Liberty and Republicanism within the North American Context: A Study of the American Revolution and the Canadian Rebellions

Michael A. Wallace
Siena College

Introduction

The Atlantic Revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were prosecuted on the advancement of liberty and republicanism. Within the North American context, these broad tenets articulated the importance of a sovereign, educated and virtuous citizenry as well as the standards of an effective government constitutionally constrained in its authority. The American Revolution and the Canadian Rebellions stand as specific affirmations of these principles.

Within the United States, two phases of political discourse arose after the French and Indian War. The first consisted of British colonial officials who worked within the British imperial system, on a constitutional level, to bring out reforms relating to greater political autonomy. However, as tensions grew, in response to the Stamp Act crisis and other punitive legislative acts, a second phase emerged. By mid-1776, this ideological movement not only articulated the justification for independence via a political revolution, but also began to establish the principle republican motives of the new nation. The strength of this phase lies in the rapid dissemination of ideas and information through pamphlets. Paine's *Common Sense* championed this new model of moving the theoretical into practical arguments. Additionally, the *Declaration of Independence*, the *Articles of Confederation*, the state constitutions and the United States Constitution affirm an evolution of thought regarding the application of liberty and republicanism within a political system that resisted tyranny. Together, Jefferson, Madison and Washington took an active role in institutionalizing the evolved republican principles.

The political success of the American Revolution was viewed with empowerment by the colonial dominions of the Western Hemisphere. In this context, Canada was no exception to the wave of republican experiments that occurred within the Atlantic World. By the 1830s, the domestic political situation, which had evolved dramatically since the end of the American Revolution and the War of 1812, became increasingly strained with Great Britain. In using the American political blueprint, Papineau (Lower Canada) and Mackenzie (Upper Canada) sought to combine aspects of republicanism to reform the colonial system imposed in 1791. In demonstrating a significant understanding of the philosophies and motives of the American Revolution, leaders from Lower and Upper Canada demanded similar reforms, including greater political authority and transparent administrative practices. In total, these demands would form the basis of an emerging concept known as responsible government – a fundamental goal shared by Lower and Upper Canada. However, when these requests were left unresolved, violence ensued. Even though the effects of military force lost momentum because of disorganization and regionalization, the case for reform could no longer be ignored. In the end, Canadian leaders won key concessions relating to responsible government. These actions marked a pivotal stage in the trajectory of Canada as a modern nation-state.

The American Revolution and the Canadian Rebellions stand as specific affirmations of liberty and republicanism. In seeking reforms within the constitutional framework of the British imperial system, both movements followed a similar preliminary trajectory. When the demands were not realized, violence ensued. Although leaders from both movements understood the fundamental link between liberty and republicanism, the conditions surrounding their application differed. However, both movements demonstrated a strong adherence to a similar vein of ideological discourse.

The American Revolution

The American Revolution articulated the principles of liberty and civic virtue within the context of a functioning republican political system. The revolution was prosecuted on two distinct political and philosophical tenets: The colonists' practical experiences in self-government under British rule and their knowledge concerning the nature of government in the tradition of English constitutionalism and Enlightenment figures, including Locke and Montesquieu. From these individuals, colonists acquired knowledge of inherent natural and legal rights, a social contract

and the necessity of institutional checks as a means of preserving liberty. In advocating for a limited and legitimate government, Locke articulated the following in *The Second Treatise of Government*, "… God hath certainly appointed government to restrain the partiality and violence of men. I easily grant, that civil government is the proper remedy for the inconveniences of the state of nature" (22). In building on this argument, the importance of procedure is best articulated by Montesquieu in *The Spirit of Laws*, "Whenever the people as a body holds supreme power in a republic, this is a democracy. […] In a democracy it is crucial to have fixed rules determining how the right to vote is to be given, who is to exercise this power, who is to receive it, and what matters are to be decided by vote" (178-79). Collectively, these ideas were widely distributed in pamphlets, which demonstrates the complexity of political thought that existed within the colonies. As noted by Bailyn, "In pamphlet after pamphlet the American writers cited Locke on natural rights and on the social and governmental contract, Montesquieu…" (27). However, it took years to build a coherent political framework that not only justified reform, but also an entire political revolution. Paine's *Common Sense* marked the beginning of this connection. In broader terms, Jefferson, Madison and Washington ensured the institutionalization of evolved republican principles.

The conclusion of the French and Indian War revealed the different constitutional interpretations between the American colonies and Great Britain. In using the English Constitution as both a justification and a guide, the first phase of political discourse sought to achieve administrative autonomy within the British Empire. Beginning in the mid-1760s, individuals, including: Francis Bernard, James Otis, Jr. and Daniel Dulany attempted to rectify the political relationship. These arguments formed the basis of colonial political action until 1775.

Bernard, Governor of the province of Massachusetts Bay and New Jersey, evoked the notion of colonial rights within the context of the English Constitution. His plan consisted of several parts, including: the standardization of colonial constitutions, the appointment of a royal governor in every colony and the assertion that assemblies would have jurisdiction over local affairs by containing an independent upper house that was neither a "tool of the lower house nor yet an executive council of the governor" (Morgan and Morgan 13). Together, these modifications would have brought colonial governments in alignment with the domestic British system.

The passage of the Stamp Act in 1765 brought with it significant actions that questioned Parliament's authority within the colonies. The law placed a tax, payable only in pure British currency, on nearly all printed materials. Both Dulany and Otis challenged the legality of the Act on constitutional grounds. Many colonial governments turned to Dulany's pamphlet, *Consideration on the Propriety of imposing Taxes in the British Colonies, for the Purpose of raising a Revenue, by Act of Parliament*, in developing their case for resistance. Dulany emphasized that colonists not only had rights, but they "could not be overthrown" by the decree of Parliament (77). Additionally, he attacked the argument of virtual representation as "repugnant to [the colonist's] conception of representative government" (82). Otis, also a pamphleteer and author of the phrase "No taxation without representation," sought resistance measures through grassroots efforts (e.g. boycotts) in order to effectively build the case for united colonial opposition. He called for the Massachusetts legislature to issue a circular letter to enlist the support of colonial governments. On October 19, 1765, the Stamp Act Congress passed the *Declaration of Rights and Grievances*, which critiqued Great Britain's imperial policies and endorsed the notion of colonial rights. The fight proved successful as the Act was repealed a year after its adoption. In response, colonists felt emboldened and subsequently sharpened their arguments against other abuses. The political effects of the Act created a network for mobilizing people and sending information. As noted by Miller, the *Sons of Liberty* served as the "first effective intercolonial union" and eventually paved the way for the Continental Congress (130). Over the coming years, Parliament's authority continued to be challenged.

By mid-1770s, the conversation over the British Constitution shifted into new dimensions, focusing exclusively on the authority of the Parliament and the King. A keen observation is made in *The Stamp Act Crisis*:

> [Colonial politicians] had been convinced by Dulany and Otis, and by the Virginia Resolves and the declarations of the Stamp Act Congress that Parliament had no right to

> tax them. […] The burden therefore was left to those whose rights were endangered: they must resist Parliament to preserve their rights, and if that meant an end to Parliamentary supremacy, then that was what it meant. (E. Morgan and H. Morgan 125)

Thus, ending Parliament's supremacy meant that King George III remained the only political connection with the colonies. As the months continued, colonial leaders stressed cooperation. However, the Battle of Lexington and Concord changed existing dynamics as it marked the beginning of bloodshed. Politically, it forced the hand of the Second Continental Congress to assume the responsibilities of a central government by raising an army and negotiating the assistance of foreign nations. As noted in *The Great Republic*, "…the situation with the king severely deteriorated by 1775, individuals of the Continental Congress began to develop contingency plans for independence" (Bailyn et al. 226). Furthermore, the rejection of the Olive Branch Petition by George III and the expansion of military campaigns in the Northeast demonstrated that reconciliation failed.

The year of intellectual culmination for the independence movement was 1776. Jointly, the publication of *Common Sense* by Paine and the drafting of the *Declaration of Independence* by the Second Continental Congress expanded on the revolutionary notions of liberty, republicanism and constitutionalism within the emerging American sense.

Common Sense, published in January, was the first colonial document directly calling for independence. In publishing this treatise, Paine brought the notion of independence into the minds of the common man with persuasive arguments framed in familial language. His most vivid condemnation of Great Britain is articulated as follows:

> But Britain is the parent country, say some. Then the more shame upon her conduct. Even brutes do not devour their young, nor savages make war upon their families […]. This new world hath been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from every part of Europe. (84)

Based upon Paine's central argument, independence remained the only option to protect the New World's notions of civil, economic and religious liberty.

Beyond Paine's central thesis, his publication is significant for introducing republicanism within a coherent context. As Adams claims, "Only in 1776 did *republic*, *republican* and *republicanism* change from defamatory clichés used to stigmatize critics of the existing order to terms which affirmative connotations, stimulating a feeling of identification with the existing political system" (397). Given the overwhelming success of *Common* Sense, it is clear that Paine's arguments resonated with all levels of the colonial population.

The *Declaration of Independence*, adopted on July 4, encapsulates America's understanding of constitutionalism and liberty grounded in the principles of limited government and natural law. As argued by Maier, "In opposing the British policies, colonists saw themselves as following in the footsteps of their English ancestors who had resisted the tyranny of Charles I and James II" (29). Jefferson, who was given the chief task of writing the *Declaration* by the Committee of Five, relied heavily on his work drafting the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Virginia, as well as the writings of George Mason and Locke.

In a consistent argument form, analogues to the English Declaration of Rights, Jefferson severed ties with the old regime, provided intellectual credibility to the independence movement through Enlightenment philosophy and asserted direct evidence regarding Great Britain's tyrannical abuses. This quote from the *Declaration*— "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, – that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness…"—is analogous to the Lockean notion that a government is instituted to solve enduring problems that cannot be rectified within the state of nature. Despite revisions and modifications by the Committee of the Whole, the document remained true to Jefferson's original mission.

In the early years of the Revolution, two significant political events occurred: the ratification of the individual state constitutions and the ratification of the *Articles of Cofederation*. In considering both sets of documents, the most evident test of revolutionary principles resided at the state level. However, the *Articles* provided for an opening of the American political system. Article three outlined the binding principles of the new nation:

The said States hereby severally enter into a firm league of friendship with each other, for their common defense, the security of their liberties, and their mutual and general welfare, binding themselves to assist each other, against all force offered to, or attacks made upon them, or any of them, on account of religion, sovereignty, trade, or any other pretense whatever.

Apart from the idea of a common national defense, individual states had immense latitude in how they established their governments and managed their affairs. A clear example is contained in the preamble of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts:

The body politic is formed by a voluntary association of individuals: it is a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people, that all shall be governed by certain laws for the common good. It is the duty of the people, therefore, in framing a constitution of government, to provide for an equitable mode of making laws, as well as for an impartial interpretation, and a faithful execution of them; that every man may, at all times, find his security in them.

Thus, the creation of a "social compact" and the recognition of citizen engagement in government affairs affirm the philosophies of Locke and Montesquieu. Additionally, the structure of the Massachusetts government served as an example to other states as it contained a bicameral legislature and a strong executive.

Madison was actively involved in American Revolution on the local, state and federal levels of government. Known as an intellectual and political statesman, he played a pivotal role in the debate regarding the effectiveness of the *Articles* and the eventual construction of a new government under the Constitution.

The aftermath of the Revolution, left the nation struggling with new political, economic and social forces, which lead to the rise of severe partisanship and self-interest within state legislatures. This factionalism not only paralyzed state governments, but also marginalized the republican notions of the Revolution. As argued in *The Great Republic*:

By the mid-1780s many American leaders had come to believe that the state legislatures, not the governors, were the political authority to be most feared. Not only were some of the legislators violating the individual rights of property through excessive printing of money and their various acts on behalf of debtors, but all the states the assemblies pushed beyond the generous grants of legislative authority of the 1776 Revolutionary constitutions and were absorbing executive and judicial duties. (Wood 244)

In rejecting the notions of democracy, based upon strict majoritarianism, Madison argued that the rule of law provided citizens with the opportunity to voice their opinions within a regulated approach that includes checks and balances. A republic, as argued in *Federalist Paper* No. 10, with a "scheme of representation, opens a different prospect, and promises the cure for which we are seeking."

As a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, Madison articulated a vision for the new nation that embodies Montesquieu's philosophy concerning the protection of liberty through the separation of powers model. His *Virginia Plan* set the tone for the convention by illustrating a government with specific delegated powers. Additionally, he tackled the notion of voting by describing where this power was derived and where it resided. Ultimately, Madison institutionalized the procedures of governing by establishing a rigorous system of checks and balances through is role as the principle drafter of the Constitution. In total, this document, which was ratified in 1787, offered immense change to the American political system. However, the states would remain the principle level of government whereby citizens would voice their grievances and enact change. With many Americans still skeptical, Anti-Federalists and Madison requested the addition of a bill of rights in order to safeguarded citizens' personal liberties.

Washington became very conscious in identifying the elements of fostering a virtuous citizenry. As an individual who held many executive positions, his leadership defines the very essence of service. As head of the Continental Army, Washington understood the balance between the powers given to him by the Continental Congress and his role as a citizen. In describing his reluctance to serve as president, he wrote the following to Marquis de Lafayette on January 29, 1789,

> "[…] I shall assume the task with the most unfeigned reluctance, and with a real diffidence for which I shall probably receive no credit from the world. If I know my own heart, nothing short of a conviction of duty will induce me again to take an active part in public affairs…" (Allen 428)

As the first President of the United States, he built philosophical and geographical consensus by appointing Adams, Jefferson and Hamilton to various positions within his cabinet. In total, Washington rose above partisan political battles because of his strong adherence to virtuous principles and unyielding conviction to serve the common good.

The American Revolution articulated the principles of liberty, equality and civic virtue within the context of a functioning republican political system. Philosophically, the movement was rooted in the colonists' experiences of self-government and knowledge of Enlightenment concepts expressed by Locke and Montesquieu. Collectively, the *Declaration*, the *Articles*, the state constitutions and the United States Constitution affirm this evolution of republican thought. Additionally, the trifecta of Jefferson, Madison and Washington affirm the institutionalization of these evolved republican principles in the new nation.

The Canadian Rebellions

The effects of the American Revolution were not confined to the borders of the United States, as the most salient details sparked subsequent revolutions well into the nineteenth century. Canada was no exception to the wave of republican experiments that occurred within the Atlantic World. The proximity and interrelatedness of the political events in the aftermath of the American Revolution and War of 1812, both partially fought along the Canadian-American border, can be interpreted as a revolution that not only redefined the political origins of the United States, but also the trajectory of Canada. Within this paradigm, the Canadian Rebellions of 1837 actively sought to use the American blueprint to force change with Great Britain. Together, the efforts of Lower and Upper Canada directly mirror the sequence of the American Revolution. Following the military conclusions of the Rebellions, responsible government was granted introduction into the emerging Canadian framework of government via the *Durham Report*. This concession stands as a victory of Canadian political leaders as it affirms the notion of accountability within government.

Emerging historiography recognizes the connection between the Canadian Rebellions and the Atlantic Revolutions. Therefore, it is inadequate to consider the once well accepted argument of a distinct American *Revolution* and a Canadian *Counterrevolution*, which is featured prominently in *Continental Divide* by Lipset. Although his work correctly articulates that two nations were created out of the American Revolution, the fundamental thesis is too stringent (1). Subsequent analysis reveals the similarities in ideological discourse that existed between the leaders of the American Revolution and the Canadian Rebellions. Specifically, the use of republican rhetoric by the leaders of Lower and Upper Canada to justify constitutional reforms not only links the Canadian Rebellions to the legacy of the American Revolution, but also provides the justification for them to be studied within the context of the Atlantic Revolutions. Historians, including Ducharme and Harvey, have articulated the importance of the Canadian Rebellions within the framework of the Atlantic Revolutions by specifically citing the impact of the American Revolution within Canada.

The political origins and ideology of the Canadian Rebellions are related to the decisive impact of the American Revolution and the numerous political changes that occurred after 1790. First, the *Quebec Act* (1774) partially improved conditions for French-Canadians as it revived traditions that existed during the French Regime, including: French civil law and the Seigneurial System. The *serment du test* was abolished and replaced with a simplified oath of fidelity to the English Regime. Thus, French-Canadians remained loyal to Great Britain and did not join the northern military campaigns of 1775 – as members of the Continental Congress hoped. However, the idea of a political partnership was not shelved as the *Articles* allowed for reconciliation: "Canada acceding to this confederation, and adjoining in the measures of the United States, shall be admitted into, and entitled to all the advantages of this Union; but no other colony shall be admitted into the same, unless such admission be agreed to by nine States." Despite an open invitation, the *Quebec Act* successfully suppressed the ability of a

political partnership as it remained in effect within Canada until 1791.

The second largest issue following the American Revolution was the impact of thousands of Americans immigrating along the Canadian border into the Great Lakes region. While many were Loyalists, a significant portion was not. As acknowledged by Graham,

> "By 1812 probably no more than one-fifth of the population was British; another fifth may have been genuine Loyalist, but at least three-fifths were non-Loyalist colonists from the United States. Inevitably many of these recent immigrants were tempted by the vision of their adopted country as a future territory of the Republic…" (108).

Thus, Great Britain was forced to reassess the policies governing Canada due to the changing demographics.

The most immediate political change undertaken by Great Britain to reassert imperial control was the Constitutional Act of 1791. As envisioned, the act intended to strike a balance between the French-Canadian and English populations by repealing major provisions outlined in the *Quebec Act*. However, the decades long political fallout made a tense situation decisively worse. As noted in *Challenge & Survival*, "Although the Constitutional Act was intended to meet the demands of the English minority in Quebec without disturbing the overwhelming French majority, the Act contained within it seeds of discontent" (164).

Generally, the act divided the Province of Quebec into two distinct provinces: Lower Canada (Francophone) and Upper Canada (Anglophone). In terms of administrative changes, the act restructured the colonial governments in each province to incorporate greater British influence. Accordingly, the Governor General of British North America would serve as the monarch's chief representative. In the case of Lower Canada, the Governor would serve directly below the Governor General. In the case of Upper Canada, the Lieutenant Governor would serve directly below the Governor General.

Additionally, the act also established and the Executive and Legislative Councils in each province. Collectively, the "Governor [or Lieutenant Governor], Executive Council, Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly would become the colonial counterparts of the Crown, Cabinet, House of Lords and the House of Commons" (Herstein et al. 121). However, both Councils gained an elitist and oligarchic reputation that united colonial leaders against them. Under the revised system, colonial leaders in Lower and Upper Canada could only exercise power through the Legislative Assemblies, which governed based upon popular consent. However, this principle was severely restricted in practice as, "[a] measure passed by the [Legislative] Assembly had to receive the consent of the Legislative Council and the [respective Governor or Lieutenant Governor] before it became law (Herstein, et al. 122). Even under these circumstances, Great Britain maintained the ultimate check on colonial authority by reserving the right to nullify any law it deemed necessary.

Despite the desired goal of political stabilization, the Constitutional Act failed to achieve its objective as the relationships between the Governor and the Legislative Assembly in Lower Canada and the Lieutenant Governor and the Legislative Assembly in Upper Canada were left undefined. As argued by Graham, "The classic duel between [the Governor/Lieutenant Governor] and assembly, which had dominated the later political history of the Thirteen Colonies, was about to be repeated" (102). Thus, just as the French and Indian War revealed political differences between the American colonies and Great Britain, the effects of the War of 1812 would do the same for Canada. In effect, the Executive and Legislative Councils became more abhorred by colonial leaders as they amassed greater authority, despite the fact that they were designed to operate independently. For this reason, they became known as the Château Clique in Lower Canada and the Family Compact in Upper Canada. As near equivalences, colonial leaders within the Legislative Assemblies relentlessly attacked them as tyrannical. On this point Bourinot argues, "… the phrase [Family Compact] represented a political and aristocratic combination, which grew up as a consequence of the social conditions of the province and eventually monopolized all offices and influence in government" (140). Thus, while the War of 1812 brought to light many issues, its political conclusion did little to solve them. As Graham confirms, "[…] the inconclusive Treaty of Ghent ended an inconclusive war in December 1814" and returned the situation back to *status quo ante bellum* (114). Collectively, these unresolved issues took center stage during the Canadian Rebellions.

Despite domestic challenges, Canadian newspapers continued to report on international events, such as the French Revolution and colonial conflicts in South America and the Caribbean. By the 1820s, the situation had become increasingly volatile with Great Britain. As argued by Ducharme:

> Republican rhetoric not only gave [Canadians] stronger arguments against the status quo, but it also encouraged them to question the legitimacy and the organization of the colonial political structure. After 1828, republicanism as [a] discourse and ideology became the main source of inspiration for Lower Canadian Patriots and Upper Canadian radicals. ("Closing" 200)

Within this context, reformers from Lower and Upper Canada actively sought to use the elements of republicanism to legitimize their efforts within a coherent framework. Like their American counterparts, Canadians first began to work within the British imperial system, on a constitutional level, to bring out greater political autonomy and administrative flexibility. When these requests were left unresolved, prominent politicians from Lower and Upper Canada demanded far more radical requests that led to armed rebellions.

Lower Canada: Louis-Joseph Papineau and the *Patriotes*

Papineau became the leader of the Lower Canada Rebellion because of his ability to give the *Patriote* movement philosophical direction. During his political career, he grew increasingly wary of British Constitutionalism and began to frame political arguments within the tradition of the American system.

The *Patriote* movement was born out of the *Parti canadien*, an early nineteenth century Francophone political party that argued for the protection of agricultural institutions, such as the Seigneurial System. In 1820, Papineau was elected as the Speaker of the Assembly, which made him the *de facto* leader of the French-Canadians. In 1826, the movement consolidated to form the *Parti patriote*, in reaction to the growing sense of nationalism. As political disputes deepened, the party began to consolidate its grievances and demand specific reforms relating to government accountability and increased autonomy.

In 1834, *les 92 Résolutions* (or, *The Ninety-Two Resolutions*) were ratified by the Legislative Assembly. Collectively, these political grievances pushed for the *Patriote* desire of restructuring the colonial government by expanding political rights. The legacy of the *Declaration* is evident within the construction of the document as it points to specific abuses. However, the *Partiotes* were also aware of their unique role within the British Empire and sought to use it as point of leverage:

> Que c'est l'opinion de ce comité, que les loyaux sujets de Sa Majesté, le peuple de cette province du Bas-Canada, ont montré le plus grand attachement pour l'empire britannique dont ils forment partie ; qu'il l'ont [*sic*] défendu avec courage dans [la] guerre, à deux diverses fois, qu'à l'époque qui a précédé l'indépendance des ci-devant colonies anglaises de ce continent, ils ont résisté à l'appel qu'elles leur faisaient de se joindre à leur confédération.

As articulated by the tone of the above section, French-Canadians understood their loyalty during the American Revolution meant something as discontent with the Constitutional Act grew.

Although the *Résolutions* were debated in London for approximately three years, they were soundly rejected in 1837. During this time, Great Britain attempted a minor counteroffer via the Russell Resolutions. With political reform all but off the table, the *Partiotes* were enraged. As Craig insists, "… the politicians of the assembly, with Louis-Joseph Papineau at their head, were convinced that they were fighting a constitutional struggle in the best English Tradition" (Craig 118). Clearly, the use of the existing political system to debate specific political grievances is analogous to the route taken by the Americans. When reconciliation was no longer a viable option, the use of military force was considered as a final attempt to force change. This new political reality is expressed by Harvey, "Frustrés par l'immobilisme des autorités impériales, les Patriotes se sont tournés vers l'indépendance, immédiate ou imminente, comme seul gage de la liberté politique des Bas-Canadiens" (199).

By the beginning of 1837, talk of revolt was increasingly prevalent. As argued in *Challenge & Survival*, "Papineau and his radical followers saw no hope of gaining reforms by [British] constitutional means. Only the use of force would convince Britain of French-Canadian

determination" (171). This realization demonstrates that French-Canadians understood a clear distinction existed between the parliamentarianism instituted by the Constitutional Act and the notions of responsible government, which respected self-government and accountability. This notion is confirmed by Hamelin and Provencher, "La loi de 1791 introduit le parlementarisme dans le Bas-Canada, non la démocratie" (47). Collectively, these grievances formed the basis of the *Patriote* cause. A speech from the *Sons of Liberty* (or, *Société des Fils de la Liberté*), a *Patriote* group based in Montréal that was created in the tradition of its American counterpart, vehemently denounced the effects of British rule and affirms the successful struggle of others who fought for republican principles. A printed selection reads:

> After seventy-seven years of British rule, we behold our country miserable, compared with the prosperous Republics who wisely threw off the yoke of Monarchy. We feel that our population is equal in capacity to theirs. We see Emigrants from beyond seas, of the same class, wretched if they remain here, happy if they join the great Democratic family, and we have daily evidence that our ill fortunes are attributable to the desolating action of a Colonial government. ("Sons of Liberty")

From this excerpt it is evident that *Patriote* leaders actively sought to use elements of republicanism to legitimize their efforts by framing them in the context of contemporary events that were transpiring within the Atlantic World.

By the fall of 1837, the *Patriotes* prepared for war. In total, three large-scale engagements occurred within Lower Canada (see FIG. 1.). Despite a stunning victory at Saint-Denis (November 23), *Patriote* momentum was severely hindered as the battles advanced into the winter months and became more disorganized. Subsequently, the Battles of Saint-Charles (November 25) and Saint-Eustache (December 14) were decisive British victories.

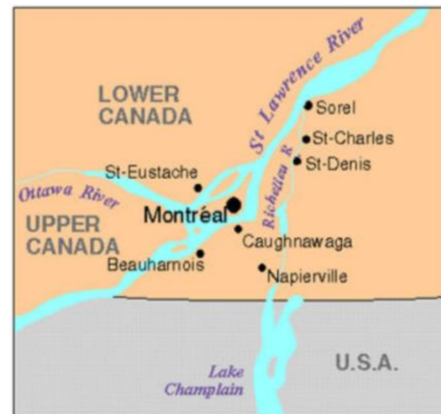

FIG. 1. "Rebellions of 1837, Lower Canada"

With the defeat of the *Patiotes* a *fait accompli*, Papineau fled to Albany, New York. In a letter dated December 18, 1837, Papineau considered his fading options and appealed directly to the American notion of republicanism, "Je suis si attaché au Républicanisme tel que l'ont compris et enseigné Thomas Jefferson et son école, dont je crois que Mr. Martin Van Buren est un des plus dignes adaptés …" (299). Despite his impassioned pleas, President Van Buren and his administration refused assistance. As noted by Harris, the Van Buren administration considered the *Patriotes* "poor and desperate men" who were "political enemies as well as dangers to peace" (54). During his time in exile, Papineau continued to refine his beliefs in republicanism. He was granted amnesty to return to Canada in 1844 and eventually made a brief return to politics.

Upper Canada: William Lyon Mackenzie and Reform-minded Politics

Mackenzie became the leader of the Upper Canada Rebellion because of his background in journalism and print media. As an immigrant from Scotland, he recognized the necessity of reform, advocated for colonial rights and attacked the elitist oligarchies within the Executive and Legislative Councils.

The motives of Upper Canadians were rooted in constitutional reform, which translated to a less violent tone than its counterpart. The source of contention was the Family Compact, an elite group of politicians who yielded immense sway in the functions of the colonial government. The notion of responsible government, as understood by Upper Canadians, is succinctly outlined in the *Seventh Report on Grievances* (1835):

> The governors of colonies, like other men, are individually liable to all the infirmities of human nature, and in their political capacity, when left to act without restraint, they, no doubt, sacrifice occasionally the interests and happiness of the people, to the gratification of their own passions and caprices. One great excellence of the English constitution consists in the limits it imposes on the will of a King, by requiring responsible men to give effect to it. In Upper Canada no such responsibility can exist. The Lieutenant Governor and the British Ministry hold in their hands the whole patronage of the Province; they hold the sole dominion of the country, and leave the representative branch of the Legislature powerless and dependent. (xxvi-xxvii)

The philosophical argument outlined above against oppressive government is analogous to the *Declaration of Independence*. Within two years, a consensus formed around insurrection as the final attempt to force change. As noted by Gates, "The [*Declaration of Grievances*], formally adopted on July 31, 1837, expressed sympathy with … the people of Lower Canada, and declared it to be the duty of Upper Canada Reformers to make common cause with them" (15). The very public display of solidarity with the French-Canadians in defense of common principles is extremely significant.

Upper Canada's more exclusive focus on constitutional arguments did not marginalize republican rhetoric. As Ducharme notes, "[Mackenzie] went as far as to reprint, in the summer of 1837, in his newspaper the *Constitution* andThomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*, first published in 1776 to promote American independence" (202). Despite Mackenzie's ability to cite monumental texts to build consensus, the rebellion itself was ill-equipped from a military standpoint. The Battle of Montgomery's Tavern, near York (Old Toronto) on December 7, lasted less than thirty minutes (see FIG. 2.).

FIG. 2. "Rebellions of 1837, Upper Canada"

As noted by Tait, "Mackenzie won enough support among American radicals and British residents in the United States to establish what he called a provisional government on Navy Island, three miles above Niagara Falls" (123). However, a counter-strike never materialized. Within the United States, Mackenzie was charged with violating the Neutrality Act of 1818 and spent a year in prison in Rochester, New York. After his imprisonment, Mackenzie became a reporter for the *New York Tribune*, covered the New York State Constitutional Convention, and moved to Albany on May 1, 1846, where he became an editor for the Albany *Patriot* in May 1847 (Gates 129 and 143). In 1849, he received permission to return to Canada.

As previously noted, Canada was no exception to the wave of republican experiments that occurred within the Atlantic World. In using the American blueprint, Papineau and Mackenzie sought to combine the aspects of American republicanism as a means of reforming the existing colonial system. The translation of famous documents and the distribution of information through newspapers and pamphlets provided philosophical justification for the outcomes they were seeking. As argued by Ducharme:

> Lorsque les réformistes comme Papineau, les frères Nelson, Bidwell et Mackenzie adoptent la définition républicaine de la liberté, ils transforment un problème pratique, qui porte essentiellement sur le moyen d'assurer l'harmonie entre les pouvoirs législatif et exécutif, en un problème politique fondamental concernant la légitimité de toute la constitution coloniale. (*Le concept* 204)

Despite the Rebellions' inability to manifest into a cohesive movement, an evident benchmark of

reform was established. The conclusion of the Rebellions would facilitate a new political reality for Canada.

The *Durham Report*, known formally as the *Report on the Affairs of British North America*, was drafted by John George Lambton, first Earl of Durham, in accordance with his observations as Governor General of British North America in the aftermath of the Rebellions. Central to the document's premise was the necessity of finding a political solution to the situation that had transpired. Even though the document, which was presented to Parliament in 1839, made irrationally strong social accusations, the fundamental political concepts articulated would have profound ramifications in describing the necessity of responsible government.

First, Durham sought the union of the Lower and Upper Canada. This policy, which extends back to 1822, received criticism from French-Canadians as it demonstrated Durham's desire to punish them for their actions during the Rebellions. The following observation is made in the *Report*:

> I expected to find a contest between a government and a people: I found two nations warring in the bosom of a single state: I found a struggle, not of principles, but of races; I perceived that it would be idle to attempt any amelioration of laws or institutions, until we could first succeed in terminating the deadly animosity that now separates the inhabitants of Lower Canada into the hostile divisions of French and English.

The tension between the populations, as outlined by Durham, provided the means to justify the passage of the Act of Union of 1840. Politically, the act created the Province of Canada by fusing together Lower and Upper Canada under one colonial government. As argued by Tait, "The Act of Union was by no means the complete solution to problems in the Canadas. In fact, it was in itself rather vague. Much depended on the way in which [it] was to be put into practice" (144). Additionally, in evaluating the necessity of political reform, Durham saw responsible government as a viable policy and endorsed it. On this point, Graham asserts, "To break the chronic deadlock between executive and elected assembly [Durham] simply recommended that the executive or cabinet should be made responsible to the majority of the elected assembly in every matter relating to local affairs" (122). Under this new reality, Great Britain retained power over complex imperial issues, however, Canadians retained a large amount of jurisdiction over internal affairs. Together, the joint government of Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine and Robert Baldwin oversaw the institutionalization of reforms associated with responsible government in 1848. Further action would be undertaken during confederation process, which established the Dominion of Canada in 1867.

The Canadian Rebellions can be viewed as a movement that actively sought to use the blueprint of the American Revolution as a means of forcing change with Great Britain. Even through Lower and Upper Canada differed in their political approach, the common interest in government reform set Canada on a new political course toward a modern nation-state.

Conclusion

The American Revolution and the Canadian Rebellions stand as specific affirmations of liberty and republicanism within the context of the Atlantic Revolutions. Both movements followed a similar preliminary trajectory by first attempting to initiate reforms within the constitutional framework of the British imperial system. When these demands were not realized, violence ensued. Although leaders of the American Revolution and the Canadian Rebellions understood the fundamental link between liberty and republicanism, the political conditions relating to their application yielded different political outcomes. However, both movements demonstrated a strong adherence to a similar vein of ideological discourse.

Works Cited

Adams, Paul W. "Republicanism in Political Rhetoric Before 1776" *Political Science Quarterly* 85.3 (1970): 397-421. JSTOR. Web. 4 Oct. 2014.

"Address of the Sons of Liberty, of Montreal to the Young Men of the North American Colonies." [Montreal] 1837: n.pag. *Bibliothèque Et Archives Nationales Du Québec*. Sons of Liberty. Web. 21 Feb. 2016. <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/1935279>

Allen, W.B, ed. *George Washington: A Collection*. Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1988. Print.

Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. 2nd ed. Cambridge
Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992. Print.

Bailyn, Bernard, David B. Davis, David H. Donald, John L. Thomas, Robert H. Wiebe, and
Gordon S. Wood. *The Great Republic: A History of the American People*. 2nd ed. Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1981. Print.

Bourinot, John G. *Canada Under British Rule 1760-1905*. 2nd ed. London: Cambridge University Press, 1909. Print.

Canada, House of Assembly, Upper Canada, *The Seventh Report From The Select Committee of THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY of UPPER CANADA On GRIEVANCES*, (Toronto: House of Assembly, 1835).

Craig, Gerald M. *The United States and Canada*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968. Print.

Ducharme, Michel. "Closing the Last Chapter of the Atlantic Revolution: The 1837-1838 Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada." In *Liberty! Égalité! Independencia! Print Culture,Enlightenment and Revolution in the Americas, 1776-1838*, edited by David S. Shields and Caroline F. Sloat, 193-210. Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 2007.

Ducharme, Michel. *Le concept de liberté du Canada à l'époque des Révolutions atlantiques (1776-1838)*. Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010. Print.

Gates, Lillian F. *After the Rebellion: The Later Years of William Lyon Mackenzie*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988. Print.

Graham, Gerald S. *A Concise History of Canada*. New York: Viking Press, 1968. Print.

Hamelin, Jean, and Jean Provencher. *Brève histoire du Québec*. 3rd ed. Montréal: Boréal, 1997. Print.

Harris, Marc L. "The Meaning of Patriot: The Canadian Rebellion and American Republicanism, 1837-1939" *Michigan Historical Review* 23.1 (1997): 33-69. JSTOR. 4 Oct. 2014.

Harvey, Louis-Georges. *Le Printemps de l'Amérique française : américanité, anticolonialisme et républicanisme dans le discours politique québécois, 1805-1837*. Québec: Boréal, 2005. Print.

Herstein, H. H., L. J. Hughes, and R. C. Kirbyson. *Challenge & Survival: The History of Canada*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1970. Print.

Howard, A.E. Dick. "James Madison and the Constitution" *The Wilson Quarterly* 9.3 (1985): 80-91. JSTOR. Web. 4 Oct. 2014.

Lipset, Seymour Martin. *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada.* New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.

Locke, John. "The Second Treatise of Government," in *The Selected Political Writings of John Locke*. Ed. Paul E. Sigmund. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. 17-125. Print.

Maier, Pauline. *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*. New York: Vintage Books, 2007. Print.

Miller, John C. *Origins of the American Revolution*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943. Print.

Morgan, Edmund S., and Helen M. Morgan. *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to the Revolution*. 3rd ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997. Print.

Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense*. 4th ed. Penguin Classics: New York, 1986. Print.

Papineau, Louis-Joseph. Louis-Joseph Papineau to George Bancroft, December 18, 1837, quoted in Ronald Howell, "A Papineau Political Testament in Exile, 1837." *The Canadian Historical Review* 38.4 (1957): 259-300. Print.

"Rebellions of 1837, Lower Canada." Map. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Rebellions of 1837, 2013. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.

"Rebellions of 1837, Upper Canada." Map. *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Rebellions of 1837, 2013. Web. 23 Oct. 2015.

Richter, Melvin. *The Political Theory of Montesquieu*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977. Print.