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A Lost Cause Renewed: Quebec, the Civil War, and Canadian Confederation

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Abstract: Discussion surrounding Canadian Confederation often centers around whether the Dominion of Canada was built on an act or a pact. There are valid points to be made for each argument, but it just may be that both are incomplete. The act or pact debate often fails to fully consider the unique experience of French Canadians in the years leading up to Confederation in 1867, which means that a third argument has largely been overlooked. For French Canadians, the years leading up to the passage of the British North America Act of 1867 saw a renewal of the Conquest and revival of national myth. Throughout the early 1860s, the American Civil War reminded them of their past struggles against the British. They remembered how their farms and villages burned as the British captured Quebec in 1759, and as they watched their French Louisianan brethren succumb to the Union Army and Americanization, they remembered how they had been abandoned by France a century earlier. By 1867 French Canadians felt they were alone on a continent full of anglophones and Protestants who were committed to assimilating them and extinguishing the last light of true Catholicism in North America. Rather than share the fate of Louisiana's French, they sought a ceasefire. They desired a means to prolong their struggle for cultural survival, and Confederation offered this. By building on established historiography and examining contemporary newspaper sources, this article reveals that for French Canadians, Confederation represented an armistice more than an act or pact.

Keywords: Canadian Confederation, American Civil War, the Conquest, Quebec-Louisiana relations, national myth

Act or pact? These three simple yet profoundly important words are often found at the heart of the sometimes intense conversation surrounding Canadian Confederation and Quebec's national question; taken together they pose a question that asks what it fundamentally means to be Canadian. Scholars and political scientists have debated the question for more than a century without forming a solid consensus on the matter.¹ There are no easy answers to this issue. Perhaps to some extent, both the act and pact arguments are true. There are, indeed, legitimate arguments to be made for each case; however, there is a third argument that should also be a part of the debate. More than an act or a pact, this argument contends that in 1867 Confederation marked a ceasefire in a battle that had begun

more than a hundred years earlier. French Canadians knew this battle as the Conquest, and although it had taken various forms over the course of a century, the 1860s saw this lost cause renewed with a violence, intensity, and urgency that had not been present since the Seven Years' War. New combatants were introduced, and the hostilities played out in a new, more southern theater of war. The struggle, however, remained the same; for French Canadians this struggle could summarily be described as English-speaking Protestants attempting to impose their godless, industrial, vulgar way of life on a beleaguered, agrarian minority. In this sense, French Canadians experienced the American Civil War as a continuation of the Conquest. The war reopened old wounds from which national myth, tradition, and religious duty poured out, thus imbuing the conflict with a profound meaning that was felt uniquely by Canadiens. Consequently, to a great number of francophones, the British North America Act of 1867 represented an armistice as much as it did a union.

Examination of the French-Canadian experience of the American Civil War must first begin by recognizing the importance of national myth. In his book, *Love in the Western World*, cultural theorist Denis de Rougemont provides useful insights into the formation and power of myth. He writes, "A myth makes it possible to become aware at a glance of certain types of *constant relations*... A myth expresses the *rules of conduct* of a given social or religious group. It issues accordingly from whatever *sacred* principle has presided over the formation of this group."² In short, myths describe and prescribe constant relations, rules of conduct, and sacred principles. They provide a lens through which a group of people view the world around them; in the case of national myths, they can define entire peoples as they influence interpretations of history, color opinions of current events, and inform ideas about the future. Furthermore, de Rougemont's use of the phrase "to become aware at a glance" suggests that myths do not necessarily encourage deep analysis. They simply reveal the way things are and always have been. Constant relations and sacred principles are eternal concepts. They are matters that do not require constant reevaluation, and as such they exert a certain hold on people that becomes deeply, perhaps unconsciously, ingrained over time. These ideas are of crucial importance as one proceeds with an analysis of French Canadians and the Civil War as they provide

a framework for understanding how myth and national consciousness are very much intertwined.

As the Civil War laid the foundations of the American South's Lost Cause, French Canadians' own national myth, the Conquest, was brought to the forefront of their collective memory. With the importance of myth already established, it is vital to also come to a complete understanding of the Conquest itself. In its simplest sense, the Conquest refers to Great Britain's acquisition of New France at the end of the Seven Years' War. However, as a national myth it is much more complex. In addition to being conquered by the British, French Canadians understood their abandonment to also be a part of the Conquest. They felt that France, their mother country, had rejected them and traded them away for the apparently more valuable islands of Guadalupe and Martinique. With this in mind, historian Daniel Francis refers to the Conquest as a "neurosis-making event" that was at once both a humiliation and a tragedy for Canadiens, and he suggests that for French Canadians, the Conquest was the defining moment in their national history.³ Being a defining moment, one can understand that it was through this traumatic event that French Canadians, now alone and defeated on a continent dominated by their adversaries, were made a distinct people. It was from this painful memory that they drew conclusions about the constant relations, rules of conduct, and sacred principles that defined who they were and what their purpose was. Therefore, it must be recognized that the French-Canadian nation, steeped as it was in myth, was born out of the Conquest.

The Conquest was more than just a singular event, however, and French Canadians relied on national myth to explain their regrettable situation after the Seven Years' War ended. After the war, the British made continued attempts at assimilation in their new colony, and it appeared to French Canadians that the British were wholly committed to ensuring the complete amalgamation of their people into British society. The Conquest, therefore, was an ongoing process. Perhaps more importantly, as a national myth it revealed to francophones that the British commitment to assimilation was a constant relation, and each measure taken by the British reinforced what had become a defining belief among French Canadians. Whether it be by the sword or by the pen, they believed the British were committed to destroying the French-Canadian way of life. The Royal

Proclamation of 1763, for example, made it clear that the Conquest, now being continued through the passage of legislation, was about more than territory. The institution of English law, the oath of allegiance that prevented Catholics from holding public office, and the western settlement boundary meant to push English-speakers into Quebec demonstrated that the French-Canadian nation, its culture, and its religion were to be conquered as well. With a relatively small English population and a lack of new anglophone arrivals, however, authorities soon found that it was vital to retain the loyalty of the French Canadians, who formed the bulk of the population. The Quebec Act of 1774 was passed with the aim of undoing many of the assimilative measures the British had taken since 1763, but the national myth was already firmly established. French Canadians knew that the British would continue trying to assimilate them, and now understood that their numerical superiority in Quebec offered them a means of defending their identity. It is also important to mention, as Laurier LaPierre carefully points out in his work on French-Canadian nationalism, that the Quebec Act granted a “whole series of privileges and concessions” to Quebec’s Catholic clergy.⁴ These privileges and concessions were attempts at appeasing French Canadians, certainly, but more importantly they solidified the Church’s perceived role as the protector of French Canada and as the most effective institution French Canadians had for dealing with British authorities. Thus, more rules and relations of the national myth became entrenched. The Church would defend French Canadians, and French Canadians would in turn defend the Church.⁵ Their condition was simple. The British would continue trying to assimilate them, and they would rely on their numerical superiority in Quebec and the power of the Church to defend their French-Canadian identity. Clearly then, it was through the lens of the Conquest that French Canadians understood the rules and relations that governed their situation in North America.

Nearly a century later, on the eve of the U.S. Civil War, the Conquest still loomed large in the hearts and minds of Canadiens. As they had done previously with the Quebec Act, British authorities continued to shift the official position toward French Canadians to a more conciliatory posture. Parliament revoked Section 41 of the *Act of Union*, for example, which had declared English

to be the only official language of Canada.⁶ However, it was apparent to French Canadians that regardless of whatever steps officials may have taken toward appeasement, the larger population of ordinary anglophones still viewed the assimilation of francophones as inevitable. Evidence of this can be found in an 1860 article from the *Montreal Witness*, in which an English Canadian explains his understanding of the French in North America. The author⁷ writes, “The small French population of America is . . . destined in all probability to be absorbed by the dominant population by which they find themselves surrounded.”⁸ He goes on to give specific statistics to show just how small and scattered the French population of North America was, and concludes that only Lower Canada and Louisiana had any chance of preserving pieces of their French identity. This emphasis on French Canadians’ minority status had extreme significance at a time when English Canadians were calling for representation based on population. Moreover, pointing out how small and scattered francophones were in North America was a direct attack on the traditional defenses French Canadians had understood to be part of the constant relations and rules of conduct established by their national myth. Their founding myth had established that a numerical superiority would protect them. According to this article, however, that protection was quickly vanishing. The realities of British rule that had been explained by French Canadians’ national myth were reaffirmed by articles like this, which effectively kept the fires of the Conquest burning in the hearts of francophones. It appeared that anglophones would relentlessly seek to conquer, and the only hope for survival rested on holding on to small pockets of influence in places like Quebec and Louisiana.

Along with predicting the destruction of North America’s French societies, the *Montreal Witness* article goes on to completely disparage the French role in colonizing North America. The author declares, “The French had an amazing aptitude for running over immense tracts of wilderness, but this is something very different from colonization.”⁹ This dismissal¹⁰ of French Canadians’ history is significant. Canadiens had a great deal of pride in their origins and ancestry. For instance, in 1815 Parti Canadien leader Louis-Joseph Papineau argued that Canadiens should be proud of their French origins because France had contributed as much to the development of civilization, science,

literature, art, liberty, and government as Britain.¹¹ Historian Katherine Morrison's work suggests that Papineau was not alone in his French-Canadian pride. She lists "the founding of Quebec City in 1608, the courage and ingenuity of the early settlers, and their creative relations with many native tribes who helped them survive in a northern wilderness... [And the exploration of] the heartland of the continent before the English had ventured beyond the Alleghenies"¹² as accomplishments that nineteenth-century French Canadians celebrated. Anglophones' attempts to dismiss these accomplishments were essentially assaults on French-Canadian heritage and identity. Thus, one of the most important aspects of the Conquest's power as a myth is revealed. More than land or even power, in the eyes of French Canadians, the British strove to conquer their entire history and identity. Assimilation did not mean simply integrating or mixing into British society, it meant killing their ancestors and erasing their legacy. After a century of British rule, their language, religion, traditions, accomplishments, and their entire history as a people were still at risk of being wiped away from the historical record.

As they looked through the lens of the Conquest, French Canadians saw that their entire way of life was facing destruction in the 1860s. The particularities of that way of life must now be examined if one is to understand the French-Canadian experience of the Civil War. The French-Canadian way of life in the Civil War era can succinctly be described as traditional. The noted historian Jacques Monet explained that the essentials of French-Canadian life in the nineteenth century were "their ancestral land, their French language, their Catholic Faith, their time-honoured, and peculiar jurisprudence, and their long family traditions."¹³ These pillars formed the basis of a life that was most often lived in a rural area while practicing traditional agriculture; the land and traditional farming seemed to offer French Canadians the most effective resistance against any change that might weaken one of these pillars. LaPierre expands on this fact, and his work supports the idea that the land of Quebec and the traditional agriculture practiced there held a significant, perhaps mythic, importance to French Canadians. According to LaPierre, francophones refused to leave Quebec even though better farmland existed elsewhere and refused to adopt the more advanced

farming techniques that were allowing English-speakers to become much more profitable in agriculture because of a certain *mystique de la terre* that suggested the land of Quebec was essentially the lifeblood of French Canada.¹⁴ This *mystique de la terre*, one could argue, was grafted onto the myth of the Conquest as a sort of sacred principle that dictated that francophones would survive only if they remained on their ancestral land and remained engaged in their traditional vocation. Traditional farming in Quebec was believed to be what francophones were meant to do. To defy this, was to bleed French Canada. This principle was reaffirmed by the fact that the British dominated virtually all other areas of the economy, which was yet another reality of the Conquest.

With this attachment to the land in mind, one can see that any force that pulled francophones away from Quebec and traditional agriculture would have been viewed as imperiling the survival of French Canada. The Civil War was exactly this kind of force. While historians have been unable to settle on a precise statistic regarding Canadian participation in the Civil War, the commonly agreed upon numbers range from 20,000 to 40,000, with the highest estimate at around 53,000.¹⁵ The exact numbers, however, are less important than the French-Canadian perceptions of their participation in the conflict. Abbé Hercule Beaudry of Quebec is well known by Civil War historians for his claims made in early 1865 that 40,000 French Canadians had fought in the American war and that 14,000 of them had lost their lives as a result.¹⁶ These strikingly high, most likely exaggerated numbers reveal a perceived crisis in Quebec. The high death rate communicated by the Church served as a warning to French Canadians that leaving their ancestral land would only bring trouble. Research done by American historian Preston Jones demonstrates that numerous French-Canadian newspapers echoed the Abbé's concerns about Canadiens being pulled away from their land and their farms. In March 1865, the *Gazette des Campagnes*, for example, published a letter from a French-Canadian soldier who claimed to have been one of the many "victims" of the Union Army's deceitful recruiting agents. In the letter, originally written just outside Richmond, Virginia in June 1864, he describes the horrible plight of his French-Canadian brothers-in-arms who were made cannon fodder and makes a plea to his kin still in Quebec stating, "May they eat what little they can scrounge from working the

land rather than come here to enlist in the Northern army.”¹⁷ The message here is clear. Quebec was where French Canadians were meant to be, and traditional life, regardless of its challenges, was far superior to any alternative. The forces causing French Canadians to ignore the *mystique de la terre*, to defy their traditional vocation, and to forget the rules and principles laid out by their national myth were widely seen as forces of evil; they attacked the pillars of French-Canadian life and threatened the numerical advantage that francophones maintained in Quebec. As such a force, the Civil War marked a renewed attempt at conquest by anglophones.

More important than their attachment to the land was French Canadians’ attachment to their Catholic religion. In his work on French Canadians and Confederation, historian David Kwavnick writes of the nineteenth-century French Canadian: “His religion was the central fact of his existence and every other aspect of his life was interpreted in terms of . . . his membership in the Church.”¹⁸ The nineteenth-century French Canadian understood the world and his place in it through his relationship with God more than anything else. Moreover, French Canadians believed themselves to be a people chosen by God. After the French Revolution’s attacks on Catholicism, it seemed to many Canadiens that they had become the rightful heirs of the legacy of Catholic France, the so-called first daughter of the Catholic Church. As such, they understood themselves to be the protectors of the Catholic religion, and believed that they had a divine mission to build a French-Catholic model of civilization in North America. They were tasked with a sacred duty to be a beacon of godliness on a continent full of Protestant anglophones. According to historian Beverly Rasporich, in 1866 the Bishop of Trois-Rivières, L.F.R. Laflèche likened the land of Quebec “to that which God promised Abraham, a land that will endure everlastingly for those yet unborn,” and he declared that the establishment of a Catholic nation on such a promised land was the providential mission of French Canada.¹⁹ Once again, it becomes clear that the French-Canadian identity was wrapped up in national myth. The land, religion, and future of the French “race” all were interdependent on one another. The stakes were impossibly high, and the Conquest greatly endangered their success.

The Civil War, as a continuation of the Conquest, presented a major threat to French

Canadians' divine mission. Catholics across North America universally condemned Protestantism as the cause of the war. A Boston-based Catholic newspaper, *the Pilot*, for example, attributed the war to "violent, vulgar Saxonism."²⁰ Meanwhile, *Le Propagateur Catholique* of New Orleans spoke of Protestants' inability to distinguish good from evil, which ultimately led them foolishly to seek a "liberté du mal."²¹ French-Canadian newspapers held similar views. Preston Jones explains that the *Gazette des Campagnes* declared America, with its relatively high crime rate and its toleration of Mormonism's polygamy, to be the "most immoral country in the world" and proclaimed to readers that the Civil War was just one battle in a larger, global war against Catholicism.²² If French Canadians had dreams of a Catholic North America, the power of the Union Army and its largely Protestant and industrialized society was a more than formidable opponent whose incredible ability to wage war was put on full display in the early 1860s. Worse yet for French Canadians was that this apparently religious war threatened to spill into Quebec. In 1858, the famous abolitionist John Brown had declared in Canada West (Ontario) that after the Union Army dealt with the "Slavocracy" in the South, they should conquer the "French Priestocracy" in Quebec.²³ Facing threats such as this, the *Courrier du Canada* referred to the Yankees as part of a "race malfaisant."²⁴ At a time when language, religion, ethnicity, and "race" all blended together, the weight of this commentary cannot be overstated; it had clear implications for English-speaking, Protestant, British Canadians.

Although there was certainly a feeling of animosity toward all Protestants, the Northern states, with their industry and vulgar materialism, were seen as particularly detestable by some French Canadians, who viewed them as being the war's aggressors. Many Canadiens would have agreed that the war was truly one of Northern aggression. On May 27, 1861, *Le Canadien* told readers, "*Mais on sait fort bien que ce n'est pas l'abolition de l'esclavage que veut et Nord, mais subjugation et l'exploitation du Sud.*"²⁵ French Canadians tended not to see slavery as being central to the war, and more often believed the war was really about the North trying to dominate and exploit the South. As another largely agrarian minority that resisted domination, many French Canadians were sympathetic to the Southerners' cause and their attempt at autonomy. This was a very different view of the war than

British Canadians held. While they had grievances with the Northern states, most British Canadians viewed the South as backward and slavery as a great evil. A May 1861 article from *The Montreal Herald and Daily Commercial Gazette* explained to readers that although they might not be able to expect the same treatment from Americans, Canadians had to support the American Union because of its antislavery stance and because the Southern states' rebellion represented a threat to constitutional governments all over the world.²⁶ Similarly, an Eastern Townships newspaper, the *Stanstead Journal*, wrote that the Southern states had seceded only because their inferior agricultural way of life had caused them to fall behind the industrialized North, and even explicitly shamed Canadian newspapers that propagated different opinions.²⁷ In this view, the destruction of the Southern way of life was seen as progress, much as British Canadians understood the Conquest to be progressive and beneficial for the French. This connection would not have been lost on French Canadians who were often cited as being inferior to British Canadians.²⁸

This disagreement between French Canadians and British Canadians about what was progress and what was exploitative, wanton destruction had its roots in the Conquest. In his book, *The People of New France*, Allan Greer describes the events that led to the capture of Quebec and Montreal by British forces in 1759 and 1760, and he explains that French Canadians remember these events as especially dramatic and meaningful. He writes of the siege of Quebec, "Week after week in the summer of 1759, British batteries bombarded the capital without mercy, while raiding parties burned villages all up and down the St. Lawrence in defiance of then current rules of civilized warfare."²⁹ French Canadians' memory of the loss of Quebec and the barbaric, unjustifiable, merciless burning of their ancestors' homes was deeply ingrained by their national myth. The destruction of New France took on an even greater significance in the context of the Civil War. In November of 1864 the *Morning Chronicle and Commercial and Shipping Gazette*, a Quebec newspaper, gave readers an update concerning the war. General W.T. Sherman's infamous scorched-earth march was just beginning at this time, and was a topic of particular interest. The newspaper relates information from American newspapers stating, "His [Sherman's] army will now leave such a swath of desolated

country behind it as shall give Georgia and South Carolina a lasting lesson in war.”³⁰ The article goes on to quote a New York-based newspaper that described Sherman’s burning of Atlanta as the work of a military genius. It must be noted that the writers at the *Morning Chronicle and Commercial and Shipping Gazette* did not agree that Sherman’s actions were those of a genius, and they even characterized his scorched-earth policy as bloodthirsty; however, the newspaper still stated its support for the Union and expressed satisfaction in Abraham Lincoln’s reelection. It seems British Canadians were not overly enthusiastic about the unsavory policies of Union Army generals, but were willing to look past them in the name of progress.

For French Canadians, the parallels to the Conquest were harder to ignore. According to Preston Jones, the French-Canadian newspaper *L’Ordre* wrote in April 1865, “History will surely be stained by the inhuman conduct of Northern generals,” and likened the Union Army to Vandals rather than Christians. Jones also cites articles from the *Gazette des Campagnes* that told readers that Southerners were more honorable than Northerners and that Lincoln was a tyrant whose assassination may have been divine intervention.³¹ For French Canadians, the destruction of the South was reminiscent of the destruction of Quebec at the time of the Conquest. The lack of healing since the eighteenth century became apparent as old wounds were reopened, and myth and memory bled from the French-Canadian national consciousness. Francophones were reminded of the British message of progress that had accompanied the Conquest. This progress had led to economic domination and political domination. British Canadians still resisted giving the French language official recognition,³² after all. As this constant relation revealed itself time and time again, it seemed to French Canadians that “progress” was the anglophones’ codeword for domination and subjugation; thus, the war in the South appeared to be just another front in the larger struggle that was the Conquest.

Given this background, the American Civil War carried the highest of stakes for French Canadians. The entire French identity was under attack. Promises of money and adventure lured francophones away from their homeland to die for the godless Union Army; their divine mission

seemed less achievable as opposition grew in the form of the aggressive and industrialized Northern states; the Catholic faith and French culture in Quebec were directly threatened by America's manifest destiny; and industry was being exported from the American North into Canada.³³ At the same time, their British Canadian counterparts identified with a completely different experience. British Canadians may have feared American expansion, and may have had issues with the United States,³⁴ but ultimately their view of the war was that a superior culture was imposing its will on an inferior, backward people. The war was seen as progress. Therefore, a clear minority on a continent full of English-speaking Protestants who were bent on ending their traditional way of life, French Canadians found themselves engaged in a multi-fronted cultural war that threatened the rules and sacred principles they so deeply valued. In this sense, the Civil War was a renewal and even an intensification of French Canada's lost cause.

It must be noted that the French, Catholic model of civilization that French Canadians hoped to build in North America was not necessarily limited by national borders. Newspaper articles show that French Canadians felt very much connected to Franco-American populations. In June 1862, the *Morning Chronicle and Commercial and Shipping Gazette* published a brief article titled "Whom Shall We Believe." The article presents two opposing reports from the United States that offer conflicting accounts of the French makeup of the Confederate Army. One report claims that there are no French in the Southern armies, while the other observes that many in the Southern armies are often seen speaking fluent French.³⁵ Although the article provides no clear answers to its readers, it establishes the fact that Quebeckers had a deep interest in their Franco-American counterparts' participation in the war. The previously cited article from *Le Canadien* titled "Adresse des Français de la Louisiane" reveals the same interest by publishing letters from French Louisianans. This fraternal connection between the former French North American colonies is one of the most important aspects of the French-Canadian experience of the Civil War.

Louisiana was seen as an especially important place by French Canadians. French Canadians maintained a very romanticized view of Louisiana's French during the war years, and New Orleans

held particular significance as it had been home to the largest population of francophones of any city in North America well into the 1860s.³⁶ Many Canadiens believed that Louisiana had a better chance of preserving French heritage than Quebec did. Research done by Preston Jones has revealed statements from French Canadians such as Louis-Antoine Dessaulles saying that the Louisianans were “*plus français que nous*,” and “the *Louisianais* had preserved a French civilization superior to that of Quebec.”³⁷ More than just admiring them, French Canadians saw themselves in Louisiana’s French and easily identified with their struggle against an oppressive majority. Quebec newspapers such as the *Courrier du Canada* lamented the French blood that would be spilled in the Louisiana regiments.³⁸ *Le Canadien* simultaneously called for support for francophones fighting for their rights in the Southern armies, while condemning francophones who fought for the North as traitors to their heritage.³⁹ Moreover, because they saw the Protestant Northerners as anti-Catholic and even atheistic, they saw French Louisianans as noble defenders of God. Thus, they were seen as partners in the divine French mission. Abandoned by France, separated by a national border, and some 1,500 miles apart, the two societies were united in their resistance against would-be conquerors, and in this sense, the Louisianans’ fight opened a new front in French Canadians’ own war; that is to say, it was an extension of the Conquest.

It is interesting to consider that French Canadians’ romanticized views of Louisiana’s French were not exactly reflective of reality. In truth, French Louisianans had begun Americanizing long before the war began, and the conflict only accelerated this process. Louisianans were behaving in ways that French Canadians would have found deeply troubling long before Union General Benjamin Butler occupied New Orleans. For instance, an interesting study conducted by historian Gabriel Audisio reveals that several French Catholic congregations in Louisiana had begun choosing English as their preferred language for mass and that several French newspapers progressed from printing in French only, to French and English, and finally to English only between the 1840s and 1860s.⁴⁰ English even became Louisiana’s official language of instruction in 1864.⁴¹ In contrast, Louis-Joseph Papineau had declared in the 1830s that French Canadians would under no circumstances give up their

language or culture.⁴² Furthermore, intermarriage was occurring much more frequently between francophones and anglophones in the state. Historian Marise Bachand notes that intermarriage actually became common practice in Louisiana during the second half of the nineteenth century, while Catholic priests presiding over weddings in Quebec reminded new husbands and wives “they were both called to serve the glory of God and to safeguard the good of the homeland.”⁴³ The contrast between the two societies is stark. Certainly, marrying anglophones would have been viewed as conflicting with the French-Catholic mission. Additionally, Preston Jones cites a letter written by a French Canadian from Quebec living in New Orleans. The letter, sent home to his parents, explained that he was making a living in business and also that his young son spoke a mixture of French and English.⁴⁴ The letter represents everything French Canadians feared about losing their identity. It depicts a French Canadian who has left the family farm, traveled to America where he has become involved in materialistic, stereotypically Protestant business pursuits, and is raising a son who corrupts the French language with English. As the war came to its conclusion, French Canadians had to confront the growing discrepancies between their romanticized views of Louisianans and reality.

The Americanization of Louisiana must have been shocking to French Canadians. In 1862, shortly after the Union Army captured New Orleans, French-Canadian newspapers had reassured Quebeckers that the city’s francophones would never allow the Northerners to impose their government there.⁴⁵ French Canadians understood resistance to conquest as part of their identity, and they clearly believed Louisianans would also resist. In 1863, Philippe-Joseph Aubert de Gaspé cemented the commitment to resistance as an essential French-Canadian characteristic with his novel, *les Anciens Canadiens*. In the novel, the French-Canadian protagonist refuses to marry the British man she loves out of a duty to her heritage, and proclaims that to marry him would be to be “twice conquered.”⁴⁶ Here, de Gaspé essentially reminds his francophone audience that their ancestors had been willing to sacrifice their personal happiness for the good of the French-Canadian nation, and his choice of words is significant. By Americanizing, the Louisianans had been conquered. Worse yet, it seemed they embraced a new American identity without looking back. A Louisiana woman

wrote in the postwar years, “Now our city, like a woman who had been won to love her conqueror, began to assume the reconstruction that she had shed blood to resist.”⁴⁷ The differences between this letter and de Gaspé’s novel are telling. French Canadians remained faithful to their mission. No sacrifice was too great if it meant ensuring the survival of the nation. Meanwhile, Louisianans were more open to change. Americanization seemed to offer French Louisianans a path toward success, material wealth, and personal happiness at the cost of their French identity, a price many were willing to pay. As the two French societies identified more and more with different causes, the fraternal bond that French Canadians had believed to be so strong was significantly strained.

As Louisianans embraced the South’s own lost cause, their French identity was lost. With the racial aspects of the American Civil War, it seemed for Louisianans a “white” identity became more important than a French identity.⁴⁸ In response, Canada’s French tried to distance themselves from their American counterparts. As Southerners began to deny the role slavery had in the war, more French-Canadian veterans began claiming they had joined the Union Army to end slavery.⁴⁹ The parallels between this phenomenon and the Conquest must be acknowledged. After the Conquest, the French Revolution had revealed France to be less devoted to Catholicism than French Canadians were. Similarly, the Civil War had revealed Louisianans to be less committed to preserving their French identity. With the fall of French Louisiana, it was clear to French Canadians that there was no society more French than that of Quebec. Much as in 1763, when France had abandoned its North American colonies by agreeing to the Treaty of Paris, French Louisianans had agreed to terms with their American conquerors, and French Canadians once again found themselves alone; once again the humiliation was a double one. Not only had the agrarian, chivalrous, traditional Southerners been physically conquered by the industrialized Northern aggressors, but perhaps more importantly the “most French” civilization in North America had also been socially conquered by lost-cause-Southerners and was assimilating quite readily. In the tumultuous postwar years, French Louisianans found themselves in a society where slavery no longer provided the foundation of everyday life. The social position of white Southerners appeared to be in jeopardy as former slaves became freedmen,

and Reconstruction governments sought to transform the American South. The South's Lost Cause seemed to offer some stability to French Louisianans amid these changes. The idea that lost-cause-Southerners had fought heroically to preserve an honorable, chivalrous way of life against Northern invaders rather than to defend an evil, exploitive institution was quickly adopted by many of Louisiana's French, and according to Marise Bachand, for French Louisianans, "The courage [the lost-cause-Southerner] displayed during the Civil War to defend the 'superior race' smoothed differences and sealed their alliance."⁵⁰ As French Louisianans allied themselves with lost-cause-Southerners, their alliance with French Canada was broken. In all wars, the loss of an ally requires a reevaluation of circumstances, and that is precisely what French Canadians did after French Louisiana fell victim to the renewed Conquest.

Scholars would be wise to keep all of this in mind when studying Canadian Confederation. Many historians, like Phillip Buckner for example, rightly point out that the chaos of the Civil War demonstrated to Canadians the need to unite. The United States had just demonstrated its military and economic power by waging a war against itself for four years. All Canadians had reason to worry about American expansion, and Buckner argues that Confederation represented Canadians choosing to be British rather than American.⁵¹ Other scholars point out the economic benefits a united Canada promised to bring. These arguments have validity, of course, but they ignore the fact that for French Canadians, the Civil War went beyond matters of practical politics and entered the realm of myth. The relations, rules, and sacred principles rooted in the Conquest imbued the war with a profound meaning that was uniquely felt by French Canadians. They saw the Civil War as another front in their own long struggle, a struggle for God, tradition, and identity. The fall of Louisiana, a supposed bastion of French heritage, dealt a heavy blow to the French-Canadian mission. After 1865, it was clear that if a Catholic nation was to be built in North America, it would have its locus in Quebec. If the French identity was to survive, it would do so from Quebec. If Quebec failed, the French-Canadian-Catholic light to the world would be extinguished, and the Conquest would be complete.

With this in mind, one can more closely inspect the British North America Act of 1867,

and how it was perceived by French Canadians. Robert Vipond's study on Confederation explains that scholars must not conflate sovereignty and legislative power when studying the British North America Act. He demonstrates that a popular understanding of the Act in the 1860s was that although significant power would be granted to the federal government in Ottawa, it would not create the provincial governments and, therefore, could not dominate or destroy them.⁵² Furthermore, the act made French an official language for the first time,⁵³ which was a major victory for Canadiens. With this understanding the provinces would largely be free to govern themselves in their own spheres, and francophones would retain their language. After witnessing the fall of French Louisiana, this was about all French Canadians could hope for in 1867. Concerning Confederation, the *Journal de Québec* wrote, "We want to be a nation one day, and that is our necessary destiny... we prefer the political condition of which we will be a vital element, in which we will still be in existence."⁵⁴ This shows that the goal of nationhood was still very much alive, which suggests that French Canadians' struggle was not over. The *Courrier du Canada* expressed a similar sentiment when Confederation was made official stating:

One hundred and six years, eight months and eighteen days ago yesterday... the last of the French governors of New France concluded a capitulation which delivered forever to his secular enemies 'the most beautiful, the most French, and the most neglected' of the colonies France possessed... Who would have been able to foresee... that the cradle of French-Canadian nationalism, would be... governed by a French-Canadian Catholic.⁵⁵

The imagery of Quebec as the cradle of French-Canadian nationalism suggests that this nationalism would eventually grow from its youthful state into a mature entity in the future. While this goal had not yet been accomplished, French Canadians could celebrate their small victories. With Confederation, provincial borders essentially became lines of demarcation within which the French language and Catholic religion would be free from further assault, and where French Canadians could govern themselves. French Canadians were given a sanctuary from which they had means to

prolong their struggle, to regroup, to consolidate, and to live to fight another day. Significant power was given to Ottawa, to be sure, but the traditional French-Canadian way of life did not require an active provincial government. It just required that the French be left alone, and Confederation granted this. Moreover, the French Canadians did not fear a long struggle. In fact, struggle was part of their Catholic identity. Suffering and salvation went hand in hand. Quebec would bear its cross until it could fulfill its mission. If they had their language, their religion, and their land, French Canadians would have their identity. As long as they had their identity, the Conquest was not complete.

The official motto of Quebec is *Je me souviens*. "I remember." It may just be that remembrance is the most defining characteristic of French-Canadian society. This is the case presently and may very well have been the case in the 1860s. When the American North went to war with the South in 1861 to keep them in a union they no longer wished to be in, French Canadians remembered how they had come to be in a union with the British. When General Sherman left a path of destruction across the American South, French Canadians remembered how the British had burned their villages as they laid siege to Quebec. When the Southern states were said to be backward, they remembered how British rule was said to be progress. As a national myth, the Conquest has always been remembered by French Canadians. It inflicted wounds that traditionally have not been able to, or perhaps not allowed to, heal. Certain events irritate it from time to time so that it is kept raw and vulnerable, and every now and then it gets torn open. The Civil War was one such event. It reopened old wounds that the Conquest had inflicted upon the French-Canadian national consciousness, and myth, memory, tradition, and religious duty bled out. As French Canadians watched their French Louisianan brethren fight would-be conquerors, they were reminded that their own survival was also still very much at risk. By the end of the war, they had lost an important ally, and were forced to seek terms with their adversaries. The battle was not over, but a ceasefire was needed. In this sense, as much as it may have been an act or pact, The British North America Act of 1867 represented an armistice in the long battle known as the Conquest.



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Notes

- ¹ For examples of scholarship on this matter see: D.J. Hall, "The Spirit of Confederation: Ralph Heintzman, Professor Creighton, and the Bicultural Compact Theory," *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d'études canadiennes* 9, no. 4 (November 1974): 24–43, muse.jhu.edu/article/675512. See also: Paul Romney, "Provincial Equality, Special Status and the Compact Theory of Canadian Confederation," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 32, no. 1 (March 1999): 21–39, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3232771>. See also: Susan Mann, "Chapter 7: The Confederation Risk," In *The Dream of Nation: a Social and Intellectual History of Quebec*, (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 100-114. See also: George F. G. Stanley, "Act or Pact? Another Look at Confederation," *Report of the Annual Meeting / Rapports annuels de la Société historique du Canada* 35, no. 1 (1956): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.7202/300387ar>.
- ² Denis de Rougemont, "The Myth," in *Love in the Western World*, translated by Montgomery Beligion, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 18.
- ³ Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 92-93.
- ⁴ Laurier L. LaPierre, "The Evolution of French-Canadian Nationalism Up to 1896," *The Centennial Review*, Canadian Issue, 10, no. 4 (1996): 495, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23737972>.
- ⁵ Jacques Monet, "French-Canadian Nationalism and the Challenge of Ultramontanism," *Historical Papers / Communications historiques* 1, no. 1 (1966): 42, <https://doi.org/10.7202/030651ar>.
- ⁶ Alexandra Hillinger, "The Status of the French Language in British North America: from the Conquest to the Confederation," *The International Journal for Translation & Interpreting Research* 11, no. 2 (2019): 26, <https://doi.org/10.12807/ti.111202.2019.a03>.
- ⁷ Although it is not clear who the author of the article was, it is known that John Dougall was the editor, publisher, and proprietor of the newspaper. Dougall was an English-speaking Protestant who had immigrated to Montreal from Scotland in 1826 at the age of sixteen. His newspaper, *The Montreal Witness*, ran from 1845 until 1938 and consistently provided the public with a Christian, often anti-Catholic perspective of social and economic issues in Canada and abroad. It is possible that he wrote the article referenced here.
- ⁸ John Dougall, ed., "The French in America," *The Montreal Witness*, July 21, 1860, p. 457, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4183724>.
- ⁹ Dougall, "The French in America," 457.
- ¹⁰ Jason L. Newton, "'These French Canadian of the Woods Are Half-Wild Folk': Wilderness, Whiteness, and Work in North America, 1840-1955," *Labour / Le Travail* 77 (2016): 127-128, <https://doi.org/10.1353/lt.2016.0003>. While there may be some truth in stating that the French settlers did indeed do more running over tracts of wilderness

than colonizing, it is important to note that popular pseudoscience of the time often linked a race's "whiteness" to their ability to "improve" the wilderness. Newton writes about this pseudoscience in his work cited here. By making the distinction between running over tracts of wilderness and colonization, the newspaper article implies that French Canadians had failed to fully improve or civilize the wilderness and effectively casts them as inferior to their colonizing English counterparts. With this in mind, one can see how French Canadians would have seen the article as insulting and dismissive, and the accuracy of the statement itself becomes less important than the reduction of Canadiens' history to such terms.

- ¹¹ Hillinger, "The Status of the French Language," 22.
- ¹² Katherine L. Morrison, "The Only Canadians: Canada's French and the British Connection," *International Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue internationale d'études canadiennes* 37 (2008): 180, <https://doi.org/10.7202/040800ar>.
- ¹³ Monet, "French-Canadian Nationalism and Ultramontanism," 41.
- ¹⁴ LaPierre, "Evolution of French-Canadian Nationalism," 497. For examples of how Canadian agriculture outside of Quebec was evolving in the 1860s see also: Fred Landon, "Some Effects of the American Civil War on Canadian Agriculture," *Agricultural History* 7, no. 4 (1933): 163-169. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3739352>.
- ¹⁵ Damien-Claude Bélanger, "Canada, French Canadians and Franco-Americans in the Civil War Era (1861-1865)," Marianopolis College-Quebec History, August 13, 2001, Chapter 1, <http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/frncdns/studies/dcb/conc.htm>.
- ¹⁶ Bélanger, "Canada, French Canadians and Franco-Americans in the Civil War Era," Chapter 1.
- ¹⁷ Preston Jones, "Civil War, Culture War: French Quebec and the American War between the States," *The Catholic Historical Review* 87, no. 1 (2001): 60, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25025881>.
- ¹⁸ David Kwavnick, "The Roots of French-Canadian Discontent," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science / Revue canadienne d'économie et de science politique* 31, no. 4 (November 1965): 513, <https://doi.org/10.2307/139827>.
- ¹⁹ Beverly Rasporich, "Sacrifice and Death in French-Canadian Fiction: An English Reading," *Dalhousie Review* 55, no. 3 (1975): 449, <http://hdl.handle.net/10222/59883>.
- ²⁰ Mark A. Noll, "The Catholic Press, the Bible, and Protestant Responsibility for the Civil War," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 3 (2017): 361, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26381449>.
- ²¹ Noll, "Catholic Press and the Civil War," 365-366.
- ²² Jones, "Civil War, Culture War," 62-62.
- ²³ Preston Jones, "Quebec and Louisiana: The Civil War Years," *Quebec Studies* 23, no. 1 (1997): 75, <https://doi.org/10.3828/qs.23.1.73>.
- ²⁴ Jones, "Quebec and Louisiana," 75. ["evil race"]
- ²⁵ E.R. Frichette, ed., "Adresse des Français de la Louisiane," *Le Canadien*, May 27, 1861, p. 2, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3458498>. ["But we know very well that it is not the abolition of slavery that the North wants, but the subjugation and exploitation of the South."]
- ²⁶ Robert Weir, ed., "British Feeling On the American Civil War," *The Montreal Herald and Daily Commercial Gazette*, May 23, 1861, p. 2, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3184312>.
- ²⁷ J.I. Little, "From Borderland to Bordered Land: Reaction in the Eastern Townships Press to the American Civil War and the Threat of Fenian Invasion," *Histoire sociale / Social History* 45, no. 89 (May 2012): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1353/his.2012.0007>.
- ²⁸ Hillinger, "Status of the French Language," 23. Hillinger discusses Lord Durham's 1839 report in which he described French Canadians as an ignorant, illiterate people without a history nor a literature. See also: Newton, "Wilderness, Whiteness, and Work in North America," 131. Newton provides a quote from historian Edward Watts who found

that in early American literature French Canadians were portrayed as a people “meant to be governed, not to govern themselves.”

- ²⁹ Allan Greer, *The People of New France* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 110.
- ³⁰ John J. Foote, ed., “Morning Chronicle,” *Morning Chronicle and Commercial and Shipping Gazette*, November 14, 1864, p. 2, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3597657>.
- ³¹ Jones, “Civil War, Culture War,” 64.
- ³² Hillinger, “Status of the French Language,” 24-26. *The Act of Union* in 1840 is a great example of this resistance. Section 41 of the act established English as Canada’s only official language, thereby it effectively banned the official use of French. This provision was met with tremendous resistance from francophones, and in 1848 it was revoked. The fact that it was revoked and not amended is important. Instead of amending Section 41 to extend official status to the French language, Canadian lawmakers chose to get rid of it all together. An opportunity to protect and recognize the French language was therefore passed over, and francophones’ mother tongue was left in a rather precarious position.
- ³³ Landon, “Effects of the Civil War,” 167-168.
- ³⁴ Weir, “British Feeling On The American Civil War,” p. 2. This article states that the American government provided nothing but “ill offices” to Canada during the Rebellions of 1837-1838, that Americans would have celebrated any disasters suffered in Britain during the revolutions of 1848, and that the American government sought to humiliate Britain through their enforcement of laws against enlistment and strict neutrality during the Crimean War. See also: Little, “Borderland to Bordered Land,” 6, 8, 19-20. Little provides English-language newspaper articles from the Eastern Townships that condemn the American government’s handling of the Trent Affair, American Secretary of State William Seward’s discussions of manifest destiny, draft dodgers from the Northern states coming across the border into Canada, and a perceived lack of strong action taken by the American government against Fenian raiders. See also: Phillip Buckner, “‘British North America and a Continent in Dissolution’: The American Civil War in the Making of Canadian Confederation,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2017): 525, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26381475>. Buckner cites the cancellation of the reciprocity agreement as another cause of antagonism between British Canadians and the Northern states.
- ³⁵ Charles St. Michel, ed., “Whom Shall We Believe?” *Morning Chronicle and Commercial and Shipping Gazette*, June 21, 1862, p. 1, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3596916>.
- ³⁶ Marise Bachand, “Disunited Daughters of the Confederations: Creoles and Canadians at the Intersection of Nations, States, and Empires,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2017): 545, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26381476>.
- ³⁷ Jones, “Quebec and Louisiana,” 76. [“more French than us”]
- ³⁸ Jones, “Quebec and Louisiana,” 75.
- ³⁹ Frichette, “Adresse des Français de la Louisiane,” 2.
- ⁴⁰ Audisio, Gabriel Audisio, “Crisis in Baton Rouge, 1840-1860: Foreshadowing the Demise of Louisiana’s French Language?” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 29, no. 4 (1988): 343-363, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4232687>. The study also provides an interesting story of a Louisiana town council slowly switching from the official use French to English over several years in the 1840s.
- ⁴¹ Bachand, “Disunited Daughters of the Confederations,” 555.
- ⁴² Hillinger, “Status of the French Language,” 22.
- ⁴³ Bachand, “Disunited Daughters of the Confederations,” 549-550.
- ⁴⁴ Jones, “Quebec and Louisiana,” 78.
- ⁴⁵ Jones, “Civil War, Culture War,” 65.

- ⁴⁶ Philippe-Joseph Aubert de Gaspé, *Canadians of Old*, trans. Jane Brierley (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1996), 241, as cited in Morrison, “The Only Canadians,” 182.
- ⁴⁷ Bachand, “Disunited Daughters of the Confederations,” 559.
- ⁴⁸ Bachand, “Disunited Daughters of the Confederations,” 555.
- ⁴⁹ Preston Jones uses Remy Tremblay’s autobiographical novel, *Un revenant: episode de la guerre de secession*, to illustrate this fact. See: Jones, “Quebec and Louisiana,” 76-77.
- ⁵⁰ Bachand, “Disunited Daughters of the Confederations,” 559.
- ⁵¹ Buckner, “British North America and a Continent in Dissolution,” 529.
- ⁵² Robert C. Vipond, “1787 and 1867: The Federal Principle and Canadian Confederation Reconsidered,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne De Science Politique* 22, no. 1 (1989): 19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3228597>.
- ⁵³ Hillinger, “Status of the French Language,” 20-26. Until the Act of Confederation in 1867, both the French and English languages held non-legislative statuses. The French language had been traditionally protected, though. By recognizing Canadiens’ right to practice Catholicism and restoring French civil law, the Quebec Act of 1774 had provided some unofficial protection for the French language as it was attached to religious life and civil courts. The Constitutional Act of 1791 also permitted voters and members of the Legislative Council and Assembly of Lower Canada to take oaths in French or English, thereby officially recognizing the use of the French language. No law explicitly gave the French language official status until 1867, however, when the British North America Act officially allowed for the use of French in the Parliament of Canada, in the Legislative Assembly of Quebec, in all federal courts, and in the courts of Quebec.
- ⁵⁴ Quoted in Jean Charles Bonenfant, “The French Canadians and the Birth of Confederation,” *The Canadian Historical Association Booklets*, no. 21 (1996): 13, https://cha-shc.ca/_uploads/5c38a9a6d1ed1.pdf.
- ⁵⁵ Quoted in Bonenfant, “French Canadians and Birth of Confederation,” 11.

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