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The New History of the Canadian Rebellion, 1837-38: New Directions, New Interpretations, New Framework

La nouvelle histoire de la Rébellion canadienne, 1837-38 : nouvelles orientations, nouvelles interprétations, nouveau cadre

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The New History of the Canadian Rebellion, 1837-38: New Directions, New Interpretations, New Framework

Maxime Dagenais♦

Our knowledge of the past constantly evolves, changes, and is subject to reinterpretation. As we uncover new sources, develop new theoretical frameworks, and change as societies, our histories evolve. However, some histories evolve slower than others, and this is particularly the case when historical events are intertwined with national myths, collective memories, and cultural identities.

In Canada, and more specifically in the French-speaking province of Québec, our history is closely linked to our identity. After all, our license plates include the motto *Je me souviens*, a reference to the shared history of French-speaking settlers in Québec and our struggles with English-speaking settlers in Canada. While several historical events are key to this motto, one moment has had a particularly important place in our collective memory: the 1837-38 Canadian Rebellion(s). In Québec, the Rebellion has become an important part of our history and our collective identity. It is present everywhere: in numerous songs, plays, and poems, and it is even celebrated with a beer, *Unibroue's 1837*, brewed in honour of the memory of those that sacrificed their lives in the name of liberty at Saint-Eustache. And while the rest of Canada celebrates Victoria Day, in Québec, each year, we instead celebrate *la Journée nationale des patriotes*.

This day is not only a celebration of the *patriotes*, but it is synonymous with the creation of the *québécois* nation, people, and identity. Take this recent quote from Simon Jolin-Barrette, the minister responsible for the French language in Quebec:

♦ Maxime Dagenais, *McMaster University*.

> La Journée nationale des patriotes est un moment privilégié pour honorer ces hommes et ces femmes qui ont lutté avec courage pour la reconnaissance nationale de notre peuple. Au cours du printemps 1837, ce sont 10 000 personnes qui ont réclamé des réformes et un système de gouvernement démocratique. Ces grands rassemblements populaires et les combats menés par les patriotes ont tracé le chemin vers le Québec d'aujourd'hui, et notre gouvernement est fier de pouvoir leur rendre hommage. [La Journée nationale des patriotes est] un moment crucial de la construction de notre nation et de notre identité.
>
> (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021)

Of course, the mythology surrounding the Rebellion has influenced the way in which historians have interpreted and how they continue to interpret this event. Still today, the Rebellion is one of the most studied events in our history, especially in Québec where numerous scholarly articles, book chapters, books, special issues, and dissertations are produced each year (for instance, Bédard, 2016; Dagenais, 2017; Dagenais, 2020; Dagenais & Mauduit, 2019; Deschamps, 2016; Dunley, 2019; Guimond, 2017; Lamonde, 2019; Mauduit, 2022; Richards, 2020; Smith, 2017). According to the conventional narrative, this Rebellion was an ethnolinguistic conflict pitting a French-Canadian population against the British, whose domination they wished to shake off. This interpretation fits perfectly within *Québecois* nationalism, which is firmly anchored on the importance of *Québécois* values, culture, and the French language (Filteau, 2003; Deschamps, 2015, 2019; Lamonde, 2023; Laporte, 2015). This interpretation, however, is incomplete, subjective, and too simplistic. It considers the Rebellion from a very local and provincial perspective, focusing either on Lower Canada or Upper Canada, and does not reflect the most recent historiographical developments.

In the last few decades, our knowledge of the Rebellion has significantly expanded as new research, new theoretical approaches, and new publications have challenged this conventional narrative and have pushed the historiography into exciting new directions. For instance, several historians have taken the Rebellion out of its local "Canadian" context, and situated it in a wider transnational context, integrating it in the Age of Revolutions, Jacksonian America, and the Atlantic World. Others have also questioned several accepted narratives (for instance, Dagenais, 2017; Dagenais, 2020; Dagenais & Mauduit, 2019; Dunley, 2019; Ince, 2022; Mauduit, 2022; Richards, Jr., 2020; Smith, 2017). Based on the new research that has been published in the last five years, this article proposes an exploration of the New History of the Canadian Rebellion. It explores some of the most cutting-edge, novel directions and interpretations coming out of this emerging historiographical framework. Amongst other things, it demonstrates how this new history of the Rebellion has taken important steps to diversify

the conventional white-settler narrative, bringing in new perspectives, those of marginalized and racialized populations, to this story. It also demonstrates that by taking the Rebellion beyond the constraints of provincial and national borders, this new history of the Rebellion has demonstrated that it had significant transnational implications, particularly in the United States. And finally, it demonstrates how this new history has challenged the superficial historiographic boundary that historians have placed between events in Upper and Lower Canada.

What Was the 1837-38 Canadian Rebellion?

In November 1837, following a political impasse that paralyzed the Canadian colonies for more than a decade, reformers and republicans from both Lower Canada (Québec) and Upper Canada (Ontario)—including individuals like Robert Baldwin, Louis-Joseph Papineau, William Lyon Mackenzie, and Robert Nelson—revolted against British rule. Influenced by the revolutions that defined the early modern period, the "Canadian" patriots/*patriotes* first craved moderate reforms within the existing political system and later the creation of an American-style republic. Initially, these individuals sought a political system that was accountable to the elected legislative assemblies and not the appointed governors or their appointed legislative and executive councils, controlled by the local, mercantile elite. However, after years of facing a government that was unwilling to consider their moderate reforms, many began to radicalize. No longer content with reforms to the elected assemblies, they now sought a complete reform of the colonial political system and argued that only an American republican-style government would resolve their many grievances.

After decades of trying to obtain such transformations through peaceful means, rebellion was their only option. The British Government had rejected their every demand and even ordered the arrest of several *patriote* leaders. Though the Rebellion began with a *patriotes* victory at Saint-Denis (to the south of Montreal) on November 23, 1837, the outnumbered and outarmed rebels were subsequently defeated by British and loyalist forces at Saint-Charles a few days later, and the rising eventually ended with a decisive defeat at Saint-Eustache (to the north of Montreal) on December 14, 1837. In the meantime, in Upper Canada, William Lyon Mackenzie—who had been communicating with Louis-Joseph Papineau and other *patriotes* leaders—Dr. Charles Duncombe, and a force of republicans took up arms. However, in mid-December 1837, separate rebel forces were defeated at Montgomery's Tavern in Toronto and at Brantford. They then fled to Navy Island (on the Niagara River) where they proclaimed the Republic of Upper Canada. They were forced to evacuate in January 1838.

After these defeats, several rebel leaders sought refuge in American border towns where they attempted to secure assistance from Americans. They sent letters and met with local leaders and politicians and traveled to major cities including New York, Boston, and Philadelphia seeking financial and military support. All over the northern borderlands, especially in Michigan, Ohio, Vermont, Maine, and New York, thousands of Americans joined secret societies known as Hunters' Lodges, pledging to free Canada from the yoke of British imperialism and assist the rebels in their own "Canadian Revolution." Throughout 1838, Canadian rebels and their American sympathizers raided the two colonies, even leading to the creation of a Declaration of Independence of Lower Canada in February 1838. The "Canadian Revolution" culminated in an invasion of Upper and Lower Canada and major miliary encounters on Canadian soil in November and December 1838.

Though the "Revolution" was eventually put down by the British troops, the quest for reform lived on—taken over by the more moderate elements of the movement—eventually leading to the establishment of responsible government in 1848.

The Conventional Nationalist and Loyalist Narratives in Canada and Québec

While the *patriotes* may have failed in their attempts to defeat the British and set up American-style republics, the Canadian Rebellion has become one of the most fascinating events in our history to study. This is particularly the result of the radically different ways the two main settler populations have interpreted it. Both have approached it in very different ways, revealing a lot about the competing collective identities and memories within settler populations in Canada today. In Canada, the Rebellion took place in Upper Canada, modern day Ontario, and Lower Canada, modern day Quebec. Without going into the details of Canadian politics and collective memories, both settler populations share incredibly different collective experiences, and these differences are highlighted in the two mainstream and conventional narratives with the rebellion.

In Quebec, historians have adopted a very nationalist approach. Studies focus almost entirely on Quebec and see the root of the conflict as an ethnolinguistic conflict pitting French-speaking and loyal English-speaking settlers against one another. The event itself is not only described as a quest for political reform, but it was above all seen as a protest movement by a French-Canadian population trying to rid itself of the shackles of British domination. In particular, this approach draws a superficial historiographic boundary between events taking place in Upper and in Lower Canada, as historians still struggle to consider events in Lower Canada and Upper Canada as a single united political movement,

focusing instead on illustrating why both events were separate, distinct, and had only superficial connections to one another. As a result, one historian has even minimized the Upper Canadian Rebellion in the process, reducing it to a mere unpopular "stroll" led by MacKenzie (Laporte, 2015: 96). This overall perspective fits perfectly well within *Québecois* nationalism, which not only promotes the distinction of the *Québecois*, but it is a nationalism that, especially in more recent years, is firmly anchored in the importance of Quebecois values, culture, and the French language.[1]

In Ontario, on the other hand, the opposite is true. The Rebellion has not become a major part of Ontarian values. It has not become an important part of an Ontario nationalist movement, nor is there a holiday celebrating the Rebellion in Upper Canada. Instead, settlers in Ontario (like the rest of Canada outside of Quebec) celebrate Victoria Day, named after the British monarch who was on the throne when the/*patriotes* revolted. The Rebellion is not celebrated in plays, books, or poems. Moreover, it has all but disappeared from the historiography. It has been thirty years since the publication of Colin Read's *The Rising in Western Upper Canada, 1837-1838*, and since then the only book devoted to the Rebellion in Upper Canada is Albert Schrauwers' *Union is Strength* (Read, 1982; Schrauwers, 2009). Despite Schrauwers' important research, Read's simplistic, outdated, and incomplete perspective remains the dominant narrative. William Lyon Mackenzie, Charles Duncombe, and their supporters are portrayed as marginalized, disorganized radicals lacking any real support. The Rebellion is described as an anomaly, first led by Mackenzie as an unpopular *coup d'état* and then by invading Americans as the Patriot War. Several historians have argued that this can be explained by the fact that the Rebellion does not fit the image of an Upper Canada that was peaceful and loyal to the empire (see Skeoch, 1982; Mills, 1988; Knowles, 1997; Taylor, 2010).

In our 2019 book *Revolutions Across Borders: The Canadian Rebellion and Jacksonian America,* we argued that studies on the Canadian Rebellion in Canada had "stalled" in the decade following the publication of Michel Ducharme's seminal work—*Le Concept de liberté au Canada à l'époque des Révolutions atlantiques.* Ducharme had demonstrated that there was tremendous value in analysing the Rebellion beyond its provincial borders. While this observation resulted in criticisms from fellow historians that we were being *trop sévères* (too strict) with our colleagues in Canada and Quebec (Guimond, 2019: 205), we maintain our initial position: though there have been several new studies on the Rebellion *in Canada and Quebec* since 2010, very few have pushed their analyses into novel, innovative, and unique historiographical, methodological, or theoretical directions (one notable exception is Livernois & Lamonde, 2012).

1 For an analysis of *Québecois* nationalism see Lamy 2015.

In fact, we never denied that the Rebellion was an important topic of study in Canada/Quebec. In our introduction, we showcased the large number of studies published each year on the topic. We even noted that when we started working on our book in 2015, three studies on the Rebellion had been published in a 12-month period, adding that "as is suggested by the publication of three major monographs on the subject in a twelve-month period, the Rebellion remains an important topic of study in Canada" (Dagenais & Mauduit, 2019: 7). Yet, while the publication of three monographs in a 12-month period may suggest a rich field of study, perhaps even an innovative and energetic historiography that pushes the boundaries of our knowledge of this event, the fact remains that neither truly pushed the study of the Rebellion into new directions. Even when they offer something new, these analyses remain rooted in the same local, narrow, and nationalist/provincial contexts. Our critique was never about the *amount* of work being published on the topic, but the *novelty* of the work itself.

Take for instance the three books that were published in 2015: Gilles Laporte's *Brève histoire des patriotes,* Mylène Bédard's *Écrire en temps d'insurrections,* and François Deschamps's *La "Rebellion de 1837" à travers le prisme du* Montreal Herald. These books, although they are worthwhile contributions and add to the complexities of the Rebellion, continue to restrict their analyses to the same local context and continue to uphold the same conventional narrative.

The highest profile publication in 2015 was Gilles Laporte's *Brève histoire des patriotes.* This is not surprising as his work has become the dominant narrative amongst non-historians in Quebec and perhaps unsurprisingly, it is a blueprint for the nationalist narrative. The Rebellion is described as an ethnolinguistic conflict wherein the *patriotes* were defending, first and foremost, their language and culture (Laporte, 2015: 11). The focus is entirely on Lower Canada, and the superficial separation between events in both Upper Canada and Lower Canada is reaffirmed, by arguing that, unlike the Rebellion in Lower Canada, that in Upper was nothing more than a *marche menée par Mackenzie* (Laporte, 2015, 96). This book's sole contribution to our knowledge of the Rebellion are brief discussions of how the Rebellion played out in 16 regions around Lower Canada, suggesting a colony-wide movement. While these discussions are vague, incomplete, and often refer to already well-known episodes of Rebellion history, they more importantly continue to tell the story from a local, narrow, and national context, diving deeper into regionalism. The Rebellion is presented as an inward-looking and narrow-minded movement, with little connection to the world beyond the colony itself.

On the other hand, while I appreciate the historiographical additions that Deschamps and Bédard have made to our knowledge of the Rebellion, they too did not push the Rebellion into novel and innovative historiographical, methodological, or theoretical directions. Deschamps sheds light on the role of the Tories in the leadup to the Rebellion and questions the use of the term

"rebellion", insisting instead on a "political crisis" even hinting at a civil war between *patriotes* and ultratories. However, the story follows the same conventional narrative: the focus is local and the ethnolinguistic conflict between English and French-speaking settlers remains central to the analysis (Deschamps, 2015). Indeed, although Mylène Bédard's *Écrire en temps d'insurrections* should be applauded for providing greater insight into the role of women during the 1830s and 40s and giving a voice to women in a story dominated by white settler men, her book suffers from the same shortcomings: it is rooted in the same local, narrow, nationalist context. The analysis focuses on French-speaking *patriotes* and their French-speaking wives, sisters, and mothers, ignoring all English-speaking *patriotes* leaders and the women in their lives (Bédard, 2015).

The New History of the Rebellion

Since the publication of Michel Ducharme's seminal analyses of the Rebellion in the context of the Atlantic Revolutions titled *Le Concept de liberté au Canada à l'époque des Révolutions atlantiques* (2010) and more recently with the publication our own *Revolution Across Borders* in 2019, there have been several analyses that have pushed the Rebellion in innovative historiographic, methodological, and theoretical directions. This new history of the Canadian Rebellion has challenged conventional narratives and brought novel perspectives to the Canadian Rebellion, and by doing so, have shown that this local, limited, and failed Rebellion had consequences far beyond the "Canadian" border and with a far greater range of peoples. This next section will analyse some of the most interesting and cutting-edge new directions and interpretations of this historiographical framework.

The Transnational Impact

No analysis of the new history of the Canadian Rebellion can start without mentioning the important impact of transnational approaches to the study of the Rebellion. In the simplest terms, transnational history, as a theoretical concept, examines regional, local, and national events from an international perspective. Almost three decades ago, Allan Greer, in an article titled "Rebellions Reconsidered," called on historians to consider the Canadian Rebellion in a global context; in the context of the many revolts, rebellions, and revolutions that took place all over the Atlantic world (Greer, 1995). Greer reasoned that doing so would result in a much more comprehensive understanding of the Rebellion. Fifteen years later, Ducharme's *Le Concept de liberté au Canada à l'époque des Révolutions atlantiques* (1776-1838) (2010), and studies like Julie Guyot's comparative analysis of nationalist political discourse in Lower Canada

and Ireland titled *Les insoumis de l'empire. Le refus de la domination coloniale au Bas-Canada et en Irlande* (2016) as well as several others discussed below, demonstrated that there was indeed great value in analysing the Rebellion beyond its provincial and national borders. By doing so, they encouraged a new generation of historians to answer Greer's call and continue to push the Rebellion beyond its local confines, linking it with the Age of Revolutions, the Atlantic World, Jacksonian America, race-based slavery in the United States, and even events in Texas and Mexico. More importantly, this new generation of transnational historians have showed that this event was much more important than formerly understood as it had significant social, economic, and political implications beyond its borders.

When we first started working on *Revolution across Borders*, colleagues would often ask why we were studying the Rebellion from an American perspective. Surely, they would say, "these failed rebellions" did not register in the United States, beyond a few supporters along the northern borderland. What is there to study? At the surface, this assumption makes a lot of sense. The United States at the time was going through an intense period of change with the insurrection in Texas, the Market Revolution, the Bank Wars, Jacksonian America, and the battle between abolitionists and slaveholders. However, we maintained that it was precisely due to this intense context, a context in which many Americans were questioning and challenging the status quo, that the Canadian Rebellion mattered. In truth, historians in Canada are not new to transnational approaches, even in the context of the Canadian Rebellion. Yvan Lamonde, Louis-Georges Harvey, and a few others had, for instance, considered the impact of *americanité* on rebel leaders in Lower Canada (Coté, 2001; Harvey, 2004; Lamonde, 1984, 1996, 2008; Thériault, 2002). Yet, this transnationalism was always one-sided, a one-way mirror. It was limited to examining the impact of the international context on the Canadian Rebellion. However, this mirror had rarely been turned *towards* the United States. In other words, how did the Rebellion impact the United States itself? Thanks to the new history of the Canadian Rebellion, we have a much better understanding of the Rebellion's impact on their southern neighbour.

To start, the Rebellion appears to have instigated the creation of a devastating doctrine that defined American expansionism and settler-colonialism in North America in the 1840s: Manifest Destiny. While most historians associate this doctrine with the Annexation of Texas in 1845 and the following Mexican-American War, historian Louis-Georges Harvey suggests that an early version of the doctrine materialized in response to the Canadian Rebellion. Analysing John L. O'Sullivan's editorials in *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* during the Rebellion, Harvey argues that early notions of American expansionism and the superiority of democratic American values, notions that would soon be "crystalized" as Manifest Destiny in 1845 by the same John L. O'Sullivan' and in

the same newspaper, were already being discussed in editorials on the Canadian Rebellion (Harvey, 2019: 210). While some concepts would be reworked in the following years, "the Canadian Question" allowed O'Sullivan—who sympathized with the rebels, even linking them with the founders of the American Revolution in 1776—to discuss key notions that defined manifest destiny, such as the progress and expansion of democracy, the rule of republicanism and self-determination, and the end of monarchical regimes in North America (Harvey, 2019: 232). Perhaps most strikingly, however, "the Canadian Question" also allowed O'Sullivan to discuss American expansionism and the annexation of territory to America. Although O'Sullivan did not condone the annexation of the Canadian colonies, he nonetheless saw "no reason why, at some future day, our experiment should not be in successful operation over the whole North American continent, from the isthmus to the pole. (Harvey, 2019: 217). While it is true that key notions, particularly annexation, were not yet core concepts of the doctrine that later became Manifest Destiny and others changed as a response to the Annexation of Texas, Harvey concludes that it was the Canadian Rebellion, and not the Annexation of Texas, that "prompted O'Sullivan to formulate an early version of his providential vision of America's future" (Harvey, 2019: 217).

The Canadian Rebellion also provided a context with which Americans, disillusioned by the early American republic, sought an alternative to a United States they grew to oppose. Through an analysis of Dr Samuel Underhill's two Cleveland-based newspapers, *Cleveland Liberalist* and *Bald Eagle*, historian Andrew Bonthius demonstrates how William Lyon Mackenzie's "radical Jacksonian and agrarian" platform reverberated in Ohio, shaking the fragile bonds of the American union, and causing many, including Underhill, to discuss an alternative, a nation of "yeoman-farmer producers" as a counterweight to the "ruthless monied aristocracy" that dominated the United States (Bonthius, 2019).

Underhill's America was far from united and secure. It was an America that, in the wake of the Panic of 1837, had grown increasingly divided over growing poverty, economic insecurity, and corruption with the nation's banking system. It was an America that benefited the monied aristocracy at the expense of yeoman, famers, and labourers (Bonthius, 2019: 137). Within this context, Mackenzie's agrarian-centred critique of the commercial banking system grew to great popularity in the United States. When the Rebellion started, disenfranchised Americans not only supported it, but it also encouraged disillusioned Americans to rise and fight for an alternative in Canada.

Dr. Samuel Underhill was one of these disenfranchised Americans and over the course of the Canadian Rebellion, he used his newspapers to generate support for the Rebellion and the creation of a new, fair republic. Throughout, he critiqued the Federal Government's unwillingness to help, President Van Buren's Neutrality Act, and all attempts at appeasing the British. He argued in favour of the Canadian Rebellion, urging his supporters and those frustrated by the current

"rigged" system to provide assistance, arms, and ammunition, create armed militias, and called upon every "American freemen […] in every extremity, [to] make their cause our own (Bonthius, 2019: 151). The Canadian Rebellion was not only a movement worth fighting for, but it provided Underhill the opportunity to create a republic that embodied his vision of "a nation of 'yeoman-farmer producers" that could act as a counterweight to the "ruthless monied aristocracy" that was now the United States. The establishment of the Upper Canadian Republic was the first step in the fulfilment of this vision (Bonthius, 2019: 158).

Perhaps most strikingly, however, is the Rebellion's impact on American politics. Specifically, historian Julien Mauduit argued that the crisis in Canada can help explain William Harrison and the Whigs' victory and Van Buren and the Democrats' defeat in the 1840 election. The Canadian Rebellion, Mauduit explains, destabilized Van Buren's electoral basis in the Northern states, "shattering the old alliance Jackson had secured in the mid 1820s between the South and the more popular elements of the free states" (Mauduit, 2019: 240). In fact, Van Buren not only underestimated the popularity of the Rebellion in the northern states, but Harrison built a campaign around the deep-seated frustration that many harbored towards Van Buren, including his opposition of the Canadian Rebellion.

In the late 1830s, divisions began to appear in the Democratic Party's electoral base. The Panic of 1837—a financial crisis that caused severe economic anxiety and hardship in the United States—intensified these divisions (Mauduit, 2019: 242-43). Radical Democrats, known as the Locofocos, at odds with some of the party's economic policies, began asking for more radical economic policies, including the end of the privilege-based banking system. The Canadian Crisis further deepened these divisions. From the borderland states to Philadelphia and Washington, many that supported the Canadian Rebellion condemned Van Buren's treatment of the Canadian rebels and their American supporters. William Lyon Mackenzie's arrest in 1838 was especially denounced. In fact, even Andrew Jackson's former Secretary of Treasury, William Duane, demanded that Mackenzie be released (Mauduit, 2019: 246). Writing to Mackenzie, Duane stated that "the feeling manifested in this remote section of the country from the frontier […] will militate much against Mr Van Buren's re-election." Duane added that "influential men" and "friends" of President Van Buren "swear that [he] will receive no support from them whilst Wm L. Mackenzie is permitted to occupy a prison" (Mauduit, 2019: 246). The Canadian Rebellion had significant allies in the United States.

On the other hand, though William Harrison did not build an entire campaign on supporting the Canadian Rebellion, he did not shy away from associating himself with the patriots/*patriotes*. In June 1840, for instance, at an address in Cleveland—a stronghold of Canadian support as highlighted by Bonthius—he proclaimed that he was a friend of the "Canadian Revolution". At a

rally in Fort Meighs, Harrison went even further, celebrating his victories against the British during the War of 1812, using songs like *La Marseillaise* and the *Hunters of Kentucky* in the process—songs that had become synonymous with the Canadian Rebellion (Mauduit, 2019: 252-3). For two years, the president's Canadian policy had been denounced by the rebels, their American supporters, and Whig party members. Van Buren's party had become "anti-republican," "tyrannical," and "federal British tories" and Whig party candidates along the border used the crisis to condemn their Democratic opponents (Mauduit, 2019: 251). In contrast, the Rebellion helped cement William Harrison as the "patriotic General who fought the 'tories' in 1812, now a savior of a Republic threatened by would-be 'Federalists' who were, indeed, helping the British empire repress their neighbours' call for democracy" (Mauduit, 2019: 251).

Of course, the historians that participated in *Revolutions across Borders* are not the only ones that have pushed the Rebellion beyond its colonial borders. While this article has focused on their work—as they represent some of the most recent and complex analyses—several historians outside of Canada, Quebec, and the United States have made (and have been making for years) important contributions to our understanding of the Rebellion beyond Canada.

For instance, historians like Malcolm Chase, Anna Plassart, Hugo Bonin, Michael J. Turner, Françoise Lejeune, and Allan Blackstock have highlighted the impact of the Rebellion in Great Britain and Ireland. They have demonstrated that it dominated the local press (for instance, Blackstock, 2012; Lejeune, 2007) and forced many, in Britain particularly, to question and reassess their own values, principles, and political leaders (for instance, Plassart & Bonin, 2022; Turner, 2006). Focusing on radical reformer Thomas Perronet Thompson, Turner, for instance, highlights how the Rebellion—along with the Second Melbourne ministry's mishandling of it—provided the ideal context for Thompson to unite radical leaders in Britain and renew their "reform campaign" (Turner, 2006). Like Bonthius' work on Dr. Samuel Underhill and his radical vision of a "nation of 'yeoman-farmer producers," Turner's analysis reveals how the Rebellion provided the context for "radicals" in Britain to similarly push their own agenda. Unfortunately for these radicals, Turner concludes that they were unable to work together and gain popular support for their movement. Plassart and Bonin, on the other hand, revealed how the Rebellion was a defining moment that led to a reevaluation of two key terms that while were "little-used" at the time would soon become "central to British politics:" "democracy" and "nationality" (Plassart & Bonin, 2020: 39). Like Louis-Georges Harvey's research on the concept of "Manifest Destiny," the Rebellion provided the context to confront, discuss, and debate two key concepts that would define British history moving forward.

Global historians have also demonstrated that the Rebellion was heavily debated in newspapers beyond the 'Mother Country' and Ireland—including in Paris where, for example, the anti-monarchial, republican newspaper *Le*

National attempted to legitimize the Rebellion and its claims (Ayala & Lejeune, 2011)—and it even inspired another similar movement in Australia (Cottle & Keys, 2007). Aurelio Ayala and Françoise Lejeune's detailed analysis of the Rebellion in Parisian newspapers is particularly notable. They describe response of the press to the Rebellion and the reaction of French authorities, particularly the government of Louis Philippe. While the French authorities were opposed to the Rebellion—French and English relations were improving during this period, leading to the "Entente Cordiale" in in the early 1840s (Ayala & Lejeune: 138-39)—several Parisian newspapers were in favour of the Rebellion and in the process projected their own values on this event. Newspapers like the liberal *Le Siècle* and the republican *Le National* called for the government of Louis Philippe to support the Rebellion (Ayala & Lejeune: 111-115). According to Ayala and Lejeune, however, this interest in Canada and the Rebellion was very short-lived—the French, during this period, were more interested in the young republic to the south. Regardless, the authors demonstrate that the Rebellion provided republican newspapers with the context to call upon the peoples of the western word to mobilize against monarchical authority (Ayala & Lejeune: 171). When considered in conjunction with Turner's article, it is clear that the Rebellion inspired radicals and reformers in Britain and France, further highlighting the transnational impact of this "local" event.

While such analyses from global scholars have expanded our understanding of the Rebellion's transnational impact, they still, in many ways, continue to uphold several of the conventional narratives that dominate Rebellion historiography in Canada and Quebec. The Rebellion continues to be treated as two separate events and the ethnolinguistic conflict between French-speaking and English-speaking settlers remain at the center of the Rebellion. These are some of the narratives that the emerging new history of the Rebellion is challenging.

A Singular Canadian Rebellion

One of the enduring fundamentals of the conventional nationalist narrative is the continued superficial historiographic boundary that historians have placed on the events in Upper and Lower Canada. Rather than focusing on the similarities and connections, thereby treating the insurrection in Lower and Upper Canada as one singular event, historians, especially in Québec, have instead insisted on highlighting the differences to create two separate and different events. Most historians in Canada therefore refer to two rebellions—the Upper Canadian *and* the Lower Canadian Rebellions—rather than to one larger Canadian Rebellion. However, by focusing on the similarities, connections, and key concepts that reveal that these "two" events shared similar goals, the new history of the Canadian Rebellion has challenged this superficial boundary.

Whilst it is true that there are some differences and complexities between events in Upper and Lower Canada, we must not forget that the armed insurrections that took place in 1837 and 1838 are linked by the same historical cause: a fundamental and general crisis of the Canadian colonies. The history of these two colonies is deeply linked, most notably through the republican movement of the 1830s (see Mauduit, 2022). The conventional narrative maintains that both events were divided because they did not share the same homogenous goals, message, and support. Widescale support in Lower Canada and more limited support in Upper Canada is an example used by historians to emphases these differences. However, they also forget that the Lower Canadian movement was itself not homogenous; it was heterogeneous and unevenly supported across the colony. Following this logic, should we not then break apart the Lower Canadian Rebellion into various regional uprisings? For instance, should the Confederation of the six countries of October 1837 be treated as its own separate uprising? What of the uprising in the Eastern Townships? Should it also be treated as a separate event since many of rebels in the region were American in origin? Pushing this logic even further, should historians speak of the American Revolutions of 1776 in the plural since the degree of patriotism fluctuated from colony to colony, the major revolutionary documents were not signed by all the colonies simultaneously, and the reasons for mobilization differed from state to state?

The new history of the Rebellion has challenged the superficial historiographic boundary that historians have placed between events in Upper and Lower Canada, focusing instead on the similarities to suggest a more unified, homogenous event than the conventional narrative has previously proposed. One historian in particular has demonstrated that both Upper and Lower Canadian revolutionaries not only shared cohesive and unified goals, but throughout the lead up and for the entirety of the Rebellion, they met, sent letters to, and discussed with one another as well as planned offensives and next steps as a united front. While Julien Mauduit fully discusses this connection between Upper and Lower Canadian rebels in detail in his recent book *La guerre d'indépendance des Canadas: démocratie, républicanismes et libéralismes en Amérique du Nord*, I will instead focus on a captivating example that he developed in an article in *Early American Studies* entitled "American Republicanism at a Crossroads: Canadian 'Twin Stars', Annexation, and Continental Order (1837-42)," an example that demonstrates that the connection between the two was closer than the national narrative would suggest.

In this text, which analyses the concept of the "Twin Stars" Republic, an independent republic of the united Canadas, Mauduit demonstrates that the similarities between the patriots/*patriotes* of Upper and Lower Canada on the topic of independence was perhaps more established than some historians have claimed (see Lamonde, 2022). Mauduit explains that although many rebels initially hoped to join the United States as American states (or state), the Anglo-

American rapprochement of the late 1830s and the Neutrality Act enforced by US Federal Government forced many to rethink their goal of becoming American states and start considering an alternative. This alternative was the creation of a new nation: the "Twin Stars" Republic of the two Canadas, a republic that united Upper and Lower Canada under one flag and one government. In fact, Mauduit demonstrates that the unification of both Upper and Lower Canada under one government was even being discussed prior to the Rebellion itself (Mauduit, 2019: 391) For instance, in July 1837, "the Reformers of the City of Toronto" had already called for a pan-Canadian convention to establish a common "Congress." Louis-Jospeh Papineau, leader of the *patriotes*, had even been described, in the years prior to the Rebellion, as the future "president of the Republic of the Canadas" by Upper and Lower Canadian patriots/*patriotes* (Mauduit, 2019: 391). Following the start of the Rebellion, and especially following Van Buren's refusal to support the rebels, these discussions intensified. Thomas S. Brown, a leader of the Lower Canadian movement, connected with Mackenzie, the leader of the Upper Canadian movement, to discuss the establishment of "our government." Papineau even referred to "a 'provisional government' for the two Canadas" when he discussed American support with George Bancroft (Mauduit, 2019: 391). Mauduit argues that the creation of a "Twin Stars" republic had become such a common goal with Upper and Lower Canadian rebels and their American supporters that the "Twin Star" flag was a frequent sight at major events in 1838 across Upper and Lower Canada and the United States and poems and songs were written in its honor.

Even following the defeat of the rebels in November 1838, the dream of the "Twin Stars" republic did not die. Prior to his execution, François-Marie-Thomas Chevalier De Lorimier referred to the "two stars" of the two Canadas as the country he sacrificed his life for. At his trial for breaking American neutrality, Edward Theller not only praised the Canadian cause, but he referred to the "Twin Stars": "Let but the Canadians raise their banner themselves tomorrow, on the opposite shore—let them loosen their tricolored stripes and the twin stars of liberty to the breeze, and I will join them, and fight, and die, that flag defending" (Mauduit, 2019: 393).

Diversifying the White-Settler-Focused Narrative

The history of the Rebellion was, and still remains, a story dominated by the white settler population. White settler political and rebel leaders are at the forefront of most analyses and the implications and consequences of the event are told from a white settler perspective. This is no surprise as most studies focus on the ethnolinguistic conflict between French-speaking and English-speaking settlers. However, one of the most innovative and ground-breaking directions in which the new history of the Canadian Rebellion has pushed our historiography

has been to uncover—or at the very least start to uncover—its impact on racialized, underrepresented, and non-settler communities. Particularly, in the past five years, there have been more and more studies that have pushed our understanding of the Rebellion's impact on race-based slavery, enslaved peoples, and peoples of African descent in North America. Of course, this is just a start and a lot more research to be carried out on this subject. Particularly, more work needs to be done to uncover the histories of racialized, underrepresented, and non-settler communities and the Rebellion, *from their own perspectives*. However, the analyses discussed below demonstrate that the Rebellion had considerable implications on such communities, suggesting that these will be fruitful avenues of research to explore.

In his most recent book *Breakaway Americas*, Richards, Jr. tackles the topic of race-based slavery and racism with the Upper Canadian patriots. On the surface, Richards, Jr. explains, the patriots did not favour slavery. Their Canadian republic, they argued, would not include slavery (Richards, Jr., 2020: 68). Mackenzie had always opposed this "peculiar institution." Mackenzie was not alone in holding such antislavery views, as Richards, Jr. highlights many other patriot leaders and supporters—such as Lucius Verus Bierce, A.D. Smith, and Preston King—that were also vocal opponents of slavery during and following the Rebellion. However, whilst the patriots may have opposed slavery as an institution, Richards is quick to remind us that they were not supporters of racial equality in North America: "Upper Canada would be a free soil, *white* republic" (Richards, Jr., 2019: 69). According to Richards, Jr., the loyalty of the Black population of Upper Canada towards the British crown especially frustrated Mackenzie. While Mackenzie may not have understood why, it makes perfect sense why this population sided with the British: "[t]hey were ready and willing to fight for an empire that protected their freedom from the slaveholding republic to the south" (Richards, Jr., 2019: 69). As explained by David Shields in "The Power to Be Reborn," a successful Canadian Rebellion would potentially have devastating consequences for the Black population. Analysing *The Liberator*, one of the United States' leading abolitionist newspapers, Shields argued that the newspaper heavily condemned the Rebellion in 1837 and 1838. Not only did abolitionists revere British principles and liberties, "painting a northern utopia in which the genius of persons of color blossomed when permitted to order their own lives," but they also feared that if the rebels were successful—and the Canadas were added to the United States—fugitive slaves would lose this land free of slavery, and "find themselves again subject to […] the coercive power of the constitutional stipulation that fugitive slaves be returned to their owners in their home states" (Shields, 2019: 294, 296-7). Frustrated, Mackenzie was thus quick to use race-based fear to encourage the white-settler population to take up arms, arguing that if the white-settler population did not take matters into their own hands, "British authorities would unleash them [Black loyalists] on a defenseless

white populace […]" (Richards, Jr., 2019: 69). According to Richards, Jr., this anti-black rhetoric worked, gaining Mackenzie the support of "racist American Patriots who disliked black people simply because they were black" (Richards, Jr., 2019: 69).

Despite this, Richards, Jr. does not believe that race-based slavery played a significant role in the Rebellion or the Federal Government's response to the Rebellion. Comparing the government's radically different responses to the Canadian and Texas Rebellions, two similar rebellions that took place almost one year apart, Richards maintains that "the different US actions in Texas and Canada had little to do with slavery and everything to do with the vastly different military capabilities of Mexico and Great Britain" (Richards, Jr, 2020: 76). However, I argued in two articles that race-based slavery was perhaps a little more important than Richards, Jr. suggests and that it may have played a more important role on how the American government responded to the rebellions in Texas and Canada.

In a 2019 article titled "The Canadian Rebellion, the American South, and Slavery," I analysed the responses of two newspapers closely linked to slavery in the American South: the *Charleston Mercury* and *Southern Patriot*. Both newspapers were from South Carolina, a slave state, and both were founded, owned, and edited by individuals that had close ties to slavery and supported its expansion (Dagenais, 2020: 564-5). Throughout 1838, both newspapers kept a very close eye on the Canadian Rebellion, condemning it, the patriots/*patriotes*, and every northerner that came to their aid. To these southern newspapers, their cause was not only unjust, but the rebels and their supporters were, amongst other things, "evil," "rash," "gruesome," "ill- judged," "vile" and "villainous," "pirates," "enemy," "scum", and "unlawful" (Dagenais, 2019: 566). The two newspapers thus called upon the Federal Government to remain neutral, refuse to assist the Canadian rebels, and arrest any northerner that was caught assisting the patriots/*patriotes* and prevent all interference in the Canadian Rebellion.

As I stated above, the Canadian patriots/*patriotes* were not the only ones to take up arms in the late 1830s. In 1835-36, Americans living in Texas—a Mexican province at the time—and Tejanos (Spanish settlers living in Texas) rebelled against a Mexican government that was increasingly centralizing authority around a unitary regime in Mexico. However, this time, the two newspapers called upon the Federal Government and American citizens to support the Texans and help them fight for their independence. They maintained that their cause was "valiant" and, more importantly, an independent Texas, which they believed would surely join the United States, would help "insure the stability of Southern institutions" (Dagenais, 566-7).

I have argued that the historical context provides greater insight into why these southern, pro-slavery newspapers adopted a contradictory position towards the Canadian Rebellion. By the start of the Rebellion in 1837, the balance of power in the United States between slave and free states was very delicate, with

13 states on each side. On both sides, slaveholders and abolitionists feared what the addition of a slave or free state to the United States would do to this fragile balance of power. Any change to the balance of power could result in a power shift in Congress or the Senate. As such, Upper and Lower Canada and Texas became important pawns in the battle between slave states and states that had abolished slavery. And with the potential prospects of Texas joining the United States as a slave state, tipping the balance of power in favour of the slave states, it was important for northerners that the Canadian rebels, which opposed slavery, should succeed.

In fact, southern newspapers were very concerned that Americans living in the north supported the patriots/*patriotes,* not because they (northerners) believed the Canadian cause to be just, but simply because they opposed the inclusion of Texas and wanted to "trampl[e] down […] the South and her *institutions*" (Dagenais, 2019: 568). The *Charleston Mercury* stated: "It is said that the struggle of Texas has a connection with the Canada Rebellion. The comparison is made not for the purpose of benefiting Canada, but of injuring Texas. Those who are opposed to the Union with the State are most happy to seize upon every scum [referring to Canadian rebels] that floats on the stream of events" (Dagenais, 2019: 2019). What were these southern "institutions" that the north wanted to trample down? Slavery. And while the two pro-slavery newspapers did not use that word when condemning northern supporters of the Canadian Rebellion, northern newspapers did not shy away from mentioning that "the dark spirit of slavery" and the perpetuation of slavery in the United States was the true reason why the South supported Texas and opposed the Canadian Rebellion (Dagenais, 2019: 568-9).

Some northern newspapers went even further and argued that the perpetuation of slavery in the United States was the reason why the Federal Government had a positive attitude to the Texas Rebellion and a more neutral one towards the Canadian Rebellion (Dagenais, 2019: 568-9). Even though Richards, Jr. believes that the vastly different military power of both Mexico and Great Britain played the key role in the Federal Government's decision to support one and remain neutral with the other, slavery, it appears, played a larger role than he suggests. In fact, the belief that slaveholding interests and slaveholders influenced American domestic and foreign policy is nothing new. In 2016, historian Matthew Karp demonstrated that between 1833 and 1861 slaveholding southerners guided American foreign policy (Karp, 2016). These men practiced what he calls a "foreign policy of slavery" and got involved in several international struggles in the Caribbean, Brazil, Cuba, and Texas to defend slavery and the slave trade. More importantly, since these men dominated the executive branch of the federal government during the period, they made sure that American diplomacy was guided by the needs of the slaveholding South. As such, anything that could harm

the survival of slavery in the United States (or abroad)—including a Canadian Rebellion supported by the North—needed to be dealt with promptly.

While Karp did not dive into the Canadian context and Richards, Jr. may disagree, there is every reason to believe that the Canadas would have been dealt with in a similar manner. Regardless, despite these interpretative differences on the role of race-based slavery on the event, significant steps have been taken to move the story of the Rebellion beyond the conventional white-settler narrative.

Along with race-based slavery and peoples of African descent, historians have also expanded beyond the conventional white-settler narrative and considered the Rebellion and Indigenous peoples. Once again, Richards, Jr. features heavily in this new line of research, arguing that, like Black populations in Upper Canada, Indigenous peoples were equally vilified by Upper Canadian rebels and the victims of racism and animosity because of their loyalty to the British crown (Richards, Jr, 2019: 69-70). In a ground-breaking article titled "'As Long as that Fire Burned'": Indigenous Warriors and Political Order in Upper Canada, 1837-42," Nathan Ince further investigates Indigenous loyalty to the British, providing a more nuanced explanation into why they sided with the British.

Ince's article demonstrates that Indigenous Warriors in Upper Canada played an important role in the Rebellion, fighting alongside the British Government and loyalist settlers. However, they did not do so out of a sense of loyalty to the British crown, but they did so with a specific goal in mind: "to further their own vision of what constituted a desirable political order within the province." (Ince, 2022: 384) Ince reveals that the insurrection in Upper Canada provided the ideal context for Indigenous leaders to use their military power to push the British to recommit to the "Fire of Friendship," "an unwritten constitution that governed the relationship between First Nations and the British Empire throughout the St Lawrence watershed" (Ince, 2022: 387). Maintaining this fire was the responsibility of both Indigenous nations and the British Empire. However, it was at risk of dying because of continued settler violence and "increasingly unsympathetic colonial administrations" (Ince, 2022: 388). The British Government's need for military assistance to defend British North America during the Rebellion provided the ideal context for Indigenous nations to pressure the British Government to "observe the long-established terms of the Indigenous-Imperial relationship in exchange for their political and military support."

While it is impossible to know just how many Indigenous warriors fought against the patriots in 1837 and 1838, Ince maintains that records demonstrate that a minimum of 1,278 warriors took up arms during the period of the Rebellion (Ince, 2022: 394). Why individual indigenous warriors took up arms in favour of the British is as varied as why settlers took up arms against the British. According to Ince, while some feared the colony's annexation to the United States where violence and Indigenous removals "was reaching its apogee," others wanted pay, provisions, and prestige (Ince, 2022: 397). Although these are all

valid reasons why Indigenous warriors would take up arms for the British, Ince argues that many did so "to [maintain] the principles of the Fire of Friendship." Indigenous support during the Rebellion thus came at a price for the British and as a result, the British promised to uphold several of its obligations to the Fire of Friendship, including the issuing of annual presents, protecting indigenous property and expelling settler squatters from Indigenous land, and increase Indigenous influence in the Indian Department by appointing Indigenous leaders (Ince, 2022: 398-9). Unfortunately, while the British Government benefited from Indigenous warriors during the rebellion, in the years that followed, the British did not maintain the Fire of Friendship and one by one, the principles of the Fire of Friendship ended in the decades that followed (Ince, 2022: 404-5).

Conclusion: The Conventional Narratives Persists

Since the publication of the *Revolutions Across Borders*, the New History of the Canadian Rebellion has not only challenged conventional narratives, showing that the Rebellion was more than an ethnolinguistic conflict between French-speaking and English-speaking settlers and that both Upper and Lower Canadian rebels shared more similarities than previously acknowledged, but it has pushed the Rebellion into exciting new directions. It has shown that this Rebellion was a transnational event with important social, economic, and political implications beyond its borders and has uncovered a story that involves more than the white-settler population of Upper and Lower Canada. Yet, despite all of this, despite all of the recent research that has challenged the dominant narratives and helped deprovincialize the Rebellion, the conventional narrative remains a constant force in Rebellion historiography, especially in Québec.

Recently, in 2022, Yvan Lamonde, whose name is synonymous with the history of the Rebellion in Québec, published a study titled, *Les Colonies du Haut et du Bas-Canada avant et à l'époque des rebellions.* His goal was to analyse the Upper and Lower Canadian Rebellion(s) in a comparative context in order to understand the differences, similarities, and connections between the two rebellions. Unfortunately, however, this book reveals the persistence of the conventional nationalist narrative in Rebellion historiography. Throughout the book, Lamonde outlines the many occasions when Upper Canadian patriots and Lower Canadian *patriotes* met, conversed, planned, and even argued with one another. Lamonde asserts that the two groups shared a similar "global project", despite the fact that, according to his own account, they physically met, wrote to one another, borrowed from one another, and had similar demand. However, he nonetheless concludes that there were more differences than similarities. Rather disappointingly, he was also unwilling to engage with the latest research that has

emerged from the New History of the Canadians Rebellion. As a result, Lamonde continues to perpetuate the belief that the Upper and Lower Canadian uprisings do not represent a single, unified movement. A similar critique can also be made about Phillip Buckner's "The Canadian Civil Wars of 1837-38", which does not meaningfully engage with this latest research and regrettably fails to acknowledge François Deschamps' analyses, who first suggested that the Rebellion was a civil war (Deschamps, 2015 & 2019).

This brings us back to what I stated at the beginning: some histories evolve slower than others, and this is particularly the case when historical events are linked with national myths, collective memories, and cultural identities. In the case of the history of the Canadian Rebellion, the historians of the new history of the Rebellion are not only challenging long-established and persistent historiographical narratives, but they are confronting deep-rooted national myths, collective memories, and cultural identities.

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