 53.

⁴⁶Warner, 206.

⁴⁷Warner, 207.

⁴⁸See Chapter Four.

In 1890, McCarthy became an outright supporter of the abolishment of publicly funded Catholic, French-language schools in Manitoba, the first step in an attempt to assimilate the French-Canadian communities in the province. The furor that exploded in Quebec over these developments is well known; but what is often overlooked is that this act of anti-French-Canadian legislation also led some French Canadians to seek annexation to the United States. As Donald Warner highlighted: “[t]he French [Canadians] had been loyal to British rule [...] not from love or economic advantage but from expectation that the British would honour the constitutional claim, and the right, of the minority to its religion, language, and schools.”⁴⁹ However, without the guaranteed protection under the Canadian constitution and the British crown, French Canadians may as well be annexed to the United States and enjoy the material benefits that accompany such a political union.⁵⁰ Warner’s strong statements, though, do not necessarily reflect the overall feeling in Quebec towards annexation. The majority of the population, save for some intellectuals and politicians, were content to remain within the Dominion under the British flag. Indeed, there were advocates of political union at this time, but the discussion itself was still in its infancy.

In the United States, when this final movement emerged, the Democrats under President Grover Cleveland were in power in Washington. However, neither the Democrats nor Republicans were willing to expand and broaden trade relations with the Dominion. In general terms, though, the majority of Americans truly believed that Canada’s ultimate destiny was with the United States and that the peaceful annexation of its territory was only a matter of time. The United States government was paying

⁴⁹Warner, 209-10.

⁵⁰Warner, 210.

attention to the growing unrest in Canada and the emergence of a new movement for annexation. However, as James Callahan summarized:

Although many expected the situation to result in the peaceful annexation of Canada, the American government made no effort to realize these expectations. It would not take the initiative in any movement for annexation and was not seeking to induce Canada to take the initiative in such action. Many Americans, however, were interested in a new Canadian agitation for political union [in 1887]...⁵¹

This approach to Canadian affairs is not surprising considering the position the United States held towards Confederation twenty years earlier. As the British North American colonies prepared to unite into a new federal union, Americans watched with varying attitudes. Some were fearful of a new monarchical nation in North America; others were supportive of this initiative; whereas the majority were indifferent as they believed political union of the two countries was inevitable. Most importantly, the people of the United States did not want to force political union upon the people of Canada. Thus, just as in 1867, it is likely that the majority of the American populace would have welcomed the people of Canada into the United States should they choose to do so freely, but they would not force such a union by coercion or force of arms.

There were, of course, advocates of political union in the United States Congress despite the fact that the government did not pursue any official expansionist policies under Cleveland. Callahan highlighted that on 13 December, 1889, Republican Senator Benjamin Butterworth of Ohio introduced a joint resolution in the House “to prepare for the annexation by negotiations with the Dominion [of Canada] and with Great Britain.”⁵² This resolution failed, but it shows that the idea of the annexation was being discussed in the United States. The following May, 1890, Republican Representative from Illinois,

⁵¹James M. Callahan, *American Foreign Policy in Canadian Relations* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1967) 370.

⁵²Callahan, 382.

Robert Hitt, submitted a report from the House Committee on Foreign Affairs that recommended that when Canada was interested in entering into a commercial agreement with the United States to remove tariffs, the President should appoint three commissioners to meet with Canadian officials to discuss such an economic agreement.⁵³ These resolutions were received as an encouraging sign in Canada, particularly within the Liberal party.

However, in the fall of 1889 United States federal election the Democrats were defeated. This brought in a new, Republican government under President Benjamin Harrison and Secretary of State James G. Blaine, who were opponents to reciprocity.⁵⁴ By this time, “the American foreign policy concerning Canada was influenced by American increasing strength of the eighties [sic] [and] by the British movement for imperial federation.”⁵⁵ The Harrison administration moved the United States into an era of high protectionism. The Conservative government in Canada, under pressure from the Liberals, had to seek some form of reciprocity with the United States. But in October 1890, all hopes of establishing a new treaty on reciprocity were dashed with the passing of the McKinley Tariff Act.⁵⁶ The McKinley tariff raised duties on many products from Canada, both agricultural and manufactured, which placed Canadian natural resource producers and manufacturers in a tough situation. To make matters worse, the American government secured reciprocity treaties with numerous European nations though it did

⁵³Callahan, 417.

⁵⁴Gordon T. Stewart, *The American Response to Canada since 1776* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992) 93.

⁵⁵Callahan, 411.

⁵⁶Charles S. Campbell, *The Transformation of American Foreign Relations, 1865-1900* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976) 105.

not extend increased trade relations with Canada.⁵⁷ As Gordon T. Stewart argued regarding the U.S. stance towards Canada, there was an

accumulating annoyance with Canada [that] paved the way for an American rejection of Canada overtures for reciprocity [...]. The McKinley tariff increases of 1890 led to these Canadian advances, but the Republican administration was in no frame of mind to listen sympathetically.⁵⁸

Once again, Canadians encountered a protectionist American government which exacerbated the economic problems already apparent in the Dominion.

The impact that the McKinley tariff had in influencing annexationist sentiments in Canada is varied amongst authors. P.B. Waite argued that with the protectionist McKinley tariff, “unrestricted reciprocity, commercial union, [and] annexation, all labels that could cover the same thing, was [*sic*] back in Canadian politics.”⁵⁹ Donald Creighton saw a direct link between the McKinley tariff and the famous 1891 federal election. He argued that the higher tariffs frightened both political parties and that it was the reason why Macdonald called the election a year before he was legally required to.⁶⁰ Creighton addressed this issue again in his biography of Sir John A. Macdonald, stating that the Conservative leader argued that the McKinley tariff was meant to “starve Canada into annexation.”⁶¹ Robert Brown, however, did not believe that the tariff was meant to force commercial union or annexation, despite the fact that it blocked trade on natural products.⁶² What is agreed upon amongst historians, though, is that the tariff did play a

⁵⁷Campbell, 140.

⁵⁸Stewart, 93.

⁵⁹P.B. Waite, *Canada, 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971) 221.

⁶⁰Creighton, *Canada's First Century*, 74-5.

⁶¹Donald Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1955) 546.

⁶²Brown, 193.

large part in the 1891 election that was fought on the grounds of unrestricted reciprocity vs. the National Policy.

The American stance toward reciprocity and annexation between 1887 and 1891 did not change. In fact, under the Republicans, the idea of continental union dissipated even further. This viewpoint regarding Canada remained constant: annexation was not a policy that would be followed in Washington despite the calls for it north of the 49th.

The Conservative organ, the *Montreal Gazette*, published a prophetic article in 1887, in which it declared,

It is not improbable that the people will, sooner than may now imagine, be called on to determine whether the work accomplished in 1867 is to be undone, whether Confederation is to be preserved or allowed to lapse into its original fragments preparatory to absorption into the United States. ... All indicate that the Liberal party is arraying its force for an effort to smash the Confederation.⁶³

The country was, indeed, moving towards an important election. The years between 1887 and 1891 saw the decline in the Canadian economy and the rise of the desire for reciprocity in some quarters. By 1891 the issue of Canada's economy could be ignored no longer. Annexationist rhetoric ran rampant during the electoral campaign as it was used by both sides to promote their respective political platforms. The 1891 federal election also marked a turning point in the province of Quebec, one that would have lasting implications for the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Between 1887 and 1891, annexation was but a small point of interest in the political and social discourse. Although it was being discussed, it was not until after the 1891 federal election that annexation rhetoric really expanded. This can especially be seen within the newspapers and pamphlets of the era. The movement for annexation

⁶³Donald Creighton, *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1957) 367.

gained momentum post-1891 and was an important point of discussion, particularly in exploring Quebec's and Canada's future. Also, discussion surrounding annexation was primarily negative in Quebec, especially from the French-Canadian community. That Quebec was socially and politically conservative at the end of the 1880s is quite evident. The economy of Quebec – primary and secondary – was expanding slowly and interests were being developed. Businesses would, in some cases, promote expanded trade between Canada and the United States. However, liberal economic political forces gained strength in the province that carried great influence. In particular, aspects of the Rouges ideology once again entered the mindset of some influential French Canadians and this helped to influence the movement for annexation in Quebec after 1891.

Chapter Two: The 1891 Federal Election and the Rise of Annexationism

The period between 1887 and 1891 saw the rise in discussion of unrestricted reciprocity and the prospect of annexation. Unlike previous moments in which annexation was discussed, the resurgence of annexationist rhetoric in the 1880s was slow to develop until 1891. This chapter will explore the competing ideas surrounding annexation as experienced during the 1891 federal election and will highlight the rise of annexationist sentiments. Although the election was called and based upon economic issues, the political aspect of annexation became the focal point. The shift from economics to politics as the prime factor for annexation was an important action in the movement for annexation.

The reactions to annexation varied in Quebec and were based on numerous factors, such as language and political ideologies. Prime Minister Macdonald was the key figure in this political move that shifted the discourse from economics to politics. The conversation surrounding annexation increased dramatically during this election. The newspapers of the era provided excellent insights into how the various communities in Quebec reacted to this monumental election. It was because of the federal election that annexationist discourse completely entered into public discussion.

The 1891 Federal Election is well known to students of Canadian history, particularly for Sir John A. Macdonald's famous phrase "a British subject I was born, a British subject I will die." This famous statement captured the essence of the fight for control of the Canadian parliament during this important election. There was a considerable rise in discussion surrounding reciprocity with the United States, so much so that Macdonald could delay no longer and he called a snap election in the depths of the

cold, Canadian winter. The campaign pitted Prime Minister Macdonald and his Conservative party against the Liberals under their young and relatively inexperienced leader Wilfrid Laurier, facing his first election as party chief.

It is very important to note that both parties desired some form of reciprocity with the United States. It was the degree of free trade that differentiated the parties, and dramatically at that. For the Conservatives, they preferred limited reciprocity, similar to the 1854 Reciprocity Treaty in which only non-manufactured products crossed the border free of duties. Many people throughout Quebec, and indeed the whole of Canada, especially in the ranks of the Liberal party, preferred the policy of unrestricted reciprocity and believed the National Policy had failed to develop the weak Canadian economy. Thus the Liberals had adopted the policy of unrestricted reciprocity – *réciprocité illimitée* – in 1887 under which all products would be free of tariffs. It was upon this varying degree of reciprocity – specifically natural resources vs. manufactured products – that the 1891 election was based.

Canada's future was still unknown as the people went to the polls in 1891. For some, Canada's existence as an independent Dominion was in jeopardy due to the economic depression which had been plaguing the nation since the late 1870s. Others, however, were more optimistic and believed that this was all part of the development into a strong, autonomous, North American state. The prospect of annexation, however, could not be ignored by the people of Quebec as the election campaign waged on. Donald Warner summarized this period stating: "With these developments, the election of 1891 became the closest approach to a plebiscite on annexation in Canada's history."¹ This

¹Donald F. Warner, *The Idea of Continental Union: The Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960) 225.

analysis, however, is not entirely true. The discussion of annexation played an immense role in the election, though annexation as a political movement remained an unpopular matter in Quebec. The key reason for this is that the majority of Quebecers, although embracing the Liberal platform of unrestricted reciprocity, did not believe that annexation was the solution to their economic problems. This is especially clear from the electoral results. Of the sixty-five seats available in Quebec, the Liberals secured thirty-five while the Conservatives managed to win only thirty. The Liberals won the majority of their seats in rural areas of Quebec that were resource towns where the voters were primarily agriculturalists or natural resource producers. Freer trade with the United States was desired amongst the majority of French Canadians who lived in the rural, small towns.

Macdonald's decision to dissolve parliament a year before his mandate was explained by Montreal's daily Conservative newspaper, *La Presse*:

Le gouvernement a, par l'entremise du gouvernement de Sa Majesté fait certaines propositions aux États-Unis pour étendre nos relations commerciales avec ce pays. La proposition a été soumise au président et le gouvernement Canadien est d'opinion que, si les négociations doivent se terminer par un traité, que le Parlement du Canada devra ratifier, il vaut mieux que le gouvernement prenne cette question en considération avec une députation nouvellement élue par la population.²

According to this report, the government was committed to working towards a limited reciprocity agreement with the United States. What the election hoped to determine was whether the people of Canada desired the putative Conservative program of limited reciprocity under negotiation or the proposed Liberal platform of unrestricted reciprocity. As the campaign began, discussion was limited to the economic advantages and disadvantages of both forms of reciprocity; the political implications were not debated until mid-February. Once the political aspect of annexation appeared, however, due to the

²*La Presse*, 4 February, 1891.

Conservative party's declaration that "reciprocity is annexation", the flood gates had opened and the issue of the election became annexation. The principal reason for this shift was that Macdonald and the Conservatives relied heavily on the belief that the majority of Canadians would oppose unrestricted reciprocity with the United States if political unity with Great Britain was threatened. Economically, however, free trade with the United States was quite popular, particularly amongst the rural French-Canadian community in Quebec.

The question of reciprocity divided the province of Quebec along linguistic lines. For the majority, French-speaking community of Quebec, unrestricted reciprocity with the United States would have been very advantageous for one significant reason. As Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby explained, "au XIXe siècle, l'économie du Québec est essentiellement basée sur l'agriculture et le commerce."³ The vast majority of French Canadians were agriculturalists living in the countryside. Their lifestyle depended upon their ability to trade their produce and livestock. Under the terms of unrestricted reciprocity, all goods, both manufactured and agricultural, would cross the border free of duties, which would be of great advantage to the vast majority of Quebecers. The British-Canadian communities, on the other hand, lived primarily in cities – such as Montreal, Quebec, and Sherbrooke – and small, scattered towns in the Eastern Townships. Their economic interests were largely tied to industry, which benefitted from the protectionist policy of the Conservative party. Also, attachment to the United Kingdom held important political implications for British Canadians. The reactions to the election based on

³Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby, *Histoire Économique du Québec, 1851-1896* (Montréal: Éditions Fides, 1971) 39.

reciprocity, and then annexation, will be examined from the varying linguistic and political perspectives.

The French-Canadian press – as well as the English-language media – was divided along political lines. Most newspapers, unlike today, were used by the political parties to present their political ideology to the people. As such, the debate surrounding reciprocity and annexation as discussed within the papers can be summarized as this: if Canada were to adopt a policy of unrestricted reciprocity with the United States, would it eventually lead to annexation? A careful analysis of various French-language newspapers from across Quebec reveals just how prevalent the discussions about annexation became.

A typical article during the election campaign can be found in the daily, Conservative paper, *Le Quotidien*, from Lévis. On 9 February, 1891, the editors of *Le Quotidien* printed an article under the headline “Le Canada pour les canadiens,” and argued that the Liberal policy of unrestricted reciprocity

serait la ruine de notre industrie nationale, la ruine de nos manufactures, un véritable désastre national; ce serait encore une politique qui ferait de nous, un peuple libre, un peuple vassal, ce serait enfin la route nous conduisant à la taxe directe et comme conséquence à l'annexion.⁴

The Conservative party was unambiguous in their claim that unrestricted reciprocity would lead Canada to its inevitable conclusion: loss of industrial jobs and annexation to the United States. Another typical Conservative attack article was published by *La Presse* on 7 February. Although the Liberals, especially their leader Wilfrid Laurier, had vehemently argued that their platform was strictly economic, *La Presse* accused the Liberals of being closet annexationists:

M. Laurier veut donc inaugurer le règne du Yankee sur les rives du Saint-Laurent; à la suite des Goldwin Smith, qui a prononcé nécessaire la réciprocité illimité pour

⁴*Le Quotidien*, 9 February, 1891.

arriver à l'annexion; ... à la suite de Wiman qui veut l'union commerciale pour gage assuré de l'union politique; à la suite de Mercier qui nourrit de son souffle empoisonné les haines de race et de religion, qui introduit la banqueroute chez nous pour amener fatalement des bouleversements politiques et briser la confédération... Il est logique; il poursuit sa carrière; lui et son parti étaient les ennemis de la Confédération canadienne, colonie maintenant, puissance indépendante, tantôt.⁵

According to *La Presse*, the Conservatives were the only party that desired the maintenance of the Canadian Confederation.

Another excellent example of the Conservative's campaign to convince electors to vote for them can be found in an article from *Le Journal de Waterloo*, a weekly paper published in the small community of Waterloo in the Eastern Townships. On 26 February, with increasing claims that reciprocity would lead to annexation, the paper printed the following article:

L'ennemi du moment, l'ennemi le plus dangereux c'est l'annexion dissimulée sous le masque de la réciprocité illimitée. Les hommes qui la favorisent parmi nous sont les pures ennemis et de notre nationalité, et de nos institutions, et de tous les principes sociaux et politiques qui nous sont chers.⁶

Annexation was used a bugbear to scare the electorate into voting for the Conservatives. The Tories conflated the issues of unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union, two different economic policies, in an attempt to scare the voters against the Liberals. Most importantly, they associated both economic policies with the larger, political idea of annexation. They used this effective political manoeuvre throughout the electoral campaign.

The Liberal papers, however, were quick to respond to deny all Conservative allegations. In order to combat the Conservative argument that reciprocity meant annexation, several Liberal papers attempted to show that not only was unrestricted

⁵*La Presse*, 9 February, 1891.

⁶*Le Journal de Waterloo*, 26 February, 1891.

reciprocity necessary, but it was also extremely beneficial to Canada and Canadians. *La Gazette de Berthier*, a Liberal organ published weekly in Berthierville, printed an article on 13 February that attempted to show the benefits of unrestricted reciprocity. The article stated that:

La question de réciprocité avec les États-Unis est aujourd'hui dans le domaine de la discussion générale; tout le monde connaît le principe de cette mesure et tout le monde comprendre [*sic*] le besoin de l'adopter au plus vite si l'on veut sortir de l'effrayante stagnation dans laquelle se trouvent en ce moment nos affaires.⁷

The most important aspect to this article was that annexation was not mentioned. In order to win the election, the Liberals had to prove that it was possible to secure a treaty for unrestricted reciprocity with the United States without jeopardizing Canada's political autonomy or its role in the British Empire.

Treason was another word that the Conservative party used throughout the campaign. According to the Tories, anyone who supported unrestricted reciprocity was a traitor to their country and the Empire. In response to this grossly exaggerated claim, the Liberal newspaper, *Le Franco-Canadien*, published in the town of St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, inverted the argument claiming it was the Conservatives who were traitors. One excerpt exhibits this clearly:

C'est un crime de haute trahison, au dire du vieux cynique, que de chercher à ouvrir à notre commerce, à notre agriculture, à notre industrie, l'immense marché naturel qui se trouve à nos portes.
Nous voulons, par la réciprocité commerciale avec les États-Unis, faire gagner à nos cultivateurs 30 cts de plus sur chaque minot d'orge qu'ils cultivent. Trahison! s'écrie sir John.⁸

According to *Le Franco-Canadien*, the real treason would be to inhibit the Canadian people from trading freely with their closest neighbour. Clearly, despite the fervent

⁷*La Gazette de Berthier*, 13 February, 1891.

⁸*Le Franco-Canadien*, 26 February, 1891.

campaign of the Tories to label their counterparts as traitors, the Liberal media maintained its convictions.

One French-language paper, *La Patrie*, was ambiguous in its reporting on the electoral campaign and the question of annexation. The paper supported the Liberal party and the need for unrestricted reciprocity. However, contrary to the Liberals, it believed that annexation was also necessary. On 16 February, an article appeared which expressed an interest in witnessing the return of the old liberal – possibly alluding to the Rouges – ideology and the prospect of annexation:

La Patrie s'est applaudie de voir le libéralisme, qu'on croyait mort, relever la tête et s'est montrée tout fière, car son libéralisme, c'est celui des anciens qui ne se cachaient pas, qui avaient l'annexion dans leur jeu et le montraient à tout venant. Donc, le parti libéral ne se contente pas seulement d'aller chercher ces inspirations à Washington, quant à ce regard notre politique commerciale. Il complète secrètement notre absorption par la république voisin.⁹

A few weeks later, nearing the end of the campaign, *La Patrie* published another influential article that vehemently denied that reciprocity would lead to annexation. On 27 February, the paper stated that “C'est avec le cri d'annexion aux États-Unis que nos adversaires tentent le plus vigoureusement de jeter la terreur dans le cœur de nos nationaux à propos de traité de réciprocité illimitée que le parti libéral propose de conclure avec nos voisins...”¹⁰ Evidently this newspaper saw through the Tory plan of using annexation as a bugbear. The following day *La Patrie* addressed the issue of reciprocity and used the treaty of 1854 as precedent:

...on répand partout la doctrine erronée que la réciprocité conduira infailliblement à l'annexion.
C'est aussi faux que stupide. Nous l'avons déjà eu la réciprocité de 1854 à 1866 et alors, a-t-on jamais à changer de régime.¹¹

⁹*La Patrie*, 16 February, 1891.

¹⁰*La Patrie*, 27 February, 1891.

¹¹*La Patrie*, 28 February, 1891.

La Patrie was a key supporter of unrestricted reciprocity because of what the economic policy represented. It is not surprising, however, that by 1893 *La Patrie* took the next step and declared itself in favour of annexation.

The election also had a great impact on the rise of nationalist sentiments in Quebec amongst French Canadians. In the late nineteenth century, French-Canadian nationalism had two dimensions: Quebec and pan-Canadian. The most important goal was to maintain the French language, culture, and Catholicism within North America. Secondly, although the province of Quebec played an important role, French-Canadian clerical nationalism was not merely contained within provincial boundaries, but extended across the entire Dominion. Yet, during the 1891 election, numerous newspaper articles appeared that addressed the future of French Canadians directly. One such article was published within the pages of *L'Étoile de l'Est*, a Conservative paper from Coaticook, a small town that lies less than thirty kilometres from the international border with Vermont. On 25 February, the paper published a report that was not only highly critical of Laurier and the Liberal party but also asked the crucial questions:

Allons-nous rester canadiens, maintenir nos institutions, conserver le patrimoine que nous ont légué nos braves ancêtres aux prix de tant de sacrifice?
Devons-nous nous effacer et nous laisser engouffrir dans le gouffre américain?
Le castor et la feuille d'érable continueront-ils à être des emblems chéris et vénérés, ou vont-ils devenir la proie de l'aigle américain?¹²

The vast majority of French-Canadian newspapers that addressed nationalist questions were starkly anti-annexationist, which is not surprising in the least. The perceived economic advantages to annexation were well established yet the political, social, cultural, and religious implications were far too risky for French-Canadian nationalists.

¹²*L'Étoile de l'Est*, 25 February, 1891.

Free trade was an acceptable, and desired, economic policy; political annexation and the potential widespread implications, however, were not.

There is no doubt that the French-Canadian *nationalistes* outnumbered the annexationists in Quebec as is evident with the lack of support for political union with the United States. This nationalism was used as a bulwark against the threat of annexation. The Conservatives' ploy of using the British loyalty cry, therefore, worked in Quebec, but not to the degree desired. French-Canadian nationalist arguments would continue to dominate throughout the period 1887-1893 and these prevented any tangible movement for annexation despite the efforts of some annexationists.

Although the two main political ideologies battled in the newspapers, politically independent papers also weighed in on the debate surrounding unrestricted reciprocity and annexation. Two influential papers, both published in Quebec City by well known editors, provided support for the Conservative campaign by arguing that unrestricted reciprocity with the United States would lead to annexation. Those two papers were: *La Vérité*, edited by Jules-Paul Tardivel, and the *Journal des campagnes*, edited by Thomas Chapais.¹³ Tardivel was an American-born, French-Canadian nationalist, and at times secessionist, who was a fervent supporter of the Catholic Church and the French culture in North America. Although not an annexationist, Tardivel desired to see the New England states dissolve from the American Republic and unite with Quebec to form a separate, French-speaking Republic in the northern third of North America. During the 1891 election, Tardivel argued that reciprocity would lead to commercial union because

¹³Although listed as an independent paper, Chapais' *Journal des campagnes* was essentially a weekly edition of the Conservative *Courrier du Canada*.

it was the only policy that the Americans would accept. Therefore, as he argued on 14 February:

Cette union commerciale, les États-Unis l'accepteront sans doute, car ce serait le commencement de notre absorption par la grande république. Mais ils n'accepteront jamais la réciprocité illimitée sans l'union commerciale, car la première seule ne leur offrirait aucune garantie.¹⁴

Thus, Tardivel warned against accepting any form of free trade with the Americans because the only plausible outcome, as he believed, would be political union. Also, Tardivel did not consider that a great number of French Canadians desired annexation in the first place. Chapais' weekly edition was more conservative in its ideology than Tardivel's. Like Tardivel, Chapais saw only disaster for the French Canadians if the Liberals won the election. One example of this can be found on 12 February in which Chapais argued that "Il est évident que, pour les observateurs clairvoyants, que la fin logique de mouvement et de la politique prêchés par le parti libéral est l'annexion du Canada aux États-Unis."¹⁵ Chapais was also a traditional French-Canadian nationalist who believed strongly in the Canadian union and the British connection. Therefore, it would be surprising if Chapais had promoted a policy that had the potential of restricting Canada's economic autonomy and eroding ties with Great Britain.

These two newspapers also highlight how the distaste for annexation did not simply follow party lines – though both were very Conservative in nature. Rather, it shows that the desire for annexation was opposed almost universally throughout the Francophone elite of Quebec. These two papers show that the issues of the day – such as annexation – were being discussed from all perspectives. Before, talk of annexation was very limited and did not carry much importance. The election, as is evident, placed

¹⁴*La Vérité*, 14 February, 1891.

¹⁵*Journal des campagnes*, 12 February, 1891.

annexation in the public discourse as a viable but controversial political option, despite its rejection amongst the majority of the population.

Near the end of the electoral campaign, the Catholic clergy broke its silence. It once again advocated the maintenance of the Canadian Confederation and warned of the dangers of annexation. Archbishop of Montreal, Édouard-Charles Fabre, issued a pastoral letter that was disseminated across Quebec on 24 February, 1891. In the letter, he outlined the Church's official position and how Catholics should vote. Mgr. Fabre's letter was also quite candid about the inherent dangers to the French-Canadian 'race' if Laurier and the Liberals won the election. The Conservative paper, *Le Quotidien*, published excerpts from Mgr. Fabre's letter, especially the benefits that French Canadians enjoyed as part of the British Empire. Fabre argued that the British Crown protected "nos lois, nos institutions, notre langue, notre nationalité, et par-des-sus tout notre sainte religion," and that "des avantages précieux, propres à notre pays que nos voisins eux-mêmes ne partagent pas, et dont vous devez estimer d'un grand prix la conservation."¹⁶ Annexation, in the opinion of Fabre, would cause untold damage to the French-Canadian culture, and especially to their sacred religion.

The following day, 25 February, *Le Quotidien* published another article from the clergy under the headline "Réciprocité illimitée alias de l'annexion. Opinion du clergé". Clearly, the alliance between the Catholic Church and the Conservative party remained strong twenty-four years after Confederation. The article in *Le Quotidien* stated that:

Puisque le clergé se croit en conscience, obligé de dénoncer la Réciprocité illimitée du haut de la chair; il faut croire que cette politique est bien dangereuse et qu'elle porte atteinte non seulement à notre liberté, à notre langue et à nos lois, mais aussi à notre religion.¹⁷

¹⁶*Le Quotidien*, 24 February, 1891.

¹⁷*Le Quotidien*, 25 February, 1891.

Unrestricted reciprocity, in the eyes of the clergy, was a disguise for annexation and a Liberal victory would ensure political union with the United States. The article also outlined how it was the duty of all Catholic voters to oppose any policy that would threaten the Roman Catholic religion. Therefore, “il était de son devoir de denoncer toute idée d’annexion aux États-Unis et toute politique conduisant à cette fin,” because “la province de Québec qui est essentiellement catholique reconnaîtra son devoir et mettra en pratique, comme toujours, les recommandations et les conseils de son clergé.”¹⁸ The clergy’s condemnation of reciprocity and annexation were made amply clear to Catholic voters as most newspapers carried these articles.

Despite the warnings of the clergy, however, many French-Canadian voters in Quebec did not follow the pastoral advice. The appeal of unrestricted reciprocity with the United States was quite strong amongst the French-Canadian Catholics. Doubtless the Church’s warnings influenced a great number of undecided voters, but the election results speak loudly to the draw of improved economic and thus material benefits. The political and economic liberalizing forces within the provinces were still brewing causing great changes in the province and amongst the people. Therefore, the bugbear of annexation was not as effective as the Conservatives would have preferred.

As is clear, the 1891 federal election triggered a great deal of discussion among French Canadians concerning annexation. Yet, there was no organized movement during the election to successfully promote and eventually bring about the annexation of Canada to the United States. The majority who advocated unrestricted reciprocity did so for the economic benefits that were promised and either did not worry about the potential

¹⁸*Le Quotidien*, 25 February, 1891.

political implications or they were not even considered. For some Rouges followers, however, the political implications were most important.¹⁹ These Rouges were interested in the ideological benefits of union with the United States, such as republicanism and the separation of Church and State. Despite this lack of support for annexation, the idea of political union had emerged as an issue that warranted discussion. Although the majority of political leaders and voters argued against annexation, the concept was, nevertheless, now in the open. In the years that followed, annexation would become a hot-topic issue in Quebec.

Another key aspect to the rise of annexationist rhetoric during the 1891 federal election can be found within the British-Canadian newspapers across Quebec. Although a minority in terms of population, the British-Canadian influence in Quebec was considerable. The social, economic and political power that the English-speaking community wielded in Quebec during this era is well known to historians and will not be discussed in detail.²⁰ However, what will be examined are the reactions to unrestricted reciprocity and annexation as displayed within the English-language press. The majority of British-Canadian businessmen preferred the high tariffs associated with the National Policy. There were, of course, a few British-Canadian businessmen who desired unrestricted reciprocity and even annexation to the United States.

¹⁹By the 1890s a clear distinction had developed between the Liberal party and supporters of the rouge movement. The Liberals had followed the path of Wilfrid Laurier who had revised the liberal political ideology to be inherently less radical and less threatening to the church. There were, however, those who still followed the radical faction of the rouge tradition who were anti-clerical and republicans.

²⁰See Sheila McLeod Arnpoulous and Dominique Clift, *The English Fact in Quebec* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984); Ronald Rudin, *The Forgotten Quebecers: A History of English-Speaking Quebec, 1759-1980* (Quebec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1985); Garth Stevenson, *Community Besieged: The Anglophone Minority and the Politics of Quebec* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999). For an excellent bibliography on English-speaking Quebecers, see Michael Behiels, *Quebec Since 1800: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 2002).

The English-language media was divided along political lines just like their French-language counterparts. The Conservative papers expressed similar arguments in English as in French during the beginning of the campaign. The daily *Montreal Gazette* established the Tory line early in the election as it reported on the seemingly impossible task of securing a reciprocity treaty with the United States while maintaining political sovereignty. In a rather bleak yet seemingly astute article, the paper argued:

Indeed an extraordinary amount of credulity is required to entertain the notion that the Republican Party in the United States will treat with Canada for anything short of annexation. All efforts to persuade that party to even listen to overtures for a measure of mutual commercial advantage, not hazardous to our political independence, have failed in the past, and there is absolutely nothing in the present situation to warrant belief that the early future will bring a radical change.²¹

This article presented the situation accurately as the United States was not interested in opening up its markets to the Canadians as witnessed with the passing of the McKinley tariff in 1890.

Arguments against unrestricted reciprocity appeared throughout the English-language press across Quebec. Politically independent, though staunchly British-Canadian, *The Enterprise*, published in the small, south-western community of Huntingdon, was persistent in its attacks on the Liberals and their economic policy. For example, on 19 February, an article appeared which issued “a protest against the suicidal policy of unrestricted reciprocity or rather commercial union, which is one of the pet schemes of Sir Richard Cartwright and Erastus Wiman to eventually end in our being annexed to the United States...”²² Although party lines were followed carefully, independent papers weighed in on the argument, though, as seen with the French-Canadian paper *La Vérité*, usually opposed the change of political regimes.

²¹*Montreal Gazette*, 2 February, 1891.

²²*The Enterprise*, 19 February, 1891.

A common aspect within British-Canadian newspapers was addressing the colonial connection. *The Enterprise* did exactly this by arguing that unrestricted reciprocity would destroy the colonial link with Britain and lead to only one conclusion: annexation.²³ Since Confederation in 1867, the British Canadians in Quebec lived in an unusual position: a minority in population in their home province though part of the vast majority in their country, coupled with their unusual power and influence despite their small number. As such, the colonial link was very important to them. Unlike most French Canadians who viewed Canada's place in the British Empire as neither good nor bad, it was a crucial aspect of the British-Canadian identity in North America. On 26 February, *The Enterprise* addressed this point in an articulate article declaring:

Although an independent newspaper, as a public journal we cannot but help taking sides when the question of loyalty to Canada as a British colony comes up. Under the flag of England all parties, irrespective of creed and nationality, here in Canada enjoy the most unlimited freedom and liberty. For our part we are not prepared to change our allegiance just now, and we have no doubt that in this we echo the opinion of the electors of this county, who will give tangible proof of it by their votes on polling day.²⁴

Loyalty to the British Crown, a key component to Macdonald's campaign, was evidently fostered amongst many in the English-language media. Just like French-Canadian nationalists, British-Canadian nationalists, for the most part, refused to entertain the notion of accepting a change in their political institutions by Canada becoming a state in the much larger American Republic.

The Liberal media, though, were also quick to counter the arguments that the Tory organs presented. In fact, the Liberal newspaper the *Quebec Daily Telegraph* had been dismissing Conservative scare tactics as early as January 1891. On 21 January, the

²³*The Enterprise*, 19 February, 1891.

²⁴*The Enterprise*, 26 February, 1891.

paper published an article that declared that “[t]here is a good deal of rubbishy loyalty talk by Tory organs and Tory politicians over the disloyalty to Great Britain involved [says the *Montreal Herald*] in the establishment of free trade relations between Canada and the United States.” In fact, according to the *Telegraph*, “[t]here is no sentiment in trade, and if Canadians find it more profitable to trade with the United States more largely than with Great Britain they will do so, and have a right to do so.”²⁵ The Conservative claim that a closer trade relation with the United States was treasonous to the mother country was also challenged by the *Montreal Daily Witness* on 18 February when it argued that:

It is a singular fact that neither the British Government nor the British press see anything ‘disloyal’ or hostile, to have unrestricted reciprocity of trade between Canada and the United States. It is only the Canadian combinesters, whose privileges are threatened, that raises the ‘disloyalty cry’.²⁶

In general, the English-language Liberal newspapers disputed the Tory claim that unrestricted reciprocity was treasonous rather than outright supporting the economic policy. This is one of the key differences between the English- and French-language papers in Quebec during the 1891 election.

There were, however, some Liberals who were in favour of annexation and expressed this opinion publicly. The *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, in the opinion of one reader, had published a series of articles that spoke in favour of annexation. On 31 January, a letter appeared in the *Telegraph* that stated:

To the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*,
Dear sir – In view of the number of annexationist articles that have lately appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*, I think it is but just that you should exhibit the country you wish us to be annexed to in its more sombre colors as well as its gayer ones...
Yours sincerely,

²⁵*Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 21 January, 1891.

²⁶*Montreal Witness*, 18 February, 1891.

Subscriber

PS: I withhold my name as I am at present employed by an annexationist and do not want to get into trouble.

S.

Unfortunately the letter did not reveal who the author or the ‘annexationist’ was, but it shows that some British Canadians desired annexation. The response from the editor of the *Telegraph*, though, is more interesting:

Annexation to the United States means a new era of prosperity for our country, by the flowing in of capital and the thousand and one other benefits to be derived by our people under the Stars and Stripes. -- Ed. *Telegraph*.²⁷

This direct declaration in favour of annexation shows that some people were willing to publicly identify themselves as annexationists. However, despite this public declaration, the paper was careful to distance itself from those in favour of annexation and reaffirmed its loyalty to Laurier and the Canadian union. Much like the letter in the *Telegraph*, on 3 March, a letter from anonymous “Tory Annexationist” was published that declared his personal sentiments on political union. The letter stated that he would once again vote for the Conservatives and that unrestricted reciprocity would lead to annexation. As for Canada’s future, the letter stated that “Independence is not feasible, and imperial federation is the worst of humbug,” however, “[t]hat annexation is the ultimate, natural destiny of this country I have no doubt...”²⁸ Annexation, as the answer to Canada’s unknown political future, had supporters during the election, but they were few, particularly within the British-Canadian community.

During the 1891 federal election, despite the attention given to annexation by the British-Canadian press, there was no organized movement amongst the English-speaking portion of the population, much like in the French-Canadian community. Although

²⁷*Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 31 January, 1891.

²⁸*Montreal Witness*, 3 March, 1891.

British Canadians in Quebec were still a minority, their influence had continued to grow in the years since Confederation. The loyalty cry had been raised and was followed closely in the English centres of the province. Indeed, some British Canadians cast their votes for the Liberals, but the thirty-seats won by the Conservatives contained the vast majority of the English-speaking vote. Another important fact was the change in attitude of the British-Canadian business class in 1891. In 1849 when the first annexation movement appeared, the main supporters were angry, Tory, British-Canadian businessmen. But by 1891, the protection offered by the National Policy seemed to quell their displeasure. However, the Liberal newspapers across Quebec did not forget the Tory annexationist supporters and made sure to remind their readers of this fact.

There are few similarities between the Annexation Movement of 1849-50 and the discussions surrounding annexation in 1891, though the Liberal papers highlighted some of the more obvious ones. For example, *La Patrie* published an article on 16 February that published the names of former annexationists, such as future Prime Minister J.J.C. Abbott, who were now prominent public men.²⁹ *La Gazette de Berthier* also connected the 1849 annexation movement to the discussions during the 1891 election and asked rhetorically on 27 February “Qui sont les vrais annexionnistes?” According to this paper, the real annexationists were the old Conservatives who still held important positions within the federal government. The article also highlighted:

Nous pouvons leur metre sous les yeux un document qui les démasquerait et ferait éclater l’hypocrasie de leur loyauté apparent. On sait qu’on 1849 il y eut une grande agitation annexionniste au pays. Qui était à la tête du mouvement? Les chefs tories de l’époque, et tout ce qu’il y avait alors de plus bleu. Nous avons leurs manifestes; nous avons leurs signiatures. Beaucoup d’entre eux sont encore de ce monde. Ils se reconnaîtraient aisément; du reste, le peuple reonnaîtra bien, lui, ce parti hyprocrite

²⁹*La Patrie*, 16 February, 1891.

qui aujourd'hui a besoin un cordon de douaniers pour protéger sa loyauté envers l'Angleterre?³⁰

Therefore, the Conservatives stood on weak ground labelling the Liberals as annexationists and traitors considering their past. The *Montreal Witness* also addressed this point clearly when it stated on 25 February that, “there is a marked similarity between the economic condition of Canada in 1891 and that of 1849,” yet “the remedy which is now proposed is, however, not annexation, but that remedy which the men of 1849 regarded as inadequate, reciprocity between Canada and the United States.” Within the same article, the *Witness* provided a strongly worded retort to the Conservative loyalty cry stating:

Judging from the fact that [the Tories] are now opposing reciprocity under conditions which in time promise to produce as strong a feeling in favour of annexation as existed in 1849, they are again casting longing looks backward to their old-time policy. That they should, under these circumstances, talk about treasonable conspiracies on the part of the men who are trying to give annexation its death blow, is painfully puerile.³¹

Clearly the Annexation Movement of 1849-50 and its guiding Manifesto were not forgotten in Quebec and, indeed, had returned to haunt the Tory signers in 1891. Although some similarities can be drawn to the 1849 movement, these must not be stressed too greatly. By 1891, the annexation movement of 1849 was a distant memory and those who declared themselves in favour of political union had changed their opinions drastically. If the old annexationists of 1849 were still continuing their campaign to see Canada annexed to the United States then there would certainly be a connection between these movements. However, this was not the case. Therefore, the 1887-1893 movement must be seen as a new movement entirely.

³⁰*La Gazette de Berthier*, 27 February, 1891.

³¹*Montreal Witness*, 25 February, 1891.

For a province in which its electorate voted Conservative consistently for almost twenty-five years, the electoral result is quite important, though not surprising. The secondary material available is quite thorough in its analysis of why Quebec gave more seats to Laurier than Macdonald. Robert Craig Brown saw an important connection between the Mercier-Laurier alliance during the election arguing that “Mercier’s alliance with Laurier liberalism in the campaign, the rumours of the McGreevy scandal, the lack of cooperation between Langevin and Chapleau in the Macdonald cabinet, the appeal of unrestricted reciprocity, or the attraction of a French Canadian leader of the Liberal party” were all reasons for the increase in seats for the Liberals.³² Noted historian P.B. Waite also found a similar connection in his study *Canada, 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny*:

although the Conservatives had the majority of the votes cast, Laurier took five seats from the Conservatives. The Conservative votes were hived in traditional seats, while the Liberals exploited their advantage in areas that had swung to Mercier in Quebec provincial elections.³³

Waite’s perceptive analysis is the most important in determining why the Liberals were able to garner more seats than their Conservative counterparts. Macdonald’s ‘traditional seats’ were located in the major city centres – Montreal and Quebec – where the British-Canadian communities were considerable. These voters were unlikely to stray away from the Conservatives and the National Policy because the British Canadians had much to lose with reciprocity and more to gain with the National Policy. Donald Creighton best embodied, and reflected, these feelings of the British-Canadian populace in his writings on the era. For the majority of the British-Canadian voters, unrestricted reciprocity was a synonym for commercial union, which led down the road to annexation. The loyalty cry,

³²Robert Craig Brown, *Canada’s National Policy, 1883-1900: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) 210.

³³P.B. Waite, *Canada, 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973) 225.

therefore, was front and centre in voting against the Liberals. As Creighton argued, commercial union “would certainly mean commercial discrimination against England and ominously closing relations with the United States; it might conceivably result in the loss of Canada’s fiscal – and political – independence.”³⁴ Creighton, just like the British Canadian population of Quebec in 1891, believed that

in all probability Canadian fiscal autonomy would not long survive a trading association which so closely resembled a complete commercial union; and the loss of financial independence might be followed swiftly by political annexation to the United States. These doubts and fears counted enough, with enough people, to decide the contest.³⁵

Of course, as is clear, this was not entirely true for Quebec, especially because French-Canadian farmers wanted unrestricted access to the U.S. market.

In contrast to the urban centres that unsurprisingly voted Conservative, Laurier was able to secure his ‘victory’ in Quebec because of the rural votes. Robert Rumilly summarized this point succinctly, arguing “Les campagnes votent pour la réciprocité, et les centres industriels contre, ainsi qu’on le prévoyait.”³⁶ Overall, unrestricted reciprocity was very popular amongst the rural population of Quebec. The agriculturalists and natural resource producers desired freer trade with the United States which the Liberal party promised if elected. Thus, Laurier’s campaign for freer trade would not have been as successful without the votes from the rural, small town French Canadians in Quebec. Also, in the rural communities of Quebec, where the vast majority of the population lived – and was almost exclusively French-speaking – the loyalty cry did not have the same effect as it did in other parts of Canada. French Canadians, indeed, were loyal to the

³⁴Donald Creighton, *Canada’s First Century, 1867-1967* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1970) 70.

³⁵Creighton, *Canada’s First Century, 1867-1967*, 78.

³⁶Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la Province de Québec*. Tome VI (Montréal: Éditions Bernard Valiquette, 1940) 206.

British Crown and tolerated the British Empire; it was their loyalty to Canada and their language, however, which were paramount. As seen in the numerous newspaper articles above, loyalty to British Crown was important as the monarchy was believed to protect French-Canadian's constitutional rights, especially their language, laws, and religion. Although this was an important factor, it obviously did not scare voters away from the Liberals and unrestricted reciprocity. For rural French Canadians, unrestricted reciprocity would have brought a degree of economic prosperity to their country and province which outweighed the loyalty argument. Another important aspect was the simple fact that the Liberal leader was himself a Catholic French-Canadian which explains, in part, Laurier's success in rural Quebec. As Rumilly explained: "loin de rejeter la Confédération, les Canadiens français lui seront plus attachés si un des leurs, Wilfrid Laurier, devient premier ministre à Ottawa. Car c'était encore un argument, dans la province de Québec: la victoire libérale mettra un des nôtres à la tête du pays."³⁷

There were, of course, some who desired annexation to the United States and saw the opportunity to bring about this result by voting Liberal. Robert Rumilly also summarized this point when he argued that "Il existait sans doute des paysans, moins à l'aise que leurs voisins d'outre-frontière, et qui, par indifférence ou cupidité, n'eussent pas refusé l'annexion aux Etats-Unis."³⁸ Like the editor of the *Quebec Daily Telegraph* who advocated political union, those who desired annexation to be sure were a small minority in Quebec during the 1891 election. Unrestricted reciprocity was a viable political option for rural, small town French Canadians; and the connection to annexation

³⁷Rumilly, *Histoire de la Province de Québec*, Tome VI, 199-200.

³⁸Rumilly, *Histoire de la Province de Québec*, Tome VI, 205.

was not made as it had been in the rest of Canada. However, due to the reports in the newspapers, many people in Quebec regarded annexation as a serious threat.

During the 1891 federal election, despite the preponderance of outcries against annexation, there was essentially no active movement for political union with the United States in Quebec. That there were proponents of annexation is doubtless; but they remained the minority and often did not publicly express their desire for political union. Unlike in Ontario where the annexationists, such as Goldwin Smith, were boisterous in their campaign for annexation, Quebecers in general remained quiet on the issue. Indeed, the Conservative press used the threat of annexation to win the election. Yet, a great many French Canadians and some British Canadians did not buy this tactic. They voted for the policy that would best provide relief to the depression that had plagued their province and Canada for many years. Robert Craig Brown made a very astute conclusion regarding the newspapers in Quebec during the 1891 election. He argued that “[i]n retrospect it is clear that the newspaper debate gave an impression of greater support for the movement than it ever possessed.”³⁹ Unlike in 1849 during which time there was the *Annexation Manifesto* and a Montreal Annexation Association, there was nothing of the sort in 1891. There were, indeed, connections to the 1849 movement, particularly the shift in political ideals by members of the Tory party who were staunch supporters of Confederation, including future prime minister J.J.C. Abbott; however, to argue that the movement in 1849 was reinvigorated in 1891 would be straining historical credulity.

Another crucial aspect throughout the election that must be outlined is that the United States would likely not have accepted any sort of free trade with Canada regardless of which party was in power. The Republicans under President Benjamin

³⁹Brown, 146.

Harrison had implemented the protectionist McKinley tariff in 1890 that was popular amongst the American industrialists and their workers. Harrison and his Secretary of State, James G. Blaine, were not prepared to offer a reciprocity treaty, limited or unlimited, to Canada. The two, especially Blaine, were expansionists. They would not have issued a reciprocity treaty that benefitted Great Britain. Only commercial union, in which the tariff levels were established in Washington and controlled by the United States Congress, was acceptable to some Americans. This, however, would not be acceptable to Canadian politicians or the vast majority of French- and British-Canadian voters. Both Macdonald and Laurier were Canadian patriots who would not sell out their country to the Americans.

Overall, the 1891 federal election was a pivotal moment for annexationism in Quebec. Not only had the debate over unrestricted reciprocity brought annexation back into public discussions, it also shifted the focus from purely economic issues – unrestricted reciprocity or commercial union – to the political aspect of annexation. Freer trade with the United States remained an important policy for Quebec following the election, particularly amongst the rural, small town agriculturalists and the natural resource producers. Macdonald was successful in shifting the focus to political loyalty which won him the election. Whereas Laurier was successful in highlighting the importance of expanded free trade with the American Union and was able to secure more seats in Quebec because of this. In the years following this monumental election, annexationist sentiments continued to grow partly due to new arguments in favour of political union. Another key aspect in the agitation for annexation emerged out of the English-French strife that continued to bubble just under the surface. As such, the

annexation movement was about to reach its apex before once again fading into the historical abyss.

Chapter Three: The Public Response to Annexation, 1891-1892

The loyalty card had been played; the bugbear of annexation had reared its head; and yet the province of Quebec had given a majority of its seats to the Liberal party and its platform of unrestricted reciprocity. The predominantly francophone population generally approved of closer economic relations with the United States and French Canadians had cast their votes accordingly. This did not, however, mean that they desired closer political ties with the American Republic. Quebec still witnessed discussions regarding unrestricted reciprocity, commercial union, and annexation following the federal election, but in most cases these discussions were not positive. A number of pamphlets were published that argued against closer political ties with the United States, whereas traditional proponents – such as Goldwin Smith and Erastus Wiman – continued their campaign to see Canada and the United States become more socially, economically, and politically integrated.

Between March 1891 and the beginning of 1893, discussions surrounding annexation flared up at three intervals. The first phase occurred immediately following the federal election during which annexation was outright rejected by a number of authors and the social elite. The second phase occurred between late summer 1891 and December of 1892 when the political atmosphere in Canada and Quebec exploded in a flurry of ‘racial’ tension. The third phase arose out of the political and social discourse during the winter of 1892. Indeed, annexation was still a hot topic in the province of Quebec. Most interesting was the dialogue between French Canadians on annexation. At the same time when many of the social elite were warning that annexation would bring the ruin of the French ‘race’ in North America, a few dared to offer the alternative: that

annexation would in fact be beneficial to French Canadians. It appeared as though Canada's future was still unsure despite the electoral results in March 1891.

Although the prospect of annexation received considerable attention in Quebec, there does not appear to have been an organized movement to bring about this goal. From the sources consulted those who advocated annexation did so mostly on their own terms and for their own reasons. Unlike in 1849 when the disgruntled business elite of Montreal formed the Annexation Association and drafted the *Annexation Manifesto*, the annexationists of 1891-1893 did not have an association or a guiding document to unite them. In Ontario, the 'loyal' province experienced a surge in annexationist sentiments,¹ which could explain the rise of discussions on annexation in Quebec. Yet overall, Quebec was in no position to lead the push for annexation as the majority of the population rejected this political option. It was during this time that annexationist sentiments were publicly debated leading to the movement's apex and eventual collapse across Canada in 1893.

Annexationist sentiments, for the most part, were not making much headway in Quebec, neither before or after the federal election. The people of Quebec preferred Laurier and the platform of freer trade with the United States; however, this may have been different had Goldwin Smith's electoral document *Canada and the Canadian Question* been published before the campaign concluded instead of appearing in April 1891. Written as a campaign document for the Liberal party, Smith unabashedly condemned Confederation as an utter failure and a political anomaly.² *Canada and the*

¹Robert Craig Brown, *Canada's National Policy, 1883-1900: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) 250.

²Damien-Claude Bélanger, *Pride and Prejudice: Canadian Intellectuals Confront the United States, 1891-1945* (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 2006) 3.

Canadian Question is one of the most controversial books in Canadian history, providing a great amount of discussion amongst academics since its publication. For example, Donald Creighton wrote his famous study *The Empire of the St. Lawrence* in part to refute the claims made by Smith that Canada was a geographic and political absurdity. Robert Craig Brown called Smith's essay "Perhaps the most thorough and devastating attack on Confederation that has ever been penned."³ Most recently, Damien-Claude Bélanger cited it as "the most important Canadian essay of the nineteenth century."⁴

The essay's most critical argument is that Canada was an English-speaking nation and that the French-Canadian population needed to be assimilated – along the lines proposed by Lord Durham in his infamous 1839 study – in order for Canada to achieve a single, national identity. Smith argued that Quebec was creating its own national identity, one distinct from the national character of Canada that had been in development since 1867.⁵ In order to 'fix' this problem, Smith proposed political "reunion" with the United States. He preferred the word "reunion" over annexation because he perceived the latter as an ugly word and that "nothing but the accident of civil war [the American Revolutionary War for Independence] ending in the secession, instead of amnesty, has made them [Canada and the United States] two."⁶ As Elisabeth Wallace, a biographer of Smith, argued regarding this point: "Goldwin Smith was the most lucid and persistent advocate of Canada's union with the United States. Annexation was a term he never used, since it implied forcible absorption by the States against the wishes of the Canadians and

³Brown, 140.

⁴Bélanger, 3.

⁵Goldwin Smith, *Canada and the Canadian Question* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose and Co., 1891) 169.

⁶Smith, *Canada and the Canadian Question*, 212.

without the consent of the Mother Country.”⁷ Only political union – annexation – could assimilate the French-Canadian people. Smith outlined this position clearly when he wrote:

And this reminds us of another reason for not putting off the unification of the English-speaking race, since it is perfectly clear that the forces of Canada alone are not sufficient to assimilate the French element or even to prevent the indefinite consolidation and growth of a French nation. Either the conquest of Quebec was utterly fatuous or it is to be desired that the American continent should belong to the English tongue and to Anglo-Saxon civilization.⁸

With such blatant attacks on the French-speaking population of Canada – focused almost exclusively on Quebec – it is very hard to believe that French Canadians would have supported political union with the United States. In fact, Smith’s ‘racist’ and assimilationist arguments were a key factor in the rejection of annexation.

Smith’s attacks on the French-Canadian community did not go unnoticed in Quebec. In August 1891, Louis-Georges Desjardins, Member of Parliament from l’Islet, published a collection of articles he had penned between 1888 and 1891 under the title *Considérations sur l’Annexion*. Desjardins addressed the key topics of the era within these articles – unrestricted reciprocity, commercial union, and annexation – all the while aspiring to prove that annexation was not Canada’s ultimate political destiny and that the people desired a continued separate existence from the United States. Within his well developed introduction Desjardins portrays Goldwin Smith as “le plus ardent défenseur de la réciprocité illimitée, au Canada” and that Smith was “décidément annexionniste.”⁹ Already an opponent to annexation, Desjardins admitted “[j]e suis devenu adversaire encore plus décidé de l’union commerciale et de la réciprocité illimitée, en lisant le livre

⁷Elisabeth Wallace, *Goldwin Smith: Victorian Liberal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957) 253.

⁸Smith, *Canada and the Canadian Question*, 217.

⁹L.G. Desjardins, *Considérations sur l’annexion*. (Québec: 1891) 7-8.

récent de M. Smith.”¹⁰ Doubtless, this sentiment was shared with many French Canadians who read Smith’s work. The main argument of *Canada and the Canadian Question*, that of union of the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’, was rejected by Desjardins for the following reasons: “M. Smith voudrait, par l’annexion, l’unité des deux pays de langue anglaise dans l’Amérique du Nord. C’est une utopie. Les États-Unis ne sont pas un pays anglais.”¹¹ The United States, he argued, was composed of numerous ‘races’ from all over the world which made the idea of a unified Anglo-Saxon nation of Canada and the American Republic a sheer illusion.

Desjardins also highlighted Smith’s ‘racist’ stance toward the French Canadians:

Après tout ce qu’il a fait contre nous, M. Smith ne doit pas être étonné si on le considère comme l’ennemi de la race canadienne française. Peu d’écrivains se sont montrés aussi préjugés, aussi fanatiques à notre égard. Il a persévéramment déploré notre présence sur ce sol d’Amérique, et il ne cesse de nous dire que nous sommes un obstacle au progrès du pays.¹²

Smith’s political ideology of Anglo-Saxon dominance was not hidden from the public discourse and was, clearly, not overlooked by the French-Canadian community. The collection of articles within this compilation, it appears, was republished with the goal of warning French Canadians of the dangers associated with annexation and its guises – such as unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union.

Alongside the refutation of Smith’s ideas, Desjardins also outlined an important concern for French Canadians: the loss of their language, civil law, and religion. Canada, Desjardins argued, was superior to the United States: economically, socially, and politically. Desjardins, and indeed numerous other opponents to annexation, argued that the material benefits that followed annexation – which were undoubted – were the only

¹⁰Desjardins, 8.

¹¹Desjardins, 10.

¹²Desjardins, 10.

advantage. However, Desjardins believed that Canadians did not need these material benefits. Their parliamentary system of government, constitutional laws, and freedom of religion were more important than how rich individuals were.

Desjardins also addressed the supposed advantages for Quebec if Canada were annexed to the United States. He argued that although some – though he does not mention any names – believed that Quebec would be a much wealthier state within the American union, Desjardins saw this as an illusion. Despite the fact that the province would grow exponentially in population as a state in the Republic, the population would cease to be French. “Heureusement,” he argued, “dans ses desseins sur nous, la Providence en a décidé autrement.”¹³ Providence, according to Desjardins, had intervened and provided the French Canadians with a province of their own and, with that, a great responsibility:

Nous avons aujourd’hui le légitime orgueil d’avoir joué un rôle important dans l’histoire politique de notre pays et même de ce continent. Avec l’annexion, ce rôle aurait été pour ainsi dire absolument nul. Plus le progrès matériel aurait été rapide et grand, plus vite nous aurions été submergés, et plus tôt nous serions disparus de la scène politique comme élément national distinct.¹⁴

Desjardins provided a striking commentary on why annexation was not desirable for French Canadians by focusing on the important aspect of their existence in North America and the role they were to play as established by Providence. In his concluding paragraph within the compilation, Desjardins summarized all his arguments and left his readers with the following to consider:

De notre côté, tout nous convie à continuer avec courage et persévérance l’œuvre de la confédération. Ce que nous avons accompli en vingt ans est bien de nature à

¹³Desjardins, 44.

¹⁴Desjardins, 45.

nous convaincre, plus que jamais, que nous avons dans notre population, notre territoire et nos libres institutions tous les elements de la grandeur nationale.¹⁵

Desjardins' message was clear for his fellow French-speaking compatriots: keep the faith in Confederation and continue to build the province of Quebec so that it will remain a largely French-Canadian province. Annexation would only destroy what the years of hard work had achieved.

Desjardin's influential articles highlight an important shift in the movement for annexation in Quebec that followed after the 1891 federal election. Between 1887 and 1891, the arguments surrounding political union were formed almost exclusively on economic issues. Following the election, the economic aspect became secondary and the political and ideological aspects emerged as the most important considerations. It was generally accepted that annexation would improve Quebec's, and Canada's, economy; but the price associated with this – the potential assimilation and complete loss of political institutions – was the deciding factor. Therefore, although economics continued to be an influential aspect, the political future of Quebec became of primary importance.

Despite the shift from economic to political importance following the federal election, proponents of unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union continued to push the issue. On 26 September 1891, Erastus Wiman published an article in the *Brooklyn Eagle* (Brooklyn, New York) as a response to former Member of Parliament, Francis Wayland Glen – an American manufacturer and a proponent of annexation – titled *Impossibility of Canadian Annexation*. It is important to note again that Wiman was not an annexationist. He walked the fine line between annexation and commercial union that was ever present when discussing one idea or the other – but he truly believed that

¹⁵Desjardins, 58.

Canada and the United States should remain politically independent. He presented this opinion to the readers of the *Brooklyn Eagle* by declaring that “there is no argument in Canada in favor of annexation except the material argument, and if the material argument is removed by reciprocity, annexation is immediately postponed.”¹⁶ Here Wiman’s preference for commercial union is clear. Throughout the debates on unrestricted reciprocity, commercial union and annexation, Wiman maintained that by eliminating the political question from the issue altogether, both Canada and the United States could work towards establishing a common tariff and mutually benefit from it: “my position in this matter is simply this: that annexation is unnecessary, is undesirable, and is impossible.”¹⁷

In a rather interesting section of his article, Wiman accurately refutes Glen’s claim that French Canadians desired annexation. Wiman stated that Glen was mistaken “that the French sentiment favors a political relation with the United States,” because they are “dominated” by the Church.¹⁸ The clergy, according to Wiman, feared that they would lose their influence if admitted into the American Union, despite the freedom of religion that each state guarantees. Thus, “the French people [synonymous with the province of Quebec as a whole], while under the influence of the Church of Rome, will [never] favor annexation to the United States.”¹⁹ There is some truth to this observation. The clergy outright condemned the policy of annexation to the United States as political union was anathema to the teachings of the Catholic Church. Although Wiman may have

¹⁶Erastus Wiman, *Impossibility of Canadian Annexation* (New York: 1891) 5.

¹⁷Wiman, *Impossibility of Canadian Annexation*, 9.

¹⁸Wiman, *Impossibility of Canadian Annexation*, 6.

¹⁹Wiman, *Impossibility of Canadian Annexation*, 6.

been out of touch with Canadian public opinion, he was accurate in his perceptions of the Catholic Church, even though it carried a negative connotation.

Wiman continued his crusade of securing commercial union between Canada and the United States throughout the year 1891. In a series of speeches and articles, he continued to argue that the prospect of annexation did not carry any favour in Canada, especially in Quebec amongst the French Canadians. Wiman was accurate in the perception that French Canadians did not want political union. Although he represented an Anglo-Canadian perspective, his opinions were still important in Quebec. While addressing his American audience, Wiman outlined Quebec's unique position in Confederation: the safe-guard to English domination in Canada and North America as a whole. Because Wiman was generally unknown in Quebec his crusade for commercial union did not carry much influence, particularly amongst the French-speaking elite. This was because his campaign was based along Anglo-Saxon conformity.²⁰ What becomes evident, then, is that Wiman's campaign, although followed loyally for many years, was unable to make headway in Quebec. The same, as Robert Craig Brown argues, was true for the Americans: "In short, Commercial Union, despite its vociferous supporters was not and would not be an important political question in the United States."²¹ Although commercial union was not popular, it continued to be discussed as part of Canada's future which became increasingly important.

Along with the uncertainty of Canada's political future, considerable political and social problems emerged in Manitoba and the North-West Territories during the 1880s and early 1890s that threatened to upset the status quo. On 30 July, 1892, the Judicial

²⁰Brown, 128.

²¹Brown, 132.

Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) ruled that the government of Manitoba was legally allowed to abolish publicly funded Catholic and Protestant schools and establish a single publicly-funded school system after reviewing the cases *Barrett v. Winnipeg* and *Logan v. Winnipeg*.²² Reactions to this ruling varied in Quebec – it was, overwhelmingly negative, however – though the ruling did have an impact on the desire for political union with the United States.²³

The decision of the JCPC was seen by some French Canadians as another affront to the French language and character in Canada. Most of the publicly-funded Catholic schools in rural Manitoba were staffed by French Canadian nuns and laywomen who taught a largely French curriculum. Godfroy Langlois was a rouge journalist who believed that a drastic change was required after this most recent set-back for Catholic French Canadians. Born at Ste.-Scholastique, Lower Canada, in 1866, Langlois adhered to the political ideology of the old rouge movement of the 1830s.²⁴ As a young man, Langlois joined the Liberal newspaper *La Patrie* where he developed his liberalism and ideas concerning the French-Canadian and Acadian communities in Quebec and throughout Canada. The ruling of the JCPC allowed Langlois to highlight his liberalism. He demonstrated his political beliefs in an article he wrote by declaring: “The time has come to put an end to concessions and to make ourselves respected. ... There must be a national awakening in all four corners of Papineau’s province.”²⁵ For Langlois the

²²John S. Ewart, *The Manitoba School Question* (Toronto: The Copp, Clark Company (Limited) Publishers, 1894) 21. See Chapter IV for the specific ruling of the JCPC.

²³Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la Province de Québec*, Tome VII (Montréal: Éditions Bernard Valiquette, 1940) 33.

²⁴Patrice Dutil, “Godfroy Langlois,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, 31 March, 2009 <http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=6762&&PHPSESSID=k3nki8hpobmre7giejau523c2>.

²⁵Patrice Dutil, *Devil’s Advocate: Godfroy Langlois and the Politics of Liberal Progressivism in Laurier’s Quebec* (Montreal-Toronto: Robert Davies Publishing, 1994) 61.

solution to the problem was the annexation of Quebec to the United States. In the American Republic, each state controlled its educational system without interference from the federal government. If a majority of Quebecers opted for annexation, Langlois believed that French-language instruction would not be threatened. As an anti-clerical thinker, though, Langlois did not mention the right to publicly-funded Catholic schools since these were outlawed in the American States.

That the Manitoba Schools Question influenced some people to become annexationists is certain. To be sure, as Patrice Dutil argued, “the Manitoba Schools Question helped to revive the notion that annexation to the United States was desirable.”²⁶ Donald Warner also believed that the social tensions caused by the strife in Manitoba convinced many Quebecers, both British and French Canadian, that annexation was desirable.²⁷ Godfroy Langlois was clearly one of those who believed annexation must follow. Within the pages of *L'Écho des Deux-Montagnes*, the “ORGANE DU PARTI LIBÉRAL DANS LE DISTRICT DE TERREBONNE”, Langlois wrote numerous articles in the summer and fall of 1892 advocating annexation. Despite his claims that annexation was not only necessary but desirable, he was disappointed by the lack of enthusiasm for political union in his home province. On 10 November, Langlois lamented this fact when he wrote in the pages of *L'Echo*: “La grande cause de l’annexion du Canada aux États-Unis fait de grands progrès de tous les jours dans la province d’Ontario et elle n’en fera dans notre province que lorsque cette questions vitale aura froidement et sérieusement été discutée devant le public.”²⁸ According to Langlois, the issue of annexation had to be

²⁶Dutil, *Devil's Advocate*, 62.

²⁷Donald Warner, *The Idea of Continental Union: The Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960) 209-10.

²⁸*L'Echo des Deux-Montagnes*, 10 November, 1892.

discussed in public in order to see any steps toward achieving political union with the United States.

What is most interesting, though, is the lack of discussion surrounding annexation in the newspapers of Quebec following the decision of the Manitoba Schools Question. Despite Langlois' cries for political union, most newspapers remained either silent on the issue or continued to oppose the notion of annexation. Reporting of the Manitoba Schools Question appeared intermittently throughout August until November in which the articles disclosed information on the ruling of the JCPC and how the justices had contradicted the articles that brought Manitoba into Confederation in 1870. The main reason for this is that the Manitoba Schools Question caused a rise in French-Canadian nationalist sentiments centred primarily in Quebec. The idea that Quebec was the only true homeland of the French Canadians became an influential ideology in *la belle province*. Thus the schools crisis facing Catholic French Canadians in Manitoba was unlikely to be manifested by a desire for annexation to the United States.²⁹

Most surprisingly is the lack of discussion of annexation within the pages of the ultra-Liberal press, *La Patrie*. On 3 October, *La Patrie* published an article under the headline "L'Union Politique" in which it argued that Canadian independence would be terrible for the Canadian economy whereas annexation would be quite beneficial. It also claimed that "Le mouvement [d'annexion] s'accroît de plus en plus," but did not elaborate except declaring that numerous papers were attempting to humiliate *La Patrie* by labeling them annexationists.³⁰ A few weeks later, on 27 October, *La Patrie* published an article on Canada's future informing its readers of the movement for annexation in

²⁹For an excellent description of the influence of the Manitoba Schools Question in the nationalist rhetoric in Quebec, see A.I. Silver, *The French Canadian Idea of Confederation*, specifically chapter nine.

³⁰*La Patrie*, 3 October, 1892.

Ontario, but that it had not, up to that point, reached Quebec.³¹ Annexation was still being discussed within the public discourse, though not with the same passion as presented by Langlois.

There were, however, reports that countered Langlois' call for annexation. *Le Canadien*, a Liberal newspaper from Quebec City, published an article on 1 September written Théo Bertrand that argued against the need for annexation. In light of the controversy that emerged from the JCPC decision, Bertrand argued that "Il n'en est pas ainsi de nous, Canadiens-français. Nous sommes ici chez nous; nous sommes les vrais Canadiens. Nous aimons le Canada non pas comme une seconde patrie."³² There were, for Bertrand two options for Canada: a legislative union of all the provinces or annexation to the United States. As for the latter, he argued "Quant à l'annexion, Québec n'en veut pas non plus, et n'en voudra jamais qu'à la dernière extrémité."³³ Bertrand's observation is quite correct in that annexation was not a popular idea in Quebec. His conclusion, however, was the most relevant and insightful summary. "Il existe dans l'esprit," he wrote, "de presque tout les colons l'idée de former à côté des Etats-Unis un pays libre et indépendant, et je ne crois que l'idée d'annexion fasse jamais beaucoup de progrès, surtout si nos relations commerciales avec nos voisins viennent à s'améliorer."³⁴ These would eventually be prophetic words as the desire for annexation dissipated with the improvement of economic conditions in Canada.

After an examination of the newspapers from across Quebec, it did not matter if the paper was Liberal or Conservative, the Manitoba Schools Question seemingly did not

³¹*La Patrie*, 27 October, 1892.

³²*Le Canadien*, 1 September, 1892.

³³*Le Canadien*, 1 September, 1892.

³⁴*Le Canadien*, 1 September, 1892.

provide a rise in annexationist sentiments. The decision to eliminate Catholic education was universally condemned by the French-Canadian population of Quebec, but annexation was not a popular by-product, save for Godfroy Langlois' passionate declaration in favour of political union. This is even more interesting upon review of *Le Nord*, a Conservative organ from St. Jérôme that consistently debated political ideas with Langlois' *L'Echo des Deux-Montagnes*. Besides Langlois, there is little evidence to suggest that the Manitoba Schools Questions fuelled annexationist discourse or sentiments among Quebec's French-Canadian community. Despite the lack of discussion on annexation, Canada's future was still in question.

On 28 November, 1892, Sohmer Park in Montreal hosted a conference on Canada's future in which four orators took to the stage and outlined their beliefs concerning Canada's political destiny. The conference was well advertised across Montreal from newspapers of both political affiliations. *La Minerve* informed its readers that "MM. Cardinal, Lemieux, McGown et Myers, de Toronto, tous orateurs des plus distingués, discuteront le système colonial, la fédération impériale, l'indépendance et l'annexion. Il y aura ensuite un vote au scrutin. Que ceux qui veulent être bien placés se rendent de bonneheure."³⁵ *La Patrie*, published a special invitation to the women of Montreal to attend the gathering, stating:

Les dames sont spécialement invitée à assister à cette intéressant séance dans laquelle on discutera l'avenir du pays. On veut qu'elles experiment hardiment leur opinion en cette circonstance, et c'est pour cela qu'elles prennent part aux suffrages au meme titre que les hommes. Si nous nous commes quelque choses comme nation, nous le devons en grande partie au patriotisme et au devouement bien connus de la femme canadienne.³⁶

³⁵*La Minerve*, 28 November, 1892.

³⁶*La Patrie*, 28 November, 1892.

Along with the list of speakers, the newspapers informed their readers that a vote was to be held at the end of the conference based upon the four propositions presented. The run of articles preceding the conference surely aided its attendance. The exact number of attendees is unknown as numbers vary depending on the newspaper. *La Patrie* stated the attendance at close to ten-thousand; *Le Quotidien*, from Lévis, reported close to nine-thousand; the *Montreal Gazette* a mere four-thousand; and Donald Warner estimated that approximately five-thousand attendees were present.³⁷ French Canadians composed the majority in attendance which was important to the outcome of the conference.

The four orators were: Mr. J.T. Cardinal, a lawyer from Montreal, who proposed the maintenance of the status quo; Mr. McGown who advocated imperial federation; Mr. Rodolphe Lemieux, proponent of independence; and Mr. Elgin Myers who advocated annexation.³⁸ Interestingly, in every newspaper article about the conference the journalists noted that Myers hailed from Toronto. Each speaker was allotted thirty minutes to present his case, after which the ‘vote’ would commence. The speeches were printed in full in the 29 November issue of *Le Canadien*, published in Quebec City. Because each speaker gave a thorough examination of their topic it would be too lengthy to discuss all their ideas here. Therefore, only the most relevant information, particularly regarding annexation, will be highlighted.

Cardinal spoke of the advantages to maintaining the status quo. In his address, he argued that the current political situation was best for Canada, and more particularly for Quebec and the French Canadians. Specifically, Cardinal highlighted that the French language was an official language at the federal level in Canada and that French-language

³⁷Warner, 210.

³⁸Unfortunately, no newspaper reported the full name of McGown or Cardinal.

rights were protected under the Canadian constitution. He outlined that imperial federation would be advantageous for Great Britain, but not for Canada per se, while annexation carried the same disadvantages. Cardinal showed his opposition to political union with the United States when he challenged: “Je défie l’éloquent avocat de l’annexion, de démontrer à cet auditoire que nous aurions, nous Canadiens-français, autant de protection dans l’Union américaine que nous devons la Confédération canadienne.”³⁹ As for independence, he was not opposed to the idea but believed that Canada needed to mature politically in order to achieve that end. Essentially, Cardinal concluded with particular attention to his French-speaking compatriots to remain committed to Confederation and not to despair the situation in Manitoba.

McGown highlighted the fact that the British Empire was vast and far reaching; thus, should Canada join the British in an imperial federation, its prosperity would continue to grow as the Empire expanded across the globe. He argued that Canadians wanted a stronger connection with the Empire so that their country was not isolated by independence or annexation. By joining Britain in an imperial federation, Canada would enjoy all the same benefits it currently had – protection by the British navy and army were particularly emphasized – as well as the chance to expand its economy. McGown stated to his audience in candid terms that he believed the United States wanted to absorb Canada by force and that any Canadian who did not resist this move, or resist this position, was a traitor.

Lemieux followed McGown and was by far the most popular speaker of the night according to numerous reports. He began his speech with a brief historical overview, outlining that since the first French governor, Champlain, to the current Governor

³⁹*Le Canadien*, 29 November, 1892.

General, Lord Stanley, Canada had only known the colonial regime. “Je viens de demander à l’immense assemblée de ce soir,” Lemieux asked, “s’il n’est pas un autre régime, plus en harmonie avec nos intérêts et nos aspirations?”⁴⁰ For Lemieux, Canadian independence was the answer. He outlined how he respected England for what it stood for and the benefits bestowed upon Canada; however, Canadian interests at the moment were more important. Lemieux addressed the concern that Canada’s population was too small to become independent; while he recognized this concern, he did not believe it was a reason not to become independent. At the time, England maintained all the commercial benefits under the current political and economic situation; but if Canada became independent, it would control its own economy and be master of its destiny. Provincial strife, he believed, would also dissipate which would allow for a new, national identity that united all Canadians. He called upon both linguistic groups to unite: “Anglais et Français, nous rivaliserons encore, mais cette fois sur un terrain où le pied sera sûr, la main franche et où le cœur ne subira ni faiblesse ni honte: j’ai nommé la république canadienne.”⁴¹

The final speaker of the night was Myers who spoke in favour of annexation. His opening argument touched upon the commercial aspect, stating that Canada would never achieve commercial greatness being tied to a European power. Following that line, he argued that imperial federation would only cause more problems for Canada than it would solve. “L’union continentale,” he stated, “est au contraire le plus grand projet de confédération, d’une confédération naturellement indiquée par la Providence, avec nos

⁴⁰*Le Canadien*, 20 November, 1892.

⁴¹*Le Canadien*, 29 November, 1892.

propres enfants et nos propres frères.”⁴² This statement is quite interesting as Myers, an Anglophone from Toronto, addressed the aspect of Providence and the natural progression of Canadian development. Usually writers saw Providence as keeping Canada and Quebec out of the American Union; Myers openly countered that perception. He also outlined that should Canada be annexed, the federal government in Washington has no veto power over state’s bills, which would mean that Quebec could pass its laws without fear of federal interference. Myers concluded that the same offer to join the Americans in 1775 still existed and that it was not too late.

With all the presentations concluded, the auditorium was adjourned until all the ballots were cast and the votes tallied. A total of 2,999 ballots were cast with the following results: 364 for the status quo, 29 for imperial federation, 1 614 in favour of independence, and 992 for annexation.⁴³ Upon examination, it becomes clear that the people who attended this conference were more in favour of independence; yet, annexation also garnered a significant number of votes. Donald Warner concluded from these results that “this formerly loyal province could no longer be taken for granted,” as annexation had won a considerable amount of favour.⁴⁴ This conclusion, however, is misleading. The newspapers and their analysis of the success of the night reveal more than voting results.

The following day, 29 November, the newspapers across the island of Montreal, and even some as far away as Lévis, reported on the events of the preceding evening in great detail. Not surprisingly, the reactions to the conference were mixed, providing a very interesting insight into how these individual newspapers responded to the idea of

⁴²*Le Canadien*, 29 November, 1892.

⁴³Warner, 210.

⁴⁴Warner, 210.

Canada's political future. Some labelled the night as a success, such as *L'Etendard*, published in Montreal, which reported that "La réunion au Parc Sohmer hier soir a été magnifique," and that "[l]es orateurs ont été écoutés et applaudis."⁴⁵ *La Minerve* felt that "Les propriétaires du Parc Sohmer peuvent être fiers du résultat qu'ils ont obtenu hier soir."⁴⁶ From Quebec City, *Le Canadien* reported that "L'assemblée d'hier soir a de l'importance," and, more importantly that, "L'assemblée d'hier soir au Parc Sohmer a eu un succès qui fera époque dans les annals de notre ville."⁴⁷ Clearly, for these newspapers the conference was a success and addressed a very important issue for Canadians.

There were, of course, those who felt that the conference, although interesting, should not be taken too seriously. For example, an article in *La Presse* argued that "la soirée pour n'avoir pas le caractère sérieux d'une réunion politique, a cependant été fort intéressante et parfois amusante."⁴⁸ It is not surprising that *La Presse* was not favourable to the conference as it was a Conservative organ and, as highlighted by the paper, "[l]a majorité de l'auditoire était composée évidemment de libéraux."⁴⁹ Unfortunately, the article did not elaborate on why the conference should be taken as entertainment rather than a serious discussion. *La Presse*, though, was not the only paper to heap scorn on the conference. The *Montreal Gazette* printed an article on the conference under the headline: "It Turned out a Fizzle. A good natured crowd assembled to hear four orators discuss the future of Canada and laughs at them." Also a Conservative paper, the *Gazette*, like *La Presse*, indicated that "It was quite evident that [the audience] was composed

⁴⁵*L'Etendard*, 29 November, 1892.

⁴⁶*La Minerve*, 29 November, 1892.

⁴⁷*Le Canadien*, 29 November, 1892.

⁴⁸*La Presse*, 29 November, 1892.

⁴⁹*La Presse*, 29 November, 1892.

entirely of Liberals...”⁵⁰ which meant that it could not be considered a serious political talk as the Tories were not properly represented. Finally, *La Gazette de Joliette* also remarked on the seriousness of the gathering. It stated that “Cette soirée a été intéressante, paraît-il, et nous le croyons sans peine; mais on aurait tort de prendre la choses trop au sérieux. Il s’encoulera probablement encore bien des années avant que le Canada adopte une autre constitution politique.”⁵¹

Myers’ speech on annexation specifically received numerous comments in the papers. *Le Quotidien*, although disagreeing with Myers’ platform, offered a positive review of his speech stating: “M. Myers a fait prevue d’un rare sang-froid et de jugement et ne s’emportant pas en face des interruptions qui ont accueilli ses premières paroles. Il a impose silence aux plus tapageurs et a plaidé sa cause de manière à mériter les félicitations de ceux même qui ne sont pas de son avis.”⁵² *La Minerve* was brief in its comments, but stated that “M. Myers est un avocat très habile et il a bien plaidé sa cause.”⁵³ Despite the fact that Myers was an Anglophone from Toronto, his opinions were greeted with professional courtesy by some of the newspapers. It also shows the willingness on the part of the citizens of Montreal to listen to a political idea that was apparently unpopular. However, it must be noted that Myers was interrupted several times by students from McGill who booed his cries for annexation. The *Montreal Gazette* reported that “God Save the Queen” had to be played following his speech to subdue the rowdy spectators.⁵⁴

⁵⁰*Montreal Gazette*, 29 November, 1892.

⁵¹*La Gazette de Joliette*, 7 December, 1892.

⁵²*Le Quotidien*, 30 November, 1892.

⁵³*La Minerve*, 29 November, 1892.

⁵⁴*Montreal Gazette*, 29 November, 1892.

The ‘voting’ results also drew considerable attention from the papers. *L’Etendard* highlighted that “Il y a eu 2000 votes de donnés. L’indépendance a triomphé par une forte majorité. Cela n’empêchera pas le pays de continuer à vivre dans le statu quo.”⁵⁵ In an article published in *Le Franco-Canadien*, the author stressed the fact that the votes for independence outnumbered the other three options combined by an impressive 229 votes.⁵⁶ It is not surprising that this fact was stressed considering that an article was published by *Le Franco-Canadien* on 24 November in which it declared that the year 1892 was the year for independence.⁵⁷ Most papers highlighted that independence garnered the most votes, but also that annexation tallied almost one-thousand. Godfroy Langlois reported on this fact within the pages of *La Liberté*, stating that “la question d’union américaine était pour la première fois traitée publiquement et cependant elle a obtenu 992 suffrages...”⁵⁸ However, the *Montreal Gazette* informed its readers to not take too much notice in this result. Although annexation had come in second for voting, “The balloting was a farce. The annexationists who ran the meeting voted several times, as they had the foresight to gather in a heap of the programmes containing the ballots.”⁵⁹ This critique is difficult to verify as no other newspaper made reference to any cheating by the voters or the organizers. It could also simply be the case of a Conservative organ attempting to perform ‘damage control’ with the results.

Despite the critique, though, the voting reveals an important underlying trend. It is not surprising that independence garnered the most support. Yet the votes garnered for

⁵⁵*L’Etendard*, 29 November, 1892.

⁵⁶*Le Franco-Canadien*, 1 December, 1892.

⁵⁷*Le Franco-Canadien*, 24 November, 1892.

⁵⁸*La Liberté*, 1 December, 1892. *La Liberté* was founded by Langlois in November, 1892, after his first newspaper, *L’Echo des Deux-Montagnes*, was condemned by the Catholic Church for its political ideologies. The new paper was still printed in Ste-Scholastique under the same format as the former.

⁵⁹*Montreal Gazette*, 29 November, 1892.

annexation are quite revealing. That almost one-thousand people should feel that annexation was Canada's political destiny showed that some of the discussions about political union had been successful, especially if Langlois' report is considered. Annexation had been discussed in the papers across Quebec for five years, yet this was the first public conference in which political union was debated. The actual number of votes garnered for annexation, though, must not be taken at face value, especially considering the *Montreal Gazette's* concern of false balloting. Also, Myers' speech was delivered in English to a predominantly French-Canadian audience that leads one to speculate on who voted for annexation. Unfortunately there is no break down of who voted as it was a secret ballot and the exact composition of the crowd – of British and French Canadians – cannot be determined. However, since annexation was able to gather the second most votes, it had clearly experienced some rise in support.

There is a considerable lack of historical analysis about this conference in the secondary material that exists today. Aside from the voting results and a few comments about the conference by Donald Warner and Robert Rumilly's *Histoire de la Province de Québec* volume six, no other authors addressed the events on the night of 28 November. Although the conference did not seem to spawn any dramatic changes in the politics or social atmosphere of Quebec, a gathering of five- to ten-thousand people is significant. What makes it all the more significant is the strong showing for annexation from the voting results. It is noteworthy that almost one thousand spectators voted for annexation in a province where some – such as Erastus Wiman and Goldwin Smith – thought political union never possible. Therefore, to state that no one in Quebec desired annexation is false, just as is concluding that a movement for annexation was present. It

is unfortunate that authors in the past have largely ignored this conference as it is an important part of the public discourse on Canada's future in Quebec. One explanation for this could be that the conference did not produce many headlines off the island of Montreal. Though after thorough research of numerous newspapers across the province, the issue of annexation as raised by this conference was indeed an important phenomenon.

A similar public discussion was held about the future of Canada in the city of Sherbrooke in which the topic focused solely on commercial union and annexation. The composition of the population of Sherbrooke warrants mention. In 1891, the population of Sherbrooke was recorded as 3 755 non-Francophones – mainly British Canadians – and 6 342 French Canadians.⁶⁰ The independent-Conservative *Le Progrès de l'Est* reported on the conference, stating that “La discussion des questions politiques pratiques menaçant de causer un peu trop de feu, à l'Union Commerciale, l'on a sagement décidé de limiter les sujets aux questions moins inflammables et de se rebattre sur la politique encore à l'état théorique speculative.”⁶¹ The issue of commercial union was still an important matter being discussed, but so, too, was annexation. “La première séance a eu lieu lundi dernier; le sujet de discussion était l'opportunité de l'annexion du Canada aux États-Unis,” the paper reported, “sujet d'actualité par le temps qui court, mais cependant encore assez loin de la politique active pour ne pas porter ombrage aux susceptibilités bleues ou rouges.”⁶² Discussions on annexation, such as this, were not uncommon in the Eastern Townships, especially considering the proximity to the United States

⁶⁰Jean-Pierre Kesteman, *Histoire de Sherbrooke: Tome II De l'âge de la vapeur à l'ère de l'électricité (1867-1896)* (Sherbrooke: Productions G.G.C. ltée, 2001) 91.

⁶¹*Le Progrès de l'Est*, 29 November, 1892.

⁶²*Le Progrès de l'Est*, 29 November, 1892.

The years 1891 and 1892 saw a distinct shift in the discussion surrounding annexation. Whereas in the years before the federal election the focus was primarily economic, Canada's political destiny became the focal point. Goldwin Smith's *Canada and the Canadian Question* was the strongest opinion piece favouring annexation penned in nineteenth-century Canada. Smith was blatant in his attacks on the French-Canadian population and his desire for political "reunion" with the United States. Although he was able to spark discussion, Smith's influence in Quebec was minimal. Smith was Ontario's annexationist leader; Quebec did not have such a figurehead. According to Donald Warner, Wilfrid Laurier commented on this point when he told a friend "the movement for political union which now manifests itself in certain counties is not yet a serious one but might very soon become so, if a prominent man were to place himself at the head of it."⁶³ However, there was no such person to become the leader of the annexationist movement in Quebec.

Opposition towards annexation also increased during this period. Desjardin's articles presented a gloomy future for French Canadians as part of the American Republic. He also focused on the political implications of annexation aside from the more obvious economic and material benefits. Discussions such as these highlight the move from economical to political considerations surrounding the discourse on annexation; though proponents of commercial union such as Erastus Wiman continued their campaign to achieve a new economic intimacy between Canada and the United States.

The impact of the Manitoba Schools Question and the subsequent discussion on Canada's future is also an important aspect to the movement for annexation. The social and political strife caused by the abolishment of publicly funded Catholic schools in

⁶³Warner, 210.

Manitoba certainly caused some, such as Godfroy Langlois, to desire annexation; but the outcry following the JCPC's decision did not create a surge in annexationist sentiments. The newspapers of the era show that annexation was still discussed intermittently, but not with the furor one would assume. Yet the political questions that arose out of the Manitoba Schools Question clearly had some influence as was evident during the conference on 28 November, 1892. The four political options were discussed in public for the first time and it was independence and annexation that showed the strongest favour. As mentioned previously, though, the results must be taken at face value. Although annexation received close to a thousand votes and it had become an acceptable public discussion point, it did not create a mass movement for political union.

Therefore, the period between 1891 and 1892 is an important time in the development of annexationist ideas and sentiments. Following the increase in public discussion and the importance placed on political issues, the year 1893 saw the apex of annexationism before fading away once again. Between 1891 and 1892 there was no organized movement for annexation like the one in 1849, but there were advocates of political union who publicly expressed their opinions. More talk of annexation emerged in 1893 especially after two public conferences in Montreal in which political union was front and centre. However, just as annexation had emerged quietly in 1887, it was about to disappear just as suddenly after 1893.

Chapter Four: The Apex of Annexationism, 1893

By 1893, the prospect of annexation had been intermittently discussed throughout Quebec for almost six years. During that time, the debate surrounding annexation shifted from being primarily economic to being primarily political by encompassing numerous new aspects. The key reason for this was that the economic policies of unrestricted reciprocity and commercial union had been rejected by the majority of Canadian voters in 1891 because the Conservative party had been successful in redefining the question of the election. Due to this, the political prospect of annexation became the focal point. As highlighted in the previous chapters, annexationism had entered the public discourse and was no longer simply a bugbear. This trend continued throughout 1893 with the publication of several pamphlets promoting and opposing annexation. Two important speeches were also delivered that discussed annexation to the United States. However, what remained constant was the very low support that this political movement garnered. Due to this fact, by the end of 1893 the annexation option was once again drifting into obscurity. A key component of the decline in support for annexation was that Canada's economy experienced a gradual recovery from the depression that had plagued it for over a decade. Also, the American economy began to slip into a recession that once again brought the old economic issues to the forefront. Although politics had become the focal point of annexation between 1891 and 1893, the economic outlook always remained the primary concern of Quebecers.

Following the public discussion of annexation in November 1892, another important conference was held on the subject. On 17 March, 1893, at the Club national in Montreal, Jean-Baptiste Rouillier took to the stage and openly promoted annexation to

the United States.¹ Not much is known about the life of J.-B. Rouilliard save for his journalistic record. By 1893, however, Rouilliard was an outright annexationist; but as noted in the first chapter, he did not always support this political option. He came to believe that Canada's ultimate destiny, and more specifically the destiny of the French Canadians, lay in political union with the United States. As a young man he enlisted in the Union Army to fight in the American Civil War, spending a considerable amount of time in the United States. It is likely that Rouilliard developed his strong attachment to republican ideals and institutions during this time. He returned to Quebec following the war where he began his journalistic career and entered into a life of public service, eventually becoming Deputy Inspector-General of Mines in the Mercier government of the late 1880s. In 1893, Rouilliard moved his family to New England after being, as Alexandre Bélisle described, a "victime [...] de la politique."² Rouilliard continued his craft in New England where he founded the journal *L'Union Continentale* in Boston; however, only three or four issues were ever published. He died at Fall River, Massachusetts in 1908 at the age of 65.³

Rouilliard's conference in 1893, fittingly titled *Annexion: Conférence l'Union Continentale* was published shortly after his speech. The essence of his conference is captured in its title and Rouilliard, according to *La Patrie*, spoke for two hours on this topic. The speech itself is quite long and too detailed to be cited in large excerpts; however, sections of this conference must be addressed. Most importantly, Rouilliard

¹The exact spelling of Jean-Baptiste Rouilliard is debated as it is spelt numerous ways. However, for this paper, the author has selected the spelling found on the printed document of his speech which contains the second 'I'.

²André Bélisle, *Histoire de la presse franco-américaine* (Worcester, MA: L'opinion publique, 1911) 288.

³Bélisle, 288-91.

began by stating that his speech was of his own beliefs and opinions and did not necessarily reflect the ideas of the Club national or any political party. Rouilliard's speech is particularly interesting because of the manner in which he approaches his topic, that is, by showing the positive aspects of annexation. He touched on issues such as the influence of the Catholic clergy over French-Canadian society, the fear of assimilation within the American Republic, the economic benefits, and finally the oppressive politics of the Canadian Conservative party.

Within the public psyche in Quebec, the power and influence of the Catholic clergy was an accepted, and valued, aspect of society. The clergy vehemently opposed political union with the United States for numerous reasons. For Rouilliard, these prejudicial ideas expounded by the clergy were keeping French Canadians subservient to the English-speakers in the province and inhibiting progress. As Rouilliard stated, "Voilà ce qui explique comment il se fit que les Canadiens-Français ne profitèrent pas de l'occasion pour s'émanciper, pour devenir des hommes libres, dans un pays libre et préférèrent demeurer colons anglais sous la férule anglaise."⁴ Rouilliard argued that French-Canadian immigrants in New England retained their Catholic faith and identity while enjoying the material benefits that accompany life in the Republic. Thus, French Canadians need not worry about the destruction of their sacred religion. For the 1.5 million French Canadians who immigrated to New England assimilation had not occurred. Therefore, the French Canadians could remain French even after Canada being annexed to the United States. On this point Rouilliard argued:

Certaines personnes redoutent que l'entrée de la province de Québec dans l'Union Américaine soit le signal de son asservissement et que nous nous trouvions jetés

⁴Jean-Baptiste Rouilliard, *Annexion: Conférence l'Union Continentale* (Montréal, 1893) 6.

dans les flots d'un océan ...anglo-saxon. Il y a déjà longtemps qu'on nous y a jetés dans les flots de l'océan...anglo-saxon.⁵

According to the speaker, Confederation was a ploy by the British government to assimilate the French-Canadian population, as had been proposed in 1839 and that the Tory government had been working to achieve this goal in Canada since 1867. In the United States, according to Rouilliard, this would not occur. The aspect of being assimilated, as was the case of the French in Louisiana, was discarded by Rouilliard because “par l'annexion nous rentrerions librement et sur un pied de parfaite égalité avec chacun et tous les États de l'Union américaine, et nos droits politiques et religieux seraient assurés.”⁶ Clearly for Rouilliard, he did not worry about assimilation of his compatriots.

The main goal in which the people of Quebec should have been working toward, as envisioned by Rouilliard, was:

de créer un ou des États ayant une majorité composée d'influences aux aspirations françaises. Ce sera le moyen de préserver l'élément français déjà fixé aux États-Unis, ainsi que les groupes dispersés dans différentes localités de la Confédération, lesquels trouveraient alors dans l'État de Québec les avantages qu'ils sont forcés d'aller chercher aux États-Unis.⁷

Here was a clear and concise argument for the annexation of Quebec to the United States: to create a French state in the Union that would be for the benefit of all francophones in North America. Previous statements in favour of annexation had been made for the benefit of Canada and the Canadian peoples; Rouilliard, however, was not concerned about the British Canadians. His main focus was to secure a place in the United States where he and his compatriots would form a majority with considerable influence.

⁵Rouilliard, 10.

⁶Rouilliard, 23.

⁷Rouilliard, 21.

Although many writers – unfortunately Rouilliard does not mention any by name – warned about the weak French-Canadian influence within the United States, a nation of sixty-five million people, Rouilliard countered this argument by asking rhetorically what the French-Canadian influence was in the British Empire with a population of four-hundred million. A unified French state, he believed, would be stronger and have more influence than at present in the province of Quebec.

As for the economic and material aspect of his platform, Rouilliard outlined that “L’Union continentale, par l’annexion aux États-Unis, assurerait un tarif uniforme, un tarif protecteur élevé, contre les pays transatlantiques, et libre échangiste avec les peuples des amériques [*sic*].”⁸ In 1893, Rouilliard believed that the federal politicians negotiated economic treaties with other nations not for the benefit of Canada, but for the benefit of Britain. As a state in the American union, the tariff would be established by the much stronger United States and French Canadians would reap the benefits of such an arrangement. To do this, the “ligne imaginaire qu’ils ont nommé frontière,” must be eliminated. Above all else,

...nous avons un territoire plus grand que celui des États-Unis, et notre population n’étant à peu près qu’un douzième de celle de l’Union Américaine. Nous avons donc beaucoup de terrain à occuper, à développer, à exploiter et ce qui mieux est, nos 70 millions de voisins sont en état de nous aider à utiliser nos vastes ressources, ce qui nous enrichirait et permettrait à nos compatriots de demeurer au Canada.⁹

In fact, the economic issues addressed by Rouilliard only comprised a small portion of his speech. He clearly recognized the material advantages that French Canadians would enjoy within a commercial union with the United States, but his main focus was the political and ideological plight of the French-Canadian community in Quebec.

⁸Rouilliard, 26.

⁹Rouilliard, 27.

Rouilliard's speech is the most well known annexationist document of this time. In fact, it remains one of the only well publicized documents in which support for annexation is its focus. As explained previously, most people who were advocates of annexation did not make this fact known publicly. Rouilliard, however, was bold in his declaration that annexation was not only a viable political option, but the best option for French Canadians. Upon examination of the newspapers of the era, though, Rouilliard's speech does not seem to have had much influence on the people of Quebec. As will become clear, there was a considerable lack of reporting on Rouilliard's conference outside of Montreal. Also, there is no mention of Rouilliard's conference in the secondary source material available. This is likely due to the fact that this conference did not cause an uproar in Quebec.

The reactions from the Montreal media reveal an interesting insight into how Rouilliard's conference was received in Quebec; however, not much was written about the conference itself. One obvious paper that supported Rouilliard was *La Patrie*. As mentioned in Chapter One, *La Patrie* did not support annexation in 1887. Yet by 1893, the editors decided to embrace the cause of political union with the United States. On 16 March, *La Patrie* published an advertisement for the conference under the headline "Club national. Séance extraordinaire vendredi soir" – the only advertisement for the conference that could be found – in which it stated that "Vendredi, le 17 mars courant, séance extraordinaire à laquelle M. J.B. Rouilliard donnera une conférence sur l'Union Continentale."¹⁰ Surely this advertisement helped to draw people to attend the event.

On 18 March, the paper published another article that revealed its pro-annexationist stance. The article began: "Hier soir, les vastes salles du Club national

¹⁰*La Patrie*, 16 March, 1893.

étaient littéralement remplies d'un auditoire des mieux choisis et pressés d'entendre le magnifique ouvrage de M. J.B. Rouillard [*sic*] sur l'«Union Continentale». Les dames y assistaient en très grand nombre.”¹¹ According to this article, the auditorium was full with spectators although it does not say exactly how many were in attendance. The article continued stating that for two hours, “le savant conférencier a tenu ses auditeurs sous le charme de sa parole éloquente et vibrante du plus patriotisme.”¹² Statements such as these supporting Rouillard are not surprising considering that Rémi Tremblay, a contributing editor of *La Patrie*, was an old friend and brother-in-arms during the American Civil War and a supporter of annexation. Tremblay even read a poem entitled *La grande loi de l'annexion* in which the allusion of marriage was used for the union of Canada and the United States.

La Minerve also published a lengthy article on 18 March about Rouillard's conference. The article was rather neutral though it raised numerous interesting points. The author began by addressing the topic of Rouillard's conference:

Nous ne voulons pas déprécier complètement l'œuvre du conférencier qui a le mérite d'avoir coûté beaucoup de travail à l'auteur...mais nous regrettons vivement que M. Rouillard sois resté dans le terre à terre d'un partisan politique maladroit adriessant la parole devant une assemblée populaire pendant une lutte électorale. Une sujet aussi vaste, aussi important comme celui de l'annexion méritait d'être traité avec des vues plus larges.¹³

It is interesting that *La Minerve* believed that Rouillard's conference would have been more effective had it been delivered during an election. Had Rouillard presented his case to the people of Quebec during an election, he may have had more success in garnering

¹¹*La Patrie*, 18 March, 1893.

¹²*La Patrie*, 18 March, 1893.

¹³*La Minerve*, 18 March, 1893.

support for his cause. Annexation was unlikely to have gained much success, though, because no political party was advocating political union with the United States.

The rest of the article provided a rather fair description of Rouilliard's central themes and how he proposed they be achieved. Near the end of the article the author revealed that the conference was poorly received:

Le grand coup de théâtre qui devait produire un effet si extraordinaire était réservé pour la fin. Plusieurs fillettes ont apporté un drapeau dont la hampe était surmontée du coq gaullois. C'est le drapeau que M. Rouillard a rêvé pour notre pays lorsque nous serons devenus Américains. L'effet à été masqué car la plupart des auditeurs, sans applaudir, ont quitté la salle.¹⁴

Here is a stark difference to what *La Patrie* had presented. Whereas *La Patrie* alluded to the conference being a success, *La Minerve* felt that the audience lacked enthusiasm for the presenter's topic. With regards to this, *La Minerve* stated "Nous regrettons vivement pour M. Rouillard. Le fiasco d'hier soir, mais après tout, il n'était forcé de donner cette conférence."¹⁵ Historians, who have studied the topic of annexation, especially the current period under study, have erroneously overlooked Rouilliard's conference. This conference was a direct avocation of annexation and one of a very small number of works that presented annexation in a positive light. Although Rouilliard did not create a mass movement in favour of annexation, his speech deserves historical recognition.

The overall impact of Rouilliard's conference was questioned. This was particularly evident with *La Minerve*'s judgement of annexationist sentiments in Montreal. Although Rouilliard's conference could be judged as a good 'first step' toward building up annexationist sentiment, "...Le Club National," *La Minerve* argued "devra donner bien des séances de ce genre avant de gagner le peuple canadien à la cause de

¹⁴*La Minerve*, 18 March, 1893.

¹⁵*La Minerve*, 18 March, 1893.

l'annexion."¹⁶ Clearly, according to *La Minerve*, one conference on annexation was not enough to convince the Canadian people – or more accurately the people of Montreal – to accept the cause of political union with the United States. Unfortunately, much like the reviews in *La Patrie*, this article lacked any editorial comments. However, the lack of editorials in favour or in outright opposition of Rouilliard's speech also highlights an important social response. Annexationism, which had appeared at numerous intervals in Quebec's history, was not seen as a popular option for Quebec's or Canada's political future. Had there been an annexation movement in Quebec its supporters would likely have increased their efforts after a Rouilliard's speech.

Although Rouilliard's conference did not have the impact that he had hoped, it continued to be addressed following the publication of his speech. Godfroy Langlois, writing in *La Liberté*, published an article on 4 May in which he praised Rouilliard's speech. "Nous accusons," Langlois wrote, "reception d'une brochure contenant la magnifique conférence de notre ami M. J.B. Rouillard sur l'union continentale."¹⁷ Langlois' article reveals that there was some contact between annexationists in 1893, though seemingly limited. That Langlois and Rouilliard were friends is no surprise, especially considering that both men were members of the Club national in Montreal. However, besides this praise by Langlois, there are no other examples of support for one another. This is where the disjunction between annexationists becomes clear.

Annexation did not appear to have many supporters even by 1893. The political and economic difficulties experienced by the people of Quebec were not enough to persuade the majority of people that annexation was necessary. However, one famous

¹⁶*La Minerve*, 18 March, 1893.

¹⁷*La Liberté*, 4 May, 1893.

French Canadian was willing to lend his support to the cause. Sometime in 1893 – the exact date of publication is unknown – Louis-Honoré Fréchette published an article in an American journal – the name of this is also unknown – titled “The United States for French Canadians.” Fréchette was born at Lévis on 16 November, 1839. As a young man he moved to the United States in a self-imposed exile between 1866 and 1871, likely in opposition to Confederation. There in the United States Fréchette developed his annexationist sentiments as a newspaper journalist in Chicago. Upon his return to Canada he became a Liberal Member of Parliament in the Alexander Mackenzie government between 1874 and 1878. Despite his service in the House of Commons, Fréchette never lost his annexationist sentiments.¹⁸ Fréchette, however, is best known for his poetry. He was a very popular poet and won numerous national and international distinctions. In this article, Fréchette declared himself an “interpreter of what I believe to be the opinion of most of my compatriots, the French Canadians of the Province of Quebec.”¹⁹ As Fréchette saw it, Canada had three political options. Not surprisingly, the options that he listed were imperial federation, independence and annexation. Imperial federation and independence, according to Fréchette, were impossible. There was, then, “for me, and I am sure for the greater number of my compatriots, only one reasonable solution to the problem; that is to accept the last of the three alternatives [...] political union with the United States: – in the received newspaper phrase, Annexation.”²⁰

Despite Fréchette’s popularity and influence as a poet and journalist, his belief that the majority of French Canadians supported annexation is not supported by evidence.

¹⁸Jacques Blais, “Louis Honoré Fréchette”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, 1 Oct. 2009 < http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=6724&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=i0mo5o3n9p04m9ecvgecotcerj6 >.

¹⁹Louis-Honoré Fréchette, *The United States for French Canadians* (1893) 337.

²⁰Fréchette, 343.

Annexationist sentiments were quite weak in Quebec and did not seem to be making much progress in 1893. Besides the conference at Sohmer Park on 28 November, 1892, and the speech made by Jean-Baptiste Rouilliar on 17 March, 1893, annexation received scant attention in the Quebec media which is as close to an indication of public opinion as possible. Fr chet te, though, was persistent in his belief. He believed that the “political influence of the Canadian Catholic clergy is no longer what it once was,” and that “the idea of Annexation has, during the last few years, made rapid progress with Canadians of French origin.”²¹ Fr chet te was so confident that he went so far as to argue that were French Canadians “consulted on the question under conditions of absolute freedom, without any moral pressure from either side, I am certain that a considerable majority of Annexationists would result from the ballot.”²² Confirming this statement is nigh impossible as no vote was ever held on the subject. However, given the predominant objections to annexation in the years preceding, it is unlikely that a majority of French Canadians would have supported annexation.

Thanks to Rouilliar and Fr chet te, the prospect of political union with the United States was again addressed publicly. Their arguments reflected the secessionist perspective: that annexation to the United States would be the most beneficial political option for Quebec and French Canadians because of the greater “States Rights” within the American Union. They challenged the commonly held beliefs that annexation would lead to the destruction of the French-Canadian community in North America as presented by the Catholic clergy. Rouilliar and Fr chet te did so by highlighting that Quebec society had changed, and was continuing to change, in which the impact of the clergy had

²¹Fr chet te, 344-45.

²²Fr chet te, 345.

dissipated – although it still retained a strong influence. Annexation, therefore, had to be treated as a legitimate option facing Quebecers on their political future.

On 4 April, 1893, Honoré Mercier emerged after a semi-retirement following his dismissal from office in 1891. At Sohmer Park in Montreal, Mercier offered a very strong address in favour of the independence of Canada, though talk of annexation also comprised a considerable part of the speech. According to numerous newspaper reports, the conference was very well attended by people across the Dominion, though with the majority hailing from Montreal. On 5 April, the *Quebec Daily Telegraph* published an extensive article that outlined the subject of Mercier's speech. Much of Mercier's address, like Rouilliard's, was directed to French Canadians throughout Canada, though it also contained numerous references to the country and its people as a whole. To begin, the *Telegraph* reported that close to eight-thousand spectators attended.

Mercier began his speech by outlining his take on Canadian history in which the union of Upper and Lower Canada and Confederation were imposed upon the French Canadians “with a hostile intention to wipe them out as a race.”²³ However, he clarified: he was not anti-English. He admired the English people; yet, because he was French in origin and education, he had no love or admiration for England itself. His allegiance lay with his home country. Thus, he called for the immediate separation of Canada from English colonial rule and to establish itself as an independent nation in North America. For Mercier, three options were available to the Canadian people: continuing the status quo, independence, or annexation – only two of which, according to him, were truly viable. Continuing the status quo, he believed, was impossible. It was, as Mercier declared, time for Canada to choose its political destiny. Confederation had failed to

²³*Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 5 April, 1893.

achieve the goals set out by the composers of the British North America Act which meant that independence or annexation remained. He recognized that calling for either was labelled as treasonous by some ultra-loyal elites, but it was an issue that had to be raised.

After this denunciation of Confederation, Mercier addressed the issue of annexation to the United States. As a political solution, Mercier respected it; as a reality, he opposed it. He recognized the undeniable material benefits that would arise from political union, particularly with a supposed influx of American immigrants into Canada's vast territory to exploit its rich natural resources. Canadians were not immigrating to the United States out of a lack of patriotism, he argued, but rather out of necessity. This was particularly true of the French Canadians. The clergy had been active in labelling immigration to the United States as an affront to their religion and culture. To this, Mercier "ridiculed the pretended fears of those who claimed to see in annexation a grave danger to the religion of the French Canadians."²⁴ In the United States, he outlined, the people were free to worship as they pleased. Religious freedom was one of the pillars of American society in which, if annexed, the French Canadians would embrace. However, there was a misconception. Although each state in the American republic was free to establish a policy regarding religious freedom, publicly funded religious schools did not exist.

This was also the case for the French language. It is true, Mercier admitted, that the French in Louisiana were assimilated and the great French culture that once flourished had been replaced by English-speaking Americans. But there were no similarities between the French Canadians and the Cajuns of Louisiana. As Mercier saw it, French Canadians knew how to fight to keep their language, culture, and religion as

²⁴*Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 5 April, 1893.

they had been doing so for over a century. The Cajuns, on the other hand, did not have the same will to survive and were accordingly assimilated. With the material benefits and no cultural threats, “in the presence of all these facts, it could not be denied that annexation offered the greatest advantages to the Canadian people.”²⁵ Mercier was an extremely clever politician and was purposely ambiguous to attract the largest number of supporters possible. Thus, “notwithstanding all these advantages, he advised his fellow countrymen to demand independence,” despite his ‘support’ for annexation.²⁶

According to Mercier, Canadians should demand independence for four reasons: 1) “through necessity”; 2) “through patriotism”; 3) “on account of its material benefits”; 4) “because the Canadians [are] able to maintain an independent existence.” Because of the following reasons, Mercier reasoned, any person who advocated annexation should also be in favour of independence. “In fact,” as the *Telegraph* outlined, “the one [independence] was the first step towards the other [annexation], for except by violent methods, annexation could and would never be effected otherwise than by treaty, which was impossible as long as Canada remained a colony.”²⁷ This statement by Mercier is one of the most important of his speech and was highly scrutinized by the media. What must be emphasized, however, is that Mercier was not an annexationist. He highlighted the potential benefits of political union but he did not believe that it was a viable option. In fact, his address to annexation was likely a ploy to convince annexationists to support the movement for Canadian independence.

²⁵ *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 5 April, 1893.

²⁶ *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 5 April, 1893.

²⁷ *Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 5 April, 1893.

Although Mercier's speech was a mixture of sentiments in favour of independence and annexation, his conclusion left many feeling that his stance was not as ambiguous as first believed. According to the *Telegraph*:

Before retiring, Mr. Mercier also repeated once more with great emphasis that his only reason for advocating independence at this juncture was because Canada should first be independent in order to treat with the United States for annexation, because, if it remained a colony, England would never consent to allow it to treat for itself...²⁸

With this conclusion, Mercier received a "prolonged applause" and a resolution was adopted thanking him for his speech and the urgency of the "immediate emancipation from British connection."²⁹ Independence and annexation were clearly the important topics of the day and Mercier had seemingly championed them both. The larger implications of this conference, however, were yet to be discussed. The debate was waged across the province with dozens of articles appearing discussing Mercier's controversial topic.

Even before Mercier took the stage at Sohmer Park, one paper was discussing his stance towards annexation: *La Patrie*. On 3 April, the radical Liberal press made a blatant statement in favour of annexation when it printed: "Nos lecteurs connaissent notre opinion en ce qui concerne l'avenir du pays. Nous sommes convaincu que l'Union politique continentale est le but vers lequel devraient tender les efforts de tous les hommes sérieux."³⁰ Much like Mercier, *La Patrie* saw the advantages of independence: "Que le Canada soit nécessairement destiné à faire partie, tôt ou tard, de la grande république américaine cela ne laisse pas l'ombre d'un doute dans notre esprit. Cela

²⁸*Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 5 April, 1893.

²⁹*Quebec Daily Telegraph*, 5 April, 1893.

³⁰*La Patrie*, 3 April, 1893.

n'empêche pas que tout mouvement en faveur de l'indépendance aura nos sympathies."³¹ In typical prose, *La Patrie* addressed the French Canadians in its declarations in favour of independence as a means of achieving annexation. Canada and the British Canadian population had mistreated the French-speakers of the country and a new political destiny was deemed necessary. "C'est même pour obtenir cette indépendance," the article stated, "dans toute sa plénitude que, nous plaçant au point de vue franco-canadien, nous préférons une alliance avec nos voisins, à un nouveau marché de dupes avec les faux frères qui nous ont trahis tant de fois."³² Ideas such as these have been seen previously from *La Patrie* and following Mercier's speech, it continued to publish its pro-annexation sentiments.

On 5 April, *La Patrie* called Mercier's speech "Un éloquent et vigoureux plaidoyer en faveur de l'annexion."³³ According to the newspaper, despite the fact that Mercier declared himself in favour of independence, his real goal was advocating political union with the United States and they believed he was not alone. "Il y a un grand nombre de citoyens," it argued, "qui sont en faveur de l'annexion et les motifs qui militent en faveur de cette idée sont forts et nombreux."³⁴ This is a rather interesting claim because with the exception of this statement, a rather small minority of newspapers even discussed the topic of annexation. Public discussions on annexation, as observed previously, were few and far between except at a few key intervals. It is unlikely that a "grand nombre de citoyens" actually supported the cause of annexation, save for a small circle associate with the radical rouge ideology. Yet *La Patrie* continued its support of

³¹*La Patrie*, 3 April, 1893.

³²*La Patrie*, 3 April, 1893.

³³*La Patrie*, 5 April, 1893.

³⁴*La Patrie*, 5 April, 1893.

annexation, especially for the benefit of the French Canadians. The article agreed with Mercier that “[n]otre nationalité serait moins en danger aux États-Unis qu’ici parce ce que là-bas les États sont souverains, tandis qu’ici les provinces n’ont que des droits fort restreints.”³⁵ The issue with *La Patrie*’s reporting was that it focused solely on the aspect of annexation and did not address the issue of independence. Mercier’s speech was a clever address which inter-mixed independence and annexation, though his true purpose was to promote an independent Canada, not annexation to the United States. Thus, *La Patrie*’s bias, although intriguing, was not representational of public opinion in Quebec.

Whereas *La Patrie* supported Mercier’s pro-annexation sentiments, more conservative newspapers warned about Mercier’s hidden agenda. *Le Quotidien* reported on the hidden aspect of annexation by highlighting that Mercier strongly advocated independence as a means of achieving annexation. “De là,” the paper from Lévis stated, “il se replie sur l’indépendance qu’il nous représente implicitement, ou plutôt. Presque ouvertement comme le seul pont-levis qui puisse rendre possible l’annexion aux États-Unis.”³⁶ It also specifically commented on Mercier’s supposed patriotism and his attachment to his native country. In the opinion of *Le Quotidien*, “Il est donc évident que M. Mercier possède de très faibles notion de patriotisme;”³⁷ a patriot, in their opinion, would not support annexation. This is quite similar rhetoric as seen during the 1891 federal election in which patriotism and loyalty were called to the fore. Clearly the use of the bugbear of annexation was still quite relevant and popular within Conservative circles. *Le Quotidien* was in fact very up-front in its criticisms. The conference, it argued, was “une aplogie de l’Annexion, sous le couvert de l’Indépendance,” and that “M.

³⁵*La Patrie*, 5 April, 1893.

³⁶*Le Quotidien*, 6 April, 1893.

³⁷*Le Quotidien*, 6 April, 1893.

Mercier n'a pas eu le courage de se proclamer hautement annexionniste. Mais toute sa conférence tend à ceci: obtenons l'Indépendance pour arriver à Annexion."³⁸ The Conservative media, such as *Le Quotidien*, focused more attacking Mercier than the subject of his speech. Being a Liberal, Mercier was not well received in Tory circles. Although the Conservative media believed that annexation was not a popular idea amongst the majority of people of Quebec is true, their attacks on Mercier would not have found as much favour as Mercier was seen as the champion of the people of Quebec.

Jules-Paul Tardivel, editor of *La Vérité*, wrote an editorial on Mercier's speech that revealed his interesting opinions regarding Quebec's future.³⁹ He argued that "Si nous étions annexés aux États-Unis, nous continuerons peut-être à parler le français, dans la vie privée, pendant certain temps;"⁴⁰ but that the French Canadians would never constitute an independent people. For Tardivel, the future of the French-speaking peoples in North America was paramount; political allegiance was secondary. Tardivel still opposed annexation as he had in 1891 and his political beliefs would not change over time.

Honoré Mercier was a very capable and brilliant politician. He knew how to spin an idea to make it politically appealing to his benefit. His role in creating the *Parti national* in 1885 following Louis Riel's death and rallying the French-Canadian community of Quebec around his platform is one such example. It is very likely that Mercier's speech on independence was another example of his political savvy.

³⁸*Le Quotidien*, 8 April, 1893.

³⁹As described in chapter two, Tardivel desired to see the United States dissolve and a new, French-speaking republic form out of the ruins of the New England states and Quebec.

⁴⁰*La Vérité*, 15 April, 1893.

Independence was an issue that was gaining strength in Quebec, particularly amongst French Canadians. The political climate in Quebec, following the Manitoba Schools controversy, was ripe for a discussion on Canada's political future. Independence was a topic that Mercier could be sure to draw the attention of the province and the country. After reading Mercier's speech one can easily conclude that annexation was a key topic and aspect of his drive for independence. He admired the United States and made no attempts to hide this fact. However, his admiration and loyalty to his home country could not be questioned. One of Mercier's biographers, Robert Rumilly, outlined that the former premier "a toujours recommandé l'indépendance plutôt que l'annexion."⁴¹ Thus, Mercier was using annexation to push for independence just as the Conservatives used the bugbear of annexation to win the 1891 election.

Mercier's speech on the future of Canada is important to the discussion on annexationism during this era because it shows that political union was an ever present idea in the public mind. Much like Rouilliar, the former premier's speech did not generate a flurry of annexationist sentiment. In fact, save for the reporting in newspapers, Mercier's conference did not create much of a stir in favour of anything. By examining the newspapers following the 4 April speech it becomes clear that the issue of annexation was blown out of proportion. Mercier used the prospect of political union merely to support his campaign for Canada's independence from the British Empire. By this time in 1893, support for annexation was declining considerably although the newspapers, particularly the Conservative papers, continued to stress the bugbear of political union.

⁴¹Robert Rumilly, *Honoré Mercier et son temps*, Tome II (Montréal: Fides, 1975) 365. Rumilly's assertion, however, must be examined carefully. Rumilly was an Ultramontane Catholic and a French Canadian Conservative nationalist. Thus, his perspective on Mercier holds important political and ideological implications.

In the summer of 1893, Mercier made a speaking tour across the United States, though mostly in New England. There he delivered numerous speeches on Canadian-American relations, Canadian independence, and annexation. His audiences were primarily Franco-Americans. Since 1887, Mercier had been championing the colonization of Quebec from a nationalist perspective. Along with other nationalists, Mercier came to see Quebec as the homeland of French Canadians, thus the province needed to be ‘colonized’. A key component to this was stopping the outflow of emigrants to the United States and, instead, populating the northern areas of the province. By speaking with the Franco-Americans, Mercier may have attempted to convince families to return to *la belle province*, which was part of his colonization plan, by emphasizing a push for Canadian independence. Much like his speech in Montreal on 4 April, Mercier was seemingly vague in what he truly advocated. As Robert Rumilly summarized: “L’indépendance du Canada est pour les uns une fin en soi, pour d’autres une étape vers l’indépendance de la province de Québec, et pour d’autres encore une étape vers l’annexion aux États-Unis. Mercier se garde de dissiper l’équivoque.”⁴² It must be restated that Mercier was not an annexationist. His references to annexation were used to gain a wide breadth of support for his desire for Canadian independence.

In Quebec, though, there were newspapers that followed Mercier’s American speaking tour. One was *La Presse*. According to Rumilly, *La Presse* reported that Mercier was in the United States

Pour lui. Simplement pour lui. M. Mercier, qui se sait impossible au Canada, cherche à se refaire une popularité dans les centres canadien des États-Unis. Il n’a aucune illusion sur l’inutilité de ses efforts annexionnistes chez nos voisins, mais il en a beaucoup sur le prestige qu’il peut acquérir de l’autre côté de la ligne et sur la

⁴²Rumilly, *Honoré Mercier et son temps*, 367.

sonnante qu'on donnera à cette influence, aux époques de grandes élections aux États-Unis...⁴³

Once again Mercier's true motives were being challenged. His critics believed that he was promoting annexation in the United States to provoke a broad movement for political union. Rumilly outlined that on 8 August, Mercier responded to the criticism in *La Presse* in which he stated:

Je suis allé aux États-Unis pour deux motifs principaux. D'abord connaître les conditions sociales et matérielles dans lesquelles se trouvent nos compatriotes émigrés, et ensuite pour les intéresser à la cause de l'indépendance du Canada.⁴⁴

Mercier clung to the defence that he was only promoting the cause of independence while in the United States but it still led some to question his true motives.

While visiting the American Republic, Mercier attended meetings with several American businessmen, particularly members of the continental union league. He met with prominent men such as the business mogul Andrew Carnegie and editor of the *New York Sun*, Paul Dana, in hopes of securing American funds for future provincial elections and to encourage U.S. investment in Quebec.⁴⁵ Donald Warner argued that Mercier's involvement with these continentalists was meant to show support for political union. Brown, however, disagreed with this observation. As he wrote in a footnote regarding Warner's argument: "I think this is misleading. Americans might have so regarded it, but it is doubtful that French Canadians equated independence with annexation."⁴⁶ Mercier was hoping to increase U.S. investment in Quebec. It would be misleading to argue that Mercier approached these American businessmen to seek annexation. Brown argued

⁴³Rumilly, *Honoré Mercier et son temps*, 368.

⁴⁴Rumilly, *Honoré Mercier et son temps*, 368.

⁴⁵Robert Craig Brown, *Canada's National Policy, 1883-1900: A Study in Canadian-American Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) 254.

⁴⁶Brown, 255.

quite astutely that “Even before these latest meetings between Canadian and American political unionists took place, annexation sentiment was withering away in Canada.”⁴⁷

The year 1893 experienced a surge in discussion surrounding annexation to the United States. But this surge was more of a last attempt at creating a push for political union. Aside from Rouilliard’s and Mercier’s speeches that addressed annexation, public opinion opposed closer political ties with the American Republic. There were, indeed, those who advocated and supported annexation for various reasons – political, economic, and social – but these people remained the minority. Had there been a true movement for annexation in Quebec more newspapers, aside from within the large city centres, would have published articles discussing public gatherings in which political union was the main topic. Instead, annexation conferences were held almost solely in Montreal, which is not surprising. The Montreal region has been at the centre of supporting radical movements such as the Lower Canada Rebellions and the annexation movement of 1849-1850. The smaller communities of Quebec, even those which lay close to the international border, did not experience a true movement for annexation to the United States.

Another crucial factor in the decline of annexationist sentiments was the return of Canadian economic expansion and prosperity. As John T. Saywell wrote,

There was generally a modest improvement in Canada’s economic conditions between 1891 and 1893. Reasonably good harvests, an increase in the value of agricultural products, and diversification which enabled many farmers to take advantage of urbanization and an expanding British market aided agriculture.⁴⁸

⁴⁷Brown, 256-7.

⁴⁸John T. Saywell, “The 1890s”, *The Canadians, 1867-1967*, J.M.S. Careless and R.C. Brown, eds. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1967) 113.

Britain was slowly replacing the United States as Canada's key trading partner following the expansion in the British agricultural market.⁴⁹ Also, the Canadian Manufacturers Association became more powerful than the diverse commodity producers, such as fish, forestry, mines and agriculture which helped to spur economic recovery. Along with the improvement in the Canadian economy, the United States entered into a recession following the 1893 financial crash. Donald Warner described this issue succinctly:

This spectacular smash dropped the Republic into a terrible depression. As in 1873, the United States on its way back down passed the Dominion, which was beginning its long climb back to prosperity. Canadian envy of the United States, rankling for a decade, disappeared and carried with it the desire for annexation.⁵⁰

In the United States, a mounting surplus of manufactured goods exacerbated the depression and caused, as Charles Campbell described, a panic in 1893.⁵¹ Relative Canadian prosperity and American economic difficulties combined killed the prospect of annexation. Robert Brown best summarized this point: "After all, there was little prospect that Canadians would continue to support annexation when they saw the United States again slip into a disastrous depression."⁵² Prosperity, in essence, was the enemy of the annexation option.

In June, at the Liberal party convention in Ottawa, unrestricted reciprocity was replaced in favour of a policy of lower tariffs.⁵³ The Liberals tactfully changed their platform away from unrestricted reciprocity due to the change in public opinion.

Economic policies were still very important, but the political aspects had altogether

⁴⁹Brown, 221.

⁵⁰Donald F. Warner, *The Idea of Continental Union: The Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960) 238.

⁵¹Charles S. Campbell, *The Transformation of American Foreign Relations, 1865-1900* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1976) 142. For more in-depth information on the U.S. economic difficulties of 1893, see pages 142-143.

⁵²Brown, 256.

⁵³Brown, 260.

become the prime factor in Canadian affairs. Although the party removed unrestricted reciprocity from its platform, it remained committed to freer trade with the United States.

There emerges a stark similarity to the annexation movement of 1849-1850: just as prosperity brought about the demise in 1850, the same process occurred in 1893. The difference is that discussion of annexation seemed to almost completely dissipate in 1850, whereas talk of annexation continued in Quebec and Canada even after the emergence of economic recovery. The reason for this is because the movement for annexation in 1849-1850 was solely economic; between 1887 and 1893, although economics played a key role, it was clearly not the only issue. The political aspects emerged and influenced desires for annexation the United States. Because of this, it is clear that annexationism of the 1880s and 1890s was not a continuation of the movement in 1849. Another important difference is that in 1849 the main proponents were British-Canadian businessmen. By 1892, the most fervent annexationists in Quebec were French-Canadian intellectuals such as Langlois, Rouilliard, and Fréchette. By 1893, the arguments in favour of annexation had been discussed for six years and were no longer attracting the same reactions or support as in the past. It appeared as though the concept of annexation had outlived its usefulness and slipped, once again, into obscurity.

Conclusion

There are three important reasons for the decline in annexationist sentiments by mid-year 1893. First, as has been clearly outlined, there was no organized movement to bring about political union with the United States. Second, the rise of nationalisms – both French- and British-Canadian – severely undermined annexationist desires. Third and most important economic conditions in Canada began to rebound while the economy of the United States entered into a recession. Despite the fact that the debate shifted from being primarily economic to primarily political following the 1891 federal election, it was the economic arguments that brought about the eventual demise of annexationism. Just as the prospect of annexation seemed to have materialized suddenly in 1887, its demise came with the same swiftness. It is important to highlight, though, that annexationism did not entirely end in 1893. Continental union continued to be a point of discussion and was an important aspect in several publications after 1893, such as James Douglas' *Canadian Independence, Annexation and British Imperial Federation* published in 1894; and Edmond de Nevers' *L'avenir du peuple Canadien-français*, published in 1896. However, discussion of annexation had largely dissipated by the time these essays appeared.

It is not surprising that there was no movement for annexation or political union in Quebec as experienced in 1849 in Montreal. Between 1887 and 1893 there was no French-Canadian 'leader' of the annexationists like Goldwin Smith in Ontario. A reason why no single person, or even group for that matter, emerged as the leader of the annexation movement in Quebec is rather clear: no individual had the same intellectual drive and heft for political union as someone such as Smith. Those who advocated

annexation in Quebec were minor figures in the grand scheme and did not have the same impact as others. Also, the majority of the French- and British-populations of Quebec rejected political union with United States making the development of a movement more difficult.

Amongst the French-Canadian community, the majority appear to have desired expanded economic relations with the United States. Politically, however, they preferred to remain independent from their southern neighbour. This was seen clearly during the 1891 federal election. As explained previously, the French Canadians who lived in rural, small towns were primarily agriculturalists and natural resource producers who would likely have benefitted from freer trade with the American Republic. They adhered to Laurier's Liberal policy of unrestricted reciprocity. The Catholic Church was quick to denounce political union, which also carried considerable influence amongst the French-Catholics of the province.

In some ways, the mass immigration of French Canadians to the New England States was seen as a form of annexation as thousands left for the textile factories. This was perceived by some as a calamity to the French-Canadian community; whereas for others, such as the staunch French-Canadian nationalist Jules-Paul Tardivel, it was the natural step towards creating a new, French-speaking republic in North America. Tardivel believed in the reunion of French-speakers across the continent. This is strikingly similar to Goldwin Smith's idea of the reunion of the Anglo-Saxon 'race'.

The British-Canadian community, although a minority in terms of Quebec's population, enjoyed considerable power and influence and did not want to jeopardize their situation in the unknown of political union. Unlike in 1849 when the British-

Canadian businessmen of Canada East proposed annexation to avoid assimilation into the majority French-Canadian community, in 1893, the British-Canadian community did not desire political union. The same can be argued for the French Canadians. In the past, the fear of assimilation existed amongst the French-Canadian elite. Following Confederation and the creation of the province of Quebec, French Canadians felt secure in their political territory to truly express themselves. In fact, the linguistic strife in the west – particularly in Manitoba following the schools controversy – reinforced the idea of Quebec as the only credible homeland of French Canadians. Indeed, some, such as Jean-Baptiste Rouilliar, argued that annexation would bring more security to French Canadians, but the majority preferred to remain in Canada with the assured protection in Quebec.

It was not until 1892 in which advocates of annexation made themselves vocal. By 1893, only three prominent French Canadians had declared themselves publicly in favour of annexation: Godfroy Langlois, Jean-Baptiste Rouilliar, and Louis Fréchet. There was little connection between these three men, save for a friendship between Langlois and Rouilliar – though there is no strong evidence of how close they were. Fréchet and Rouilliar were born around the same time, 1839 and 1843 respectively, and had similar careers: both were journalists and spent time in the public sector.¹ Langlois was born a generation later in 1866 but followed the same political opinions as Rouilliar and Fréchet, specifically an adherence to the rouge ideology of the 1830s. Aside from these commonalities, they apparently did not combine their efforts to form an organized movement for annexation. One can only speculate what would have happened

¹Jacques Blais, “Louis Honoré Fréchet”, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, 1 Oct. 2009 < http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=6724&interval=20&&PHPSESSID=i0mo5o3n9p04m9ecvgtcotcerj6 >; André Bélisle, *Histoire de la presse franco-américaine* (Worcester, MA: L’opinion publique, 1911) 288.

had they formed an Annexation Association like the one formed in Montreal in 1849. The old Rouges argument re-emerged that stated that French Canadians as a community and as individuals would be better off in the American Republic than in the Dominion. Rouilliard spoke at length of this argument in his address on 17 March, 1893. Despite this position, the majority of French Canadians rejected the idea. Aside from these three annexationists, the majority of the population rejected annexation as the solution to Canada's destiny.

Another important aspect that cannot be overlooked is the reaction to the idea of annexation in the United States. As Donald Warner explained, most Americans were simply not interested in annexing Canada or in negotiating a political merger of the two states. Warner offered five explanations for this conclusion: interest was limited to the states along the international border and even there it was weak; a few Senators desired annexation but they were the minority; only three motions were made in Congress between 1889 and 1891 concerning the annexation of Canada, none of which were discussed on the floor; the English-French discord was unattractive; and, finally, Britain as a threat in North America was fading away.² Although these five conclusions are accurate, the most important point was that the Americans were unwilling to extend the olive branch and reach a new reciprocity agreement with the Canadians. The McKinley tariff of 1890 clearly showed this point. Many Americans were still angry at the reciprocity treaty of 1854 which they believed unfairly benefitted Canada. Also, the Republicans were protectionists with regards to their economic policies and practices.

²Donald Warner, *The Idea of Continental Union: Agitation for the Annexation of Canada to the United States, 1849-1893* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1960) 216-17.

During this time, Anglo-American relations were paramount that trumped Canadian desires. Since the end of the American Civil War, Anglo-American relations were in caught in a precarious state with neither nation willing to risk war with the other. Due to this fact, Great Britain and the United States settled international issues at the expense of Canadian interests. Britain was unwilling to push the issue of reciprocity for Canada as it did not want to upset the unstable status quo with the Americans. For their part, the Americans viewed Canada as a mere British colony and not an independent nation. As such, the American statesmen were more concerned with trade with Britain than securing a new reciprocity treaty with Canada. During this era of the North Atlantic triangle, Canada was the weak link that was trumped by the need to maintain strong Anglo-American relations.

Americans had realized that there existed a desire in Canada for political union, though the sentiment was weak, especially in Quebec. Therefore, the United States was not willing to invoke an international conflict over annexation if the people of Canada did not desire it. Although the Americans were not going to press the issue of annexation, it did not stop some from concluding that it was an inevitable or desirable outcome. Just as the prospect of annexation remained in Canada between 1887 and 1893, the same can be said for the United States. In fact, as James Callahan argued,

near the end of Harrison's administration [in 1892] American newspapers expressed considerable sentiment in favour of 'Continental Union'. They seemed to recognize, however, that American annexation of Canada could originate only in Canadian initiative... Evidently American annexation sentiment largely subsided before the change of administration.³

³James M. Callahan, *American Foreign Policy in Canadian Relations* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1967), 412-13.

Any movement for political union between Canada and the United States after 1865 seemed destined to fail as the Americans waited for the Canadians to initiate the movement and the vast majority of Canadians preferred imperial union or independence over annexation to the American Republic. Part of the failure also can be attributed solely to the Americans. Gordon Stewart argued that “Since 1867, the refusal of the United States to change her high tariff stance toward Canada had backfired. Instead of bringing Canada to plead for annexation it had contributed to the emergence of a separate power on the continent.”⁴ The province of Quebec, along with the Dominion as a whole, continued to develop alongside the United States; and although ties to the American Republic remained essential, desire for deeper political ties died out.

Of the four political ‘options’ presented to the people of Quebec – maintenance of the status quo, imperial federation, annexation, and independence – the latter carried the most popularity. As Honoré Mercier argued in his speech of 4 April, 1893, independence for Canada was not only desirable, but possible. The current state of the Dominion for many French Canadians was unacceptable. Annexation carried too many negative connotations for it to be a truly popular idea in Quebec despite the support from a few intellectuals. Independence, then, as H. Blair Neatby explained, was “more respectable,” in Quebec because it “was not identified with annexation.”⁵ The results of the voting from the ‘Canada’s Future’ conference of 28 November, 1892, also shows that independence was the most preferred political outcome. Between 1893 and 1894, as Robert Rumilly highlighted, numerous political ideas emerged particularly amongst the

⁴Gordon T. Stewart, *The American Response to Canada since 1776* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1992) 102.

⁵H. Blair Neatby, *Laurier and a Liberal Quebec: A Study in Political Management* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1973) 49.

younger generation, including independence, Quebec separatism, and annexation.⁶ Annexation was a political option that was discussed and debated in public, but never amounted to much more than a passing and unrealistic idea.

Economically, expanded trade relations with the United States were strongly desired. Unrestricted reciprocity experienced some popularity until the 1891 federal election at which time it was replaced and the political dimensions were emphasized. Commercial union did not enjoy much support in Quebec throughout this time despite the efforts of Erastus Wiman. After these two economic policies were rejected by the majority French- and British-Canadian communities in Quebec, a small minority of journalists and intellectuals tried to promote political union with the United States for a variety of reasons. As highlighted earlier, these annexationists were unable to garner the support required to achieve their goals.

The demise of annexationism in late nineteenth century in Quebec, overall, was due to the improved prosperity in Canada after 1893. After nine years of economic depression, the Canadian economy began to rebound. The American economy, on the other hand, slipped into another economic recession. It is understandable that many French Canadians would desire greater free trade relations with the United States during times of economic malaise in order to improve markets for their products. It is not, however, logical to yearn for closer economic relations with a country whose economy was caught in a recession. Much like in 1849, the prospect of annexation emerged because of the recession in Canada. In 1850, when the fear of economic ruin passed, the annexationists abandoned their campaign. As Damien-Claude Bélanger argued, “in

⁶Robert Rumilly, *Histoire de la Province de Québec*, Tome VII (Montréal: Éditions Bernard Valiquette, 1940) 163.

Quebec, the arguments in favour of annexation were also primarily economic.”⁷

Prosperity was the enemy of annexationism.

Although a ‘movement’ for annexation did not exist in Quebec between 1887 and 1893, the idea of political union received considerable attention and public discussion. During this period, Canada’s future seemed undetermined and annexation to the United States, for some, remained a legitimate option. The use of annexation as a bugbear during the 1891 election, although securing Macdonald another victory from the other provinces, had generally failed in Quebec. The 1891 election allowed annexation to once again become a topic of debate in public as witnessed by the events in 1892. Despite the rise in annexationist discourse, especially public conferences, by 1893 the idea of political union had died out. Powerful ideological, political and economic forces prevented the option of political union from becoming anything more than a vanishing illusion.

⁷Damien-Claude Bélanger, *Pride and Prejudice: Canadian Intellectuals Confront the United States, 1891-1945* (Ph.D. dissertation, McGill University, 2006) 239.

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Huntingdon

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