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Crossroads of Empire: American Fenians Invade Canada

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Crossroads of Empire: American Fenians Invade Canada

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Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1866, members of the Fenian Brotherhood—an Irish American nationalist organization—crossed the border into Canada and seized control of Fort Erie. Although British and Canadian forces reclaimed the area a few days later, the invasion exposed the consequences of empire for the state and the people it marginalizes. The Fenians were products of British Empire, their identity grounded in the resistance to the colonization of Ireland. But they were also active participants of American Empire, trying to further American expansion, inspired by politicians who publically advocated for continental hegemony. By invading Canada, the Fenians believed that they were pursuing a noble cause, left unfinished in the American Revolution, to end British rule in North America. They did not consider that the majority of Canadians wanted to maintain their imperial relationship with Britain.

This dissertation examines the Fenian invasions of Canada through the lens of empire so as to better understand the environment from which they emerged, and how they were able occupy Canadian territory (even if only for a few days). Although originally intended as a financial support organization to the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Dublin, the Fenians became a powerful organization with its leaders publically declaring their intentions to attack Canada. However, their efforts did not result in the annexation of Canada to the U.S. Instead, the Fenian invasion of Canada played a key role in pushing the provinces further into the British imperial fold, culminating in the Canadian Confederation in 1867 and the official recognition of Canada as a Dominion in the British Empire. Although the Fenians were unsuccessful, their story is vital to the history of America in the world. It exposes the repercussions of the imperial process—particularly how state expansion inspires filibustering violence among its citizens. It also underscores the importance of examining transnational movements and how they impact and are shaped by empire. The rise and fall of the Fenian Brotherhood was tied to the expansion of both the British and American empires. The Fenian invasion of Canada also led to the organization’s decline, but it served a vital purpose in how it impacted the evolution of the Irish nationalist movement both in Ireland and America.
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For Jimmy, Chewie, and the Chicken.
At 3:30 am on June 3rd, 1866, members of the Canadian militia and British Royal forces boarded a train in Toronto heading toward Fort Erie, the most eastern point of the Ontario Peninsula. Their plan was to reclaim Fort Erie from a group of Irish nationalists—members of an organization called the Fenian Brotherhood—who had crossed the Niagara River from Buffalo, New York and occupied the Canadian territory after fighting off local inhabitants. When the train came to a halt approximately ten miles from Fort Erie, General R.W. Lowry led the Canadian and British soldiers by foot towards their destination. Lowry was himself Irish, yet his allegiance differed considerably from the men he was sent to capture. A career military man who had fought in the Crimean War, Lowry had arrived in Canada to command a regiment of British imperial forces.

As Lowry and his men marched towards Fort Erie, he made his loyalties clear. It was now his “business,” he proclaimed, “to snuff out the silly efforts made by an Irish-American party to disturb [British] rule in Canada.” He would not have to snuff anything out on that night, however. Lowry and his men arrived at Fort Erie to find the *USS Michigan*, a United States military gunboat, anchored in the river just off the peninsula with a massive barge to her stern, holding the Fenians under arrest. The skirmish in which Lowry seemed rather eager to participate had already taken place, and another regiment of royal forces and Canadian volunteers had forced the Irish Americans back across the Niagara.
Medics tended to the wounded and local civilians walked through the area dismayed at the carnage.

The moment may have been anticlimactic for Lowry and his men, but it was tragic for the captured Fenians, and for one local woman in particular who waved an amputated leg above her head and cried out “God save ould [sic] Ireland.”¹ Her cries meant little to a British soldier on site who dismissed her as a drunk. But her declaration serves as an exclamation mark to a bizarre event and raises questions concerning its historical significance. Why had Canada become a space for Irish declarations of nationalism? How had the Fenian Brotherhood been able to amass a force capable of invading another country? And, what did they hope to accomplish?

The answers to these questions not only tell the story of the rise and fall of the Fenian Brotherhood, they also reveal the imperial milieu from which the organization emerged. The Fenians were products of the American and British empires—foraged by British imperialism in Ireland and U.S. imperialism across the American continent. Largely comprised of Irish Americans, members of the Brotherhood belonged to a transnational association of Irish nationalists in the United States, Canada, and in Ireland—people who wanted an independent Ireland, free from English rule. In the two years leading up to the attacks in Canada, Irish nationalists—members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Ireland, which was a sibling organization of the Fenian Brotherhood—had staged several unsuccessful risings in Cork City, Limerick, and Dublin. During this time,

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¹ This account is based on the observations and writings of Viscount Wolseley, a British officer who was with General R.W. Lowry at Fort Erie. Viscount Wolseley, The Story of a Soldier’s Life (London: A. Constable & Co., 1903), 160-161.
the British colonial government had shut down the Irish nationalist newspaper in Ireland, *The Irish People*, and suspended habeas corpus.\(^2\) As Americans, the Fenians hardly feared such reprisals prior to their Canadian exploits. They were able to publically declare their intentions to attack Canada, amass men and weapons on the border, and eventually capture Fort Erie (even if only for a few days). What is more, members of the Brotherhood who were captured by American authorities were eventually released with their weapons and offered transportation home. Although the Fenians were ultimately unsuccessful in gaining a foothold in Canada, they had achieved a level of unprecedented success compared to nationalists in Ireland.

This dissertation examines the Fenian Brotherhood’s invasions of Canada through the lens of empire so as to better reveal the consequences of this power structure and to provide a more comprehensive examination of the conditions that informed the belligerent Fenian policy. The Brotherhood’s successes and failures encapsulate the risks and rewards of empire. Their story underscores how state expansionism can bolster a martial spirit in its citizens and lead to filibustering violence.\(^3\) It also highlights the ways in which displaced peoples can navigate imperial systems to their own advantage, and at their own peril. Ironically, the Fenians were both victims and agents of empire. As such, they expose the costs of such a system for the state and its populace. Born from Irish


\(^3\) In the United States, filibustering was when Americans “raised or participated in private military forces that either invaded or planned to invade foreign countries with which the United States was formally at peace.” See Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), xi.
nationalism as a response to British colonialism in Ireland, the Brotherhood wielded great influence in the mid-nineteenth century when resistance to imperialism had gained momentum throughout Europe. But the expansion and power of the Fenian organization occurred in the U.S., where its members took advantage of economic and political resources they simply did not have access to in Ireland.

The Fenian Brotherhood became a formidable presence in North American during the nineteenth century. However, a comprehensive explanation as to why members of the organization attacked Canada and how they were able to consider such actions feasible is multifaceted and has eluded serious consideration by scholars. General Lowry’s denouncement of the Fenians’ efforts as ‘silly’ was one of many made by British and Americans. This perception has prejudiced scholarship on these events, leading many historians to write the Fenians off as irrational and dismiss them as unworthy of serious study.

In one of the first volumes on the Fenian movement in the United States, William D’Arcy argued that the members of the Brotherhood who attacked Canada were “imbued with a single thought, hatred of England, and men filled with hatred rarely think clearly or correctly gage their prospects of success.”

Renowned historian of United States and Canadian relations, Robin Winks, even described the Fenians as “ridiculous.” Much like accounts of Fenianism in North America or detailed narratives of the attacks, this scholarship tends to analyze

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only the implications and consequences of the Fenians’ actions in Canada.\(^6\)

Although diplomatic historian Brian Jenkins examined the organization in greater depth, his work only presented the Fenians as a political impediment to the diplomatic relationship between the U.S. and Britain during Reconstruction.\(^7\) Winks, D’Arcy, and Jenkins (among others) missed an opportunity to analyze the political, social, and economic environment that led members of the Brotherhood—many of whom were experienced soldiers—to consider the attacks plausible and worthwhile. Even the most recent full-length study of the Fenian Brotherhood and Anglo-American relations by David Sim tends to regard the organization as only disrupters of foreign policy without fully considering their political and cultural context.\(^8\) Historians have generally relegated the Fenians to inept actors in what is regarded as a foregone conclusion: the late nineteenth century British and American rapprochement. Sadly then, a more comprehensive look at the complex nature of the role non-government people play in foreign relations is overlooked.\(^9\) The Fenians are worthy of study, not only for their role in impacting Anglo-American relations and helping understand the formation of rapprochement, but in what their story tells us about the imperial world from which they emerged.

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\(^9\) The Fenian invasions in Canada have been included in volumes on Feniansim but these narratives do not expand beyond a limited view of Fenianism as a political movement, albeit a transnational one. For example, W.S. Neidhardt, op. cited. The attacks themselves have been detailed in a military historical study by Hereward Senior, op. cited.
American Empire-

The Fenian story reminds us that policy makers are not the only ones who shaped the history of American foreign relations. Paying attention to how and why the Fenians believed invading Canada was a good idea—and something they assumed the U.S. government would support—allows for a greater appreciation of the aggressive, even belligerent, nature of American culture and push for expansion during the nineteenth century. As an agent of British imperialism, General Lowry’s mission was to defend British rule in Canada. Although the Fenians did not serve the U.S. government in the same official capacity, they were still working to continue American empire, following a long line of non-state or private actors who attempted to shape U.S. expansion in the nineteenth century.

In this way, American empire was not unique. The quest for territorial hegemony and dominance over the people living there has characterized most empires throughout history. Scholars may still debate how to differentiate between modern and traditional empires but they generally agree, according to Paul James and Paul Nairn, that all empires “extend relations of power across territorial spaces over which they have no prior given legal sovereignty, and where, in one or more of the domains of economics, politics, and culture, they gain some measure of extensive hegemony over those spaces for the purpose of extracting or accruing value.”¹⁰ U.S. expansion across the North American

continent fits into this definition. As historian Thomas Hietala has argued, the fact that the United States acquired contiguous rather than noncontiguous territory “makes American aggrandizement no less imperial than that of other empires.”

In search of fertile land, both private citizens and policymakers continued the systematic removal of Native Americans that had begun over two centuries earlier. The Treaty of Paris ignored Native American land rights in 1883, and Jefferson’s Northwest Land Ordinance assumed that all lands held by the U.S. at that time were to become states. Although Jefferson did note that the Indians had rights to the land they occupied, he emphatically asserted the claim of pre-emption by the American government to buy the land (usually accompanied by military force). The Indian Removal Acts of the 1830 reinforced this approach and underlined the assertiveness of American foreign policy over the continent during the nineteenth century.

Assuming a racial superiority and creating an ideological myth to claim a natural or divine right to the North America, American settlers and the U.S. government pushed native people off their land through exploitative treaties or by force. Even though official U.S. policy often recognized Indian tribes as sovereign nations (in the sense that usually the federal government said it alone had the right to make treaties with Indians not private individuals), the government treated American Indians as colonized peoples. Historian Walter LaFeber reminds us that, by the mid nineteenth century, Americans moved with “increasing authority into such extracontinental areas as Hawaii, Latin America,

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Asia, and Africa.” The U.S. government played an active role in this expansion. And while official measures may not have been as pronounced or declarative as late century military occupations, coups, and wars in Hawaii, Cuba, and the Philippines, they are just as vital in the evolution of American empire.

American foreign relations scholars have long recognized this process. In his seminal work, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, William Appleman Williams sparked a fundamental shift in the historiography of the field by refuting claims that the Spanish-American and Philippine-American wars were a ‘great aberration’ in American history. Since the countries inception, Williams argued, the U.S. government and its people had always been concerned with the acquisition of more land as “a primary way of solving their problems and fulfilling their purposes.” Though he focused largely on the economic motivations that drove expansion and empire building, Williams inspired a new framework through which scholars more carefully examined how both government and non-government people shaped American foreign relations.

Walter LaFeber expanded on Williams’s research, arguing that a mid-nineteenth century shift occurred in the nature of American expansion and empire building—from a haphazard to a more systematic approach with a concerted diplomatic corps and a strong American business sector actively

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competing with European companies for international markets.\textsuperscript{14} Other notable works by Robert Beisner, Edward Crapol, and Thomas McCormick built on LaFeber’s argument and further entrenched a continuity theory of American foreign policy.\textsuperscript{15} For the few skeptics that remained—those who were still unable to reconcile how the Spanish American War and Philippine American War fit with earlier American foreign policy—LaFeber responded with a simple question: why was the \textit{USS Maine} in Havana in the first place?\textsuperscript{16}

Over the last several decades, the principle underlying this question has spurred considerable debate about the relationship between policy makers and pioneers in American expansion. For Thomas Schoonover, the war of 1898 exposed the nature of this relationship as it “reflected U.S. society during the century before the conflict.”\textsuperscript{17} Throughout the nineteenth century, both the U.S. government and American citizens exercised their perceived right to conquer the continent. Despite being couched in rhetoric of republicanism, this activity was often aggressive and belligerent. The U.S. government may not have officially

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\textsuperscript{17} Thomas Schoonover, \textit{Uncle Sam’s War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization} (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2003), 4.
\end{flushleft}
sponsored every exertion of empire building. But the dynamic between government and non-government peoples in expansion was, as Hietala has maintained, a “complimentary process.” That Canada never became part of the U.S. should not preclude its inclusion in the discussion of this process. The northern territory had been on the American manifest destiny horizon for most of the nineteenth century, but remained under British rule due to fits of defensive measures taken by the U.S. government, the lack of a strong standing military and naval force, and a tacit assumption that it would eventually become part of the country. By 1860, American politicians were making public speeches about the inevitability of Canada’s place in the American imperial fold.

This outlook—American empire building through expansion and continental hegemony—was one of the nation’s first and most enduring projects, occupying foreign relations well before the signing of the constitution. When this process stalled or drew political division, other issues were often underlying the fissure such as racial implications of incorporating nonwhites, the expansion of slavery, or upsetting trade. The belief in spreading the American dream did not waver. Examining the Fenian Brotherhood through this lens provides a context for why and how the organization was able to amass an army, publically declare their intentions to invade Canada, and occupy the British North America even for a few days. As historian Paul Kramer reminds us, an “imperial analytic” can allow scholars to see the very terms “domestic” and “foreign” as actors’ categories.

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18 Hietala, 257.
19 For example, in 1860, William H. Seward, running for President, made a speech in St. Paul, Minnesota where he said Canadians were “building excellent states to be hereafter admitted into the American Union.” More examples will be highlighted in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.
forged in struggles “over space, sovereignty, and boundary-making.” Indeed, if nineteenth century American public figures openly utilized the term empire to describe their country, historians today should not fall prey to American exceptionalist narratives that preclude its use. The Fenians must be examined in the environment in which they operated.

In contrast, by containing the Fenians within the framework of the nation state, less is revealed. At times a nebulous term, a nation-state is grounded in a communal geopolitical awareness of its polity but cannot often be pinned down by a singular ethnic or cultural identity of its people. A community of shared beliefs and experiences is helpful in defining a nation of the modern era. But as French historian, Ernest Renan declared, a nation is also a “soul, a spiritual principle” whereby people “suffered, enjoyed, and hoped together.” American empire building involved the participation of people across social, economic, and ethnic lines, rallying behind many beliefs about the nation—including the strident faith in American exceptionalism. Empire building perpetuated nationalism,

21 Ibid, 1359. Here Kramer explains how it was only at the dawn of the twentieth century when the term “empire” took on a negative connotation due to exceptionalist politics when the United States emerged as an “extra-continental power” and began acting like other “global imperial systems.”
diffusing difference inherent to a liberal nation through the practice of forgetting or relying on myths to bind different people together within a nation state, while simultaneously legitimizing class distinctions, racial hierarchies, and gender differences. People who did not participate were marginalized or excluded.

Empire building is a powerful tool of the nation-state, perhaps as effective as print capitalism. But as Benedict Anderson notes, nations are limited in that they have “finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which, lie other nations.” The United States' government, and its people, rarely recognized the sovereignty of native peoples to the continent. Likewise, the Fenians did not respect the autonomy of the Canadian people.

The concept of nation building tends to sanitize the aggressive nature of foreign relations, providing only part of the story. Studying the Fenians through an international methodological framework is similarly problematic. At first glance, an international lens appears most fitting for the Fenian story. The organization spanned multiple nation-states and its history seemingly compliments state-centered narratives much like those of missionaries and reformers. However, international history places most of the emphasis on the interaction between nations. The state remains the focus of the study, instead of the complex and varied effects of state power on people, and vise versa. The Fenian Brotherhood was a transnational organization—operating across national boundaries—navigating British and American imperial structures in order to

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25 Ibid.

26 This concept of an international history is largely influenced by Kramer, op. cit., 1384.
establish its presence on a global scale. Much in the same manner that history through a nation-state model does, international history tends to disguise the underlying truth that America was an empire set on sloughing off European competition on the continent in order to occupy more territory itself in fulfillment of a ‘manifest destiny.’ When utilized appropriately, the methodological structure of empire offers a more comprehensive examination of the networks and movements of people beyond borders.

Recent scholarship has begun to reflect this outlook. Studying empires, historian Frederick Cooper has argued, exposes the interactions of high diplomacy and makes far more accessible the “exchange of ideologies and social norms.” Cooper has maintained that empires “established circuits along which personnel, commodities, and ideas moved, but were also vulnerable to redirection by traders and subordinate officials.” One of the most valuable applications of this approach has been Aim’s McGuiness’s *Path to Empire*, which reexamined the nineteenth century route thorough Panama as an imperial space—an economic zone or enclave of U.S. power in a Latin American country. This hegemony, McGuiness argued, was based on the fact that an American company owned the Panama Rail Road that took travelers across the isthmus, and wielded considerable economic and political power over the local government. McGuiness presented the path across Panama from an U.S. gold perspective whereby Panama became an essential corridor to speed up western

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28 Ibid, 53.
American continental domination. Thus, by looking at the Panamanian path through the lens of American empire, McGuiness was able to provide a more complete picture of its significance to American foreign relations. Canada was also a space for American imperial ambitions that the Fenians tired to exploit, and should be examined in a similar light.

McGuiness’ study also helps us recognize the role nongovernment people play in the process of empire building. In his study, Panama Rail Road employees were ‘agents’ of American empire—people who attempted to further American continental hegemony. Nongovernment people who actively participated in this process may be unofficial agents (when compared to diplomats and politicians), but they are agents nonetheless. Nineteenth-century American history is full of such figures, perhaps none more infamous than the filibusters of the 1840s and 1850s—men who “raised or participated in private military forces that either invaded or planned to invade foreign countries with which the United States was formally at peace.”

Filibusterers were expansionists. Historian Brady Harrison labeled William Walker—perhaps the most famous filibusterer of the era—an “agent of empire,” and argued that Walker had been largely missing from historical records because the filibuster's story was one of conquest, a darker side to good neighbor and American exceptionalism. Robert May’s influential work on filibustering exploits by the likes of Walker, John Quitman, and Narciso Lopez carefully examined the

American culture that made these men. May presented extensive evidence of how masses of people worshiped the filibusters—as seen through the popularity of songs, plays, and stories about them. Filibustering, May argued, represented the “spirit of an age” where the pull of romanticism and adventure combined to foster a popular culture of expansion. The Fenians were swept up by the same emotion and hoped to use filibustering to conquer as well.

Reinforcing the notion that filibustering was an extension of American expansion, historian Amy Greenburg pointed out that while the Mexican American war may have marked the end of substantial territorial gain for the United States it did not “limit the ideology of Manifest Destiny, a vision of American Exceptionalism that promised a near-boundless growth of the American republic and that justified continental expansion as providentially inspired.” Throughout this period, Greenberg found that there was a fine line between patriot and pirate, a line that was “finessed” at the public meetings of filibusters throughout the nineteenth century. Speeches made by Fenian leaders before the invasions in Canada support this theory as they echo the sentiments of earlier filibusters.

Brady Harrison traced the origins of this imperial rhetoric to Ralph Waldo Emerson’s 1844 call to “The Young American.” Emerson, Harrison argued, gave power to the American imperial self by making available “an elegant rhetoric”

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32 May, op. cit., xii.
34 Ibid, 645.
about the power and responsibility of Americans to lead the world.\textsuperscript{35} John O’Sullivan’s declaration of Manifest Destiny one year later reinforced this ideology and popularized a mantra for a forceful perpetuation of American empire. The Fenians simply picked up this torch after the Civil War. Though William D’Arcy maintained that the Fenians’ aims in Canada “seem fantastic, hare-brained, and impossible,” he also admitted that they deserve attention because they were the “only [private] organization in the history of the United States which armed and drilled publicly.”\textsuperscript{36} Why the federal government allowed this to happen and why the Fenians felt that they could get away with such behavior are potent questions, the answers to which further illuminate the nature of America culture and politics in the nineteenth century.

These questions hold even more weight in light of federal legislation specifically prohibiting the kinds of actions taken by the Fenians and their filibustering predecessors. In 1818, Congress passed the Neutrality Act, replacing the original Neutrality Act of 1794. The new act added provisions for imprisonment up to three years and a fine of up to three thousand dollars for any person who “within the territory or jurisdiction of the United States, begin or set foot on, or provide or prepare the means for, any military expedition or enterprise…against the territory or dominions of any foreign prince or state, or of any colony, district, or people with whom the United States are at peace.”\textsuperscript{37} The

\textsuperscript{35} Brady Harrison addresses the ideological underpinnings of filibustering in “The Young Americans: Emerson, Walker, and the Early Literature of American Empire,” \textit{American Studies Journal}, vol. 40, no. 3 (Fall, 1999): 75-97.

\textsuperscript{36} D’Arcy, op. cited, 410-411.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875}, Library of Congress, 15th Cong., 1st Session, 1\textsuperscript{st} sess., chap. 88, pg. 449.
spirit of the law was to recognize and preserve neutral foreign relations of the United States by preventing private actors from inciting conflicts that might embroil the country in wars it did not mean to start.

And yet, the United States government had a tradition of tolerating filibusterers in the nineteenth century—paying lip service to international law by publicly denouncing American citizens from attacking a sovereign territory, but then doing very little to punish the perpetrators. Robert May noted there were occasions when federal authorities found it “convenient to overlook, or even assist, filibuster plots in the expectation that they might eventuate in U.S. territorial growth.”38 In a December 1835 message to Congress, President Andrew Jackson condemned filibusters and asked all United States district attorneys and army officers to monitor suspicious activities or recruiting for filibustering missions. But as May points out, federal authorities in the Jackson administration often allowed border crossings by known filibusters, and Jackson did not enforce his demands. “By his leniency,” May concluded, “Old Hickory set a precedent of presidential impotence against filibustering that would be remembered.”39 Jackson was personally familiar with subverting international laws when, as a general in the military, he unilaterally decided to lead an invasion into Spanish Florida in 1818. Although Jackson later claimed he was following orders, his actions led to an international crisis during which Secretary of State John Quincy Adams had to diplomatically assuage Spanish anger and reject demands for Jackson’s head. Because the United States government was

38 May, op. cit., 7.
39 Ibid, 10-11.
interested in acquiring Florida at the time of Jackson's military invasion, American expansion bolstered the tradition of extralegal activities. The Fenians understood this legacy and took advantage of a similar environment after the American Civil War. Ultimately however, they overestimated the U.S. government’s willingness to allow a paramilitary group to dictate the taking of Canada from the British.

A different kind of immigrant-

With the popularity of filibustering and the push for American expansion during the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that the Fenian invasions of Canada were one of several attempts made by Americans to undermine British rule in Canada. Historians Cassandra Pybus and Hamish Maxwell pointed out that the 1830s were marred in border raids by American ‘patriots’ who hoped to inspire a revolution in Canada against British rule.40 In 1839, British colonial authorities apprehended ninety-two of these patriots and summarily convicted them to imprisonment in Van Diemen’s Land. While Pybus and Maxwell focused most of their study on the conditions of imprisonment and servitude in Australia, they did shed light on the militant republicanism of the Jacksonian era. For the Americans in captivity, there was a “crucial tension between the vivid recreation of the systematic degradation and brutality of convict life and the presentation of

their superior American manliness and their republican virtue.\textsuperscript{41} This worldview, Pybus and Maxell concluded, was not that different from the ideology fostering British Empire. Pybus and Maxell’s study provides a helpful context for the Fenians who were similarly quick to critique the injustices of British rule in Ireland while extolling the righteousness of American republicanism as justification for their invasion of Canada.

While the Fenians are unique as American filibusters because they were motivated in part by Irish nationalism, it was largely the tradition and collective experience of empire building that directed their filibustering efforts to Canada. The unifying measure of the push for American continental hegemony is not new. Amy Greenberg has documented how American white males transcended class, regional differences, and ethnicities in antebellum American empire building.\textsuperscript{42} Other historians have drawn similar conclusions about white male identity formation in the United States during this time. David Roediger and Noel Ignatiev have convincingly argued that Irish Americans became “white” through participation in labor unions, the Democratic Party, and anti-black riots.\textsuperscript{43} Participation in the project of American expansion was a similar rite of passage for non-Anglo Saxon white males in the United States took to gain acceptance into the polity of the American nation-state. Thus, being an active participant of furthering American empire was a cultural implication of American citizenship.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, xiv.
This is not to say that all Americans were imperialists. However, as Greenberg and others have shown, the project of American expansion was one outlet for Americans to express their patriotism and champion their citizenship. The Fenians channeled their collective republican militant energy in this manner. They ardently believed that they were as righteous in their actions as General Washington and his troops had been almost one hundred years earlier. And just as western settlers had pushed Native Americans and Mexican citizens off their land in the name of liberty—assuming the U.S. government would protect them and their claims against foreign peoples—the Fenians exhibited a similar hubris. Taking such action appeared to be a viable path of initiation into the polity that extolled American exceptionalism.

In this manner, the Fenians help reveal how white males navigated their American citizenship in the nineteenth century. As American citizens, the members of the Brotherhood had several advantages over their brothers in Ireland. They were afforded greater civil liberties in the United States compared to nationalists in Ireland who faced a British colonial rule that often violated freedom of speech or due process. And thanks to the American Civil War, the majority of Irish American Fenians were experienced soldiers carrying government-issued weapons—which allowed them to consider invading Canada a possibility. The lack of coordinated Fenian attacks in Ireland and in England were not only because of the aggressive policing, but also due to the military inexperience among its rank and file members. American Fenians used their
citizenship status—a benefit from their participation in the American project—to further nationalist aims.

The Fenians counter immigration narratives that describe nineteenth century Irish Americans as famine victims, laborers, members of families barely scraping by in tenements, or voters only worthy of manipulation by more politically powerful Irish Americans. In 1985, Kerby Miller challenged colleagues to look beyond well tread immigrant categories, arguing that the popular image of the Catholic Irish exile emigrant had blinded historians to the wide range of Irish immigrants. Miller proved that Irish Catholic immigrants in the United States painted themselves as exiles because of a religious and cultural worldview as opposed to an experience of alienation in their new country. The Fenians both fall into this category and defy it. They often spoke of themselves as exiles and victims, but they were also active members of the American polity. As members of a transnational organization, the members of the Brotherhood took action on an international stage, trying to redefine the policies and boundaries of two empires. They occupied a liminal space as victims of British Empire and agents or active proponents of American Empire. Examining their story through a framework that emphasizes both their ties to Ireland and the ways they used their

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American citizenship as an influential political faction is essential to revealing the complex nature of immigrant identity.\textsuperscript{45}

The Fenian story highlights the global context of Irish immigration to the United States, a perspective that historian Donald Harman Akenson has argued is important because it helps reveal a more comprehensive view of the Diaspora.\textsuperscript{46} Lawrence McCaffrey echoed this point, and called for greater analysis of the varied Irish experience in America such as regional differences in immigration, Irish Catholicism as a culture and ethnicity rather than only as a religion, and the impact of middle class status and suburbanization of Irish American values as potential areas to explore.\textsuperscript{47} Kerby Miller himself took up one of these mantles and examined the ways in which many Irish immigrants became Anglicized in the United States at the expense of their Irish Catholic or Irish nationalistic identity. Irish nationalism, he concluded, was not a response by all Irish immigrants in America; rather it depended upon individual meanings of Irish identity. A study of the Fenian Brotherhood's invasion of Canada underscores this thesis as it demonstrates how some Irish Americans—the leadership in the Catholic Church and Irish American Protestants in particular—opposed the Fenian Brotherhood.

By looking at the meaning of Irish myths and identities, Miller has drawn other beneficial conclusions helpful for a study of the Fenians. For example, he

\textsuperscript{45} This dynamic is explained in greater detail throughout this dissertation. Several Fenians benefitted from the U.S. government’s claims that they had become naturalized U.S. citizens and could therefore be punished for treason in Ireland.

\textsuperscript{46} Donald Harman Akenson, \textit{The Irish Diaspora, A Primer} (Toronto: Meany, 1993).

found the term ‘Scotch-Irish’ problematic because it homogenized “historical reality” and obscured the fact that eighteenth century Ulster Presbyterian society was “internally differentiated by local circumstance and diverse regional, social, and cultural origins of migration from Scotland.” Investigating letters, church records, and immigration documents, Miller found that many Irish immigrants to North America from 1660-1814 identified themselves as Scotch-Irish when they were in fact Irish Catholic. Scotch-Irish ethnicity, Miller concluded, was “in part the product of an intracommunal struggle for cultural and political hegemony led by members of a conservative Ulster American bourgeoisie.” Miller’s work was significant for his emphasis on the tension between identity and immigration. He concluded that the question of ethnicity and nationality is not one of ancestral birthplace or religion, but one of “individual and collective identification, which in turn is subjective, situational, and variable, shaped by a multitude of shifting social, cultural, political and even psychological circumstances.” Of course, many immigrants outwardly transformed their identity to adapt, while others did so in more subtle ways—maintaining political or cultural principles of their birthplace. This is certainly true of the Fenians who, were in part, motivated by the lure of American expansion while remaining outspoken critics of British Empire.

Literature on Ireland’s position within the British Empire is valuable in gaining a better understanding the Fenians’ unique immigrant identity.

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49 Ibid, 78.
50 Ibid, 81.
Unfortunately, this historiography is relatively new because nineteenth-century historians and proponents of empire Jeremy Bentham, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill influenced the historiography for over one hundred years. These men viewed Ireland only through the lens of its usefulness to the empire because they saw all colonial holdings as a source of national pride. Over time however, Smith, Mill, and Bentham grew concerned that maintaining colonies only served to weaken England’s military position in the world because of the resources required in defending distant lands.\textsuperscript{51} They offered proposals for England to “emancipate her white settler colonies.”\textsuperscript{52} But Mill and Bentham (and later most liberals) made Ireland an exception to this position, arguing that it was important to “retain the connection with Ireland because it was politically impossible to do otherwise.”\textsuperscript{53} Mill also regarded the Irish as racially similar to the people of India. Both ethnicities, he argued, were barbarous and incapable of governing.\textsuperscript{54} Mill and Bentham sanitized the untidiness of colonization and rationalized empire as to extol its benefits to anxious politicians.

It was not until the middle of the twentieth century when historians Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher subverted traditional interpretations by directing attention away from the metropole and placing it within the colonies. Reflecting a

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\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 604. Both men also argued that India was an exception to their anti-imperialism.
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wider movement in academia towards the study of colonial peripheries, Robinson and Gallagher produced innovative scholarship on the varied types of colonial encounters revealing the complex nature of empire and the extent to which colonies were able to influence the development of British imperialism.\textsuperscript{55} Within a few decades, scholars began to look at the ways in which the Irish were active participants in British Empire. For example, S.B. Cook examined how, through intellectual and administrative “circuits of exchange, one component of empire, (Ireland) exerted an extraordinary degree of influence on the development of another (British India).”\textsuperscript{56} By problematizing Ireland’s liminal position within the British Empire, describing it as both part of the “third realm” of the United Kingdom and as “sharing in the colonial experience in ways that the English core of the metropolis state did not,” Cook challenged traditional interpretations of the British Empire as a simplified top down process and inspired other historians to further develop this thesis.

The Fenian invasions of Canada represent another case when Irish shared in the colonial experience—as victims or exiles in one empire, and as participants in another. Other scholars of Irish immigration help provide a historical context for the contradictory nature of the Fenians. Michael Holmes examined specific “pathways” of Irish immigration to India during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries—military service, colonial administration, and


missionary groups. He characterized the relationship between India and Ireland as a paradox, complicated by conflicting notions of imperialism and nationalism. Often, as Holmes argued, those Irish who were instrumental in establishing and maintaining British rule in India, supported the anti-colonialist movement in their home country. Irish soldiers, he pointed out, established a reputation in India for being extremely violent, even garnering a nickname among the locals, ‘Rishti,’ which served as a warning to other natives about their brutality. For Holmes, the Irish were not only victims of empire. In this manner, the Irish soldiers in India had much in common with the Fenians. They were both critics and proponents of empire.

C.A. Bayly advanced a similar position, focusing on how nineteenth century Irish families transplanted themselves to India for economic advancement. Like Holmes, Bayly found that despite emergent nineteenth-century nationalist movements in both Ireland and India, most Irishmen “seemed to have identified with British rule in India...because the Irish were not only the victims of the imperial state, but also some of its greatest beneficiaries.” Indeed, as historian Joseph Lennon pointed out, even in the 1840s while Irish MP’s and administrative officials condemned the British reaction to the famine in Ireland, they demanded greater participation and recognition in British India. To illustrate

58 Ibid, 238
60 Ibid, 388.
this contradiction, Lennon included an 1848 speech made by William Keogh, leader of the Independent Irish Party in the British Parliament. Although Keogh discussed the Irish famine throughout most of the speech, Lennon pointed out that Keogh began by “criticizing British discrimination against Irish officers in the Indian Civil Service.”

Keogh attacked British neglect and “mismanagement” of Ireland during the famine yet simultaneously demanded greater responsibility and respect for the Irish in British India. Ireland, Keogh argued, had not received the benefits it deserved as an “integral part of the empire.” Despite Irish “imperial participation,” Lennon declared, “Ireland’s place in the British Empire has been infrequently acknowledged in Britain and Ireland.”

Keogh’s statements and the focus of Irish universities towards service in India certainly undermines notions of Ireland’s status in the British Empire as solely a colonized space.

While the Fenian experience in America did not exactly mirror that of the Irish in India, the comparison between the two helps reveal the space that many immigrants hold within empire. How Irish nationalists rationalized empire in India for personal gain while simultaneously condemning British colonization of their homeland is similar to how Fenians ardently defended and pursued American expansion and continental domination while critiquing British occupation of their homeland—and ultimately hoping to injure England by invading Canada. The methodological framework of empire allows the complexity of such experiences

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid, 172.
to come to light. As historian Anne McClintock reminds us, empire is messy and does not often fit neatly into conventional academic categories that have precluded historians from looking deeper into the interpenetration of immigration and empire, or immigration and foreign relations.64

Mathew Frye Jacobson’s work illuminates the significance of this approach. Utilizing empire as a framework to examine immigration and United States’ foreign relations, Jacobson exposed the tensions between American empire building, modern American nationalism, and immigration—specifically American conceptions of “peoplehood, citizenship, and national identity against the backdrop of escalating economic and military involvement abroad and massive population influxes at home.”65 For Jacobson, the construction of white identity began when the Naturalization Act of 1790 granted European immigrants the status of free white persons. But when large numbers of Irish immigrants came in the 1840s, white entitlement became culturally even more narrowly defined. Irish immigrants were white according to the naturalization law, but animals in cartoons, despised Celts due to their religious difference and labor activism, Caucasians when resisting Chinese immigration in the West, and even Anglo-Saxons as they furthered American imperialism. Irish immigrants moved between racial spheres, sometimes by will, and other times as victims. The Fenians negotiated similar categories. For example, they gained political power by leveraging the growing voting population of Irish Americans. Presidents Grant

64 Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
and Johnson both pardoned the Fenians who invaded Canada to appease members of Congress who counted on the Irish American vote.

Thus, British Empire drove the Fenians to America, but American Empire created the environment whereby they could become conquerors (or in their minds, liberators). The Canadian territory the Fenians attacked was, at the time, a British colony. But what did this status mean to Canadians or to the U.S. government and its people who spent the first half of the nineteenth century working to conquer the North American continent? The Louisiana Purchase, the acquisition of Florida, the War of 1812, the annexation of Texas, the Mexican-American War, the forced exile of Native Americans to the west were all efforts to make the continent in America’s image. Not only did politicians openly discuss annexing Canada, many proposed punishing England in 1865 for her proclamation of neutrality during the Civil War and her assistance to the Confederacy by demanding a short sale of Canada to the United States.

But the majority of Canadians, it turned out, were not interested in being a spoil of war, and the British were not willing to part with their North American colony. Americans had overestimated their cultural and ethnic connection with the Canadian people who were more interested in maintaining an imperial relationship England. One year after the Fenians captured Fort Erie, the provinces of eastern Canada—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and Quebec territory—formed a confederation under the British crown. Only three years later in 1870, the Dominion of Canada officially came into existence. The formal imperial reorganization of Confederation and Dominion, according to
historian Thomas Bender, was an example of how an imperial power (England) “reconfigured” its structure to create a “combination of empire and modern nation-state.” In other words, Britain was able to maintain her empire while allowing Canada to become a nation. Though historians point to multiple reasons for this imperial consolidation, David Cannadine’s work is vital to explaining why Canadians favored ties to the British Empire over American republicanism. Cannadine argues that class and traditional social hierarchies dominated perceptions of empire, and that Britons identified with the imperial order in the same way that they understood the social order—as a layered hierarchy “sanctioned by tradition and religion.” Cannadine traverses the geography of British Empire during what he considers its heyday, 1850-1950. He distinguishes between precursors to official imperialism—dominions, colonies, and mandates—so as to point out how British officials both replicated domestic

67 Ibid, 146.
structures of order abroad and relied on existing and indigenous hierarchy structures to maintain power. As capitalism began to level some of the hereditary social structures in England that conservatives cherished, empire offered a nostalgic outlet to preserve the loss of a Burkeian ordered way of life.

Thus, the Canadian Confederation and official establishment of a Dominion in the British Empire is a clear indication that, despite Fenian and their fellow expansionists’ hopes, the world outside the U.S. was not a blank space onto which Americans could export imaginations and institutions.\textsuperscript{70} The Canadians rejected American republicanism. Instead, they remained loyal to the Britain’s constitutional monarchy while demanding better protection against their southern neighbor. That the Fenian raids played a role, inadvertent as it may have been, in solidifying Canada’s place in the British Empire is significant and worthy of study. It is as important to examine the abandonment and failures of imperial plans, just as it is its successes. As Paul Kramer reminds us, paying attention to “empire’s vulnerabilities” sheds light on aspects of U.S. foreign relations history that has been previously ignored.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{70} Kramer, op. cited,1363. Here Kramer discusses why “methodological nationalism” is problematic.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 1382. Kramer argues for a “fully realized” historiography of the United States in the world that is dethatched from binaries of empire and transnationalism only.
The Fenian Invasions of Canada-

The Irish Diaspora to the United States has long captured the imagination and attention of historians.\textsuperscript{72} Oscar Handlin, Kerby Miller, and Donald Harman Akenson are just a few of the scholars who have made notable contributions to the field.\textsuperscript{73} Recent works have expanded traditional interpretations by embracing issues such as gender and engaging in comparisons with countries such as Australia.\textsuperscript{74} While the history of the Irish in America continues to benefit from the consistent production of comprehensive volumes as well as more focused case studies and comparative methodology, Irish Fenianism in the United States during the nineteenth-century—and more specifically the relationship between Fenian Raids in Canada and United States' Foreign Relations—has been largely overlooked. Literature that deals with Fenians in the United States tends to mention the Irish nationalists as a side note. Thomas N. Brown's 1956 article, "The Origins and Character of Irish-American Nationalism," remains one of the few exceptions, as it traces the evolution of Irish nationalism throughout the nineteenth century from its earliest signs in Irish American newspapers to the

\textsuperscript{72} The first recognized scholarly investigation of Irish immigration to the United States was published by sociologist Edith Abbot in \textit{Immigration: Select Documents and Case Records} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924).


development of the Fenian Brotherhood. The Fenian raids in Canada only garner minor attention in Brown's study. However, he does make connections between these events and Anglo-American relations. Brown maintains that the Fenians may have taken advantage of the Irish American political clout with the U.S. government, but the Johnson and Grant administrations exploited the Fenians as well when negotiating with the British about issues from the Civil War.

Studies that link the Irish and the Civil War or focus on Irish American soldiers or regiments are also helpful in assessing the development of Fenianism in the United States leading up the attacks in Canada. While there were several Irish Brigades in the Union Army, it is not clear how many were motivated by the desire to gain military experience in order to wage a future war on Britain through Canada. What can be discerned from primary sources according to Susannah Ural Bruce, however, is that the most Irish American Union soldiers “explained their views of the Northern war effort in terms of both their Irish and American identities.” Scholars cautiously note that the sense of dual identity does not mean that all Irish American Civil War soldiers were Fenians. Yet these studies explain the martial culture from which Fenianism emerged in the post-war period.

Mitchell Snay’s work—which compares the Fenians, Freeman, and Southern

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77 Bruce, “‘Remember Your Country and Keep Up Its Credit:’ Irish Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865,” op. cited, 334-335.
Whites—has been helpful in understanding the political and social environment that made the Brotherhood viable. Uncomfortable with historical accounts that only cited the Fenians as “disrupters” to strained Anglo-American relations, Snay joined the Fenians with southern white terrorists and freed African Americans to “suggest their relevance to the dynamics of nationalism during Reconstruction.”

All three groups, Snay concluded, “developed a consciousness of being as a separate people and fought for a place in the American body politic.” Though Snay limits his analysis to conceits of American nationalism, his work is still useful in its conceptualization of the dual identity the Fenians often carved out for themselves. Members of the Brotherhood not only saw themselves a part of an Irish nation in exile, they believed that they held a significant place in the American republic.

The scholarship on Anglo-American and Canadian-American relations during the Civil War and Reconstruction provides some context for a more in-depth examination of the Fenians as a product of both British and American Empires. In 1960, Robin Winks published a canonical work on Canada and the United States during the Civil War. While his analysis of diplomatic relations is useful, Winks only devoted a few pages to the Fenian threats in Canada—

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79 Ibid, 8.
80 Ibid, 6.
81 By the 1990s a detailed account of the Fenian raids, including the only successful Fenian attack in Ridgeway emerged. Hereward Senior’s, *The Last Invasion of Canada*, op. cited, offers a true military history of the events between 1866 and 1870. Although Senior provides very little contextual secondary source analysis, his account makes good use of considerable amount of primary sources from both Canadian militiamen defending the border and Fenians involved in the attacks.
82 Robin Winks, *The Civil War Years: The United States and Canada*, op. cited.
mentioning the attacks only in relation to other threats posed to Canadian border by Confederate soldiers during the American Civil War. As noted earlier, Winks cast the Fenians as “ridiculous,” without investigating how they were able to invade Canada in the first place. By privileging the Civil War, Winks minimized the implications of the Fenian attacks for the Irish in the United States and Canada as well as the foreign policy of both countries.

Fortunately, other scholars have filled in the gaps. In *Fenians and Anglo-American Relations during Reconstruction*, Brian Jenkins drew connections between Anglo-American relations and Irish nationalism—skillfully linking multiple themes that previous historians had dealt with separately. His work examined how the Fenians used growing Irish American voting power and financial resources to pressure American officials in Washington—including Secretary of State William Seward, various members of Congress, and President Johnson himself. As Jenkins pointed out, one of the most blatant examples of this process occurred when several members of Congress tried to convince their colleagues that the Fenian prisoners in Canada who had been captured after the failed raids should have been afforded rights as belligerents of war. The Civil War claims between the United States and Britain were also a focus of Jenkins’ study, as were the hardening of British policies towards the Irish after the Fenian raids in Canada, the Manchester rebellion, and the Clerkenwell explosion in England.

Though Jenkins’ conclusion—that Fenianism often impeded better Anglo-

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83 Ibid, 23.
American relations immediately following the Civil War—was not groundbreaking, his study provided a solid base from which to further examine the implications of the Fenian raids as an event where the forces of empire, colonialism, nationalism, and post-colonialism converged. \(^{85}\)

The most recent analysis of the Fenians and U.S. foreign relations by David Sim expanded on Jenkins’ work and offered one of the first accounts that historicized Irish nationalism and its “complex connections with the American Union over the long nineteenth century.”\(^{86}\) Motivated by the belief that American historians have not paid enough attention to the Irish as a destabilizing force in Anglo-American relations, Sim focused on how the Fenian Brotherhood attempted to make use of American sympathies for the Irish in order to recast the Anglo-American relationship. That they ultimately failed and brought the United States and England closer, Sim rightfully argued, does not make their attempts any less significant. Sim’s work stands out for its thesis—that the Fenian invasions of Canada underscored the openness of U.S. government to the influence of nonstate actors in American foreign relations, but that ultimately British and American politicians built stronger ties through the marginalization of revolutionary Irish nationalism.\(^{87}\) However, Sim limits his methodological approach to the relationship between American politicians and Irish-American


\(^{86}\) David Sim, op. cit., 2.

\(^{87}\) Ibid, 7
nationalism from the late 1840s to the early 1870s. Though he admits that the
“Irish American nationalists saw allying their cause with American power as
necessary if they were to achieve their ends,” Sim does not engage in a
discussion of how American empire played a role in this process.

By viewing U.S. foreign policy during the Civil War era “through the lens of
Irish nationalism,” Sim correctly argued that we are better able to understand the
North Atlantic world during this time. The Fenian invasions of Canada
represent a crossroads of American and British Empire and underline the
constant interaction between government and non-government individuals in
foreign relations. By focusing only on the emotional motivations driving the
Fenians, we lose sight of the social, cultural, and political environment that
informed them. The Fenians, I argue, were not as curious as they seem in
retrospect. Rather they fit within a larger history of non-state or private actors
who attempted to shape U.S. foreign policy and even reshape United States’
borders. In other words, by taking the Fenians seriously, we gain greater insight
into their world and the history of American foreign relations.

Through the methodological framework of empire, even more can be
revealed. This dissertation seeks to build on Sim’s work, recognizing the value of
examining non-state actors who challenge and shape U.S. foreign policy, while
looking at how the Fenians and their actions in Canada are a consequence of

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90 Ibid.
empire. The Fenians and the Irish Republican Brotherhood relied on U.S. national interests, specifically American desire for expansion and a popular animosity towards Great Britain. My study connects the Fenian Brotherhood, a transnational movement, with United States imperialism of the nineteenth century. Labor markets in the industrializing United States drew Irish Americans to its shores. As Jacobson and others have pointed out, the Irish, while facing nativist attacks, came to enjoy a privileged status in the United States in large part due to the racial hierarchy they helped to entrench, but also because they were able and did participate in the American project of empire building. Though this is a Fenian-centered project, the state does play a prominent role in contextualizing how and why the Fenians became emboldened enough to invade Canada. Thus, chapter one examines the history of Anglo-American relations concerning Canada from the Paris Peace negotiations in 1783 to the American Civil War. Chapter Two details the evolution of the Brotherhood from its original conception as an Irish nationalist group--meant to provide support to the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Dublin—to a distinctly Irish American organization with plans of its own. Chapter three continues this trajectory and looks at the Americanization of the Fenians, a transition that ultimately led to its downfall. Chapter four reveals the Canadian reaction to Fenian invasions and how the events spurred an imperial nationalism in the British North American provinces. In chapter five, Canadian Confederation and improving Anglo-American relations play an integral role in the decline of the Brotherhood. This chapter demonstrates
the ways empires respond to displaced groups that attempt to usurp state power structures.

The Fenian attack on Canada brought international attention to the Irish nationalist movement but damaged its brand. Canadians publically declared that the organization was similar to the Barbary pirates of the late eighteenth century. Such comparisons highlight the criminal and violent nature of the Fenian filibustering attempts in Canada. Additionally, they raise questions about the U.S. government's complicity in the kind of action it scorned from citizens of other countries. These issues come to light in the conclusion of this dissertation, as does the legacy of the Brotherhood. Although other organizations carried the mantle forward, they largely remained underground and secretive, never experiencing the same public spotlight or clout that many members of the organization enjoyed. The conclusion of this dissertation touches on the evolution of the Irish American nationalist movement in the wake of the Fenian Brotherhood. Though Irish Independence did not occur for another fifty-five years, the Fenians were an integral part of the process and certainly inspired future Irish Americans to secure their role in the fight.

Although this dissertation is not a social history of the Fenian Brotherhood, it does give weight to the social fabric of empire in addition to its political complexities. The Fenian story exposes the messiness of an imperial system, particularly the costs for those swept up in its enticing offers of power. The perils are often far less for governments than for the people they marginalize, but the
consequences for both are worthy of study as an instructive measure to the destabilizing impact empire can have on society.
Britain’s Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown in October of 1781, but it was not until the spring of the following year when British and American diplomats convened in Paris to negotiate the terms of peace. For the American representatives—Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams—the process was particularly arduous due to the personal animosity between the three men. While Franklin viewed Adams as provincial, Adams and Jay were often suspicious of Franklin’s cosmopolitan sensibility and his gestures of indebtedness to the French.¹ But the British and French diplomats preferred negotiating with Franklin, whose adept diplomacy ultimately helped the Americans seek favorable terms from the British while securing loans from the French to fund the insolvent American states.² And yet, despite his many achievements in Paris, Franklin was unable to acquire Canada for his new country—an outcome the Continental Congress had hoped he would achieve.³ This failure set in motion a perilous course for the relationship between the United States and Britain as both pushed to expand their empires across the North American continent in the decades to come.

The negotiations in Paris and the ongoing Anglo-American conflict over Canada until the Canadian Confederation in 1867—when Canada officially became a dominion state in the British Empire—are significant to the evolution of United States’ foreign policy and the role Canada played in American expansion. This triangular history created the political environment from which the Fenians emerged, and was fundamental in their belief that invading Canada was not only a good idea, but also something the United States government would support. The Fenians were a consequence of both British and American empires.\(^4\) In order to understand how such imperial overlaps work, and the social fabric of empire that produces groups like the Fenians, we must first investigate the national structures that create them.

Scholars have examined the diplomatic tensions between the United States and England concerning Canada in the nineteenth century, but few have connected this dynamic to the rise of the Fenian Brotherhood.\(^5\) Historian Michel Ducharme offered a glimpse of what this kind of methodology could offer when he studied the affects of late eighteenth century republicanism on nineteenth

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\(^4\) This will be addressed in further detail in the chapters two and three of this dissertation.

century reform movements in Upper and Lower Canada. Ducharme was frustrated that very few scholars had integrated Canadian history into a broader Atlantic context—a framework that reveals complexities and exchanges not often seen before. Imperial paradigms can unearth similarly tangled stories. Ducharme’s work reminds us that with empires comes resistance. By examining the ways in which the United States and Great Britain negotiated, battled, and aligned over Canada, we gain a greater understanding of how the Fenians were an unconventional product of two empires.

Setting Boundaries-

The dynamic between the United States and Britain today is drastically different from what it was in 1783, or what it became over the course of the nineteenth century. Given the present state of geopolitics and the current familial closeness of the two countries, it is easy to lose sight of the tension, fear, and aggression that once plagued Anglo-American relations. Even the Great Rapprochement—described by historian Bradford Perkins as the convergence of diplomatic, political, military, and economic objectives between the United States and Britain at the end of the nineteenth century—is often overstated as inevitable.

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at the expense of accurately examining the acrimonious nature of earlier Anglo-American relations. Control of Canada was one of the most contentious issues to come between Britain and the United States, largely because both countries pushed for expansion on the American continent. For the most part, American politicians and citizens coveted the territory to the north. They disagreed only over how best to acquire it. The British wanted to maintain colonial power in Canada for economic gain and as a way to check American power.

Thus, the future of Canada remained an integral point of negotiation throughout the Paris conference in 1783. At that time, Britain had reigned over Canada for only twenty years, after the French ceded New France at the end of the Seven Year’s War. A British Royal proclamation in 1763 organized the Canadian territories into the Quebec province and Nova Scotia, and designated a wide swath of territory for Native Americans between the Appalachian Mountains in the east to an unspecified boundary in the west. Additionally, the proclamation created non-military administrations to govern the territories and officially declared Canadians British subjects. In order for civilians to serve in public office, the Proclamation required a sworn oath to the King of England. But the pledge also included language that rejected Catholicism, posing a problem for the predominantly Roman Catholic residents of the city of Quebec and the surrounding area along the St Lawrence River—all of which was renamed the province of Quebec by the British. Refusing to denounce their faith, Catholic Canadians were unable to participate in the political process. As a result, the

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local government of Quebec did not reflect the interest of the approximately 90,000 Roman Catholics French Canadians residents. The Quebec Act of 1774 addressed these issues with measures that removed reference to the Protestant faith in the oath of allegiance, restored French Civil Law to the province, and guaranteed the practice of Catholicism to French Canadians.⁹

During the American war for Independence, the Continental Congress and the majority of revolutionaries—particularly those in New York—hoped that they would find allies in Canada, especially among the French Canadians in the Quebec province. But after failed attempts to recruit French Canadians in Nova Scotia and to rally Canadians in the Upper and Lower provinces behind the ideals of independent republicanism, the revolutionaries tried to conquer Canadian territory in order to force an alliance. From several newly secured forts in and around Montreal, British reinforcements thwarted the advancement of American troops. Still, privateers seized the opportunity of wartime chaos to raid Britain’s vulnerable Maritime colonies—Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island—the consequences of which were unfavorable for the American revolutionaries. Most Maritime residents then rejected the revolutionary movement and became fierce British loyalists.¹⁰ It was the first of many instances where the belligerent actions of Americans pushed those living in the provinces further into the British imperial fold.

As the war progressed, Canada became a sanctuary for American loyalists and a base for British military operations. Over 50,000 loyalists fled the thirteen colonies and settled in British North America over the course of the war.\(^{11}\) Despite the heightened tension between loyalists in Canada and American revolutionaries, there were considerable familial and economic connections among residents on both sides of the border. Nonetheless, many Americans—particularly those in New England—continued to pursue the acquisition of Canada. John Adams declared that “as long as Great Britain shall have Canada, Nova Scotia, and the Floridas, or any of them. So long will Great Britain be the Enemy of the United States.”\(^{12}\) Adams understood the economic significance of northern fishing rights, but he also argued on strategic grounds. Removing Britain from the continent would ensure a more peaceful future for an independent United States. Adams had made a bold prediction only a few years into the war. He claimed that his new country would inevitably expand throughout the North American continent after gaining independence; and if the British were still occupying part of this territory, hostilities would be inevitable. These sentiments were early incarnations of rhetoric that Americans would later use to justify nineteenth century expansion. Adams was arguing for America’s ‘manifest destiny’ to occupy the North American continent, and Canada was located in that path. It is this ideological tradition that evolved into the nineteenth century American ideology supporting empire, and that eventually influenced the Fenians’ plans to invade Canada.


The revolutionaries’ immediate objective in the 1770s and 80s was to defeat England, which meant any immediate designs on Canada were sacrificed in order to secure peace and independence. Thanks to French and Spanish military and financial assistance, the Americans were able to bring the war to an end.\textsuperscript{13} However, getting the British to officially recognize American independence was another matter. This had not yet occurred when peace negotiations began in Paris. The issue amplified Anglo-American tension, and was one of the reasons the Americans did not press for the acquisition of Canada as part of the final treaty. Franklin, Adams, and Jay had hoped that the British would offer Canada as reimbursement for the property damage that Americans incurred during the war, but the British never proposed such terms. Franklin even advocated the immediate purchase of Canada, arguing that any delay could lead to a rise in the price of the territory and make future procurement of it more difficult.\textsuperscript{14} Though he disagreed with Adams on most things, Franklin agreed that the annexation of Canada would avert future aggressions with the British because he felt that American frontier settlers were “disorderly” and “likely to ignite continual quarrels along the Canadian border.”\textsuperscript{15} Franklin believed that if Canada became part of


\textsuperscript{14} Morgan, \textit{Benjamin Franklin}, op. citied, 280.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 286.
the U.S., the potential for border conflicts would no longer exist. And yet, both Franklin and Adams knew that obtaining Canada was not the priority of their mission. Congress had sent them specific instructions on how to proceed:

> It is the utmost importance to the Peace and Commerce of the United States, that Canada and Nova Scotia should be ceded and more particularly that their equal and common Right should be guarantied to them, Yet a desire of terminating the War, hath induced Us not to make the Acquisition of these Objects an Ultimatum on the present Occasion.\(^{16}\)

These orders prove that many American politicians viewed Canada as a spoil of war. And just as the British had gained Canada and Nova Scotia from the French after the Treaty of 1763, United States policymakers felt that they should obtain the territory as the victors over Britain.\(^{17}\) However, Congress had also made it clear that sparring the “further effusion of blood” was of utmost significance.\(^{18}\) Because too much blood had already been spilled, sacrificing peace for Canada was not a sensible option for the Americans.

The only absolute condition Congress placed on securing peace was for the treaty to officially regard the states as an independent nation. Secondary directives included a detailed explanation of borders, and a cessation of hostilities (followed by the removal of British troops from the United States).\(^{19}\)

Because convincing the British to officially recognize the states as independent took up most of the negotiations, the American delegates did not push the British on the issue of Canada. British Secretary of State, Lord Shelburne—who favored

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\(^{16}\) The Life of John Jay with selections from his Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers, Volume II, ed. William Jay (New York: Harper, 1833), 492.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.


\(^{19}\) Ibid.
reconciliation with the colonists when he was in office fifteen years earlier—had returned to power and was in charge of negotiating the treaty. Shelburne was not interested in losing any more territory in the Americas. But for Shelburne, the remaining British provinces in North America were not for sale. Thus, his agents advised Franklin that Britain would officially grant independence to the Americans if they dropped demands for all of Canada.20

The French also made Canada a difficult award for the Americans. Aware that the French opposed American ambitions in Canada, Franklin worried that pushing the Canadian issue would result in the loss of financial assistance from his wartime ally.21 With considerable foresight, French foreign minister, Comte de Vergennes, hoped that the British would maintain their presence on the continent so that the Americans would remain dependent on the French.22 As a way to check American expansion on the continent, he also sided with Spain in its negotiations with the Americans over rights to the territory between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi river, as well as control of the river itself.23 Such diplomatic machinations had a considerable impact on how the Americans negotiated with the British. And when the matter of recognizing the states as an independent nation was finally resolved, Franklin thought that it was

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20 Stuart, op. cited, 23.
21 Morgan, 289.
23 The French had promised to help Spain retake Gibraltar from the British for Spanish assistance against the British in 1779. Unable to accomplish this, the French hoped that helping Spain maintain control in the Americas would be consolation.
best to focus on settling the western boundary at the Mississippi River rather than revisit the Canada issue.²⁴

Yet while the Americans reluctantly accepted Britain’s control over Canada so as not to upset the peace accords, they were also convinced that the territory in the north would inevitably become part of the United States. According to Reginald Stuart, this position “forecast a major theme in American perception of British North America—faith in an eventual convergence between the provinces and the United States.”²⁵ As Adams’s comments from 1776 on Canada’s presumed place in the American imperial fold reveal, independence from England was only the first step in an American continental hegemony. Indeed, complete confidence in this path allowed many American politicians to feel less anxious over the urgency of acquiring Canada. This strident faith became a pattern in American foreign policy regarding British North America throughout the nineteenth century, one that the Fenians would later ignore to their peril.²⁶ Ironically, it was this tempered approach that ultimately allowed the British to solidify control over their remaining North American colonies.

Not surprisingly, in Paris John Adams took a rather sanguine approach to the continued British presence on the northern border. Foreseeing an opportunity for the United States to rebuild its military, Adams reiterated his earlier

²⁴ Morgan, 286.
²⁵ Stuart, 26. This belief would later play a role in why the U.S. government ultimately turned against the Fenians after the attacks on Canada in 1866. At the time, many American politicians still believed that Canada would eventually become part of the U.S., and that taking the British North American territory by force was unnecessary. This reaction is detailed in chapter five of this dissertation.
²⁶ It is this strident faith in the inevitability of annexing Canada that influenced American politicians after the Civil War to not push for the acquisition of Canada from Britain. This process is detailed in chapter five of this dissertation.
sentiments that the two countries would remain in a perpetual state of war so long as the British remained on the northern border. Adams also predicted future clashes because he was not convinced that the British respected the sovereign rights of the United States. He saw no other way for the two nations reconcile their desire to expand. Thus, largely because of Canada, the British became the United States’ first great national security threat. For the Treaty of 1783, the Americans let go of their immediate hope to acquire Canada and set their sights on the west, securing access to the Mississippi River, and to the northeast coastal region where they hoped to retain access to fishing rights in the Maritimes, all of which checked British encroachment. They were victorious on all fronts. The Paris Treaty set the boundary of the United States in the north at the Great Lakes, in the west at the Mississippi, and acknowledged fishing rights in the north to areas already accustomed.

The Anglo-American arrangement concerning Canada set in motion a course of negotiation and conflict between the two countries that lasted for almost a century. In the decades following American independence, politicians and citizens alike attempted to define and shape the northern borders. It is this history that eventually helped give rise to the Fenian belief that Canada was an open frontier to conquer. One of the most glaring problems facing the two nations was that the border separating the United States and Canada was almost impossible to accurately define. In a staggering display of human incompetency,

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the language of the Treaty of 1783 did not match the geography of the land or the map used during the treaty negotiations.\textsuperscript{29} The agreed northeastern border was intended to separate the United States from British North America at Nova Scotia, and the mouth of the St. Croix River to the highlands. But the St. Croix River did not reach the highlands (the St. John River further east did). In the west, the Treaty called for the borderline to pass through the center of each of the Great Lakes, and continue west through the Lake of the Woods, ending at the Mississippi River. And yet, the Mississippi did not extend north to the Lake of the Woods.\textsuperscript{30} Unknowingly, the British had vacated claims to the vast territory south of the Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi River. On the other hand, the United States benefitted from the flawed arrangements, because it allocated fertile lands between the Ohio and the Mississippi Rivers and the lucrative fur trading routes to Montreal to the British.\textsuperscript{31}

In the years following the Revolutionary War, the treaty’s geographical errors became grounds for both the British and the Americans to disregard the

\textsuperscript{29} The 1755 John Mitchell, Map of the British and French Dominions in the North America, was the map most referred to in the 1783 treaty negotiations. See Paul W. Mapp, The Elusive West and the Quest for Empire, 1713-1763 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

\textsuperscript{30} “The Definitive Treaty of Peace and Friendship Between His Britannic Majesty and the United States of America,” 3 September 1783, Statutes at Large of the United States of America 8: 80-83.

\textsuperscript{31} The Treaty of 1783 also placed seven of the eight northern frontier posts—ones that controlled trade routes and the navigation of major waterways—on soil belonging to the United States. Two forts on Lake Champlain, Dutchman’s Point and Point-au-Fer, controlled trade from the Hudson Valley to the St. Lawrence River. Fort Oswegatchie (Ogdensburg, New York) sat on the southern bank of the St. Lawrence River. Fort Ontario (Oswego, New York) on the southern shore of Lake Ontario controlled inland access to the lake from the Oswego River. Fort Niagara was located at entrance to the Niagara River in the southwestern corner of Lake Ontario Niagara River and regulated the transportation between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. Fort Erie was the outlier, as it was on the western side of the Niagara River and remained British. Fort Erie is the first British/Canadian post that the Fenians captured when the crossed the border in June of 1866. Fort Detroit, on the west bank of the Detroit River, directed trade on Lake Erie and Lake Huron. Control of these forts was invaluable to dominating trade and navigation between the Atlantic and the interior of North America. Many posts also became valuable garrisons for British and American militaries to assert their claims to the surrounding territory.
borders. In 1784, William Pitt 'the Younger,' replaced Lord Shelburne as Prime Minister of England and went about trying to reverse, ignore, and modify the ambiguous borderlines by military occupation. He also promoting an insurgency of Native Americans east of the Mississippi. The Continental Congress was unable to form a consensus on how to respond to British encroachment and could not raise an army to adequately protect its borders. Further compromising relations was the lack of communication between England and her former colonies. Although Congress had placed Adams in London as a diplomatic minister in 1785, the British did not reciprocate and therefore did not officially recognize the United States. For these reasons, the American leaders could not effectively negotiate disputes with Britain concerning the northern border.

Meanwhile, the British military continued to occupy forts south of the Great Lakes and launched raids into New York and Pennsylvania in hopes of preventing further American settlement in the region. British Secretary for Home Affairs, Lord Sydney, directed the Governor General of Canada to "delay evacuation" of the posts, noting that the Treaty of 1783 had not set a timetable for evacuation. For Sydney, the treaty’s language of “convenient speed” was a vague measurement, and one that certainly did not require any immediate

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33 Ibid.
action.\textsuperscript{36} Sidney also pointed to the poor treatment of loyalists still living in the United States and unpaid pre-war debts by the Americans as additional justification for occupation. The Americans, he argued, had not “complied with even one Article of the Treaty.”\textsuperscript{37} While such claims were legitimate, they were also a pretense for a more substantial goal. Ultimately, the British were trying to reclaim territory granted to them in the 1774 Quebec Act, land they had inadvertently lost to the United States in the Treaty of 1783.\textsuperscript{38} Because the U.S. government could not raise an army to defend the border, British aggressions seemed probable and potentially successful.

The United States Constitution altered this asymmetrical dynamic. After its ratification in 1788, the U.S. federal government had the legal authority over its member states to enforce provisions of the Treaty of 1783. The Constitution had also created an executive branch to act on behalf of the country in matters of foreign relations and diplomacy. It further imparted to congress, the ability to levy taxes and tariffs, control trade, and maintain a standing army. With a structured national government, the United States could more effectively handle British aggressions on the northern border. Not only did the Americans see the need to station garrisons on the northern border and maintain a military presence there (as Adams had predicted), they also hoped to foster peace with Native Americans tribes in the area so as to prevent their collusion with the British. As

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} A similar process was playing out along the southwestern frontier where Spain was occupying forts and building new ones in territory belonging to the United States according the Treaty signed between the two countries in 1783. The Spanish has also aligned themselves with native American tribes and were slow to establish a diplomatic relationship with the United States.
the United States’ first Secretary of State under President Washington, Thomas Jefferson demanded that the sovereignty of the Treaty of 1783 be upheld and that British forces withdraw from forts south of the border dividing the Great Lakes.\(^3^9\) The Washington administration hoped to set a forceful tone.

And yet, border conflicts continued. When the British finally exchanged ministers with the United States and established an official diplomatic relationship in 1791, Thomas Jefferson sent communications to London complaining that British agents had been preventing Americans from navigating on the United States side of the Great Lakes and adjoining rivers. Jefferson also pointed out that the British stood in the way of peace between the U.S. and Native Americans in the Northwest.\(^4^0\) Jefferson’s complaints were well founded. British Prime Minister, Lord Grenville had planned to create an Indian Barrier State according to the borders drawn in the 1768 Treaty of Fort Stanwix—along the Ohio River from the Mississippi to the Appalachians, and along the 1763 Proclamation Line from the Appalachians to Nova Scotia. The British goal was to use negotiations between the U.S. and Native American tribes as a proxy to push the border further south, thereby regaining territory allocated in the 1774 Quebec Act. Jefferson, on the other hand, viewed any British involvement in the area as a sign that they did not respect the U.S. as a sovereign nation, and he rejected all proposals.\(^4^1\)

\(^{39}\) Thomas Jefferson to George Hammond, Philadelphia, 29 November 1791, American State Papers, Foreign Affairs 1:188. For a more extensive treatment of this issue see Robert S. Allen, op. cited.
\(^{40}\) Ibid.
The Americans particularly resented British involvement in their negotiations with Native American tribes in the north. Yet while George Washington rejected British mediation and insisted that the U.S. confer directly with the native people concerning boundaries, he did agree to the British serving as interpreters during negotiations. The Six Nations and the western tribes could not agree on which boundaries to press for—the Six Nations wanted the boundary as defined by British proposals for an Indian Barrier State, whereas the western tribes sought the old Fort Stanwix line. When the Americans made it clear that they would agree to neither, the talks ended and peace seemed unfeasible.  

Washington may have wanted peace, but he desired control of western lands even more.

Adams’ prediction concerning problems arising over northern border as motivation for building an army finally proved true. While the Constitution had allowed for a standing army, it was not until late in 1790 when Congress “enacted a new law expanding the authorized strength of the army to 1,216 rank and file.” Two years later Washington deployed General Anthony Wayne and his troops to the borderland region in dispute. Officially called the Legion of the United States, this military outfit was the nascent country’s first official deployed army. By the spring of 1793, Wayne had over 2,000 men, thus providing Washington with the impetus to proceed more forcefully against the Native Americans on the border. In fact, Washington sent the Legion to the garrisoned

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42 Wiley Sword, op. cited, 135
43 Ibid, 82.
Fort Recovery (Ohio), which was located in a territory claimed by both the British and the Americans. Based on this move, the British Governor General of Canada, Lord Dorchester, predicted that war was on the horizon, and held firm on the British-Canadian position of an undefined border north of the Ohio River. Dorchester and his lieutenant governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe, ardently believed that the old boundary line of the Quebec Act was the law of the land. As such, the two men felt it was their duty to protect this territory and assist the Native American in establishing favorable boundaries with the United States. Thus, Dorchester authorized the arming of Fort Miamis along the Muamee River (Maumee, Ohio) fifty miles south of the British garrison at Fort Detroit. Such actions were a clear sign that the British not only had no intention of relinquishing control of their remaining North American colonies, they hoped to increase their holdings as well.

To complicate matters further, the British Navy, in the fall of 1793, began detaining ships laden with goods and materials from any colony belonging to France, as well as ships carrying provisions or supplies for the use by any French colony. British commanders subsequently seized more than two hundred and fifty American merchant ships in the British West Indies. With British troop movement on the northwest frontier and their strong-arm tactics towards American ships in the Caribbean, the United States Congress passed an

46 Ibid. Although the British had occupied the fort during the Revolutionary War, that they had abandoned it well before the Treaty of 1783.
embargo of all British goods in March of 1794. Though war between Britain and her former colonies appeared imminent, Washington also sent John Jay to England with the hope that diplomacy could prevail.

While Jay tried to settle the border and maritime issues with the British in London, skirmishes erupted in the Old Northwest. Washington viewed the British move on Fort Miamis as an “encroachment made upon our territory, by an officer and party of British troops,” and he granted permission to General Wayne to march against the enemy and anyone associated with them. Wayne did just that in the summer of 1794 when the American Legion repelled a full-scale attack by the forces of the western Indian Confederation that were augmented by Canadian militia in Native American dress, and supervised by military officers of the British-Indian Department. Wayne and his men then advanced on the Indian Confederacy in an area of the forest where the trees had fallen from several tornados—named Fallen Timbers. The remaining members of the Indian Confederacy fled to the British fort at Miami. Heeding American warning about being seen as aiding the Native Americans, the British refused to allow them in. The fort even remained closed to retreating British regulars of the British Indian Department and the Canadian militia. Instead of assaulting the British garrison, Wayne brutally razed the fields, Native American villages, and homes belonging to British-Indian officers. In a remarkable statement, the British had abandoned

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49 Gaff, op. cited, 243-253.
50 According to Gaff’s, *Bayonets in the Wilderness*, 196, the Canadian militia consisted of approximately sixty former members of the Tory Rangers.
51 Ibid.
its allied Indian Confederacy in order to avoid war with the Americans. This betrayal marked the end of an alliance between the British and Native American tribes of the Old Northwest and thwarted British plans for control of North America, the inland waterways, or an Indian-barrier state.

And yet, once again the British did not fully concede the territory to American control. Around the same time General Wayne engaged the British at Fallen Timbers, Lieutenant Governor Simcoe sent another detachment of the British Army from Fort Oswegatchie (Oswego, New York) to warn off American settlers in the Sodus Bay area (Rochester, New York). Convinced that the Americans were violating British rights to Indian Territory, Simcoe justified British aggressions by declaring that the Americans had not complied with the 1783 Treaty. Because the British had maintained the Fort at Detroit—repairing it in order to continue pushing for a British-Indian alliance—American soldiers of the Legion did not expect the peace to last. In other words, if the Americans were not going to honor the Treaty, the British were not going to do so either.

In the end, Lord Grenville finally agreed to evacuate the frontier forts in the fall of 1795. But he then had forces garrison forts across the lakes and rivers on the British side of the border in hope of claiming Indian Territory. What is more, after signing Jay’s Treaty, Simcoe and several ministers in Grenville’s cabinet felt that some elements of the treaty were not settled, and such ambiguities once

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52 John Graces Simcoe to Lieutenant Sheaffe of the 5th Regiment of Foot, 10 August 1794, Simcoe Papers, volume II, 364.
53 Patrick Griffin, American Leviathan: Empire, Nation, and Revolutionary Frontier (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 149.
again justified British non-compliance. They continued to push for an Indian barrier state, and still hoped to establish boundaries that made the contentious forts fall outside the United States before the date set for evacuation in Jay’s Treaty. Holding onto the forts meant continued control of the waterways, an advantage for the British due to their naval superiority. For the time, it appeared that Adams’ prediction had proved true: as long as the British remained in North America, they were a constant threat. The acrimonious environment played heavily in the development of Anglophobia amongst Americans that deepened in the nineteenth century, one that the Fenians later tried to take advantage of while building support for their cause.

Nonetheless, General Wayne’s decisive victory at Fallen Timbers had shifted the balance of power on the Northwest and helped to give the U.S. a sense of confidence about their potential for continental expansion. In the summer of 1795 at Fort Greenville, the Washington administration signed a peace treaty (Treaty of Greenville) with Native American tribes. Since the end of the Revolutionary War, the British had tried to mediate a treaty to their advantage, but they were ultimately left out. Overpowered, the Indian Confederacy accepted a boundary line with the U.S. that was far more restrictive than the 1768 Fort Stanwix Treaty. The new line ran from present day Cleveland, sixty miles south, then due west to Fort Recovery, and finally southwest to the Ohio River—just west of present-day Cincinnati. The Treaty of Greenville also required that all land east and south of the new boundary be surrendered to the

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United States, placing the British Forts at Niagara, Oswego, Oswegatchie, and on Lake Champlain in U.S. territory.\textsuperscript{55}

Jay’s Treaty and the Treaty of Greenville officially ended the British occupation of territory south of the Great Lakes.\textsuperscript{56} It also created commissions to arbitrate the physical border discrepancies left over from the Treaty of 1783—specifically the line drawn from the Lake of the Woods to the Mississippi and the St Croix River in the east. The effect of the two treaties was felt on the frontier. Cross-border insurgencies decreased and the British withdrew the British-Indian Department from the old Northwest. British agents no longer interfered with Native American sovereignty or the right of preemption claimed by the United States. After a series of attempts to regain power in North American after the Revolutionary War, the British proved that they were ultimately unwilling to commit to another war in order to achieve their goals. Only decades later, this policy would change. But for the time, the two treaties brought considerable peace to the border and led to an increase of largely white American settlement of the area.\textsuperscript{57}

Though diplomacy may have momentarily prevailed, not all American borderland residents were willing to comply with the terms of the agreements. Many residents of Vermont, for example, did not want to remain part of the United States. With this knowledge, Alexander Hamilton specifically warned the New York State assembly not to make Vermont’s bid for statehood difficult.

\textsuperscript{55} Griffin, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{56} The treaty did allow the British to hold onto trading privileges with Native Americans in U.S. territory.

because he suspected that leaders in Vermont were conducting negotiations with the British to become a Canadian province.\textsuperscript{58} Not only was Hamilton worried that “connections have already been formed with the British in Canada,” he was also concerned that Vermont politicians would vote to remain an independent republic.\textsuperscript{59} With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1792, French agents tried to encourage Vermonters to invade Lower Canada and liberate the French from British rule. Three years later, Vermont resident and Jeffersonian Republican, Ira Allen, travelled to France and purchased weapons for such an excursion. He had hoped to help smuggle arms to the French in Canada and possibly align Vermont with their cause, but British and American spies thwarted the plot. By 1797, the Quasi-War between the United States and France diminished American sympathies with the French and ended Vermont residents’ interest in leaving the United States to create a republic with French Canadians.\textsuperscript{60}

While most Vermonters did not actively participate in attempts to undermine Vermont’s American statehood, Ira Allen still represented a worldview shared by many of the residents there, and of others living in border states who felt little affinity with the U.S. federal government. The physical distance between the border region and the east coast nexus of U.S. governmental power was one cause. But mere survival needs and even ideological differences also played a major role. Economic expediency drew the attention and energy of border

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
residents towards the north. In the decades following the American Revolution, the population along the New England border with Canada exploded and led to the increase of trade, and even smuggling of goods. The Canadian provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick “intermeshed” with New England’s frontier communities, creating a “Maritime borderland community, built around common economic interest, family ties, and cultural heritage.” New Englanders migrated to Vermont and New York, while some even headed up into Lower and Upper Canada. With a climate similar to that of New England, the shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie appealed to migrants. Many also moved for economic reasons, seeking employment in developing commercial centers of Montreal and Quebec City, or near British garrisons that depended on the local economy. Others traveled north to seek refuge for their beliefs and practices including Quakers, Mennonites, and even participants of the failed Whiskey Rebellion in 1794. The more Americans settled near and over the Canadian border, the more separated they became from national politics and cultural identity to the south.

Thus, long before the Fenians headed north to take advantage of the porous border, the region became a space where loyalties were local and “human relations, survival, and self-interest often transcended allegiance for a distant national government.” This process influenced the development of

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61 Stuart, 31.
62 Ibid, 34. There is very little scholarship on the American Canadian borderland region during this time. Most existing work focuses on the late nineteenth century or twentieth century historical period such as Sheila Mcmanus, “Mapping the Alberta-Montana Borderlands: Race Ethnicity and Gender in the Late Nineteenth Century,” Journal of American Ethnic History, vol. 20, no. 3 (Spring 2001); and Aldona Sendzikas, “Drawing Border: The American-Canadian Relationship during the Gilded Age,” Canadian Journal of History, vol. 49, no. 2 (Autumn, 2014). Essays in Freedom’s Conditions in the U.S.-Canadian Borderlands in the Age of Emancipation ed. Tony Freyer and
distinct regions. The Maritimes centered on fishing, lumbering, and trade. In the 1780s and 1790’s, farmers and lumbermen settled the St. Croix Valley. The Champlain Valley was known for a north-south communications and trade along waterways. Rivers and the Great Lakes marked the western region out to Detroit. Whereas the British-Indian alliance worried settlers in the Northwest, eastern settlers were more concerned with trade and fishing rights.63

When Congress passed President Jefferson’s 1807 embargo—which officially criminalized all exports from the United States to Canada—illicit trade along the borderland region became commonplace. Defiance of the law was frequent because enforcing the embargo across the entire Canadian-American border was next to impossible. New York state politician, De Witt Clinton, remarked that the embargo “enriched the frontier settlements, and the impediments to a free intercourse with Canada became very unpopular.”64

Insurrections against federal authorities who enforced the Embargo Act grew in number as locals harassed customs collectors and federal authorities that refused clearances for vessels headed for Canadian markets.65 The response was further evidence that national policies, by and large, did not appear to concern the inhabitants of the borderland region. North of the border were markets, friends, and even family members. The region’s cross-border


63 Ibid.
64 De Witt Clinton, The Life and Writings of De Witt Clinton, ed. William W. Campbell (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1849), 82.
65 Ibid, 83.
connections thrived, and undermined American politicians of the Early National period who continued to view the Canadian provinces as a British threat.\textsuperscript{66}

The contrast between life in the borderland region and international foreign policy in the decades after the American Revolution reveals a distinct difference between the mindset of politicians and diplomats in Washington D.C. and non-government peoples populating the borderland region (particularly those benefiting from its permeable nature). Members of the latter group did not give weight to boundaries. Their outlook assumed that the territory and its people of the area were not necessarily tied to a nation. Although this way of thinking did evolve, its basic principle remained throughout the nineteenth century and later played a role in the assumptions the Fenian Brotherhood made about the Canadian border and its people.

\textbf{Another War for the Continent-}

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the political environment outside the borderland region in the U.S. had become far more divisive. During this period, Americans largely split into two distinct political parties: Federalists, and the more Anglophobic Democratic-Republicans—who were weary of British continental dominance. British impressment of American citizens at sea and the perception that the British were still supporting, and even abetting, Native American attacks on frontier settlers south of the Great Lakes fueled the flames for many Democratic-Republican politicians who clamored for war. Canada again became

\textsuperscript{66} Stuart also makes this argument, op cited, 53.
embroiled in Anglo-American tensions, particularly in the American debate concerning the War of 1812.

The Democratic-Republicans, who supported war, did so on a defensive basis. Debates in Congress revealed the tension in this distinction, whereby members of Jefferson’s party pointed to their previous opposition to war with France in 1798 as a reminder of what happened to a political party who pushed for war. They argued that because American voters had made their position known and “ousted” Adams’ Federalist party for its Quasi War, Democratic-Republicans should not press for war with England, lest they suffer similar political consequences.67 It was one thing to go to war with Britain to defend the honor and sovereignty of the United States in the American Revolution, but another thing to shed blood for conquest, even if it were to ensure access to maritime rights. Because members of Congress were not convinced that war would even result in the successful procurement of additional fishing water rights, they remained skeptical.68

The decision to go to war with England in 1812 was also heavily contested by residents in New England and by southern states where economic ties to the British Empire were strong. Americans there wondered whether politicians were using hostilities as a pretense to conquer Canada. The northern states of Pennsylvania and New York were also split on the issue, but many residents of Ohio and Kentucky supported the idea of conquering Canada to kick the British

67 “Debate on the Second Resolution Reported by the Committee of Foreign Relations,” National Intelligencer, issue 1753, January 4, 1812. The record from the debate stated: “But now forgetting our old professions under a French crisis, we has raised the cry of war under a British one, and nothing short of it was to save our honor.”

68 Ibid.
out of North America and to put an end to British-Indian alliance. These divisions were not surprising given the greater threat from Native Americans facing frontier residents of Ohio and Kentucky compared to eastern states. Nonetheless, James Madison's administration saw potential in threatening to conquer the Canadian provinces as leverage. Madison hoped that by doing so, he could force the British to abandon the Orders in Council that prevented American ships from trading in the British West Indies, and end the impressment of American citizens on the high seas.

Madison's position quickly gained traction among American politicians. Addressing his fellow congressmen, Henry Clay declared that the “conquest of Canada is in your power… the militia of Kentucky are alone competent to place Montreal and Upper Canada at your feet.” Clay went on to ask his colleagues if war would be effective in wresting the remaining British North Americans’ possessions, extinguishing the “torch that lights up savage warfare,” and acquiring the entire fur trade of Canada. For the majority of Congressmen, the answer was yes, and after they voted for war, Madison directed the military to gain control of Canada and hold it as a “hostage for peace and justice.”

The exigency of combat also determined the Madison administration’s position on

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70 Stuart, 59. See also Reginald Horseman, op. cited.


72 Ibid.

Canada. James Monroe, a leading figure in Madison’s cabinet as Secretary of State and War, argued that in case of hostilities “it might be necessary to invade Canada, not as an object of the war but as a means to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion.”

Obtaining Canada may not have been Monroe’s direct objective, but it was to be a by-product of U.S. aggression. Once in American hands, he maintained, it would be “difficult to relinquish territory which had been conquered.” Thus, for many American politicians, the motivation behind conquering Canada during the War of 1812 was to annex the provinces so as to increase American domination on the continent. For others, it was to punish the British, force them to stop impressment, and end what the Americans perceived as continued British incitement of Indian uprisings against American settlers.

John Quincy Adams made his feelings about the subject known when he argued that the acquisition of Canada “was not, and could not be the object of this war.” Adams’s position had nothing to do with not wanting the provinces. He was already convinced that Canadians would want to merge with the United States, and he felt that annexation was only a matter of time. Others Americans argued similarly that the priorities of war were to end British impressments and to prevent the British from creating an Indian buffer state in the Old Northwest.

Acquiring Canada, they declared, was of secondary importance. And yet, one

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74 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
must consider the public denouncement of taking Canada as merely a way of concealing ulterior motives. U.S. politicians may have publically justified expansion in Canada as a response to Britain’s refusal to yield on impressments, but that did not mean it was.

Anglo-American relations concerning Canada had come full circle. Although diplomacy had been jettisoned for more aggressive actions, the debates and negotiation over Canada remained the same. In 1783, Americans had fought for independence, and enough blood had already been shed to forgo insisting on control of Canada in victory. Almost thirty years later American politicians had enough amnesia about the grim realities of war to become pugnacious in their demands for Canada. Even those who were not publically supportive of fighting for the northern territory appeared satisfied with obtaining Canada as a spoil of war. Once again, Canada had become a pawn in the battle between Britain and the United States—an established empire against an emerging one. Unfortunately for American expansionists, the U.S. still did not yet have the military power of the British to demand absolute hegemony over the North American Continent.

Ultimately, it was the misfortunes of war that limited American politicians’ continued push for Canada. Americans were not as successful in battle as they had hoped, and by 1814 expansionist goals were pushed aside by the more pressing matter of achieving peace. Once again, one of the biggest disadvantages for the Americans was the lack of a significant naval presence on the Great Lakes. Unable to control the waterways, the U.S. military was
dangerously vulnerable facing the British. This fact motivated Congress to approve funds over the next several decades for a larger navy and to build stronger fortifications along the Great Lakes.\textsuperscript{79}

In the meantime, though, the Treaty of Ghent ended hostilities, restored conquered territories, and created a boundary commission without addressing neutral rights or impressment.\textsuperscript{80} By returning Anglo-American relations to an antebellum status, diplomats postponed settling disagreements over boundaries, trade, and fishing rights. Thus, Canada remained in British hands, a result that deeply angered residents of the American Old Northwest—the region where those with the greatest fervor for annexing Canada to the United States resided.\textsuperscript{81} Military leaders in that region were also some of the ardent supporters of annexation. General Andrew Jackson, for example, told volunteers that they had fought the British to “seek some indemnity for past injuries, some security against future aggressions, by the conquest of all the British dominions upon the continent of North America.”\textsuperscript{82} But with a subsequent military victory against the Tecumseh Confederacy at the Battle of Thames, American settlers in the Old Northwest were content with a return to the status quo. In the decades to follow, they would focus instead on maintaining a peaceful frontier.

\textsuperscript{79} William P. Leeman, \textit{The Long Road to Annapolis: The Founding of the Naval Academy and the Emerging American Republic} (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 71-75. All of Chapter three is helpful in understanding this process. Also see Jonathan R. Dull, \textit{American Naval History, 1607-1865: Overcoming the colonial legacy} (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2012).


\textsuperscript{81} Stuart, 63.

\textsuperscript{82} Andrew Jackson, “To the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division,” 7 March 1812, \textit{The Papers of Andrew Jackson, volume II}, ed. Daniel Feller ed., (Digital Edition), 290.
The war may have left the border in place, but it also further solidified British identity of the colonies “north of the line,” and deepened an anti-Canadian sentiment among many Americans. Indeed, some historians argue that the war’s most substantial legacy was that it “inculcated separate national identities into the minds of ordinary folk on each side of the border.” Though Federalists believed that ‘Madison’s war’ was one of conquest and that Canada was not compatible with American republicanism, Nathaniel Macon, a Democratic-Republican, provided an explanation of the confusion many Americans living outside the borderland region felt about Canada and its residents:

But these Canadians are surely a most uncommon people. At one time they are our brothers, friends, and associates; at another, they are French refugees and old Tories. Their country, too, must be something like themselves. At one time it is so valuable that Great Britain will never part with it, and at another it is so poor that it would be a curse to the United States; at one time the whole nation cannot take it; at another, a single State, and that not a large one, can take it with ease.

Macon’s words captured the often-ambiguous relationship between most Americans and their northern neighbors. However, for American residents living near the Canadian border, the war had not altered their view of Canada as an economic resource, and of Canadians citizens as trading partners, friends, and even kin. Though Congress had prohibited trade with any part of the British Empire during the war, frontier residents continued to move goods across the border, particularly across the New England and Maritimes regions. And because

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83 Robert Bothwell, *Canada and the United States: The Politics of Partnership* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) Bothwell also argues that the War of 1812 was an episode of the Napoleonic Wars.


no land campaigns of the war occurred there, Americans sold supplies to the British. Even in upstate New York, American ports along the St. Lawrence River became hubs of borderland economic activity. Ogdensburg, New York was one such town, where residents traded with the British and Canadians to the North. Not surprisingly, borderland residents largely opposed the war. Their local needs once again outweighed national loyalties.  

And yet, even though most American residents on the border did not support the war, they did fear British control over Native Americans west of Montreal. For Americans removed from the borderland, the Canadian provinces continued to pose a danger to the United States because they provided the British with a base from which to launch attacks across the border. When Americans looked to expand, they often worried whether the British would compete for western land rights. As noted earlier, the concern underlying this question was one of the factors that led to the War of 1812. But war had done very little to resolve the issue. The fighting ended, not because the British abandoned their ambitions to gain territory in North America, but because they had defeated Napoleon in Europe and no longer needed to rely on impressment to fill a navy or trade restrictions to punish enemies. Contributing to American anxieties was British interest in Texas, Mexico, California, and Oregon. The years following the War of 1812 marked the withdrawal of other European powers from North America. On the one hand this was good for American expansionists. On the other hand, it

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86 Stuart, 65.
89 Ibid, 174.
meant that Britain only had the United States to compete with for territory on the continent.

An era of diplomacy-

In the years following the War of 1812, a change of guard in British leadership led to the appointment of a new foreign secretary, Lord Castlereagh, who presented a less aggressive diplomatic front in his dealings with the Americans. Castlereagh disagreed with Canadians who argued that because the United States was able to support land armies if aggressions erupted between England and the United States again, re-arming the Great Lakes was of the utmost importance. Instead, the British statesman sent diplomat Charles Bagot to negotiate a treaty with Richard Rush, who was in charge of the U.S. State Department at the time. The 1817 Rush-Bagot Treaty called for the disarmament of military vessels stationed in the Great Lakes and limited naval forces on both sides to only those necessary to enforce revenue laws. Once again, adhering to the treaty became a matter of interpretation. While military presence on both sides of the border decreased after the war, the U.S. and British militaries continued to expand land forces. As historian John Hern Thompson noted, the Rush Bagot Treaty—as with the Treaty of Ghent and most negotiations between Britain and the United States concerning Canada—rendered Britain’s North American interests “secondary to [its] imperial considerations.”

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90 Thompson, op. cit., 23.
91 Ibid.
also saved both the United States and Britain from a costly arms race. However, while the intent of the agreement was meant to resolve tension between the two empires that had lingered since the War of 1812, a decreased military presence on the Great Lakes would eventually come back to haunt both Canadian and American officials.

One year after the Rush-Bagot Treaty, British and American diplomats reached another important agreement that extended an 1815 commercial treaty regulating trade. Additionally, the 1818 treaty also settled fishing rights the Treaty of Ghent had failed to conclude while also extending the Canadian boundary line along the forty-ninth parallel to the ‘stony mountains’— a distance of eight hundred miles.\(^{92}\) The territory beyond the Rockies was left as “free and open to the citizens and subjects of the two powers for ten years.”\(^ {93}\) This provision was extended indefinitely in 1827, leaving the settlement of Oregon to what Richard Rush called “time… the best negotiator.”\(^ {94}\) On paper at least, Anglo-American relations appeared to be on better footing.

However, the more conciliatory approach to Anglo-American relations was threatened in 1818 when General Andrew Jackson executed two British subjects while pursuing Seminole Indians into Spanish Florida. Again, Castlereagh prioritized diplomacy, thereby diffusing the crisis. He helped negotiate a settlement between the Americans and the Spanish, whereby Florida became part of the United States in the Transcontinental Treaty of 1819. Castlereagh’s

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\(^{93}\) Ibid.

\(^{94}\) Ibid.
assistance was not simply a gesture of good will, for he understood that northern pursuits might become less desirable for the Americans with the presence of a panacea for southern expansion. His analysis paid off. And yet, because the U.S. government was interested in acquiring Florida at the time of Jackson’s military invasion, American expansion had also bolstered a tradition of extralegal activities. It was exactly this ideological and tactical approach that the Fenians would subsume in their plan to strike at Britain.

Another indication of the Anglo-American shift to diplomacy in the decades following the War of 1812 was the negotiation concerning the Monroe Doctrine. Castlereagh committed suicide in 1822, and George Canning, a man far more forceful in his diplomatic approach, succeeded him. By that time, Canning knew that Spain and France’s presence in the Americas had decreased—each only held a few Caribbean islands. Russia’s interests in the continent, Canning observed, were limited to the Pacific Coast and were largely commercial in nature, not territorial. Thus, Canning concluded that the U.S. had only Britain to contend with to the north and Mexico to the south and southwest.95 Hoping to seize an opportunity that would benefit the British Empire, Canning proposed a joint accord between Great Britain and the United States to discourage any other European encroachment in Spanish America.96 Forty years after the American


Revolution and less than a decade since the end of the War of 1812, an offer of a public and formal alliance from Great Britain seemed initially flattering and beneficial to President Monroe, especially as he pondered the events unfolding in Spain. Earlier in the year, at the suggestion of Russia and the Holy Alliance, France had made her way into Cadiz and returned the heir of Henry IV, Ferdinand VII, to the throne. Monroe and his cabinet grew concerned after catching wind of rumors that France and the Holy Alliance were interested in helping Spain regain her power over her former colonies in the Americas. Only one year earlier, Monroe had officially recognized the independence of five Spanish America colonies—Argentina, Chile, Peru, Columbia, and Mexico.  

Imbued with his father’s geopolitical sensibilities and anxieties, John Quincy Adams, Secretary of State under Monroe, viewed all European nations as a threat to the stability of his country, and argued that no “cordiality could exist between the United States and Great Britain.” Adams felt that part of his job as a diplomat and statesman was to make the world familiar “with the idea of considering our proper dominion to be the continent of North America.” Like many of his compatriots, Adams was not convinced that England, nor her European competitors, had given up designs to dominate the American continent. Independence was key to his “political creed” in foreign relations and, he felt, the most important policy for the

United States to maintain.\textsuperscript{100} It was this belief that formed the basis of the American foreign policy publically affirmed by the Monroe Doctrine, a declaration largely directed at Great Britain.

Canning was not easily deterred, even after diplomat Richard Rush reminded him of the U.S. policy of 'non entanglement' with European powers. The “powerful and controlling circumstances,” Canning argued, made the American policy “inapplicable.”\textsuperscript{101} He maintained that the future of Spain’s colonies “concerned the United States under aspects and interests as immediate and commanding, as it did or could any of the States of Europe.”\textsuperscript{102} Canning went on to ask if the political and commercial interests of the United States were to be "canvassed and adjusted… without some proper understanding between the United States and Great Britain, as the two chief commercial and maritime states of both worlds.”\textsuperscript{103} It was a brash statement, but not unexpected as Canning had simply echoed the way European nations had regarded the Americas for several hundred years—a continent whose destinies lay in the hands of seemingly more powerful men across the Atlantic Ocean. Canning had presented a veiled threat to the U.S. to align with Britain or suffer the consequences of the British Empire carving up North America.

Former presidents Madison and Jefferson advised Monroe to accept the alliance, and argued that the greatest threat to the future of the United States was another war with Great Britain. An Anglo-American alliance, Jefferson claimed,
protected the U.S. and most likely prevented other European nations from waging war over South America. Though Jefferson acknowledged that an alliance meant not being able to acquire Cuba, he felt it was a “small price to pay” for preventing England from occupying it either.104 Jefferson’s concern rested not with the encroachment of the Holy Alliance in South America, but with the potential hostility of the more powerful threat to American security. Great Britain, he wrote, “is the nation which can do us the most harm of anyone, or all on earth; and with her on our side we need not fear the whole world.”105 Jefferson supposed that no other European power dare take on Great Britain and the United States if they acted together, and that by creating a division in the “body of European powers,” the United States was more powerful herself.106 The European nations, he concluded, were only dangerous when combined with England and her maritime prowess.107 For Jefferson, removing England as a threat preempted all other concerns.

Diplomat Richard Rush did not agree with the former presidents. Because the British had not recognized the independence of the Spanish American states, Rush remained suspicious and advised Monroe to take a different position. There had been no material change, Rush argued, to the manner in which Britain has “acted in the world for the past fifty years, when the cause of freedom has been at stake; the part in which she acted in 1774 in America, which she has since acted in Europe, and is now acting in Ireland.”108 For Rush, any proposals for an alliance

105 Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, October 24, 1823. Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
made by the British were “bottomed on their own calculations.” He remained wary even after Canning announced that England was sending two commissionaires to Mexico and that his government expected an increased relationship with the Central American country in the near future. On the surface, it appeared that the British were acknowledging Mexican independence. But Rush was less certain when rumors circulated that British agents were looking into profitable mining areas in Mexico. Canning also acknowledged that his government was ordering its fleet in the West Indies to “protect the trade of British subjects with the Spanish colonies, in case the license for this trade which the Cortes granted in January last was not renewed.” If he was not assured trade was accessible, Canning believed that reprisals might be necessary.

The British were no longer tied up in major conflicts throughout the world, as they had been only a few years earlier in Europe and in North America. With unencumbered naval prowess, they were better able to enforce a privileged trade status with weaker countries when necessary. Canning also informed Rush of his country’s intention to blockade the entrance to the bay of Carthagena unless the Colombian government made “speedy” reparations for the “alleged aggression committed upon a British ship at the fort of Bocachica.” Skeptical of Canning, Rush noted to Monroe that the Columbian minister in London had informed him that the British ship committed the act of aggression. With the British Empire

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109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Edward Howland Tatum Jr., op. cited, 268.
maintaining its hold in Canada, Rush and his colleagues feared that the U.S. would become surrounded if South and Central America became too vulnerable.

Monroe and Adams were always concerned that England had her sights on Latin America. Now they had proof of her expansionists plans in Mexico and her aggressive tactics to protect her commercial interests in South America. For weeks, Canning had attempted to convince Rush and the U.S. government to be wary, if not fearful, of other European nations and their ambitions in South America. But it was ultimately the British that concerned Monroe and Adams the most. In a speech to Congress, Monroe rejected the Anglo-American alliance by declaring that the American continents were not to be “considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers.”\(^{113}\) Though Monroe made an exception for existing European colonies in the Americas, the message was clear: the United States wanted unfettered access to the continent.

Nonetheless, the Monroe Doctrine was all bark and no bite. The U.S. still lacked the naval and land military power to give the policy teeth. As such, the British took the American rejection of an alliance in stride. By warning all European powers against any new encroachment in the Americas, Monroe’s declaration ultimately favored the most powerful navy in the world because Britain was still able to economically dominate the Americas, but with less military and traditional colonial investment.\(^{114}\) It was the beginning of the ‘Pax Britannica’ era whereby Britain’s “commercial industrial, financial, and imperial might, all protected by the

\(^{113}\) James Monroe, \textit{Message of President James Monroe at the commencement of the first session of the 18\textsuperscript{th} Congress.} December 2 1823.

\(^{114}\) See chapter two of Rebecca Berens Matzke, \textit{Deterrence Through Strength: British Naval Power and Foreign Policy under Pax Britannica} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011).
superior Royal Navy, were so imposing that they deterred war.\textsuperscript{115} The first wave of industrialization had transformed Britain in the years since the American Revolution, pushing commercial interests to the forefront of politics. In the decades following the War of 1812, British foreign policy reflected this shift, prioritizing unfettered access to natural resources that fueled further economic growth as opposed to conquering new territory.\textsuperscript{116} During this time, the British imported roughly three-quarters of American cotton for their textile mills.\textsuperscript{117} Thus, British money was heavily entrenched in the United States. By 1850, English investors owned more American government securities than the rest of Europe combined.\textsuperscript{118} Both countries benefitted from this development, and for several decades after Monroe issued his doctrine, British and American politicians largely worked to avert hostilities even when Americans and Canadians living in the border region made that difficult.

Crossing Borders-

By the time the Fenians attacked Canada in 1866, Ontario politician Thomas Hodgins claimed that the invasions were one of several “baptisms of

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 1. It is worth noting that Matzke disagrees with diplomatic scholars who also point to a ‘balance of power’ political development in Europe as being largely responsible for the lack of large-scale European conflicts during this time. In chapter one, Matzke argues instead that Britain was the only economic and naval powerhouse left standing after 1815.

\textsuperscript{116} The exception to this was in India. But as David Cannadine points out, the British developed a system in India where they relied on native ruling elites to maintain power for them. David Cannadine, op. cited.

\textsuperscript{117} Stuart, 76.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
blood” that Canada had suffered as a result of raids from the United States.\footnote{Thomas Hodgins, 
*British and American Diplomacy Affecting Canada: 1782-1899. A Chapter of Canadian History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1900), 72.}

The major episodes to which Hodgins was referring were the 1837 Patriot Revolts in the provinces of Lower and Upper Canada—known today as Ontario and Quebec. What began as an uprising of Canadians demanding home rule turned into an international crisis when the rebels fled across the border to Buffalo, New York after being fired on by Canadian loyalists outside of Toronto. Memories of the British burning the city of Buffalo during the War of 1812 still haunted many residents who embraced the rebel Canadians and volunteered to raise funds and even help attack areas in Canada.\footnote{Ibid. For an in-depth examination of the 1837 Patriot Rebellions see Tom Dunning, “The Canadian Rebellions of 1837 and 1838 as a Borderland War: A Retrospective,” *Ontario History,* vol. 101, no. 2 (2009): 129–141.} But within a week of the onset of the uprising, President Martin Van Buren, publicly spoke out against potential filibustering expeditions and authorized federal authorities to prevent future invasions.

For many Americans, the rebellions in Canada carried the torch of republican ideology ignited by the American Revolution.\footnote{Ducharme, op. cited.} The Canadian leaders of the revolt, Louis-Joseph Papineau in Lower Canada and William Lyon Mackenzie in Upper Canada, both aligned their cause with that of the thirteen colonies in the 1770s and spoke of their admiration for the American Revolution and the republic that followed. Canadian republicans hoped that “by presenting their cause in a distinctly American manner, the Americans would eventually side
with them, should a conflict arise between them and the British."\(^{122}\) Before the revolts in Canada, patriots had organized a boycott of British products just as the Americans had done almost sixty years earlier. They also organized a militia similar to the Sons of Liberty, created resolutions that borrowed language from the American Declaration of Independence, and reprinted Thomas Paine's \textit{Common Sense}.\(^{123}\) Like their American predecessors, the Canadian patriots wanted greater representation in the Legislative Assembly. In other words, the Canadian rebels wanted to alter the colonial order.

Mackenzie had hoped to create a northern version of Texas, a republic carved from Canadian territory that would eventually join the United States. British forces crushed his goal and suppressed the patriot rebellions in both the Upper and Lower Provinces. Colonial forces also captured an American vessel carrying supplies for the Patriot raiders on the American side of the Niagara River and set it on fire. When news reached Buffalo that an American had died in the blaze (later proven to be untrue), volunteers for filibustering missions into Canada flooded Buffalo and other northern cities in the U.S.\(^{124}\) A republican ideological solidarity and a shared resentment of the British may have been part of the transnational appeal for supporters of the cause, but historian Robert May notes that some Americans were also enticed by promises of money or Canadian land and that “hundreds of borderland residents, many of them insecure, young laborers on seasonal employment, went off fighting for Canadian freedom.”\(^{125}\) The

\(^{122}\) Ibid, 421.
\(^{123}\) Ibid, 424.
\(^{124}\) May, op. cited, 10.
\(^{125}\) Ibid.
wide range of motivations for participating in cross-border attacks was common among the rank-and-file Fenians who attacked Canada in 1866. The Fenians too imbued their mission with same republican ideology that spurred the Canadian Patriots of 1837.

The Patriot Rebellions had inflamed cross-border filibustering. By February of 1837, “the Patriots and allied Americans regrouped and unleashed coordinated attacks against the whole U.S.-Canadian border from Vermont to Michigan.”\(^{126}\) Although none of the invasions were successful, a filibustering movement, shaped by Canadian and American citizens who formed transnational associations gained momentum in northern American cities. In 1838, members of one such organization, the Canadian Refugee Relief Association, dressed as Native Americans and set fire to a Canadian ship in Lake Ontario. That same year, another group, called the Brother Hunters, crossed the Detroit River and attacked Windsor, destroying property and killing several citizens. The Hunters, like many of these organizations, were hoping to provoke an Anglo-American war “as a means of freeing the Canadas.”\(^{127}\) President Van Buren responded by placing 2,000 federal soldiers on the border until the tension dissipated.\(^{128}\)

Despite state actions, the Canadian border region during the 1830s, remained largely in flux—an area where, according to Robert May, “the federal government and its agents were constantly forced to reckon with the expansive-and often potentially explosive, demands of a mushrooming frontier population

\(^{126}\) Ibid, 11.
\(^{127}\) Ibid, 13.
\(^{128}\) Ibid.
that remained largely ungovernable.” Another major episode of borderland residents escalating conflicts that almost embroiled the U.S. and Britain in another war occurred in the Aroostock River Valley in 1838—a region just east of Buffalo between northern Maine and New Brunswick. When Jay’s Treaty in 1794 authorized a commission to determine the boundary that was not accurately defined by the Treaty of 1783, officials established a line from the mouth of the St. Croix River at the Chiputneticook Lakes south to the Passamaquoddy Bay that spilled into the Atlantic Ocean’s Bay of Fundy. But the commission never finalized the border north of the Chiputneticook Lakes to the St. Lawrence River, a distance of over two hundred miles. After the War of 1812—during which the British occupied most of eastern Maine—another commission tried to resolve the border issue between the district of Maine (part of Massachusetts) and New Brunswick, but ultimately failed to reach an agreement.

When Maine became a separate state from Massachusetts in 1820, the local government continued to issue land grants for the Aroostock River Valley. Canadian and American lumberjacks had long sourced trees in this region, but tensions over land rights increased as the population in the region multiplied. By 1830, third party arbiters took over the border mediation, a provision required by the Treaty of Ghent. But neither side agreed to the suggested borders. After several small clashes between local militias in 1838, the governor of Maine sent a

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131 Without the northern section of Maine, non-Americans who wanted to travel within the British North American provinces, had to head north, then east and south, doubling the travel time from Quebec City to Halifax doubled.
small battalion of the state militia to the junction of the St. Croix and Aroostock Rivers—a space that both Maine and New Brunswick claimed—to arrest New Brunswick lumberjacks and confiscate their equipment. The lumberjacks resisted, and were able to kidnap a Maine land agent.\(^{132}\)

The situation quickly escalated from a border skirmish to an international incident. Maine increased the number of volunteers and sent a representative to Washington D.C. to demand protection from the federal government. President Martin Van Buren responded by ordering General Winfield Scott and his troops to the area.\(^{133}\) The British reinforced the New Brunswick militia, and both sides garrisoned forts and posts along the St. John River. Before any fighting broke out however, American Secretary of State Daniel Webster and the British Foreign Secretary Lord Ashburton negotiated a new boundary line. With an American wife and as a member of an important banking family that held considerable investments in the U.S., Ashburton hoped to avoid another war with the Americans. Fortunately for him, diplomacy prevailed and the Webster-Ashburton Treaty was officially signed in 1842. In addition to settling eastern boundary disputes, the treaty also redressed the open use of the Great Lakes by both nations as well as the boundary between Canada and Michigan and Canada and Minnesota at the 49\(^{th}\) parallel.\(^{134}\)


\(^{133}\) Ibid, 40

\(^{134}\) Ibid. For an in depth examination of the Webster-Ashburton Treat see Francis M. Carroll, A Good and Wise Measure: The Search for the Canadian-American Boundary, 1783-1842 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).
The multiple border conflicts in North America that took place in the decades following the War of 1812 had, according to Francis M. Carroll, “sparked diplomatic wild fires which threatened to ignite another Anglo-Canadian-American War." These incidents once again underscore the relationship between diplomatic overtures in international policy and the realities of life in the borderland region, which occasionally found common ground but were often at odds with each other. Although the Webster-Ashburton Treaty appeared to assuage tensions over the Canadian border east of the Great Lakes, it did not address disputed land further west. And for the next two decades, the political environment in the U.S. concerning foreign relations was dominated by a debate over how best to squeeze England out of the continent and continue to make her reliant on American cotton. In 1818, American and British diplomats had agreed to the Canadian-American boundary at the forty-nine degree line to the Rockies. By 1844, several thousand Americans had migrated to the Oregon area—land along the forty-nine degree boundary line from the Rockies to the Pacific Ocean. The proliferation of rail facilitated this process and also made it possible to imagine the Northwest’s inclusion in the American project of empire building. For the Americans, the question was not whether Oregon would become part of the United States; it was how much of it would American expansion even dominated campaign politics. Martin Van Buren lost the

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136 See Hietala, op. cited, chapter 3. Here Hietala details how politicians, specifically during the Tyler and Polk administrations, viewed all American expansion as a competition with England.


138 Hietala, 71-83.
democratic nomination for president in 1844 because he opposed the annexation of Texas. Though Polk never explicitly voiced support for all of Oregon, ‘fifty-four forty or fight’ became the official democratic convention slogan. Thus, as president, Polk considered his victory—albeit by a slim margin—a mandate for expansion. Polk played a risky back-and-forth game with England about the Oregon issue. He had Secretary of State, James Buchanan present an offer to settle at forty-nine degrees. But when the British refused, Polk returned to the ‘54’ and ‘40’ demand. In 1845, Polk reaffirmed the Monroe Doctrine, specifically the noncolonization principle. He also asked Congress to extend American laws to the Oregon territory and recommended a military build up. American expansionist politicians from the south supported Polk’s aims. Mississippi senator Joseph Chalmers argued that the United States could either acquire all of Oregon or forfeit “commercial ascendancy” to Britain. In fact, some members of congress continued to voice frustration with agreements like the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, which they felt conceded far too much to the British. 

At the time, the threat of war seemed greater with Britain than it did with Mexico. And yet once again, American politicians understood their country’s military weakness against Britain, and backed away from aggressions. British Foreign minister Aberdeen agreed to the forty-nine degree line to the Straights of Georgia, leaving Vancouver Island for the British. Though Polk had often

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139 Ibid. Hietala makes a strong argument in chapter 3 that during the 1840s and 1850s the prevailing voices in the United States government became more concerned with England’s reliance on American raw materials, most notably cotton. For this reason, acquiring fertile land in Texas and winning the Mexican-American War became paramount.  
140 Cong. Globe, 29th Cong., 1st Sess., 186 (February 7, 1846); 259 (January 27, 1846).  
141 Hietala, 75.  
142 Hietala, 80.
publicly claimed this line was unacceptable, he acquiesced when the Senate voted in favor of the bill. Still, the arrangement was not enough for some. Bill Allen, the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee—nicknamed Foghorn Bill for his adamant stance on the forty-four and fight line—resigned in protest. *The New York Herald* was also displeased, but still expressed relief that the resolution freed the government’s resources to “thrash Mexico into decency at our leisure.”¹⁴³ This sentiment pleased southern states that viewed expansion into Mexican territory as a way to increase political and economic power in an effort to make British textile mills even more reliant on cotton.¹⁴⁴ The annexation of Texas and the Mexican American War were heavily imbued with this monopolistic endeavor. What is more, calls for northern expansion subsided as southern conquest occupied the country’s imperial energy. Nonetheless, the desire to rid the continent of England’s territorial control guided these policies.¹⁴⁵

Oregon, Texas, and the gains from the Mexican American War only temporarily satisfied the push for expansion that underlined American empire. In 1856, Congress passed the Guano Island Act allowing the United States to take possession of any “island, rock, or key with guano deposits on it that is not under control of a foreign government.”¹⁴⁶ Also during the 1850s, the U.S. government launched diplomatic initiatives to acquire Cuba and Hawaii. At the same time, the American politicians continued to trumpet the “manifest destiny principle for the

¹⁴⁴ Hietala. 64–71.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid.
¹⁴⁶ Act of August 18, 1856, 34th Cong, Sess. 1, ch. 164, 119.
United States to absorb all of North America.”¹⁴⁷ This position influenced American citizens who then felt emboldened and sanctioned to participate in filibustering along the northern border.

Contributing to this environment was the fact that, despite the enactment of neutrality laws directed against filibustering, the U.S. government had a tradition of tolerating filibusterers in the nineteenth century—paying lip service to international law by publicly denouncing American citizens who attacked a sovereign territory but then doing very little to punish the perpetrators.¹⁴⁸ As previously noted, Robert May noted that there were “occasions when federal authorities found it convenient to overlook, or even assist, filibuster plots in the expectation that they might eventuate in U.S. territorial growth.”¹⁴⁹ Before the Patriot Rebellions in Canada sparked a filibustering movement on the northern border in the late 1830s, President Andrew Jackson condemned filibusters and asked all United States district attorneys and military officers to monitor suspicious activities or recruiting for filibustering missions.¹⁵⁰ But as May points out, federal authorities in the Jackson administration often allowed border crossings by known filibusters, and Jackson did not enforce or even follow up on his demands. “By his leniency,” May concludes, “Old Hickory set a precedent of presidential impotence against filibustering that would be remembered.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Filibustering is defined in the introduction to this dissertation.
¹⁴⁹ Robert E. May, op. cited, 7.
¹⁵⁰ Andrew Jackson, Seventh Annual Address to Congress, December 7, 1835.
¹⁵¹ May, 10-11.
Fenians certainly understood this history and planned to continue the filibustering tradition with little repercussion.

American politicians’ aims of continental expansion and the transnational filibustering raids along the Canadian border made it abundantly clear to the British that their imperial control over the Canadian provinces needed reinforcement. Within one year of the Patriot Raids, British officials began the process of consolidating power in Canada by studying the most efficient ways to govern the provinces. In the “Report on the Affairs of British North American,” British politician, Lord Durham, recommend consolidating Upper Canada, roughly the area of Ontario, and Lower Canada, part of the Quebec and Labrador regions, into one province.\textsuperscript{152} In 1840, the British Parliament adopted Durham’s suggestions as law and, by February of 1841, the provinces officially become a united British colony. The Union covered the eastern Canadian provinces while the western half of what is today Canada, remained under the control of the British Hudson Bay Company.

Border treaties and the formation of the Canadian Union successfully deterred American filibustering into Canada for a time. But what also drew many adventurers away from the area was the popularity of filibustering to locations in central and South America.\textsuperscript{153} Expeditions to these regions during the 1840s and 1850s led by infamous filibusters Narciso Lopez, William Walker, and John Quitman were widely reported by the American press and even celebrated in

\textsuperscript{153} See May, op cited, chapter 7.
songs and plays. Nonetheless, American plans to filibuster in Canada did not completely fade. John Brown obtained weapons in the 1850s from “an Ohio filibustering society called the Grand Eagles, whose members had indulged in fantasies of attacking and conquering Canada.” Beyond John Brown’s brief mention of this organization, there is little evidence of subsequent filibustering in Canada in the 1850s. By the end of the decade, it appeared that filibustering fever had declined due to the onset of the conflicts that led to the Civil War. The martial unrest that many American males had placed in expansionist activities such as filibustering had been replaced by a sectional conflict that led to an all-encompassing war.

The Expansionist Dilemma-

The domestic acrimony in the United States that led to the Civil War also complicated expansionists’ political debates in Washington D.C. Interest in the annexation of Canada remained, but the escalating conflict between the North and South thwarted any efforts. Northern democrats had become disenchanted with Polk and southern democrats who they felt misrepresented and manipulated events to ensure the annexations of Texas. In 1846, Whig Congressman, Caleb Smith, accused Polk and his supporters of pursuing only southern interests.

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156 Hietala, 220.
The acquisition of California, he argued, was “desired as a means of extending and perpetuation the power and influence of the South.” As the 1850s progressed, American politicians began to view expansion predominantly through the paradigm of the northern versus southern struggle—over whether newly added territory would be slave or free. Even when it was not explicitly stated, the debate in Congress over expansion was centered on slavery. As such, the absorption of Canada would have upset the balance of free and slave states.

American expansionists, then, looked to a more gradual process to bring Canada into the American imperial fold. When the British Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, the tax for Canadian goods entering the American market increased. In response, merchants in Montreal lobbied for annexation to the United States so that they had access to American markets and goods. The annexation movement in Canada spread, and “the possibility of Union with the United States received wide circulation in the provinces.” Instead of annexation, however, the British and U.S. governments negotiated a new trade deal whereby most Canadian raw materials were to be accepted into the United States duty free. In exchange, the Americans obtained expanded fishing rights on the east coast and greater navigation rights in shared lakes and rivers.

Officially enacted in 1854, the Reciprocity Treaty appeased American expansionists who viewed the arrangement as not only economically advantageous but also as a way to endear Canadians to American political and

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158 Robert Bothwell also argues this point in op. cited. Introduction.
159 Stuart, 196.
160 Ibid, 197.
161 Ibid, 200.
economic systems. The American Democratic Review, for example, advocated for the end of the British colonial system in Canada because it felt that the British crown did “not have any legal right to continue her present government there.” The Chicago Democrat maintained that the “best way to prevent the escape of slaves is to annex Canada.” The New York Times agreed, and concluded that there was “now nothing between us [the United States] and the utter expulsion of British rule from this hemisphere.” Yet in the end, American expansionists felt that Canada would—much like Texas had—shed her imperial ties and assert her intention to become part of the American republic. As historian Reginald Stuart concluded, “in the American mind, republican liberty, free enterprise, prosperity, and moral superiority constituted a magnetic force that would inevitably capture other people.” This exceptionalist belief, coupled with the increasing sectional animosity prevented an aggressive American annexation of Canada in the 1850s and continued to influence American foreign policy regarding the British North American provinces after the war.

Nonetheless, the American Civil War did alter Anglo-American relations.

The American anger over the British aide to the Confederacy during the Civil War

162 Stuart examines this issue in op. cited, pages 197-210. Secretary of State, William Marcy, was one of the most notable examples of this point of view. On pages 201-202, Stuart makes the case that a different tact taken by American politicians concerning the annexation of Canada in the 1850s also reflected a shift in American foreign policy from defensive expansion centered on security to one governed by commercial interests. American policymakers, he argues, “sought liberal commercial arrangements to supplement the private enterprise expansionism of frontiersmen and entrepreneurs.” (202).
163 “Who owns British North America.” The American Democratic Review, August 31, 1852, 113-114. Also see “Commercial Reciprocity and the American System.” United States Magazine and Democratic Review, May 14, 1844, 447-64. Stuart also details other examples from American press that reinforced this idea on pages 206-208, op. cited.
166 Stuart, 209.
led Secretary of State William Seward to cancel the Reciprocity Treaty. Many Canadians responded with disdain for their southern neighbors. One Canadian newspaper defiantly concluded that the Americans learned that they could not use the Reciprocity Treaty to “drive a hard bargain” to push Canadians into annexation.\textsuperscript{167} The Civil War shifted the American outlook on Canada and Britain. During the war, northern Americans grew frustrated that “the provinces became a refuge for Union draft dodgers, escaped prisoners, and Confederate raiders.”\textsuperscript{168} For these reasons, along with perceived British assistance to the Confederates in light of the Trent Affair and the Alabama claims, many Americans demanded Canada as a punishment.\textsuperscript{169} The tense Anglo-American dynamic, coupled with the strident belief among many Americans in their right to control of the continent, heavily influenced the Fenians decision to invade Canada.

It is from this history of Anglo-American relations over Canada that the Fenians emerged. Many Americans viewed Canada as unsettled space, land to be conquered by the force of American governance. As a result, the imperial competition between the United States and Britain on the North American continent created numerous international problems such as border disagreements, skirmishes, and another Anglo-American war. Perhaps none of these events were as surprising as the Fenian Brotherhood invading Canada. And yet, a more focused examination of Anglo-American relations concerning

\textsuperscript{167} “Coming to their Senses.” \textit{The Hastings Chronicle}, June 27, 1866

\textsuperscript{168} Stuart, 218.

\textsuperscript{169} These sentiments are detailed in chapter 3 of this dissertation. Canadian newspapers decried any support for Fenian acts in Canada as justified given what had taken place during the American Civil War.
Canada reveals that the Fenians were not acting on impulse. They were instead informed by the annals of American foreign relations that positioned Canada as an inevitable possession of the United States. Even when that failed to happen, the undying principles of American manifest destiny still deemed it a possibility for the future. The Fenians believed in the power of this gospel and acted on its promise.
Chapter Two
Imperial Consequences:
The Transnational Irish Nationalist Movement

In 1880, William Hall, an English lawyer and noted scholar of international law, wrote about the American government’s role in the Fenian invasions of Canada. He argued that it would be difficult to find more “typical instances of responsibility assumed by a state through the permission of open acts and of notorious acts, and by way of complicity after the acts.”¹ To support his claims, Hall pointed out that the Fenians had held multiple public meetings in the U.S. where they declared their intentions to invade Canada, and that they spent several months preparing with little attempt to conceal their plans. Hall then concluded that the Fenians had invaded Canada without opposition from U.S. authorities. When members of the Brotherhood were caught after the invasion, Hall pointed out that several U.S. Congressmen asked the President to pressure the courts for an abandonment of all charges. The courts complied and, by October of 1866, “arms taken from the Fenians were restored.”² For Hall, the U.S. government not only deserved scrutiny for its lack of action in 1866, but also for a similar event in 1838 when a group of men in New York obtained arms from a government arsenal and attacked Canada, conducting a raid “in the presence of a regiment of militia, which made no attempt to interfere.”³ Using both events as evidence of American violation of international law, Hall noted that war could

² Ibid.
³ Ibid. This reprisal took place during the Patriot Raids in Canada examined in greater detail in chapter one of this dissertation.
easily have been an acceptable reaction by Great Britain as a remedy to protect
its North American colonies in the Canadian provinces.

While Hall may have been biased as an Englishman, he was nonetheless
accurate in his assessment of the Fenian attacks on Canada. On multiple
occasions, leaders of the Brotherhood had made public declarations of their
intentions to invade Canada, and the United States government had done
nothing to stop them.\(^4\) These facts raise significant questions about the
motivations of American politicians, as well as about the Fenians themselves.\(^5\)
Who were these Irish American filibusters, and how did they come to believe that
invading Canada was plausible?\(^6\)

Although scholarship on the Irish in America during the nineteenth century
has been profuse, only a few have examined the ways members of populous and
thriving immigrant communites were able to challenge and shape U.S. foreign
relations.\(^7\) For over forty years, Brian Jenkins’s, *Fenians and Anglo-American
Relations during Reconstruction*, has remained the prime source on this issue.\(^8\)
Jenkins' work has been fundamental to understanding the precarious relationship
between the United States and Britain leading to rapprochement. But Jenkins’s
focus was state-centric in its approach and the Fenians are secondary characters

\(^{4}\) Examples will be presented throughout this chapter.
\(^{5}\) The efforts by American politicians to annex Canada are detailed in chapter one of this
dissertation.
\(^{6}\) I am using the term filibusters in the same manner that Robert E. May does in his examination
of antebellum men who “raised or participated in private military forces that either invaded or
planned to invade foreign countries with which the United States was formally at peace.” May, op.
cited, xi. May’s definition is also discussed in the introduction to this dissertation. As will be
discussed later in this chapter, there were also female Fenians. But for the purposes of this study,
which will focus on the Fenian who invaded Canada, the Fenian Brotherhood was largely a male
organization.
\(^{7}\) For a brief overview of the scholarship on Irish American immigration during the nineteenth
century please refer to the introduction of this dissertation.
\(^{8}\) Brian Jenkins, op. cited.
in his narrative. It was only a few years ago that historian David Sim offered a new perspective, placing the Fenian Brotherhood at the center of U.S. foreign policy to further explore how non-state actors shape international relations. Sim’s contributions are valuable to the field, but he does not fully investigate why the Fenians believed invading and conquering Canada was something they could achieve, nor does he examine the invasion of Canada in the context of American Empire. The Fenians were motivated by more than just Irish nationalism. Paying attention to them as more than just disrupters of American foreign relations is crucial to accessing the complex fabric of empire and its unintended consequences. By thoroughly assessing the evolution of the Fenian Brotherhood and the ways its members aligned their beliefs with American republicanism—and by extension, American expansion—we gain a deeper understanding of how this group of immigrants was a by-product of two empires, albeit an unconventional one.

While the Fenians were trying to strike at Britain and deepen the fissure in Anglo-American relations, they also spoke the same manifest destiny and expansionist language of other Americans, particularly politicians. The Fenians ardently believed that they were carrying Washington’s torch in ridding the continent of British occupation. They understood that traveling to Ireland and launching attacks against British forces was unfeasible compared to the potential for a successful strike in Canada with, what they believed, would be the backing

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9 David Sim, op. cit.
10 A history of the American political rhetoric of expansion concerning Canada is detailed in chapter one of this dissertation.
11 Evidence of this is included throughout this chapter.
of the U.S. government. American citizenship afforded the Fenians a different path than that of their Irish brethren, one paved by the project of American empire building. The irony, of course, is that they were victims of British Empire, immigrating to the United States as a way out of the economic discrimination in Ireland, and often escaping political and criminal persecution for their beliefs. They were exiles, condemning the British for unjustly colonizing Ireland. And yet in the United States, the Fenians became filibusters and agents or perpetrators of American Empire—propagating American expansion to further their cause. The Fenians have never before been studied within this context.

Fenian Roots-

Like other immigrant communities in the United States, Irish Americans—both immigrants and native-born Americans—came together in social and political clubs for a variety of reasons. Historian Thomas Brown has concluded that the Irish in America were drawn to these kinds of organizations because they were “afflicted with loneliness.”\textsuperscript{12} Although the exiled emigrant seeking a greater communal connection was one reason many Irish Americans sought out membership in clubs and organizations, there were also those who those who wanted to take a more active role in achieving their nationalist goals. Thanks to political freedom, money, and other resources, they were able to gather in ways that were impossible in Ireland. Of course, not all Irish Americans found common

ground with one another. Religious and ethnic differences often split communities. Irish American Protestants, for example, often tried to distance themselves from Irish Catholics by joining nativist political organizations such as the Know Nothing Party. Noted historian of Irish immigration, Kerby Miller, has examined the divergent Irish immigrant communities in the United States and emphasized the Great Famine and subsequent mass immigration as a central force guiding Irish American resentment of the British and of Irish American Protestant communities. According to Miller, the collective feeling of exile among famine immigrants and the poverty that most experienced in American urban centers fueled an active community. Social and political groups offered an outlet from an often harsh working environment where usually Catholic Irish Americans faced religious, ethnic, and class discrimination. For others, these organizations offered more than just companionship and camaraderie. They were a source of upward mobility, a space to develop economic and political connections unavailable to Irish Americans in other areas of their lives.

The Fenian Brotherhood was one such organization, it provided political and economic opportunities for many Irish American men. In fact, the organization developed reputation for its ability to “turn a nobody into a

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15 Brown, op. cit. Brown viewed Irish American political groups as a mechanism for assimilation. Brown also argued that Irish Americans organized into political and social groups as an expression of lower class solidarity.
somebody.” Ideologically, the Fenian brotherhood embodied the cultural and national hybridity of many immigrants. Founded on the principal of Irish republicanism and governed by an American expansionist sentiment, the Fenian Brotherhood lured prospective members with promises of prestige and martyrdom. As historian Timothy Lynch contends, by “stressing not just an independent Ireland but an Irish republic, the Fenians and other Irish nationalists organizations consciously embraced one of the most potent themes in American society.” Irish American nationalism was heavily tied to American republicanism. But this connection is not surprising given the tendencies of Irish Americans to also align themselves with American racist beliefs as a means of assimilation into a white hierarchy. Whiteness studies have expanded views concerning Irish acculturation in the nineteenth century. But racial assimilation was not the only method to American membership utilized by Irish Americans. Republican ideologies, encompassed in America’s manifest destiny to conquer the continent and spread her superior system of governance, captured the popular imagination of many antebellum Americans. By embracing this belief system, “Irish nationalism made it possible to be proudly American even while retaining political ties and affection for the land of origin.” For the Fenians, Irish

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16 Ibid, 41. Perhaps there is no greater example of this than John O’Neil, the general who lead the Fenian invasion into Canada. O’Neil will be discussed in further detail throughout this chapter and in later chapters of this dissertation.
18 This is also addressed in the introduction to this dissertation.
19 Most notably, David Roediger and Noel Igantiev address this process as referenced in the introduction to this dissertation.
20 Lynch, 80.
American nationalism and American republicanism were not only compatible, they shared an undying spirit for the same perceived principles of liberty.

The origins of Irish American nationalism can be traced back to the last several decades of the eighteenth century when the American and French Revolutions inspired sweeping reform movements throughout the world. In the spring of 1791, almost twenty thousand copies of Thomas Paine’s *The Rights of Man* were sold in Ireland alone.\(^{21}\) A few months later, liberals gathered in Belfast to celebrate the two-year anniversary of the fall of Bastille. At the meeting, Theobald Wolfe Tone, an Irish politician, mobilized supporters to form The Society of the United Irishmen. Tone also proposed resolutions to remove the British establishment from Irish affairs, reform the Irish parliament, and to create a union of religious faiths by giving Catholics political rights as well as abolishing the differences “that had long divided Irishmen.”\(^{22}\) Although Tone was Protestant, he ardently believed that the inclusion of Catholics was essential for Ireland’s path to independence from British rule.\(^{23}\)

The establishment of Tone’s United Irishmen—and the assertive push for Irish independence by Tone and his followers—was a response to hundreds of years of colonization by the British that began in 1536 when Henry VIII seized Ireland from the ruling feudal families. Bloody conflicts and rebellions ensued for over half a century until 1607, when the last remaining chieftains opposed to English rule fled Ireland for mainland Europe in the Flight of the Earls. During his

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\(^{23}\) Tone’s mother was Catholic but converted to Protestantism when she married Tone’s father.
reign, Stuart King of England, James I, employed a plantation system to settle Ireland with Anglican English and Presbyterian Scots, and to displace the native Irish inhabitants of land. This removal process was particularly effective in the northern Ulster region.\textsuperscript{24}

Nonetheless, Irish rebellions against English rule continued and reached an extremely violent period in the 1640s. Experiencing its own civil war, the ruling governing body in England, known as the Commonwealth, sent military general Oliver Cromwell to Ireland in 1649 to make the native Irish pay for their resistance to Protestants and to continue the settlement of Ireland, according to historian Eileen Reilly, “in a manner satisfactory to England and Protestantism.”\textsuperscript{25}

Among other harsh actions, Cromwell forcibly removed several thousand Catholic Irish from their homes in Ulster and marched them to lands west of the Shannon River. Protestant settlers—including high-ranking military officers—took ownership of the confiscated property in the east. Unfortunately for Cromwell, many of the new Protestant landowners did not want to farm in Ireland and quickly sold their land to Protestant landowners who “took advantage of the opportunity to add large tracts of land to their existing estates.”\textsuperscript{26} Since these large Protestant estates needed tenant farmers, the Catholic Irish returned to Ulster as laborers. Similar transitions took place over much of Ireland. Moreover, Cromwell’s goal of converting the papist Irish to Protestantism had failed, setting the region on course for constant tension between two religions, both of which

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 69.
claimed rights to Ireland. Over the next one hundred years, the Protestants were largely able to maintain hegemony with the help of restrictive policies. In the Irish Parliament, they enacted series of Penal Laws that prevented Catholics from participating in politics, owning land, bearing arms, or even seeking education abroad.27

Many liberal Irish Protestants also resented British rule in Ireland and were sympathetic to the plight of the Catholics. But at the end of the eighteenth century, Wolfe Tone was the first to publically advocate for a unified front where Catholics and Protestants came together to rid Ireland of British occupation. He also eloquently argued for Irish republicanism, publishing several popular pamphlets and books addressing the subject—including his Declarations and Resolutions of the United Irishmen of Belfast (1791)—where he explained the significance of Catholic and Protestants unity for pursuit of a free Ireland. “We have no national government,” Tone declared, “we are ruled by Englishmen, and thus servants of Englishmen, whose object is the interest of another country, whose instrument is corruption; whose strength is the weakness of Ireland.”28

Support for Tone’s organization quickly spread from Belfast and Dublin to the surrounding counties of Armagh, Clonmel, Limerick, and Lisburn. Although Ulster Protestants made up a large portion of the membership, in 1795 a Catholic agrarian secret society, called the Defenders, joined the ranks and played a key role in uniting the two religious groups around a collective faith in Irish independence. Relying on the increasing accessibility of newspapers, Tone and

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27 Ibid.
28 Tone, op. cited, 367. Tone also published: An argument on Behalf of the Catholics of Ireland (Belfast: United Society of Irishmen, 1791).
his United Irishmen were also able to gain greater membership and support through *The Belfast Newsletter*, and later his own print, *The Northern Star*.29

The Society of United Irishmen set the groundwork and guiding principles for future Irish nationalist groups. Not only did the Fenian Brotherhood and Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.) later canonize Wolfe Tone and incorporate his beliefs into their doctrines, they used the press to gain support and membership.30 They also struggled as he did. Over time, Tone and the other leaders of the Society of United Irishmen eventually came to disagree over the best path to achieve their goals, and infighting ultimately undermined the organization’s stability and stalled momentum.31 Nonetheless, the Society of United Irishmen’s biggest hurdle was the fracturing religious divisions among its members, with Presbyterians representing the Belfast interests and Catholics defending Dublin. Making matters more difficult for the organization, the Irish Parliament outlawed Irish nationalist groups after France declared war on Britain in 1793. As the French Revolution gave rise to the infamous Reign of Terror, many middle class Irish Presbyterians, who were members of the Society of United Irishmen and had advocated for an independent Ireland, turned against the movement, further weakening its resolve. Irish republicanism had fallen prey to sectarianism.32

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29 Connolly, 447.
30 Later Irish American organizations named themselves after Tone and other Irish nationalist martyrs. Many of these groups are mentioned throughout the rest of this chapter. The founder of the Fenian Brotherhood, John O’Mahony also referred to Tone and others while building the organization. This is also discussed later in this chapter.
31 The Fenians experienced a similar fate, which will be examined in chapter three of this dissertation.
32 Connolly, 447.
Tone and his remaining followers launched several ill-advised attempts at rebellions in 1798, but were unsuccessful, and each time met with a brutal response from British colonial forces. Eventually, Tone was captured and died in prison, becoming a martyr for the cause and solidifying his legacy as the man who “inaugurated the tradition of revolutionary republicanism.”

Events in Ireland during the early nineteenth century deepened this spirit. In 1801, British and Irish parliaments voted to pass the Act of Union, officially incorporating Ireland into the British Empire—after which it was formally referred to as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

Robert Emmet, another Protestant Irish liberal, opposed the union and maintained that the lack of Catholic representation in parliament was unjust. He revitalized the United Irishmen and led rebellions in 1803, but was captured and later executed. Much like Tone, Emmet figured prominently in the evolution of Irish nationalism due to his sacrifice and his rhetorical talent. Before his sentencing, Emmet delivered a powerful speech where he accepted his death for the cause of Irish freedom. As with Tone’s, his words would later influence the founders of the IRB and the Fenian Brotherhood.

The other group of Irish nationalists that had a considerable impact on the creation of the I.R.B. and the Fenian Brotherhood was the Young Irelanders. By 1841, the population of Ireland was over eight million with the majority of its

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33 Reilly, 80.
34 There are several different versions of Robert Emmet’s Speech from the Dock, but they are all similar in spirit.
35 Connolly, 450.
residents relying on agriculture to survive.\textsuperscript{36} The potato had long been the staple crop for subsistence in Ireland, as other higher paying crops and livestock were often sold away in order to pay the high rents. While the potato crop had occasionally failed in previous years, the blight that hit Ireland in 1845 eventually led to the death of approximately one million people, and the emigration of millions more.\textsuperscript{37} Over eight hundred thousand Irish immigrated to the United States alone between 1841 and 1850.\textsuperscript{38} The decade following Ireland’s ‘Great Famine’ witnessed a new Irish republican movement that “embodied the ghost of revolutions past and articulated once again the call to arms.”\textsuperscript{39} The revolutions that spread through mainland Europe in 1848 also revitalized Irish republicanism. That same year, a group of young Irish nationalists (Young Irishers) organized in Dublin, forming a confederation to once again push for an independent Ireland.

Across the Atlantic, Irish Americans also mobilized by challenging nativism, prejudice, and discrimination, and by garnering greater support in their crusade against Anglo oppression in the United States. This period marked a shift in direction for most Irish Americans nationalists. According to historian John Belchem, in the two decades prior to 1848, “Irish nationalists in America were constrained by residual allegiance to Daniel O’Connell, a relationship of mutual misunderstanding.”\textsuperscript{40} O’Connell was a savvy politician in Ireland who picked up the mantle of republicanism in the decades after Tone and Emmett. Though he

\textsuperscript{36} Reilly, 90.
\textsuperscript{37} Christine Kinealy, \textit{This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845-52} (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1994), 357.
\textsuperscript{38} Donald Harman Akenson, \textit{The Irish Diaspora: A Primer} (Belfast: P.D. Meany & Company, 1993).
\textsuperscript{39} Reilly, 96.
worked tirelessly for Catholic emancipation and the repeal of the Act of Union between England and Ireland, he also made unpopular concessions to British liberals and often received patronage from them. The new wave of young Irish nationalists resented O’Connell’s conciliatory approach and demanded immediate changes. When O’Connell died in 1847, the Young Irelanders pushed for aggressive protests and rebellion. But when the Irish parliament suspended habeas corpus in July of 1848, the movement waned before it had ever gained serious momentum. Many Young Irelanders were sentenced to labor in Bermuda and Van Diemen’s Land. The incident was another reminder of how difficult it was for a marginalized group to disrupt imperial power in Ireland.

A few members of the Young Irelanders were able to escape persecution. James Stephens and John O’Mahony fled to Paris where they found a community of similarly minded people. In 1853, after the political temperature had cooled, O’Mahony immigrated to the United States and Stephens returned to Dublin. In two years time, Stephens revitalized the Irish republicanism movement and created a new organization called the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Inspired by Wolfe Tone, Robert Emmett, and the Young Irelanders, the Brotherhood quickly gained momentum and officially established itself as the new bearer of Irish nationalism in Dublin in 1858. Like its predecessors, the association focused on creating an independent Irish republic. But unlike earlier movements, mid-nineteenth century Irish nationalism had a greater support system in the United States—that not only included money but arms and men as well. The same year

41 Ibid. Belchem discusses how O’Connell “announced that in returns for Repeal he would support Britain in Oregon and Texas.”
42 Ibid.
Stephens organized the IRB, O’Mahony created the Fenian Brotherhood in the U.S. to help sustain the cause.\textsuperscript{43}

This is not to say that Tone and Emmet did not have American allies during their tenures. In fact, as historian David Wilson argues, “modern, secular, republican form of Irish-American nationalism originated with the United Irishmen who arrived between 1795 and 1806.”\textsuperscript{44} Tone had even traveled to New York and Philadelphia in 1796 to seek the support of French agents there who he hoped would support the cause of Irish liberty.\textsuperscript{45} During the late eighteenth century, however, Americans used the term ‘United Irishmen’ in a variety of ways. To Federalists, United Irishmen referred to any radical democrat who opposed their policies (much as the term Jacobin was used). To many others, United Irishmen were only those men who had been sworn into the organization and attended meetings. In his analysis of the United Irishmen in America, Wilson describes three types of individuals: those who took the United Irish oath either publically or in secret, those who actively supported the principles and practices of United Irishmen but did not actually become members, and those who were born in Ireland but had immigrated to the U.S. between 1791 and 1798 and backed the


movement from afar.\textsuperscript{46} For the last group, financial support was the most common expression of solidarity.

The United Irishmen was a transatlantic organization but lacked cohesive social and political principles because its members had a stronger sense of “what they were against than what they were for.”\textsuperscript{47} For example, in the U.S., the issue of slavery divided the group—with some supporting it and others opposed. As Wilson notes, too often though, the American incarnation of the United Irishmen’s “radical egalitarianism” was not extended to African Americans or Native Americans, nor did it include women or the emerging trade union movement.\textsuperscript{48} Similar to the issues that plagued the organization in Ireland, the American faction struggled to remain a unified group. Personality clashes and competition over patronage spoils, as well as a power struggle to win support of the Irish American community often divided members. Nonetheless, these Irish nationalists “integrated into the political environment in the United States” through a hatred of England shared by most Americans at the time.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, Irish American nationalism appeared to experience greater success when more Americans resented Britain.

In this manner, the War of 1812 was a watershed moment for the United Irishmen. Its members could fight England, even if was as a member of the military for their adopted country. Though the American victory was a blow to the

\textsuperscript{46} Wilson, 10.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 9. Irish American racism is examined in greater detail by David Roediger and Noel Ignatiev, op. cited. Women were seen as vital only for their supportive role of Irish republicanism. This was particularly true of the Fenian Brotherhood and is addressed later in this chapter
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 8.
British Empire, it was an even bigger triumph for the United Irishmen. For Wilson, “America served a powerful symbolic and psychological function for the United Irishmen; it was a place of wish-fulfillment, where the broken dreams of the failed Irish revolution could actually be realized.” This tradition—where American imperial growth became the panacea for Irish nationalist frustration—continued and eventually became one of the underlining forces in the development of the Fenian Brotherhood.

Thus, the Fenian Brotherhood was not a starting point in the transatlantic Irish republican movement, but rather an integral part of its evolution. Before the Fenians were organizing armies and purchasing weapons, Irish Americans tried to send arms and funds to the Young Irelanders. Belchem points out that not only did the 1848 uprisings in Europe trigger a movement in Ireland, they “electrified Irish-America.” Early that year, the Boston Confederation of Irish nationalists established the American Emergency Fund. A few months later, a New York contingent, called the Irish Republican Union (I.R.U.), gathered to discuss sending weapons and men to assist the Irish rebels. The I.R.U. eventually made arrangements with French republicans to send arms to France in preparation for a rebellion in Ireland, and called on other Irish American organizations to provide men and money for an ‘Irish Brigade’ that would fight for freedom in Ireland. From the Emmet Association of Newark to the Boston

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50 Ibid, 7-9.
51 John Belchem, op. cited, 44-64, 46.
52 For the Boston Confederation see reports in Boston Pilot, Feb. 12, 1848-Mar. 4, 1848. Belchem, 46, discusses Irish American efforts to subsidize the Young Irelanders.
53 Belchem, 48.
Confederation, responses were enthusiastic.\textsuperscript{54} New York City was one of the hubs of Irish American political agitation. In addition to fund-raising and gathering arms for a revolution in Ireland, the I.R.U lobbied the Polk administration to maintain the Monroe Doctrine and prevent European intervention on the American continent. Similar groups in Boston, Albany, and New Orleans followed suit. \textsuperscript{55}

Comparable to how Fenian military strength later benefited from counting veterans of the American Civil War among its ranks, the I.R.U. was able to recruit a considerable amount of Irish American veterans from the Mexican-American War. In the summer of 1848, the I.R.U. organized these experienced recruits and sent military “emissaries” in “small bands” to Ireland.\textsuperscript{56} When it was clear that a full-scale revolt had failed in Ireland, the I.R.U. considered invading Canada—aligning the Irish cause with “the great American mission of republican expansionism.”\textsuperscript{57} The I.R.U. believed, as the Fenians did later, that Canada should be transferred from an empire of tyranny (British) to and empire of freedom (American). As an explicit endorsement of colonizing Canada, the I.R.U.’s second report stated:

\begin{quote}
Canada contains hundreds of thousands of patriotic Irishmen and of Canadians, who sigh for annexation to this great and glorious republic. The presence of a standing army in the New World, representing and supporting the tyranny of the old, is a nuisance that must be abolished… It is therefore our manifest duty to Ireland, to Canada, and to Freedom, to send such agencies as we deem most efficient to prepare the people of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{54} See the \textit{United Irishmen}, May 13, 1848; and the \textit{Boston Pilot}, May 6, 1848.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Belchem, 58
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
that oppressed colony for annexation to the United States, and thus complete the work that Washington began.\textsuperscript{58}

The I.R.U. had fully embraced the principles of American manifest destiny. The organization’s report made it clear that members saw Canada as a threat to the U.S. as long it was under British rule. Furthermore, members believed that they were the standard-bearers of the American republic, carrying Washington’s torch to all oppressed people, including Canadians living under occupation. Less than two decades later, the Fenians repeated this ideology to justify their invasion of Canada.

Perhaps the most significant precedent set during the time of the I.R.U that would later impact the Fenians was how the U.S. government responded to the I.R.U.’s military branch, the Irish Brigade. When Irish authorities detained two leaders of the I.R.U. in Ireland for supporting an insurrection and charged them with treason, American politicians advocated for their release. Secretary of State James Buchannan rejected the British doctrine of perpetual allegiance—whereby a British citizens was one for life—arguing that the two men in question had become naturalized American citizens, and thus, could not commit treason against a foreign government.\textsuperscript{59} For Irish American nationalists, the U.S. government had come to their defense. The move emboldened Irish nationalists and set a tone for what they would hope to expect from American politicians. In these ways, America appeared essential to the cause of Irish independence.

And yet, while the U.S. government used the incident to flex its diplomatic muscle—consequently bolstering the confidence of Irish American agitators—

\textsuperscript{58} I.R.U. Second Report, as quoted in Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Belchem, 62.
many Irish Americans retreated from the cause and began assimilating into middle class America.\textsuperscript{60} The I.R.U. movement, according to Belchem, had more rhetorical power than anything else, and “it was left to less celebrated exiles to establish Fenianism, linking Ireland and Irish-America in an exclusive physical-force nationalism which repudiated any social platform or extraneous support.”\textsuperscript{61} The mass presence of famine immigrants in the U.S. had stirred nativist unrest, and with it, stereotypes of the Irish as incapable of the birth rite of American republicanism.\textsuperscript{62} After riots against Irish American Catholics in 1844, the I.R.U. pulled back from aggressive militant positions. Nonetheless, the organization had set a precedent of aligning itself with American constitutional values to safeguard the “crucial advance from repeal to republicanism, a political progression in accordance with American precedent.”\textsuperscript{63} These Irish Americans believed that they were simply acting as private citizen soldiers of mankind’s great army for republicanism, just like the American patriots of 1776.

The Fenian Brotherhood built on the gains made by the I.R.U., and further bridged their aims with American republicanism. While both organizations benefitted from what historians Patrick Steward and Bryan McGovern describe as the American nineteenth century “modernization of state governmental structures, including the rise of democracy, industrialization, urbanization, and

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid. Belchem concludes that in the United States, many Young Irelanders exiles exposed the social conservatives of the movement.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 49.


\textsuperscript{63} Belchem, 49.
globalization,” the Fenians mobilized support in a rapid progression.\textsuperscript{64} For example, when John O’Mahony arrived in New York in 1853, he quickly began scouting for Irish Americans interested in organizing for the purposes of supplying money and arms to Irish nationalists in Ireland. What began as a small group of thirty men soon grew into a vast network that encompassed multiple eastern American cities.\textsuperscript{65} Emboldened by the potential for a transnational coalition with an American group that could provide men and money, Stephens established the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Dublin on March 17, 1858. Having witnessed the Catholic clergy try to undermine the movement in 1848 when he spoke against them, Stephens’ required all I.R.B. members to take an oath. Much like the I.R.B., the Fenian Brotherhood also began as a semi-secret society. In 1858, Stephens traveled to the United States and “laid the foundation” for the organization with O’Mahony.\textsuperscript{66} Together, the two men drafted a document giving Stephens “supreme control” of both organizations, as well as in Australia and in England.\textsuperscript{67} Based on this founding, the Fenian Brotherhood was meant to be subservient to the I.R.B.

O’Mahony was not only well versed in Irish republicanism from his participation in the Young Irelanders movement, but also because his father had been a member of the United Irishmen, and had participated in the Irish rebellion of 1798. A former Gaelic language scholar himself, O’Mahony named the Fenian

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{The Irish People} (Dublin) May 30, 1866, folder A149, Fenian Brotherhood Files, National Archives of Ireland. From now on, the Fenian Brotherhood files will be known as FBF, and the National Archives of Ireland will be known at NAI.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
organization after the ancient warrior group, Fianna, or Feonin, from a period when “Ireland was a nation and her people protected themselves again the encroachment of all invaders.” For O’Mahony and his followers, the Fenian Brotherhood was the only Irish American organization that had “enunciated the true principle of Irish independence, since the days of Wolfe Tone and Emmet.” Irish Americans, they argued, owed a debt to the land of their birth, and that unless a bold effort was made, their ‘race’ and ‘nationality' would cease. While the Fenians were certainly not the only organization that used hyperbolic rhetoric to garner support, they would come to rely on it quite often. They frequently reminded their fellow Irish Americans that England deserved the blame for the famine. It was a tactic that O’Mahony hoped would stir famine migrants and result in a massive Irish American mobilization for the cause.

Fenian Expansion-

The Fenians declared their lofty objectives at meetings and public gatherings across the country. At the second Brotherhood Congressional convention in 1865, Fenian leader James Gibbons declared: “let Fenian circles be established in every community where Irishmen reside, [so that] every man of Irish birth and lineage, who loved Ireland, and is willing to aid in her restorations shall become a member of the Fenian Brotherhood.” Gibbons also called on all

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68 William G. Halpin to H.H. Smith. May 20, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
69 The Irish American (New York) February 11, 1865, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
70 Ibid.
71 The Irish American, February 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
Irish-Americans, particularly “those of us that are in exile,” to offer arms and soldiers to their “countrymen at home.”\(^\text{72}\) The battle against England, according to the leaders of the organization, required a transnational and armed resistance. This bellicose tone was echoed by the central Fenian organizer in New England, W.J. Hynes, who claimed that the object of the organization was “to liberate Ireland from the despotic rule of England, not to entreat diplomacy, but by the sword.”\(^\text{73}\) Only with the Fenians, Hynes believed, could the Irish accomplish these goals. Hynes also made an important distinction about the unique character of the organization compared to nationalists in Ireland. He noted that Fenians “were sworn to maintain faithful allegiance to the United States.”\(^\text{74}\) The Fenians were different from the Irish Republican Brotherhood, not only in the greater resources they had access to, but also in their dual allegiance.

O’Mahony was even more forceful in his speeches, declaring that the Brotherhood was “virtually at war with the Oligarchy of Great Britain.”\(^\text{75}\) He reminded Irish Americans that despite their privileged status as citizens of the United States (when compared to those in Ireland), they were not to forget that Ireland had been under colonial rule for over two hundred years since the Confederation of Kilenny in 1642. Although the Irish parliament sat in Dublin, it was “foreign to the soil and hostile to the people,” because the British parliament had passed a law that prevented Irish nationalists from “meeting in convention in

\(^{72}\) Ibid.
\(^{73}\) Address of the Officers of the Shawmut Division of the Fenian Brotherhood to the people of New England (Boston: Rockwell and Rollins, 1866), 4. A119, FBF, NAI.
\(^{74}\) Ibid.
a legislative capacity.”\textsuperscript{76} The Fenian Congress, he explained, “acts as part of a national assembly of an Irish Republic. Our organized friends in Ireland constitute its army.”\textsuperscript{77} It was a bold statement, for O'Mahony had declared that the only safe place for the government of an Irish republic was in the United States.

But in the first months of 1865, \textit{The Irish American}—a newspaper dedicated to the Fenian Brotherhood—recommended the formation of a military corps by the younger members of the Brotherhood in American cities and towns. The purpose of a creating a military unit was so that the Brotherhood could hold itself in constant readiness, “either to sail at once for Europe or to march into the British Provinces at the command of the United States authorities… the chances of successful invasion would be greatly increased by our being found ready.”\textsuperscript{78} In New York, O'Mahony had already established a “military engineering class,” a bank account, and a staff to maintain the treasury and correspondence of the organization.\textsuperscript{79} One of the bank note companies even printed bonds in the name of the Irish Republic and “negotiations were made” for the purchase of eight ocean steamers—each able to carry one thousand men—and large caches of weapons from the U.S. government.\textsuperscript{80} O'Mahony had not only created a small government that operated within the borders of the United States, he had also formed its own military regiments. Already, the Fenians had benefitted from being an American organization.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{The Irish American}, February 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.  
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{79} The \textit{New York Daily News} (New York) January 2, 1866, folder A11, FBF, NAI.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
The American Civil War also played a significant role in the extent to which the Fenian Brotherhood “began to reflect its American environment.”

Perhaps most significantly, the war was an ideal environment for Brotherhood recruiting and training. With over two hundred thousand Irish Americans fighting in the war, there was a large concentration of potential members. A considerable majority of these men served in the Union army, but close to twenty thousand Irish American men represented the Confederacy. In addition to full Irish American regiments, such as the renowned 69th New York and 182nd New York Volunteer Infantries, the sheer number of Irish American men mobilized for war almost guaranteed that the Fenian message would spread. Fenian leaders declared that thirty thousand of their members had fought for the Union in the Civil War for two purposes: to preserve the Union and to gain military knowledge to use for the emancipation of their own country. Though estimates of Fenian membership were at some fifty thousand members by the end of the Civil War, the organization had even greater reach. In the spring of 1866, over 100,000 people gathered at picnic grounds in Jones Woods in the Yorkville section of

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81 Brown, 41.
82 See Damien Shiels, *The Irish in the American Civil War* (Gloucester: The History Press, 2013). Shields looks at the Irish effort in the war beyond the Irish Brigade to reveal a greater Irish American involvement in the military.
85 Address of the Officers of the Shawmut Division of the Fenian Brotherhood to the people of New England. (Boston: Rockwell and Rollins, 1866), 4, folder A119, FBF, NAI. In an address of the Fenian Officers of the Shawmut Division to the people of New England, the Fenians asked New Englanders to return the favor.
86 Brown, op. cited, 41.
New York City to attend a Fenian rally despite ardent opposition from the powerful Archbishop, John McCloskey.⁸⁷

Not only was the Civil War an effective recruiting ground for the Fenian Brotherhood, it also provided potential members with military training. O'Mahony understood this advantage when he declared that the Brotherhood was founded "on the conviction, that a military organization at home is absolutely essential to the liberation of Ireland… and the disruption of the most mighty empires of the world."⁸⁸ Many members of the I.R.B. did not have the military training that the Fenians gained during the war, and O'Mahony recognized that his “brothers” in Ireland needed “military leaders and competent line officers to act under them.”⁸⁹

The Civil War also created an environment where munitions were far easier to obtain than they were in Ireland. Such exigencies led O'Mahony to conclude that the Fenians were the “more favorably located” for striking at Britain and liberating Ireland because only in the United States could a “never-failing base of supplies” be secured.⁹⁰ The American environment that the Fenians had begun to reflect was unbridled in its martial nature.

Perhaps no one embodies the combative spirit of the Brotherhood more than the man who led the Fenian invasion of Canada, John O’Neil. Born in County Monaghan in the northern region of Ireland, O’Neil immigrated to New Jersey in 1848 when he was a teenager. He was a famine immigrant, with scarce resources and dim economic prospects. But in the 1850s, O’Neil joined the ²nd

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⁸⁷ This event is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.
⁸⁸ Speech by O’Mahony printed in *The Irish American* (New York) February 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
⁸⁹ Ibid.
⁹⁰ Ibid
United States Dragoons and fought in the Utah Wars. During the American Civil War, he became a captain and gained a reputation for his willingness to fight. A Canadian newspaper claimed that O’Neil was “notorious in Tennessee for many vices” including killing a man in a duel “through foul play.” And yet, the same newspaper also described him as a man of “unusual daring and personal vigor.” It was during the Civil War when O’Neil became a Fenian. He later stated that he signed up only after the organization “adopted” a plan for invading Canada. For O’Neil, the direct invasion of Ireland was impracticable. On the other hand, Canada, he argued, “would serve as an as an excellent base of operations against the enemy; and its acquisition did not seem too great an undertaking, from the number, strength, and resources of our people on the American Continent.” To support his claims, O’Neil specifically referenced the army of veteran Irish soldiers from the American Civil War who were ready to fight again. O’Neil’s brand of Irish nationalism—similar to most Fenians—was visible only through an American prism.

The militarization of the Fenian Brotherhood—thanks to the American Civil War—also helps explain why the organization pressured the I.R.B. to take more immediate military action, both in Ireland and in Canada. According to historian Christian G. Samito, such Fenian impatience “reveals a surprising level of Americanization with Irish Americans, even where dualism and great interest in

91 “The Invasions,” The Intelligencer, June 8, 1866.
92 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
Irish liberation persisted."95 Members retained a loyalty to their land of birth, while simultaneously embracing an identity influenced by their American experience. A hybridity of immigrant identity is certainly not unique to the Fenians, but their experience is telling in what it reveals about the social fabric of American empire. One newspaper described the rise of the Fenians as one that was nourished through the war, and that when the men returned home, they were "accustomed to the use of arms, fired with a martial spirit, and burning to carry out the knowledge, which they had gained in the hard-fought fields of America."96 In this way, the Civil War had helped create the Irish American nationalist civilian soldier.

The Fenian movement "served as a vehicle through which many Irish Americans, particularly those who served in the Civil War, further expressed their inclusion in the American polity.97 Fenians embraced all that American citizenship and its political traditions afforded by holding large open rallies in public places.98 By 1863, the group held its first national convention in Chicago where sixty-three branches formed the organizational structure represented by three hundred delegates.99 Officially electing O'Mahony as their Head Center, the delegates also issued a Declaration of Independence for the Irish Republic, and adopted a constitution that created a governmental structure similar to that of the United

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95 Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) 120. Brown also argued this in op. cited, 41. He notes that Fenians were in a unique position, placing their civil war service in an American context as well as one of transnational republicanism.
96 *The Chicago Republican* (Chicago) February 12, 1866, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
97 Samito, 191.
99 Samito, 192.
States. Each smaller group—referred to as a ‘circle’—was comprised of local members and governed by its own head centre or president.

With a governing structure influenced by American political traditions and a national headquarters in New York City, the Fenians had acculturated into American society and proudly declared their presence—something the I.R.B. found much more trying, and at times impossible, in Ireland. Certainly, Irish American participation in the Civil War helped to facilitate this process. As Samito argues, Fenian activism in the 1860s would have terrorized nativists a decade earlier and would have been used as an example of Irish American disloyalty, especially after the Brotherhood “declared itself the Irish government in exile… and flew a harp and sunburst flag outside its capital at the Moffat Mansion near Union Square in New York City.”

When comparing the Fenian Brotherhood’s presence to the I.R.U.’s tenuous leadership, this theory carries considerable weight. For the Fenians, the Civil War had become a crucible of American citizenship.

This transformation of Irish American nationalist identity placed the organization in a favored position for the Irish cause. Many nationalists in Ireland understood the significance of this relationship and praised the Fenian Brotherhood for its reach and ability to mobilize supporters. The Dublin based newspaper, *The Irish People*, marveled at how the Fenians had “consolidated the Irish element, the young Irish, and Irish-American blood of this great continent in one united phalanx determined to win the freedom of the land of their sires.”

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100 Ibid, 192.
101 *The Irish People* (Dublin) March 17, 1866, folder A120-122. FBF, NAI.
The Fenians also emboldened Irish nationalists around the globe, by giving expression to the belief that true Irishmen were united in their love for their homeland, and shared an intense hatred of England by providing hope that something could be done about it.

Whereas the I.R.B. often felt the heavy hand of government, the Fenians were largely left unfettered—even while publicly declaring their intentions to violate international laws. This difference often made it appear that Irish Americans were leading the cause for Irish freedom. *The Irish People* noted as much when it proclaimed that “some of the boldest and bravest defenders of our race at this moment are not of Irish birth or parentage—they are Americans.”

*The Chicago Times* agreed, and concluded that the Irish “had been taught on American soil not only what freedom is, but that it is possible for a gallant, determined people to acquire that freedom by their own exertions.” While the *Times* may have overstated the American role in Irish conceptions of republicanism, its statements are still telling. By virtue of their American citizenship, the Fenians were able to make considerable gains that often eluded their Irish colleagues.

After the Civil War, even American political leaders, according to Samito, “publicly embraced the idea that Irish Americans acted as global leaders furthering a transnational republican movement with the United States located at its apex.” One of the most significant examples of this was when United States and England resolved their differences over expatriation rights, making

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102 Ibid.
104 Samito, 192.
naturalized citizenship in the United States equal to birthright citizenship. Irish Americans played an integral role in this process and “the emergence of an Irish American national political bloc helped consummate inclusion in the American people, and it allowed this ethnic community to assert coherent arguments about changes it expected to be made to the legal concept of American citizenship.”

The Fenians had gone from victims of one empire—outcasts and exiles—to active participants in another, in which they exercised their political will. American citizenship offered protection for Irish willing to immigrate, allowing them to gain political, economic, and social influence unavailable to nationalists in Ireland.

The extent of this advantaged position was apparent in the first months of 1865. At a meeting in New York City, Fenian leaders avoided saying too much about Irish nationalists in Ireland at public meetings. One Fenian leader acknowledged that as Irish Americans they were “beyond the reach of British malignity," but that the Irish were not. The Louisville Democrat reinforced the idea that the Fenian Brotherhood was “a powerful organization of Irishmen extending throughout the entire world.” Although the complete accuracy of this statement is difficult to verify, the Brotherhood had already spread across the continent by 1865 as seen when members at the second Congressional meeting of the Fenians approved resolutions for a Fenian branch in California.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of broadening American support for Fenianism came in August of 1865 when over seven thousand men, women, and

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105 Ibid.
106 The Irish American (New York) Feburary 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
107 The Louisville Democrat (Louisville) January 20, 1865, folder A8, FBF, NAI.
108 The Irish American (New York) February 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
children attended an outdoor Fenian event in Chicago. According to The Chicago Times, the event was “a most enormous gathering, and very much larger than any number which ever attended any other similar event from Chicago.”109 The numbers are not surprising, and the newspaper also noted that the growth of the Brotherhood in and around the city had been “steady and progressive.”110 The Chicago group had first gathered in 1858 led by James Sheridan, later quartermaster of the 23rd Illinois regiment of the Union Army. In seven years, ten circles of Fenians had organized and the number of Fenians in Chicago grew to over fifteen hundred members.111 The outdoor event in Chicago captured an already blossoming movement spreading across the United States.

As a display of how much Fenianism had spread throughout the region, organizers of the Chicago event read letters of support from Fenian groups in Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa. Confirming the movement’s rapid expansion, The Chicago Times reported that Feniansim already had an “open existence” in the United States because the organization had paraded and drilled in the streets “for the sympathies of these republican states take kindly to anything having for its objects the elevation of an oppressed people.”112 The same organization existed in Ireland, the newspaper noted, but not openly, because of “the vigilance of British spies and British tyranny.”113 In other words, the state apparatus that maintained colonial power in Ireland prevented the kind of resistance from a marginalized group that thrived in the U.S. Speaking to the crowd, a Fenian

110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
leader explained this distinction, and declared that “in this country we have no
vow of secrecy or pledge of secrecy of any kind, but we have a pledge that binds
us to sustain the men at home.”\footnote{114} For the Fenians, the good fortune conferred
by American citizenship was a mandate to act.

As part of their platform, the Fenians underscored the difference between
the privileges afforded by an American experience compared to those still living
in Ireland. For example, amidst the enjoyment of the day’s festivities at the
Chicago picnic was an undercurrent of concern for Ireland’s “suffering, her
sorrows, her persecution, and of resolve to help her, to aid her, and, with God’s
good help, to raise her up to her place among the nations of the world.”\footnote{115}
Speaking to the thousands gathered, Fenian representative A.L. Morrison
reminded attendees that nationalists in Ireland were not able to meet in public or
celebrate with music and banners, as Irish American nationalists were on that
summer day in the oak grove of Chicago. He then appealed to the women in the
crowd by asking the following: “if you remember no mother, no sister, no father,
sitting in rags, and hunger, and wretchedness, while you are enjoying yourselves
beneath the bright spangled flag of America?”\footnote{116} Morrison made a clear
distinction between Irish in the new world and the old. Irish Americans, he
believed, were in a fortunate position to change the course of Irish history. As
proof, he referred to previous rebellions in Ireland that had failed and explained
that Emmet and his compatriots had committed an error for being unprepared, a
mistake that he hoped would not be replicated. The men in ’98, he argued, were

\footnote{114}{Ibid.}
\footnote{115}{Ibid.}
\footnote{116}{Ibid.}
“half armed, and half fed, and not officered at all, sometimes met with their pikes—their simple pikes—the best soldiers of Britain and routed them on many a bloody battlefield.” The Fenians were willing and able to ensure that Irish nationalists were no longer unprepared.

The Fenians calculated that England had 150,000 soldiers spread out over her empire, and that nearly 100,000 if them were stationed in India alone. The remaining troops were in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and in the West Indies. In 1865, the Fenians counted roughly 18,000 English soldiers in Ireland, though some members declared that England would find “she can’t depend upon all the red coats she has in Ireland.” Members of the Brotherhood felt confident that of the 250,000 men who had joined the Irish militia, three quarters of them were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. They hoped to help plan the disintegration of the British army by appealing to the loyalty of the Irish troops, “who constitute one-third of the Queen’s service.” Yet while confident that these Irish soldiers were prepared for battle, the Fenians knew that resources were lacking. Americans needed to raise over two million dollars to pay for 100,000 rifles and six months worth of ammunition.

In their effort to raise money and arms, the Fenians continued broadening American support. In Chicago, A.L. Morrison admitted that the Fenians desired the “sympathy and assistance of the American press.” He also addressed his ‘American friends,’ specifically those who had fought for years through a “bloody

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117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
120 “The Fenian Picnic,” The Chicago Times (Chicago) August 12, 1865.
121 Ibid.
war.\textsuperscript{122} Seventy-five commissioned officers that had fallen at the battle of Chancellorville in the Civil War, he pointed out, were members of the Fenian Brotherhood. He also noted that while the privates who died in the war were difficult to count, the names of Corcoran, Smith, and Murphy among the dead certainly gave credence to the notion that Irishmen had “laid down their lives battling for this American republic.”\textsuperscript{123} Morrison concluded that such a baptism in blood was essential for the Irish to be treated as freemen, because they had to prove to the world that they were worthy of such a status. He believed that Americans loved “any people that are struggling for freedom,” for they desired that “republican institutors” should spread throughout the world.\textsuperscript{124} Aligning Irish nationalist principles with the tradition of American republicanism was an effective strategy. As the event in Chicago had demonstrated, the Fenian movement had already made considerable advances.

Other cities experienced similar growth and enthusiasm. In Wilmington, Delaware, the Fenians held their own "grand picnic... there were two or three thousand persons present, and it was the largest picnic ever held in the state."\textsuperscript{125} After reorganizing their branch, the Fenians of Wilton, New Hampshire, reported that “Fenianism [was] rapidly extending throughout the Granite State.”\textsuperscript{126} And the Brotherhood circle in Springfield, Illinois, declared that they were “prospering finely.”\textsuperscript{127} Fenian member, John F. Finnerty, spoke at a meeting of concerned

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[120 John Gerraghy, \textit{The Irish American} (New York) August, 31, 1865, folder A28, FBF, NAI.]
\item[Ibid.]
\item[126 \textit{The Irish American} (New York) September, 16, 1865, folder 28, FBF, NAI.]
\item[Ibid.]
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Irish Americans in Milwaukee, hoping to stir interest in forming a circle of the organization there. Amidst the “wild enthusiasm” of those present, “between two and three hundred person enrolled.” The response was impressive, but not surprising to the city’s local newspaper, which noted that there were few aware of “how formidable this organization is.” The newspaper also reported that 200,000 men in Ireland were ready “to rise up” against England within the next few months, and that Irish American soldiers were headed to Ireland to join in the revolt. Even if exaggerated, published accounts of the number of Irish men willing to fight only served to help increase Fenian support by making the goal of Irish independence appear more probable.

Hoping to rally even more Americans to their cause, many Fenian leaders emphasized what they believed was at stake for their new country. At a meeting of the Brotherhood circle in Springfield, New York, speakers reminded their fellow Americans that other European nations were making efforts to “cripple and confine” the U.S. by surrounding it with “hostile” systems of government. As proof of European encroachment, the Fenians pointed to the French interest in Mexico and England’s occupation of the northern provinces. England, they claimed, could never be trusted because “she furnished your own revel kinsmen with all the munitions of war to rend in pieces the government you have proved

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128 *The Milwaukee News* (Milwaukee) August 24, 1865, folder A26, FBF, NAI.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 *The Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* (Buffalo) September 8, 1865, folder A27, FBF, NAI.
yourselves so worthy of enjoying." By contrast, the Fenians argued that Ireland had been America’s friend because it contributed to:

Furnishing material for her council chambers, her armies, and the development of her resources. Her sons and daughters have stood firm by you in all the phases through which you have passed, from the declaration of independence to the present, when you are the mightiest nation on earth, and able to bid defiance to the world. In return, the Fenians asked for American support and friendship, specifically the arms to enable men to “meet their British enemies on equal footing.” It was an emotional appeal to American loyalty and Anglophobia. The request for arms and men was also another reminder that the Fenians had access to resources that the I.R.B. did not.

Fenian circles around the U.S. quickly responded to the call. Members in Berks County, Pennsylvania, made their support known in a letter to The Irish American in September of 1865. They offered the “all the materials and sinews of war,” and claimed to have between three and four thousand members that gathered in a large celebration in the city of Reading and marched through the streets. “Their fine, soldiery bearing and steady step,” one observer commented, “would remind one of a battalion of veterans on dress parade.” The procession moved into a wooded area where a celebration of dancing, food, and drink took place. Another attendant claimed that the event was “one of the

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132 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 “To the Editors of the Irish American,” The Irish American (New York) September, 16, 1865, folder 28, FBF, NAI.
136 Ibid.
grandest and best conducted picnics in Pennsylvania.”\textsuperscript{137} Even if not all of those present were members of the organization, one thing was clear, Fenian events made an impression—attracting large crowds and displaying a notable military presence.

Several Fenian branches attempted to reach out to even greater numbers of potential members by acting as social support networks within their communities. The Fenians in New York combined Fenianism and Temperance, vowing to look after one another and to help prevent members from wasting money in bars. Members were “free from all allurements and temptations,” and hoped that they would not “see a brother want or unprovided for if taken ill.”\textsuperscript{138} After having only been in operation for three months, the Fenian-Temperence coalition boasted two hundred members and over three hundred dollars in donations. Its core members hoped that more men would participate and “shun the corners and bar-rooms which serve to promote crime, want and dissipation, and furnish so many candidates to our prisons, poor-houses and asylums,” as they would then be “better prepared to cross the ocean and right the wrongs” in Ireland.\textsuperscript{139} By aligning with the social cause of temperance, the Fenians also attempted to shun the caricature stereotypes of the Irish popularized by political cartoonists such as Thomas Nast. Such efforts indicate another effort on the part of the Brotherhood to prove that they could assimilate into the American republican project, despite its hypocritical requirements for entry. From a political

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
another standpoint, it was a savvy optics move and an effective way to increase membership.

Another sign of increasing Fenian prowess also occurred in the summer of 1865 when the I.R.B., after prodding by impatient Fenians, attempted to launch a rebellion in Dublin. Though several Fenians traveled to Ireland and volunteered their services, the British cracked down on all nationalist political activity before any major plans were initiated. In September, Dublin police forces arrested I.R.B. members and seized the organization’s funds. The British government began to eject all suspected foreign Irish nationalist sympathizers in Ireland and England. British officials also suspended Habeas Corpus in Ireland—and imprisoned more than one thousand members of any nationalist political party over the next two years, holding most of them without trial. For historian Timothy Meagher, this episode reveals the weakness of the I.R.B. and its dependence on the Fenians in America for money, arms, and men. It also helps explain why so many Fenians turned their attention to the British Empire in North America. The British imperial government in Ireland had made it all but impossible to mount a successful resistance against it. With the suspension of Habeas Corpus, I.R.B. members were simply unable to promote the Irish nationalist cause. Irish Americans faced no such repercussions.

The stark contrast between the evolution of the I.R.B. and the Fenian Brotherhood is also evident when examining the extent of Fenian expansion. By the fall of 1865, there were five hundred Fenian Brotherhood circles in the U.S.

140 McGee, 35.
141 Meagher, 251.
and the organization was increasing at a rate of one hundred per month.\textsuperscript{142} Each circle had between one hundred and three hundred men in northern as well as southern cities such as Savannah, Charleston, and Portsmouth. New Orleans itself had seven circles with almost eight hundred members.\textsuperscript{143} There were also three hundred female circles. One sisterhood circle organized in Brooklyn on New Years Day in 1866, calling itself the Tara Circle of the Fenian Sisterhood. Twenty-five women attended the inaugural meeting and were accompanied by an even greater number of men from the Brotherhood who offered assistance and advice.\textsuperscript{144}

Irish nationalism had expanded beyond Irish and American borders. According to the \textit{New York Daily News}, there were forty-five thousand Irish nationalists in the British Provinces—two hundred thousand in Ireland, sixty-five thousand in England, and over five thousand in the English army.\textsuperscript{145} In addition to the Fenians in London and Liverpool, Australia had one of the strongest holds of Irish nationalist organizations outside of the United States. There, groups called themselves the United Irishmen or the Fenian Brothers. In the spring of 1866, a bureau of Fenian operations began organizing in Paris, “where the opposition press has already proclaimed for Irish nationality.”\textsuperscript{146} Because the Irish had immigrated to other realms of the British Empire, and beyond—either by forced exile or due to economic and political hardship—they were a marginalized group

\textsuperscript{142} The \textit{New York Daily News} (New York) January 2, 1866, January 2, 1866, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{146} “The Fenian Uprising,” \textit{The World} (Dublin) March 9, 1866.
in most societies. This consequence of empire had contributed to the transnational nature of the movement that emboldened American Fenians to take a leadership role.

In the United States, the Fenian movement had grown by such impressive numbers that by February of 1866, the organization held an official Brotherhood convention in Chicago—“one of the largest and most important gatherings this city has ever witnessed.”¹⁴⁷ According to the *Chicago Republican*, a large “military torchlight procession,” escorted Fenian President Roberts and Secretary of War Sweeny from the Tremont House to the hall “packed with people, many ladies gracing the galleries with their presence and aiding to enliven the somber scene.”¹⁴⁸ Nearly all of the five hundred men in the procession were clad in the official green uniform of the Brotherhood and the majority of them carried the “Springfield pattern of the United States musket.”¹⁴⁹ The men marched in line under the green flag of the Irish Republic and the Stars and Stripes. Such strident actions prove how powerful the Fenians felt in their American skin. Participants did not fear reprisals. One observer witnessed that in the U.S. “were to be found the natives of every country in Europe, no other people have made themselves so conspicuous for devotion to their native land as we.”¹⁵⁰ What is more, the public support was not displayed by lower class Irish Americans alone, as “prominent men, both in business and in politics” were present to help the Irish

¹⁴⁷ *The Chicago Republican* (Chicago) February 12, 1866, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
¹⁴⁸ Ibid.
¹⁴⁹ Ibid.
¹⁵⁰ Ibid.
Leaders at the event commended Irish Americans for their generosity with funds and concluded that after the suspension of Habeas Corpus in Ireland, the Irish republican Brotherhood and the Fenians understood that it was impractical for Americans to send over a large body of men to fight against the “tyrant power of England.” It appeared that the Fenians had effectively taken control of the transnational Irish nationalist movement.

Within a month of the Chicago convention, the Fenian branches in other cities accomplished similar feats. The Washington D.C. circle, for example, “held an immense mass meeting… there were at least two thousand people in the large hall, and as many more on the outside, who failed to obtain admittance. Many in the audience wore the United States uniform.” The Irish People proclaimed that the excitement was “intense, and the meeting was a great success.” Afterwards, smaller Fenian circles gathered and together donated over two thousand dollars. Locals considered the success of the meeting even more remarkable due to the fact that “its organization was conceived and executed in a few hours.” The nation’s capital had joined the movement and become a public space for declarations of Irish American nationalism.

One of the largest gatherings took place in Brooklyn, New York, where the Fenians held a “grand out-door demonstration.” The Irish American nationalist movement in Brooklyn had only just gained momentum, but The Irish People

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151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 The Irish People (Dublin) March 18, 1866, folder A115 – A117, FBF, NAI.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
noted that attendees, by their "zeal in the cause and liberality in the purchase of the bonds, the sinews of war… are resolved to aid their brothers at home to the utmost of their power."¹⁵⁷ One of the speakers even declared that the Fenians were going to revolutionize the British Empire. And O'Mahony himself made an appearance, proudly announcing that the Irish had "great power in America."¹⁵⁸ Brooklyn Fenians not only mobilized quickly, but also raised over twelve thousand dollars in addition to other needed materials. They also posted placards throughout the city that read: WANTED, FOR THE FENIAN ARMY, 100,000 PAIR OF PATENT LEATHER BOOTS.¹⁵⁹ Not only did such words and actions display Fenian outreach, they also demonstrate how little the Fenians feared government censure.

Other popular meetings took place in New York City. The Wolfe Tone Circle in Manhattan drew over two thousand members who filled the hall on the corner of Twenty-Third Street and Second Avenue. Mr. Meany, a Fenian leader from Ohio, addressed the group and raised money for those “languishing in British prisons.” Almost ten blocks away, the Malachi Circle of the Fenian Brotherhood held a meeting the same evening in the Fourteenth Ward Hotel. John O’Neill addressed the crowd there and spoke of the “great importance of every patriotic Irishmen to take up the bonds of the Fenian Brotherhood at once.”¹⁶⁰ Only a few months before launching the attacks into Canada, O’Neil emphasized the immediate need to increase support. O’Neil’s efforts, and those

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.
¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
¹⁶⁰ Similar meetings were also reported in New Haven, Connecticut.
of other Fenian leaders proved effective. By mid March, *The Irish People* reported that “several cases of the most approved firearms” had arrived at Fenian Headquarters in New York.\(^{161}\) American supporters were proving that they were indeed a deep resource for the Irish nationalist cause.

The suspension of Habeas Corpus in Ireland spurred even greater American support for the Fenian Brotherhood in urban centers. In Newark, New Jersey, about seventy women joined and a prominent leather manufacturer pledged to provide the Fenians with equipment.\(^{162}\) A series of popular meetings took place in Philadelphia and drew members from across the country. The State Centre of the Ohio Fenians gave a speech in which he proclaimed that the time had arrived “for practical work, and the day of noisy declamation had gone by.”\(^{163}\) Members who were present differentiated their goals from earlier attempts to free Ireland by referencing their greater ability to obtain the “sinews of war” in money and arms. Several speakers reminded supporters of “England’s doings” in the American Civil War while others spoke about how thousands of Irish Americans had emerged from the Civil War with “a military preparation that would shake the British throne.”\(^{164}\) By all appearances, the Fenians understood that their American experience was useful to the Irish cause.

Though large cities experienced bigger turnouts, impressive crowds also gathered at Fenian events in small urban centers and towns. According to *The Irish People*, a “large and enthusiastic” meeting took place in Waterbury,

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\(^{161}\) *The Irish People* (Dublin) March 18, 1866, A115 – A117, FBF, NAI.


\(^{163}\) “Fenianism in America,” *The Irish People* (Dublin) March 31, 1866, folder 123, FBF NAI.

\(^{164}\) Ibid.
D. O’Sullivan (Secretary of Civil Affairs for the Fenian Brotherhood), Captain J. H. Bryce, and Lieutenant-Colonel Fenn addressed the crowd and collected over six hundred dollars. The mayor of Hoboken, New Jersey, led a gathering and urged “prompt and practical preparations to carry to a successful termination of the object of the Fenian Brotherhood.” John Lynch and P.J. Meehan of *The Irish American* newspaper, donated one hundred dollars each. Mr. Kerrigan, another prominent Fenian, promised to contribute towards the purchase of a ship and furnish it with a gun. The Fenians also held a gathering for all Americans who supported the Irish nationalist cause in Tarrytown, New York. O’Mahony gave a speech and a “large number came forward” to join the organization. The event also marked the establishment of another Fenian Sisterhood, “when thirty young ladies, many of whom were American born, were initiated.” Residents in New Haven Connecticut claimed that “one of the largest and most successful Fenian meetings ever held in this city” took place in response to the news that the British Parliament had just suspended Habeas Corpus in Ireland. The purpose of the meeting, as one attendee noted, was to build support and collect money in order to “furnish means for striking a vigorous and successful blow in behalf of our native land.” The Fenian sisterhood then spent the next few months “canvassing the city for

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165 *The Irish People*. (Dublin), March 17, 1866, folder 123, FBF, NAI.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
subscriptions and donations."\textsuperscript{169} Events in Ireland had spurred Irish Americans into action and the reach of Fenian power continued to grow.

The number of Fenian Brotherhood events across the U.S. and the sizable crowds gathered at them underscores the influence and clout that the organization had gained since its founding. These meetings were not held in secret. They were public, and frequently grandiose expressions of Irish American support for the Fenian mission. As such, they bolstered leaders of the Brotherhood to take control of the Irish nationalist movement and move it in a direction that abandoned its original intent. With money and weapons, Fenian leaders turned their sights on Canada under the belief that the manifest destiny of American expansion had made the British North American provinces ripe for the picking.

Agents of American Empire-

As active members of the American polity, the Fenians felt perfectly suited to further American expansion—where progress across the continent, according to historian Thomas Hietala, provided a “beacon light to a world in darkness.”\textsuperscript{170} Irish Americans believed they were acting as part of a larger mission. Antebellum (Civil War) American republicanism had demanded “possession of the continent,” an undertaking not just for policy makers alone, but one that required the work of

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{170} Hietala, 257.
“two complementary assaults by national leaders and individual pioneers.”\textsuperscript{171} For the Fenians, the post-Civil War era would simply be a return to this mission. The battle over slavery had been fought, and the Fenians would play their role in making the country whole again. The government and its people could go back to pursuing their providential right of continental expansion—an agenda that John O’Sullivan had described as ‘manifest destiny.’\textsuperscript{172}

While members of the Brotherhood ardently believed in this expansionist worldview, they also hoped to exploit American Empire building for their own gains. Canadians, they believed, were puppets of the British Empire on the North American continent, and were thus fair game. John O’Neil argued that Canada was the best place for a Fenian invasion because “the English flag hangs over it, and English soldiers protect it—wherever the English flag and English soldiers are found, Irishmen have a right to attack.”\textsuperscript{173} For O’Neil, Fenian attacks in Canada were analogous to the patriot resistance against the British during in the American Revolution. By striking at England through Canada, he maintained, “we attempted no more than was done by the American Republic in the war of the Revolution.”\textsuperscript{174} Thus, the American experience had altered Irish nationalism. The new ideology not only reflected the American past, but also its present and future. Canada became a possible space for conquest because American Empire building made it so.

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} John O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” \textit{The United States Democratic Review}, vol. 6, no. 23 (Nov. 1839): 426-430.
\textsuperscript{173} O’Neil, 4.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
The Fenians made their understanding of this perspective abundantly clear. At a speech in December of 1865, Fenian president William Roberts announced that the Fenians were going to strike at England “wherever she is most vulnerable.” He acknowledged that Irish Americans live under a “free, democratic government, and must carry the lessons of equality and fraternity which democracy teaches into government and policy of the Fenian Brotherhood.” To broaden the appeal of this outlook, Roberts also drew parallels between the American fight for independence from Britain to the Irish nationalist struggle. He claimed that the American colonies in 1776 had “sent the warm and generous blood of freedom coursing through the great heart of humanity,” and that American colonists had “supported their Declaration of Independence with the sword—the only talisman that brave men wield against tyrants.” For Roberts, Americans and their rich history of revolution had inspired other oppressed people of the world to rise up against the feudal powers of the old world.

To justify striking at the British Empire, the Fenians published other grievances against England as evidence of her antipathy towards the republicanism they believed Americans held so dear. England, they argued, was the “most tyrannical power on the face of the earth, for while she preaches liberty to other nations, she practices tyranny and crushes liberty with the iron hand of power or by treachery and false friendship.” In Ireland, England was to blame.

175 “The Fenian Factions,” The Mercury (Quebec) December 17, 1865.
176 Ibid.
177 “Erin Go Bragh,” The World (Dublin) September 28, 1865, folder A29, FBF, NAI.
178 The Chicago Republican (Chicago) February 12, 1866, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
for “the wretchedness, the tortures, the house-burnings, the desolation, the
driving of human beings into the woods to live like beasts, exposed to the mercy
of the elements and of a brutal soldier.” The British had also “destroyed” Irish
commerce and manufacturing through punitive taxes that “drew wealth from the
land and soil of Ireland to enrich her own lords.” The Fenians reminded
Americans that in India, England had “obtained a foothold in one of the richest
realms of the earth” under the pretense of trade, and then drove the Indian
people from their homes and left them to die. Brotherhood leaders also pointed
out that England sold opium in China, “and when the authorities refused to
receive it, forced it down their throats at the point of the bayonet.” By openly
condemning Britain’s hypocrisy, the Fenians joined a tradition of American outcry
against European empire.

But it was England’s actions during the American Civil War that received
most Fenian criticism. “Never, perhaps, in the history of England,” Brotherhood
members argued, “was the peculiar policy of her statesmen displayed more
plainly than in that war… openly supporting the North while secretly supporting
the South, until they dyed the fields of this great land in brothers’ blood.” Once
again, the Fenians used inflammatory language to appeal to American
Anglophobia and tap into nostalgia for American history. At the Chicago
Convention of Fenians, leaders declared that Canadians were the very same
men “who sustained and sympathized with the rebellion against liberty in our land

179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
182 Ibid.
of America.”¹⁸³ With these statements, the Fenians hoped to capitalize on anti-British feeling after two Confederate agents were found on a British ship heading to London in what became known as the *Trent Affair*. Brotherhood leaders also knew that many Americans wanted to punish the British for allowing the Confederacy to purchase British naval destroyers during the war, which caused considerable devastation to Union forces. Further intensifying Anglo-American relations, during the war Confederate agents had launched attacks from Canada into St. Albans, Vermont, only to flee back across the border before American authorities could capture them. In Canada, the Confederate raiders found refuge in the neutral country when a judge ruled in favor of their release due to the fact that they had been soldiers acting under military orders. Condemning the British for these actions was popular and drew an enthusiastic response from American crowds.¹⁸⁴ The Fenians hoped to capitalize on this reaction, and use it to increase support for an attack on British North America.

These rhetorical tactics, as well as the Brotherhood’s campaigns throughout the U.S. to raise money, were largely successful. By the spring of 1866, the leaders of the organization claimed to have had access to fifteen million dollars.¹⁸⁵ According to *The Irish World*, this amount was enough to give “transportation and maintenance for one month to thirty thousand men, a greater number than were ever before mustered to the conquest of the Canadian

¹⁸³ “Fenianism,” *The Intelligencer* (Bellville) June 6, 1866.
¹⁸⁴ Ibid. The American reaction to British policies during the Civil War is examined in greater detail in chapter five of this dissertation.
possessions." In Chicago, the Fenians had five sailing vessels, a tug, and two steam transports. They planned to gather more ships in Buffalo, Cleveland, and Bay City, Michigan; and they hoped to take control all of the routes of the Grand Trunk railroad line. Fenian General, Thomas Sweeny expected to lead troops down the St. Lawrence River and converge with the rest of the Brotherhood at Montreal while isolated expeditions were to "reduce" Saint John and Halifax, forcing the eventual fall of Quebec. Such goals seemed lofty, but Sweeny served as a General in the Union Army during the Civil War and was confident in his approach. The Irish World agreed, and proclaimed that Canada will "at once be reduced to a grand military department." The plan to attack Canada was not impulsive. Rather it was well developed and coordinated by experienced veterans such as Sweeny and O'Neil.

From a tactical standpoint, then, attacking Canada made perfect sense to the Fenians. They believed that England's weak point was their North American colony, made even more so by American interest in annexing the territory. Once the Fenians controlled Montreal, they planned to make demands of the U.S. government—including formal recognition of Canada as an independent territory. Because the population of the British provinces was just above two and a-half million with only sixty thousand men serving in the military, the Fenians believed that they could take the entire British provinces in a single

\[^186\] Ibid.  
\[^187\] Ibid.  
\[^188\] Ibid.  
\[^189\] Again, the Fenians saw the process of Texas annexation to the United States as the example to follow.
campaign (excluding Quebec). Furthermore, after Canada was in Fenian possession, members believed that the Americans would join them and make annexation inevitable. The Montreal Gazette understood why the Fenians felt so confident when it noted that the United States government knew about the Brotherhood plans and took “no steps to stop the work.” Thanks to this inaction, the Fenians were convinced that they had the government’s support.

The American mainstream press also bolstered Fenian confidence, occasionally even professing outright support for the organization. Reporting on the suspension of Habeas Corpus in Ireland, The New York Herald, for example, argued that the Fenian movement had become so powerful that “all the world knew there was cause enough for the movement in the deep seated hatred of the Irish people to England.” The Herald also admonished England’s involvement in the American Civil War, reminding readers that the Union not only had to fight the south, but England too. “When we were at war with our rebellious States,” the paper noted, “England was on the side of the enemy,” and it was therefore hypocritical for the British to ask the U.S. government to suppress the Fenians, “considering the position that England assumed towards this country during the rebellion.” Like the Fenians, The Herald had placed England in clear opposition to everything American, including Irish American nationalism.

190 Ibid.
192 The Montreal Gazette, (Montreal) March 7, 1866, folder A120-A122, FBF, NAI.
193 Excerpts from The New York Herald as printed in The Irish People, March 17, 1866, folder 123, FBF, NAI.
194 Ibid.
Other newspapers followed suit. *The New York Leader* also singled England out as the enemy, claiming that she stood “like a criminal at the bar of justice and cannot avoid pleading guilty.”\footnote{Excerpts from *The Leader* as printed in *The Irish People*, March 17, 1866, folder 123, FBF, NAI.} England fears the Fenians, *The Leader* maintained, “but they dare not remonstrate with the Government of the United States.”\footnote{Ibid.} The newspaper felt that England was aware that the Fenians were “permitted to embark openly” and she was “forced to acknowledge that they have no grounds for remonstrance.”\footnote{Ibid.} For this, *The Leader* was emphatic, concluding that America “ought to love the Fenians,” because Great Britain “feels something of that contempt which she has inspired in every nation on earth that has ever had any dealings with her Government.”\footnote{Ibid.} Even *The Louisville Democrat* maligned the British, voiced sympathy for the Irish, and argued that no one blamed Ireland, “no one but sympathizers with her in her aim at impendence, and her still rebellious disposition after five hundred years of subjugation.”\footnote{Ibid.} *The Democrat* went even further by suggesting that the best course of action for the organization was to force a war between the United States and England.\footnote{The *Louisville Democrat* (Louisville) January 20, 1865, folder A8, FBF, NAI.} It was an extreme position but not unimaginable, given that several American politicians had clamored for war, or for Canada as compensation due to England’s policies during the Civil War.\footnote{This is discussed at length in chapter five of this dissertation.}

Even members of the Canadian press commented on the number of American newspapers that seemed to favor the Fenians. Within days of the
Fenian invasions, *The Intelligencer* declared that “with but few exceptions, the American press has given more or less countenance to the Fenian movement… they openly advocate their cause and urge the reinforcement of the Fenians on our frontier.” 202 Canadian newspapers were also upset over the fact that the American press had not condemned the Fenians for the attacks. “Not a word about the wickedness, or the criminality of the invasion,” *The Intelligencer* maintained, “not a word of condemnations of the scoundrels who have committed the most atrocious act known in the annals of crime.” 203 According to the newspaper, the American press only expressed their sorrow that Sweeny was “met with such a reverse on the Niagara frontier,” and only offered criticism of his foolishness in launching the attacks too soon, which resulted in a violation of the neutrality laws. 204 The Canadian paper also noted that many of the residents of Buffalo, New York, who were “American citizens of the highest respectability and standing in society, lined the American shore, cheering on the ruffians in their murderous attack upon an unoffending people.” 205 Understandably angry, the Canadians understood that American support, even if from the sidelines, played a role in empowering the Fenians.

Canadian resentment appeared justified. In April of 1866, Sweeny gave a speech in St. Louis where he claimed that “no true American” had a friendly feeling towards England, “which is the common enemy of Ireland and

202 “American Sympathy,” *The Intelligencer* (Bellville) June 8, 1866.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.
Another Brotherhood leader, A.L. Morrison, boasted that there were Americans “by the hundreds and the thousands” who will support the Fenian cause, including Germans immigrants. Again, Fenian leaders certainly had a flare for the hyperbolic and bombastic rhetoric. It was effective tactic that helped to make the organization appear more legitimate, which only served to attract greater support. But American newspapers had also played a role in inflating the Fenian sense of power.

A few American newspapers did rebuke the Fenians for the attacks. *The New York Times* described the Fenians as drawn from a class of men “who are the curse of American society,” and a “political scourge upon the American people.” *The Evening Post* called upon the U.S. government to use every means to prevent a breach of the neutrality laws. However, despite these two exceptions, Canadian newspapers pointed out that most other New York papers had “given countenance to, rather than condemned the movement from its inception to the present time.” The environment that the Canadian newspapers described allowed the Brotherhood to thrive and build momentum towards its plans to invade Canada. Although not every American newspaper supported the Fenian aims in Canada, enough did to convince Canadians that the press had emboldened the organization and increased support for the Fenian cause.

Coupled with American politicians—who either advocated for the annexation of Canada or turned a blind eye to Fenian plans—it appeared that powerful

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206 “The Roberts Side,” *The World* (Dublin) April 10, 1866, folder, A31, FBF, NAI.
207 Ibid.
208 Printed in “American Sympathy,” *The Intelligencer* (Bellville) June 8, 1866.
209 Ibid.
American establishments had contributed to an environment that fostered Fenianism.

There were a few outspoken American citizens and institutions that opposed the Fenians. The headline for an anti-Fenian rally in New York City read: DEMONSTRATION BY ENGLISHMEN AT CLINTON HALL—FENIANS ORDERED NOT TO BE PRESENT.210 One of the speakers at the event, an Irish Protestant, reminded attendees that there were many kinds of Irishmen: “the Irish gentlemen and the Irish blackguards.”211 Another strong opponent of the Fenian Brotherhood was the Catholic Church. At the Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, Archbishop McCloskey declared that the Fenian movement was one of folly “which must result in nothing but destruction and mischief,” and would only make England oppress Ireland more and force Americans to turn against the Irish.212 He appealed to his parishioners to spread the word, and encouraged others to “withdraw themselves from a movement that has already gone too far.”213

McCloskey may have had a point, but the Church had incentive to undermine the Fenian Brotherhood because the organization posed considerable competition for the attention and resources of Irish Americans. The Church denounced the Fenian organization and the movement as a whole in the following statement:

The Fenian organization has neither the confidence of the Catholic Church, nor the countenance of the best known and most respected of the Catholic laity. It is engineered by unknown leaders and political tricksters, solely for selfish purposes, and against blindly following such persons we again warn simple-minded faith-exalted Irishmen. The movement is a

210 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid.
disgusting farce, out of which, if persisted in, no good, and great evil will surely come.214

Speaking out against the Fenians was essential to the Church’s viability. There was too much at stake. The Brotherhood posed a serious threat to the hearts, minds, and pockets of Irish Americans. And while the Fenians may have been some of what the Church described them as, it was convenient to dismiss all members as ‘simple-minded’ and ‘tricksters’ as a tactic to dissuade potential members from the enthusiastic Irish American nationalist movement. The Church would eventually appear more legitimate in the face of the failed Fenian invasions. But its dismissal of Fenians has influenced the historical record, obscuring a deeper look into the environment out of which the Fenians emerged.

While the Fenians themselves admitted that the Catholic Church was one of their most formidable rivals for Irish American minds and dollars, they also claimed that their organization gained more support from the publicity opposing Catholic leaders gave them. According to the newspaper, *The Irish American*, “unjust accusations, and unfounded vituperation, have often an effect contrary to that intended by their originators.”215 Nonetheless, the Catholic Church denounced Fenianism and worked to distance itself from the organization. In the winter of 1864 for example, the Fenians of Jersey City, Hoboken, and Hudson City held a meeting to protest the local Catholic clergy, Reverend Venuta, who had tried to prevent Fenians from gathering and had threatened potential participants with spiritual retribution.216 The meeting drew a large crowd and

214 “Catholic Church Statement on The Fenian Brotherhood,” Folder A 119, FBF, NAI.
215 *The Irish American* (New York) February 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
216 *The Louisville Democrat* (Louisville) January 20, 1865, folder A8, FBF, NAI.
attendees made donations. The Fenians responded to the Church’s criticism in emphatic terms, declaring that theirs was a political movement and that the Catholic Church had no business being involved. Fenian John Finnerty chastised the Catholic Church for its opposition, arguing that the Brotherhood’s cause went beyond the church’s capabilities with a mission “to rise up a beggarly people and make them one of the powerful nations of this earth.”

For the Fenians, the Brotherhood was accomplishing more for the oppressed Irish people than the Church ever could.

Criticism from detractors and opposition from the Catholic Church did not deter the Fenians. In May, 1866, the Secretary of the Postmaster-General in Ireland ordered the post office to stop circulation of newspapers that supported the I.R.B. The Irish American concluded that there was no longer any chance of success for a rebellion in Ireland. Already convinced of this position, General Sweeny aggressively pushed for the invasion of Canada because “Uncle Sam would not refuse them belligerent rights when they had possession of certain territory.” The project of American Empire had filled the members of the Brotherhood with unbridled confidence. So too did the knowledge that the Canadians feared them. The Montreal Gazette argued that the Fenians were a strong organization and had become a power in the United States. If the Americans are not careful, The Gazette warned, the Fenian Brotherhood will “get control of affairs through the ballot box as to be able to bring about what they

\[217\] The Milwaukee News (Milwaukee) August 24, 1865, folder A26, FBF, NAI.
\[218\] The Irish American (New York) May, 23, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
\[219\] D. Thomas to the British Chief Secretary. Dublin. March 30, 1866, folder A128, FBF, NAI.
most desire—a war between the two nations.\footnote{Montreal Gazette (Montreal) March 7, 1866, folder A120-A122, FBF, NAI.} The Fenian reaction to Canadian fears demonstrated the group’s hubris. As one Brotherhood member noted, “the dread the provincialists have of us—our power over them, and the extensive spread of our doctrines at work.”\footnote{The Irish American (New York) February 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.} Canadian loyalists, the Fenians maintained, had made “fools of themselves [and] shown how far behind the intellectual progress of the current age they are.”\footnote{Ibid.} In a remarkable transformation, the bullied had become the bullies—whereby the Canadians would only benefit from the American system the Fenian would help spread to them. The Brotherhood had taken on a form of American paternal imperialism that had been applied to Native Americans, Mexicans, and even African Americans earlier in the nineteenth century. It was a similar ideology that would later be used to justify American colonization of Hawaii, Cuba, and the Philippines. The Fenians had become perpetrators and agents of American Empire.

Nonetheless, empire had burned members of the Fenian Brotherhood before. They had left their homeland because Britain’s imperial rule had marginalized them. As a colonized people, the men (and women) who would comprise the Fenian Brotherhood had experienced the worst of empire. But American Empire drew these immigrants to its shores, mostly for their labor. As American citizens, with resources and freedom to create a semi-autonomous political organization, they had also experienced the benefits of empire whereby the arbiters of power—politicians and the press—permitted, and even endorsed, their filibustering plans of conquest. The American environment would prove
fickle to this rise, however; and the Fenians would learn its limitations the hard way.
A month before the Fenian invasion in May of 1866, James Stephens, founder and president of the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Dublin, arrived in New York City. Stephens had left Ireland earlier in the year after authorities there suspended Habeas Corpus and began imprisoning all suspected Irish nationalists. Although he too had been arrested, Stephens had escaped prison and had found refuge in France before landing in the U.S. It was his first American visit in eight years, when he helped establish the Fenian Brotherhood. Since that time, the Brotherhood had grown exponentially—with thousands of members in cities and towns across the country, and the support of thousands displayed by the large attendance at public meetings. And yet despite these gains, the Brotherhood had not fulfilled its role of providing substantial financial and armament support to the I.R.B. The Fenians had also been unable to escape personality clashes and infighting. Thus, in the spring of 1866, Stephens’ motives for his American visit were to collect the promised money and arms, and to “heal the rift” that had split the Fenian Brotherhood.

Stephens and the Fenian leaders had begun their relationship under far more auspicious terms. When he left New York in 1858 after launching the organization with John O’Mahony and a sizable group of other Irish American

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1 See chapter two of this dissertation.
2 “The Irish Republic,” The New York Herald (New York) May 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
nationalist supporters, Stephens expected that, in short time, the Fenians would send money and weapons to the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Dublin as stipulated in the terms of their agreement. But during the first six years, the I.R.B. had received only one thousand five hundred pounds. Instead of additional funds, the Fenians sent over two delegates to “investigate” the I.R.B. in Dublin. Furthering tensions, Patrick Meehan (one the Fenians sent to Dublin) misplaced “valuable” documents while in Ireland that ultimately fell into the hands of British government officials. The mishap led to the seizure of The Irish People newspaper, and the arrest of its staff and other prominent Irishmen. The British Parliament then ordered the Post Office in Dublin to stop delivering all copies of the newspaper. Because Meehan had also met with Archbishops in Ireland, “the two bitterest enemies of Irish freedom in Ireland,” Irish nationalists suspected him of being an English spy. Thus, in many ways, the ocean that separated the Fenian Brotherhood and the I.R.B. represented more than just a physical distance between the two groups. It also symbolized a widening methodological gap about how the two organizations approached Irish independence. The rift not only affected the transnational relationship between the two organizations, but also fractured the Fenian Brotherhood itself, as members disagreed over the best use of resources.

The growing divide between the Fenian Brotherhood and the I.R.B., and the one within the Fenian organization itself, reveals the extent to which the

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3 James Stephens’ speech as printed in The Irish People (Dublin) May 30, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
4 The Irish People (Dublin) May 30, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
Americanization of the movement ultimately undermined its success. In other words, the Fenians reflected the environment of their adopted country—aligning themselves with objectives guided by the spirit of American expansion—at the expense of Irish nationalism. The Brotherhood took advantage of social, economic, and political opportunities unavailable to Irish nationalists in Ireland. And Canada lay before the Fenians like another American frontier to conquer—one that also could potentially result in damage to the British Empire. Fenian leaders and rank and file members had grown impatient at the lack of action by Stephens and the I.R.B. They decided to take matters into their own hands as American politicians courted their vote and looked the other way.

An examination of this process, and of the aftermath of the failed Fenian attacks in Canada is essential to understanding how American Empire influenced Irish nationalism. Previous scholarship on this matter has been scarce. While other historians have highlighted the evolution of the Fenian Brotherhood and the I.R.B, it has often been to primarily analyze the growth of Irish nationalism in the nineteenth century. Patrick Steward and Bryan McGovern have provided the most recent and useful work on this subject with, *The Irish Rebellion in the North Atlantic World, 1858-1876*. And yet their work does not fully examine the decline of the Fenian Brotherhood, including its failed invasions of Canada, within the imperial context. Because the Fenians gained considerable power compared

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7 This is not meant to cast the term ‘Americanization’ in a monolithic light. The Fenians certainly did not represent just one identity. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the term is used to explain how and why so many Fenians directed their attention to Canada instead of following the original plan to provide support to the I.R.B. and its objectives. James Stephens himself used this term when he lamented the Fenian designs on Canada.
8 See chapter two of this dissertation.
9 See Thomas N. Brown, op. cited; and Owen McGee, op. cited.
10 See Patrick Steward and Bryan McGovern, op. cited.
to the I.R.B., they were able to alter the Irish nationalist mission. The Fenians pinned their hopes on American Empire, but they were also ultimately burned by it. This result demonstrates the risk of empire, not just for national entities, but for marginalized and displaced groups as well. This process is worthy of further investigation.

Transnational Fractures-

Initially, according to historian Owen McGee, the “only real link between the I.R.B. in Ireland and the Fenian Brotherhood in New York was financial,” based on the notion that “the I.R.B. would raise an army in Ireland and the Fenians would supply it with the sinews of war: guns, money, and additional men.”¹¹ But by 1865, the Council of the I.R.B. had to send a letter to all ‘Friends of Ireland’ in America, begging for money that the Irish people then promised to repay within six months of independence. Hoping to appeal to Irish American nostalgia for their homeland, the Council also reminded Irish Americans that Ireland was the “land of their birth, of their fathers, and of their love.”¹² This desperate plea underscores the differences between the Fenian Brotherhood and the I.R.B. and the dynamic of this transnational relationship, one that often placed the Fenians in a position of authority.¹³

¹¹ McGee, 250.
¹³ The reasons for the lack of cooperation between the Fenians and the I.R.B. are further examined in chapter two of this dissertation.
Stephens often grew frustrated with the Fenian demands for military action. However, because he was unable to raise significant funds in Ireland, Stephens needed the Fenian Brotherhood to sustain the movement. Fearful of losing American support if he did not make it appear that the I.R.B. was increasing in size and power, he often exaggerated I.R.B. membership numbers and military preparation in statements to the Fenian Brotherhood. From early on, the differences between the Fenian Brotherhood and the I.R.B. reflected their environments. Though both were considered secret organizations, the Fenians quickly expanded its membership, and gained considerable political and economic power in ways unimaginable to nationalists in Ireland.

Well aware of the increasing size and scope of Fenian Brotherhood, James Stephens and I.R.B. supporters also often grew frustrated at the lack of support from the Americans. But they were in a difficult predicament, often one of desperation. Stephens found it frustrating, at times impossible, to rely on donations in Ireland. Poverty was one reason, but Stephens was also unable to tour and raise money due to a constant threat of arrest. Though he was able to establish *The Irish People*—a newspaper devoted to the cause—he was unable to generate widespread circulation while facing strong opposition from the government and the Catholic Church. When Irish authorities made “wholesale arrests” after the British government’s suspension of Habeas Corpus in February of 1866, the I.R.B. essentially went underground.

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14 McGee, 34.
16 Ibid.
Despite these obstacles, in the spring of 1866 Stephens announced to American supporters that the Irish Republican Brotherhood was the strongest it had ever been, “in numbers, discipline and in all the requirements of an army, save only in war material.”\textsuperscript{17} Membership, he reported, exceeded two hundred thousand men, with fifty thousand of them “thoroughly drilled,” and another fifty thousand “partially drilled.”\textsuperscript{18} It is likely that Stephens inflated these figures in hopes of gaining more support from the Americans. McGee points out that Stephens often exaggerated his statements to the Fenian Brotherhood because he was dependent on Fenian support.\textsuperscript{19} Yet this strategy did not pay off. In letters to the Fenian leadership, Stephens emphasized the I.R.B.’s need for weapons, but instead received “the melancholy news” of disruption among the Fenians.\textsuperscript{20} Had the Fenians sent a small force of “a few superior officers with the necessary war material,” Stephens maintained that Ireland would have become an independent country.\textsuperscript{21} It is difficult to determine if Stephen’s assessment was accurate, but his words are nonetheless crucial to understanding how the Fenian Brotherhood had shifted its focus, and even its loyalty to ambitions far different than what Stephens and the I.R.B. intended.

The I.R.B.’s disadvantaged position and Stephens’ resentment over the lack of Fenian financial support reveal the extent to which the Irish nationalist movement had become fully transnational. Though initially founded with Irish nationalist fervor and ideologies, Fenian culture and methodology began to take

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} McGee, 33.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} “The Irish Republic,” \textit{The New York Herald} (New York) May 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
on a different shape. By May of 1866, Stephens viewed the Americanization of the Fenian Brotherhood as an impediment to the original goals of the movement. For Stephens and his supporters, the Fenians were too influenced by their American expansionist environment, and he hoped to change the tide during his New York visit. At the outset, his popularity among Irish Americans bolstered his efforts. For example, his appearance at an event in Jones’ Woods, New York, drew over four thousand people. According to The Irish People, the grounds were guarded by soldiers, “already doubly enlisted in the New-York State National Guard, and in the army of the Great Organizer.”22 During his address to the crowd, Stephens made it clear that he was not interested in focusing on the past or in laying blame. Rather, he planned to move forward and hoped to collect arms and money that had been promised. He asked for Fenian infighting to end and for those who had come to the meeting “for the purpose of creating dissension and discord” to leave.23 While the event highlights Stephen’s fame in the U.S. among Irish American nationalists, it also demonstrates the fiscally inferior position Stephens often found himself in. Although he had helped create the Fenian Brotherhood, he could only make requests to its leadership. Because he could not demand the money, Stephens’ authority in the U.S. was limited. Nonetheless, Stephens tried his best to remind Irish Americans of the stakes. In many ways, the fracture between the I.R.B. and the Fenians was personal for him. He felt betrayed by the way Irish American nationalists had made empty promises, and he noted that men whom he once considered

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22 The Irish People (Dublin) May 30, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
personal friends and friends to Ireland had “proved deadlier enemies to Ireland... than British tyranny could ever do.”24 Stephens also felt that dissension among the Fenians, bad blood, and scandal, had brought shame to the Irish cause all over the world.25 The people in Ireland, he maintained, wanted “a fixed time for actions, and not to be dragged on, as they had been for years, without knowing when the time for action would come.”26 Unfortunately for Stephens, action meant something different to the Fenians. American social, economic, and political culture had provided many Irish Americans with a sense of superiority and righteousness. A growing number of Fenian leaders and members began to question the I.R.B.’s strategy for achieving Irish independence, and develop one of their own—one grounded in American ideals. But it was their alignment of Fenian goals with American expansionism that ultimately led to the Fenians’ demise, and injured the Irish nationalist movement.

Even before the split in the Fenian Brotherhood became public, a tone of paranoia and suspicion had spread throughout the organization. This anxiety spurred leaders to publically warn members against internal discord, “petty jealousies or angry vituperations,” and instead “fall in line.”27 Fenian executives also created a Committee on Credentials to examine the background of every applicant for admission into the organization, hoping to weed out any potential British spies.28 Although the policy was a sound logistical effort to stave off British

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
27 *The Irish American* (New York) February 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
28 Ibid.
infiltration of the organization, it was also an omen of the distrust and discord brewing among Brotherhood leaders.

One year before Stephens’ visit to the U.S., Fenians assembled by the thousands in Philadelphia for a convention organized by a growing faction of members who were in “opposition to the advice of president John O’Mahony.” William R Roberts, a wealthy dry goods merchant who had been the head of the Fenian War Department, led the group of dissenters. Roberts had increased his power in the Brotherhood over the years through lofty, and often bellicose, speeches and through his ability to build a coalition of loyal followers who agreed with his demand for immediate action. In one instance, Roberts drew over five thousand people at the Cooper Institute in New York City. But at the convention in Philadelphia, Roberts and his supporters decided that the time to carve their own path had come, and they voted to abolish O’Mahony’s office of Head Center. In its place, they created an executive position of President and a legislative body—a General Congress that contained both a Senate and House of Delegates. Borrowing from the American political structure, Fenian delegates who supported Roberts claimed that the new system would allow for greater representation. But the transition may have also been an old fashioned power play. A few months after the convention, a majority of Fenians voted O’Mahony out as President and Roberts assumed the position. Roberts then issued an official letter to the Brotherhood, declaring the establishment of the Congress in

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29 *The Irish People* (Dublin) May 26, 1865, folder A149, FBF, NAI.

30 *The World* (Dublin) September 28, 1865, folder A29, FBF, NAI.
New York by John O'Mahony as “illegal and invalid.” According to one newspaper, Roberts and his men had acted with “a spirit of pride, or a motive of profit.” To prove its point, the same newspaper noted that when O'Mahony reached out to Roberts in hopes of reconciling their differences and to unite the Brotherhood, Roberts declined the offer because O'Mahony’s letter did not officially address him as President of the Fenian Brotherhood. In response, O'Mahony ignored Roberts’ attempted overthrow and refused to relinquish control of the New York offices of the Brotherhood at the Moffat Mansion in Union Square.

A personal power struggle may have been part of the reason for the division, but Roberts and O'Mahoney also disagreed over the best use of Fenian resources—most importantly, whether to wait for Stephens and the I.R.B.’s timeline of rebellion against Britain or to take matters into their own hands and invade Canada. As The Irish People concluded, “O'Mahony was pledged to Stephens and the Irish people, but the Senators no sooner got power into their hands than they changed the program, and faced to the North instead to the East.” Roberts and the Senators represented a growing Fenian coalition that had become restless with a martial energy intensified by their environment. As the American Civil War came to an end, Irish American veterans were armed, trained to fight, and had little economic opportunity to do much else. Although the Fenian Brotherhood was supposed to act as a resource for the I.R.B., the

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31 “The Roberts Side,” The World (Dublin) April 10, 1866, folder A29, FBF. NAI.
32 The Irish People (Dublin) May 26, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
Roberts contingent took on an assertive and demanding position. Roberts argued that action must be the “order of the day” and that all resources, energies, and thoughts should be directed towards the military arm of the Fenian Brotherhood.”35 He felt that the organization had lost precious time with too many meetings, speeches, and declarations in newspapers. “The funds contributed by the patriotic, toiling masses of the Irishmen of America,” he argued, “must not be squandered or turned into other channels than those for which they were intended.”36 Roberts and his supporters argued that their objective was revolutionary and they had “the right to cripple the British government” in every way so as to place themselves in the most advantageous position possible before commencing the fight on Irish soil.37 For Roberts, the Fenians were entitled to take the lead because they were able to raise money. Irish nationalism had become an American institution.

Throughout the United States, members of the Brotherhood quickly took sides. The Washington D.C. Wolfe Tone and Red Hand Fenian Circles, for example, declared in favor of Roberts and Sweeny. In Poughkeepsie, New York, Irish Americans formed a “circle to sustain the plans and policy of President Roberts and his new War Department Head, General Sweeny, as being the only feasible way of relieving Ireland from the incubus of British misrule.”38 More than sixty men attended the meeting and “large sums were contributed, and a quantity

35 “The Roberts Side,” The World (Dublin) April 10, 1866, folder A29, FBF, NAI.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
of arms donated.” A captain of the United States Army, who was at the event, promised one hundred men fully armed and equipped for whatever Roberts and Sweeny ordered. It was a bold offer and one that underlines the link between the Fenian militant spirit and Irish American veterans of the Civil War.

Another example of this connection was Civil War veteran and Fenian John O’Neil—an ardent supporter of the plan to attack Canada. In fact, O’Neil did not even become a member of the Brotherhood until Roberts publically declared his intentions to direct the organization’s resources towards attacking British North America. O’Neil had been a “firm believer in steel as the cure of Irish grievances.” For O’Neil, fighting against the British, wherever that may be, was the only way to achieve Irish independence. In his official report, he justified his position in the following manner:

Because Canada was a province of Great Britain—the English flag “floats over it and English soldiers protect it… [and] wherever the English flag and English soldiers are found, Irishmen have a right to attack. In striking at England through Canada we attempted no more than was done by the American Republic in the war of the Revolution.

O’Neil’s ideology provides a clear picture of how a growing number of Fenians viewed Canada’s position in the North American Continent, and how those members aligned themselves with the American tradition of opposing England’s imperialism while supporting American expansion. The irony was striking. By utilizing the privileges afforded by American citizenship to achieve Irish

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39 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
nationalists ends, the Fenians had become a different kind of immigrant, one that was actively involved in expanding American empire.

The plan to invade Canada was also more practical according to Roberts and his followers. Possession of Canada, they claimed, would secure ports and an independent base of operations.\(^{42}\) They saw the “futility of attempting anything directly in Ireland,” but noted that if they could be shown Ireland was “accessible by a military expedition the Senate would change their plans.”\(^{43}\) O’Neil argued that not only did Canada serve as an excellent “base of operation against the enemy,” its acquisition “did not seem too great an undertaking, from the number, strength, and resources of our people on the American continent.”\(^{44}\) He was referring to the army of veteran Irish soldiers who had fought in the American Civil War and were “ready and anxious to be led to battle for their country.”\(^{45}\) This rationalization was a direct result of the Fenian American experience and another indication of the hubris that had filled so many members of the Irish American organization. Though Canada had previously been a possible target of Irish American political and paramilitary groups such as the Irish Brigade, the Fenian Brotherhood was not initially intended to act as an aggressive paramilitary organization. The shift was remarkable, and it was one of the main reasons why Stephens had grown so concerned over the Americanization of the movement.

O’Mahony tried to refocus the organization back to its original purpose of following the I.R.B.’s lead. He maintained that the Fenian Brotherhood had “no

\(^{42}\) *The Irish People.* (Dublin) March 17, 1866, folder 123, FBF, NAI.
\(^{43}\) *The New York Herald* (New York) May 12, 1866, folder A49-50, FBF, NAI.
\(^{44}\) Ibid.
\(^{45}\) O’Neil, op cited, 28.
more right to take possession of Canada, before Ireland shall have been declared in a state of revolution, than they have to hold and occupy any one of the United States."46 Unfortunately for O'Mahony, Roberts and his followers were not a small minority. As noted earlier, large crowds had gathered at Roberts' rallies ensuring the required majority of Fenian delegates to oust O'Mahony. Additionally, letters in support of Roberts poured into the Senate headquarters in New York.47 At a Manhattan meeting in March of 1866, attendees vowed to take “immediate measures for supporting the action of President Roberts and General Sweeney.” The hall was filled to capacity, and over five hundred people were forced to leave because there was not enough room.48 Roberts also claimed substantial support among the upper ranks of the organization. He argued that all leaders had agreed on making Canada a base of operations against England, which, he noted, was why he was originally appointed to the position of Secretary of War.49 It appeared that for some time, Roberts had been skillfully working to make the platform to invade Canada an official Fenian policy.

In December of 1865, news of the division among Fenian leaders had spread throughout the organization and become common knowledge among a growing segment of the general public. To a large gathering of supporters, President Roberts noted as much, stating, “the press has already made you acquainted with the change which has taken place in the head of the executive

46 The World (Dublin) April 10, 1866, folder A29, FBF, NAI.
47 "The Fenian Fractions," The Mercury (Quebec) December 17, 1865.
48 The Irish People (Dublin) May 30, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
49 Ibid.
branch of the Fenian Brotherhood.” Though he lamented the “schism” in the organization’s ranks, he explained that difference and dissension were commonplace in any organization, and pointed to the Civil War as proof that Americans understood internal battles. With O’Mahony out as president, Roberts claimed that his acceptance of the Presidency of the Brotherhood “was a necessity” not a choice,” and that he was willing to give up the position “if the right patriot came along.”

For Roberts, however, the right patriot was only someone who supported an attack on Canada.

Even As Roberts’s influence grew in the organization, O’Mahony’s supporters attempted to regain control. In Philadelphia, District Center Andrew Wynne ordered a series of public meetings to be held throughout the city with all those “in favor of Irish nationality and of supporting Stephens and O’Mahony.” At a meeting of over four hundred Elimra Fenians, leaders denounced “in bitters terms the action and policy of the so-called Roberts-Sweeny party, and warned all Americans to keep aloof from such filibustering schemes.” A number of Irish Americans came together in Hudson, New York to organize a circle of the Brotherhood and to reaffirm O’Mahony as the “guiding star of the Fenian Brotherhood on this continent.” A similar meeting took place in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, where members passed resolutions that pledged their allegiance to the “tried chiefs” James Stephens and Colonel John O’Mahony. The group

50 “The Fenian Factions,” The Mercury (Quebec) December 17, 1865.
51 Ibid.
52 The Irish American (New York) Febrary 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
53 D. Thomas to the British Chief Secretary. Dublin. April 12, 1866, folder A131, FBF, NAI.
54 The Irish People (Dublin) March 17, 1866, folder 123, FBF, NAI.
55 Ibid.
cut ties with anyone who did not “recognize the legality” of the New York
centered Brotherhood run by O’Mahony; and they agreed to “treat all documents,
papers, sensation speeches, emanating from William R. Roberts, or any person
now associated with him, with contempt.”\textsuperscript{56} Members there also swore to warn
other Fenians against siding with Roberts.\textsuperscript{57} The Emmet Circle of the
Brotherhood in Massachusetts also aligned itself with the John O’Mahony faction,
and publically announced that it condemned “as unjust and unpatriotic to the
cause of Ireland, and her brave Sons in the Gap, any rash attempt which would
be detrimental to such a glorious and holy object.”\textsuperscript{58} For members still loyal to
O’Mahony, Roberts’ leadership was not legitimate and his plan to invade Canada
amounted to nothing more than filibustering, which they believed would only
serve to undermine the success of the Irish nationalist movement.

Not surprisingly, \textit{The Irish People}, a newspaper based in Dublin and
devoted to the I.R.B., agreed. The paper not only vehemently opposed a Fenian
invasion of Canada on grounds that it would be considered filibustering, it also
asked: “what right do we have to invade Canada against the wishes of the
Canadian themselves?”\textsuperscript{59} Attacking Canada, the newspaper concluded, was an
act both “impolitic and impractical.”\textsuperscript{60} Ironically, such rhetoric was not that
different from what the Roberts side declared when condemning plans to attack
British targets in Ireland. Regardless, as a mouthpiece for Stephens, the
newspaper was not exactly objective. Roberts posed a threat to Stephens’ status

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{The Irish People} (Dublin) March 17, 1866, folder 123, FBF, NAI.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
even in his own country where it was essential that he maintain the appearance of control over the transnational movement in order to sustain the I.R.B. Nonetheless, as a powerful media outlet *The Irish People’s* criticism of Roberts carried considerable weight.

And yet, while O’Mahony was able to maintain support from a considerable number of Fenian circles throughout the country as well as prominent Irish nationalist newspapers in Dublin, questions began to rise about his leadership, specifically his handling of funds. Over one million dollars had been “subscribed” in donations to the Fenian Brotherhood.\(^6^1\) In addition to Stephens demands, both Fenians and I.R.B. members “bitterly” availed the O’Mahony management for not having sent promised arms and money.\(^6^2\) An article in *The World*, titled “Where has the money gone to?” revealed that the central governing body of the Fenian Brotherhood had accounted for very little of the donations. After an investigation, the newspaper discovered that the Brotherhood paid prominent members, such as Colonel Mulcahy, over $7,000 “for no recorded reason.”\(^6^3\) Several Fenian employees had also received large salaries, some at twelve dollars per day. The head directress of the Fenian Sisterhood made $1,500 annually and her clerk brought in $800. Other high expenditures included $3,000 for pilots; $30,000 spent on the executive mansion (Moffat Mansion) without any detailed account; $23,000 went to the Military Convention of Fenians; some received large sums for slandering anyone who spoke out against O’Mahony; and “hundreds of thousands of dollars that

\(^{61}\) D. Thomas to the British Chief Secretary, Dublin. April 3, 1866, folder A131, FBF, NAI.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) “Where has the Money Gone to?” *The World* (Dublin) April 10, 1866.
disappeared in a most miraculous manner." The investigation revealed that the Fenian Brotherhood under O'Mahony's stewardship had become a victim of its own success, with its leaders indulging in the donation coffers for personal gain.

O'Mahony attempted to place blame about the mishandling of money on the Roberts cabal. In response, Roberts claimed that the Senate of the Fenian Brotherhood never refused to send money to the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and he blamed D.B. Killian, Secretary of the Treasury, for squandering resources at worst, or mismanaging the funds at best. Roberts also responded to inquiries from the Committee of the Irish Republic Brotherhood, and offered “all books and accounts pertaining to the Fenian Brotherhood.” With the finger pointing by different members, it was difficult to prove who exactly was at fault. But the extravagant expenditures underscore how far the Fenians had strayed from their original purpose of financially supporting the I.R.B.

Because O'Mahony still retained control of the Fenian bank account and refused to allocate any funds for planning an invasion of Canada, Roberts and his supporters raised money to purchase additional weapons themselves. By the winter of 1865, The Mercury reported that the Fenians under Roberts had made a contract for a large purchase of rifles. Sweeny felt convinced that once Canada was in Fenian possession, more Americans would join them and provide additional resources. The Fenian general had reason to feel confident. Even

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64 Excerpts from The World as printed in “The Irish Republic,” The New York Herald (Dublin) May 16, 1866.
66 Roberts to the Committee of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. April 2, 1866, folder A49-50, FBF, NAI.
68 “The Fenian Uprising,” The World (New York) March 9, 1866, folder A120-A122, FBF, NAI.
Canadian newspapers pointed to the American support for Fenian aims. Months before the Fenian attack in Canada, the Montreal Gazette condemned the U.S. government for knowing about the Fenian plans and taking “no steps to stop the work.” By doing nothing, the paper charged, the Fenians believed that they had the government’s support. What emboldened Roberts and his followers even more was the fact that their plan to invade Canada was, as historian Thomas Brown described, a “well publicized expedition.” On more than one occasion, they openly declared their intentions without facing repercussions. Coupled with a strident faith in the project of expansion to fulfill an American empire of liberty across the continent, the Roberts party had all the ammunition it needed to move forward with its plan.

Though Roberts and O’Mahony were still “at fierce war with each other” in the spring of 1866, the inflated sense of American righteousness and government complicity had even begun to influence O’Mahony. After months of protesting the plan to invade Canada, in April of 1866 he led a group of Fenians in an attempt to occupy Campobello Island—a sizeable stretch of Canadian territory just across the border from the eastern tip of Maine. But when O’Mahony and his followers gathered at Eastport “on the frontier of the state of Maine,” ready to take possession of the island, across the border Canadian authorities arrested eight Fenians who were armed and prepared to assist O’Mahony. With

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69 The Montreal Gazette (Montreal) March 7, 1866, folder A120-A122, FBF, NAI.
70 Ibid.
71 Brown, 40.
72 Chapter two of this dissertation examines the Fenian public declarations of plans to invade Canada.
73 The World (Dublin) April 10, 1866, folder A29, FBF, NAI.
74 D. Thomas to the British Chief Secretary. Dublin. April 12, 1866, folder A131, FBF, NAI.
Canadian authorities alerted to his plan, O’Mahnoy retreated. For a man who had built the Fenian Brotherhood, it was an embarrassing fall from grace.

Stephens had previously endorsed O’Mahony over Roberts because he opposed attacking Canada. But when Stephens arrived in the U.S. in May, he asked for O’Mahony’s resignation and publically declared that in a moment of weakness that the Fenian leader had “allowed himself to be carried into the Campobello movement, which has ended in fiasco.” Stephens may have intended to condemn O’Mahony’s actions, but his words also raise questions about how he would have reacted had the attack at Campobello been a success. Nonetheless, Stephens considered the failure of the attack a major setback for the cause. His supporters in Ireland also continued to criticize the Roberts and Sweeny faction. They argued that for eighteen years Stephens “toiled to unite Irishmen in one solid mass for the freedom of their country,” but that his work had been undone by a few “proud and ambitious men [who] crept into the organization by stealth and cast the seeds of division into the plastic soil of the Irish heart.” The Irish World accused The Irish American—the New York-based newspaper that supported the Fenians—of poisoning members against O’Mahony and “furthering a discord in the organization.” When O’Mahony fell prey to the ambitions that had taken hold of Roberts and Sweeny, Stephens stepped in to try to restore order according to his original plan.

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75 *The New York Herald* (New York) May 12, 1866, folder A49-50, FBF, NAI.
76 *The Irish People* (Dublin) May 30, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
77 Ibid.
Other Fenians had already suggested that both Roberts and O'Mahony “withdraw in favor of some new man, in whom all can have confidence.”\textsuperscript{78} The Campobello attempt had prompted American authorities to pay greater attention to the Brotherhood, and many members of the organization worried that any further movement in Canada would be a recipe for disaster. But Roberts was not to be deterred. By May, the Roberts-Sweeny group had not yet attacked Canada, though rumors swirled that they were threatening.\textsuperscript{79} That month, the Treasury Department in Washington D.C., seized seventeen hundred rifles belonging to the Fenians; and police in Erie, Pennsylvania took possession of eighty-seven cases of arms, also property of the Fenian Senate in New York.\textsuperscript{80} Though the Brotherhood appeared to be in disarray, D. Thomas, a British spy stationed in New York, observed inflammatory Fenian speeches, the sale of bonds to increase the organization’s funds, and the receipt of money for war purposes. By all appearances, the Roberts faction was not slowing down. The inciting attitude of Fenianism Thomas concluded, had remained unchanged.\textsuperscript{81} It was only two months later that Roberts ordered John O'Neil to march over one thousand Fenian soldiers across the Niagara River and launch an attack on British North America—a clear indication that Stephens and O'Mahony had lost control of the organization they had created to support the I.R.B. The Irish American movement had taken on a life of its own, influenced by an American culture of imperial

\textsuperscript{78} “The Fenian Factions,” \textit{The Mercury} (New York) December 17, 1865.
\textsuperscript{79} D. Thomas to the British Chief Secretary’s Office, May 11, 1866, folder A151, FBF, NAI.
\textsuperscript{80} D. Thomas to the British Chief Secretary’s Office. May 22, 1866, folder A151, FBF, NAI.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
hubris. Even Canadian politician, Thomas D’Arcy McGee, recognized this process while condemning the Fenians for the attack:

For the people who assail Canada in the name of Ireland, I deny that the ringleaders are Irishmen—with some exceptions. I deny that they represent Ireland, to whom Canada has done no wrong. On the contrary, whenever Ireland appealed to us, as in the case of the distress in Connaught and the Catholic University collections, we have always heartily and promptly responded to her call.\(^{82}\)

The Fenian Brotherhood had become fully Irish American, embracing the resources and imperial righteousness of American culture. The fracture between the Fenian Brotherhood and the I.R.B. became even clearer when Stephens left New York and traveled to other Fenian circles throughout the U.S. to raise money and encourage members to support his objectives. Despite Stephens' popularity when he first arrived in New York, he was unable to achieve his goals and eventually returned to Ireland uncertain about the future of the Fenian Brotherhood and the I.R.B. The feelings of distrust were mutual. Many Fenians had grown suspicious of Stephens and even circulated reports that he was a British spy.\(^{83}\) As one American newspaper concluded, ultimately Stephens had failed to “reach the hearts of the Irish people in America,” as he had done in with those in Ireland.\(^{84}\) The division between Irish nationalists and Irish American nationalists had clearly taken Stephens by surprise. The pull of American empire had damaged Irish nationalism, but it was about to do the same to Irish American nationalism as well.

\(^{82}\) Thomas D’Arcy, *The Toronto Canadian Freeman* (Toronto) June 20, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
\(^{83}\) *The Irish American* (New York) February 11, 1865, folder A11, FBF, NAI.
\(^{84}\) *The New York Tribune* as printed in *The Hastings Chronicle* (Ottawa) June 27, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
Fenian Burn-

On June 1st, 1866, General John O’Neil and the paramilitary regiment of the Fenian Brotherhood raised a green flag on the Canadian shore at Fort Erie, and declared that he and his men were “at last on British territory.” O’Neil had led the capture of Fort Erie and ordered its town people of a few hundred residents to feed and house his men. According to one Canadian newspaper, the Fenians then “spread over the adjoining country, stretching in front and also to the left and right, gathering provisions, forage and horses, not killing anyone, and apparently, under restraint, having probably a wholesome fear of punishment in case of a reverse.” The next day, O’Neil and marched his men ten miles further into Canadian territory towards the town of Ridgeway where they met a force of nine hundred Canadian Volunteers, under the Command of Colonel Booker of the 13th Battalion of the Hamilton Volunteers, and the Queen’s Own of Toronto, York and Caledonia Companies. According to a private in the Highland Company of the Queen’s Own, there were at least seven hundred Fenians marching toward Ridgeway. After a two-hour battle, the Canadian and British

86 “The Invasion,” The Intelligencer (Bellville) June 8, 1866,
87 Ibid.
forces retreated with ten soldiers killed. And while the Fenians had also suffered
the same number of casualties, they managed to hold Ridgeway for a few days.\footnote{Ibid.}

The exact number of soldiers who fought on either side of the battle is
difficult to pinpoint, as reports from different sources vary. In addition to the
British soldier’s statements, another eye witness account reported that a Fenian
“force” of over one thousand men crossed the Niagara River at 2 a.m. on Friday
morning, June 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1866, in two “scows” drawn by a tug from the Fort Erie
village.\footnote{“The Raid on Niagara Frontier,” \textit{The Intelligencer} (Bellville) June 8, 1866.}
\textit{The Ottawa Citizen} declared that two thousand Fenians had taken Fort
Erie, cut telegraph wires, and destroyed “a great deal of property.”\footnote{“The Fenians,” \textit{The Ottawa Citizen} (Ottawa) June 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1866.} Additional
reports noted that the about five hundred strong of the Queen’s Own left Ottawa
that morning for Port Colborne, a Lake Erie town twenty miles west of Buffalo.
The newspaper declared that over two thousand Canadian volunteers were
gathering in border towns “to defend their country from the gang of marauders
who threaten their peace and happiness.”\footnote{Ibid.} From Prescott, Ontario, a small town
directly across the St. Lawrence River from Odgensburg, New York, the
enthusiasm of volunteers from supporting townspeople was impassioned.\footnote{The
\textit{Ottawa Citizen} included multiple reports, op cited.}

Although the Fenians had launched a surprise attack on Fort Erie, by the time
they reached Ridgeway, Canadian volunteers and British forces outnumbered
them. And yet, the Fenians defeated the Canadian and British forces at
Ridgeway because so many of the Brotherhood’s fighters were experienced
soldiers of the Civil War. They simply outmatched many Canadians militiamen

\footnote{Ibid.}
and British soldiers stationed in Toronto who were neither well trained nor experienced in battle.\textsuperscript{94}

The Fenian victory, however, was short-lived. O'Neil and his men may have momentarily won the battle at Ridgeway, but Canadian and British coalitions connected with more reinforcements, including General Lowry and his British royal forces.\textsuperscript{95} Together, they headed towards the area to mount a counter attack at Fort Erie and expel the Fenians from Canada. After receiving news of the oncoming forces late Saturday evening, O'Neil ordered his men back across the river to American soil, signaling for a “scow and tug” from the other side of the river.\textsuperscript{96} O'Neil was unaware that the U.S. Navy was patrolling the area, but he also understood that his sentence would be far worse if he was apprehended in Canada. Only two barges of Fenian soldiers made it back across the Niagara River to Buffalo before the \textit{USS Michigan} arrived at the scene to block the passage of the remaining men, including O'Neil.

In the early morning of June 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 1866, United States Naval commander Andrew Bryson of the \textit{Michigan} captured close to five hundred Fenians as they retreated across the Niagara River from Fort Erie, Ontario, to Buffalo, New York. Bryson also seized 317 muskets, 192 Cartridge boxes, 416 bayonets, 110 waist belts, 137 cap pouches, and 165 bayonet sheaths from the men.\textsuperscript{97} Although the number of Fenians involved in the attacks was considerably greater—with

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\textsuperscript{94} Senior Hereward also makes this point in \textit{The Last Invasion of Canada}, (Toronto: Dundurn Pres, 1991), 89.
\textsuperscript{95} General Lowry led a regiment of reinforcements and his first hand account is included in the introduction of this dissertation.
\textsuperscript{96} A “scow and tug” was the barge system used to transport people and goods across the Niagara River.
\textsuperscript{97} “The Capture by the \textit{Michigan},” \textit{The Intelligencer}, June 8, 1866.
\end{flushleft}
Canadian newspapers reporting that at least two hundred retreating Fenians managed to “drop into the water” and swim ashore—Bryson also allowed some of the “rank and file” members to go free. But he arrested John O’Neil, along with several hundred other captured men. Bryson then telegraphed officials in Washington D.C. to report the capture of the main portion of General O’Neil’s forces and asked for “instructions regarding their disposition.” Responding to the news, commander Major General George Meade—a decorated Civil War officer in charge of the Atlantic division of the U.S. military—ordered army regiments to maintain neutrality by cutting off Fenian reinforcements or supplies, which they had reason to believe were “destined to be used unlawfully—in fine, taking all measures precautionary and otherwise to prevent violations of the law.” To the Canadians, Meade’s actions were long overdue. Although neutrality laws made it illegal for an American to invade a country at peace with the United States, the government had been inconsistent in its enforcement of them.

Many Fenians did not make it back across the Niagara River and were captured by the Canadian and British forces. The aftermath of the invasion of Canada—including the trial of imprisoned Fenians—provides insight on the kinds of Irish American men who were drawn to participate in such belligerent

98 Ibid.
100 Ibid, 92.
101 For a discussion of the U.S. government’s inconsistent record enforcing the Neutrality Laws see chapter two of this dissertation. See also Robert E. May, Manifest Destiny’s Underworld, Filibustering in Antebellum America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) chapter one. For a more in depth explanation of the Neutrality laws see May, 7.
activities. It also further reveals just how much the organization had taken on a life of its own, far removed from the original vision of James Stephens and John O’Mahony. The men who were involved in the attacks in Canada were a diverse group with differing motivations for their involvement. However, there were a few common characteristics. According to a Canadian newspaper, the Fenians were the following:

Young, some of them mere boys, all of the lowest class of Irish Catholics, and nearly all of them had been in the Northern or Southern armies during the late war. They were thoroughly accustomed to the use of the rifle and to military maneuvers, and were, as a rule, daring to a remarkable degree. They had no cannon, no knapsacks, no wagons, or permanent stock of military stores of any kind, but hey had good rifles and revolvers with the United States Government mark, and enough ammunition for a short time. They had no uniforms and were ragged and dirty, but did not make worse light infantry on that account.  

The account may have been intentionally degrading in its reference to all of the men participating in the attacks as the ‘lowest class of Irish Catholics,’ but it nonetheless underlined several important claims that the Fenians had made about themselves. First, it suggests that most of the Fenians involved in the attack on Canada had been soldiers in the American Civil War and were using their U.S. military service weapons. This observation is a reminder of the distinction between the Fenians and members of the I.R.B. who lacked military experience and badly needed weapons. Second, the men attacking Canada did not have sufficient resources, ‘no knapsacks, no wagons, or permanent stock of military stores of any kind.’ Their lack of resources was likely due to the fact that in the month before the attacks, the U.S. government had seized Fenian

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102 "The Fenian Prisoners," The Intelligencer (Bellville) June 8, 1866,
103 John O’Neil also made these claims in his account of the Fenian raids, op. cited.
supplies.\textsuperscript{104} Third, the division within the Brotherhood also contributed to the reduction in basic needs. Because O’Mahony still controlled the organization’s purse, Roberts could only rely on the funds he was able to raise on his own.

But the lack of resources and the ‘ragged and dirty’ appearance of the Fenians who attacked Canada also point to the fact that the rank and file members were largely poor, uneducated men. As Fenian A.L. Morrison affirmed at a large gathering in Chicago, the soldiers were “poor laboring men” who had never seen the inside of a grammar school.”\textsuperscript{105} The testimony of the men brought to trial in Canada underscores the disenfranchised economic status of most of the Fenians involved, but also reveals a group of men who defy simple generalizations. There were several teenagers—with the youngest being fourteen—and a few men in their mid forties, but the majority of soldiers were in the twenties and thirties. Twenty-one of the Fenian prisoners captured at Fort Erie were taken to Toronto. Over sixty men became prisoners in Brantford, Ontario. Fenian Owen Kennedy was only nineteen and had come to Buffalo from Cincinnati. Patrick Norton was a native of Ireland who also traveled the same path. And while a Canadian newspaper claimed that the Fenians involved in the attack were largely men like Kennedy and Norton who originated from Cincinnati, Buffalo, and other northern locations such as Terra Hute, Indianapolis, Indiana, Cleveland, Southern Illinois, the truth was far more complicated.\textsuperscript{106}

The motives of the Fenian soldiers varied. J.H. Maxwell acknowledged that he was a member of the organization, but stated that he did not know what a

\textsuperscript{104} D. Thomas to the British Chief Secretary’s Office, May 22, 1866, folder A151, FBF, NAI.
\textsuperscript{105} “The Fenian Picnic,” \textit{The Chicago Times} (Chicago) August 13, 1865.
\textsuperscript{106} “The Fenian Prisoners,” \textit{The Intelligencer} (Bellville) June 8, 1866,
Fenian was. Maxwell also maintained that he was not fighting “on any religious
question,” rather he was “fighting for freedom.” James Diamond was an
American citizen who admitted at trial that he was glad to be arrested because
he had “innocently” gotten into trouble. Another Fenian soldier admitted to a
Canadian newspaper that he had joined the Brotherhood’s army not for pay, but
for plunder. He noted that he was surprised the Canadian people did not support
the Fenians, a telling statement of the Brotherhood’s hubris. Several other
captured Fenians revealed that they had fought for the Northern Army in the
American Civil War. For example, Patrick Keating testified that he fought for the
North and had been captured by Confederates in the South. Lacking the means
to “return home” after the war, Keating enlisted with the Brotherhood and planned
to desert as soon as he arrived in Canada. Keating’s testimony not only
reveals that some members of the Brotherhood used the organization for
personal gain, but also indicates that Fenian networks were widespread—even
infiltrating the Northern Army to recruit members during the war.

Other captured Fenians tried to maintain their innocence. One prisoner in
Toronto claimed that members of the Brotherhood had forced him to provide
spiritual support during the attacks, and emphasized his religious opposition to
Fenianism. At his trial, he stated that he was a forty-eight year old Roman
Catholic priest who, five years earlier, had immigrated to the United States where

107 Testimony from James Thompson of the Queen’s Own. The Queen vs. J.H. Maxwell, ref.
RG22-5889, York County Crown Attorney Fenian Trial Papers, Archives of Ontario, University of
Toronto. Ontario.
108 Ibid.
109 James Burke Trial, ref. RG22-5889, York County Crown Attorney Fenian Trial Papers,
Archives of Ontario, University of Toronto. Ontario.
110 “The Queen’s Own,” The Intelligencer (Bellville) June 6, 1866.
111 Ibid.
he had been a parish priest in Adderson, Madison Co., Indiana. In his testimony, the priest claimed that he was traveling to Montreal to look after a “legacy” left by his deceased brother when the Fenians took him prisoner and compelled him to “act as chaplain.”112 After the battle at Fort Erie and Ridgeway, the suspected priest stated that he was “called upon to hear the confessions of the dying men and minister the rites to them,” but that he had always opposed the Fenian Brotherhood and “preached against them.”113 Though it is difficult to prove whether the priest was telling the truth or merely trying to save himself, his insistence that he opposed Fenianism is consistent with the Catholic Church’s position.114 His story also suggests that the Brotherhood had not strayed far from their spiritual devotion, despite the violent nature of their actions. They did not waver in their strident beliefs. And this self-righteousness—whether it was grounded in religion, American expansion, or Irish American nationalism—also played a significant role in their downfall.

Many captured Fenians remained defiant, declaring both their Irish nationalism and patriotism to the United States. Patrick Donohue testified that he was a member of the Brotherhood, that he would die one, and that he would also die for “the Yankee land.”115 Donahue’s statements underline the ways in which Fenians had become Americanized, just as Stephens feared. Men such as Donahue were not just Irish nationalists, they were Irish American nationalists,

112 “Political Fugitives?” The Daily Leader (Toronto) June 8, 1866.
113 Ibid.
114 See chapter two of this dissertation for an examination of the Church’s opposition to the Fenian Brotherhood.
and their loyalty reflected this. John O’Neil was another example of how members of the organization had carved out a dual allegiance. In court testimony, O’Neil argued that his jail sentence should be “light” because he was merely acting on behalf of his adopted country.\textsuperscript{116} As noted earlier, O’Neil epitomized the Americanization of the Irish nationalist movement in that he felt Canada was the only practical space for Fenian aggressions.

James Burke testified that he had come over with other Irish nationalists from Ireland to look for work and that he ended up serving in the Northern Army for three or four years.\textsuperscript{117} Burke’s trial revealed that there were over twenty-five American citizens from Galloway, Ireland who had been captured for their involvement in attacking Canada, and that the Fenians and the I.R.B employed recruiting networks to bring Irish men to the U.S. in order to use the Civil War as a training ground. This process was also evident when several prisoners admitted to being British citizens. For example, Thomas Cooney declared that he was a British subject who had been taken prisoner by the Fenians. John O’Conner testified that he was a British subject, but that he was with the Fenian army, carrying dispatches for General O’Neil. Canadian courts also found Fenians Thomas Maxwell, John Hughes, Thomas School, and Frederick Fry to be British subjects.\textsuperscript{118}

The difference between being an American and British citizen was an important legal distinction. But for Stephens, it was also a matter of cultural

\textsuperscript{116} “Political Fugitives?” \textit{The Daily Leader} (Toronto) June 8, 1866.
\textsuperscript{117} James Burke Trial, (ref. RG22-5889, B229173), \textit{York County Crown Attorney Fenian Trial Papers}, Archives of Ontario, University of Toronto. Ontario.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
loyalty. Stephens did not feel that Irishmen who had immigrated to the United States had absolved themselves from the I.R.B., for he felt their oath had been “binding on the conscience.”\textsuperscript{119} Ironically, Stephens employed the same justification used by the British government: every person born on English soil was always a citizen.\textsuperscript{120} It was an odd alignment for Stephens, but one that demonstrated his frustration with how he felt the Fenians who had deserted the cause of Irish nationalism.

The British policy of citizenship had long posed a problem in Anglo-American relations, when the British military impressed American ships in the revolutionary era by claiming that its soldiers, who had been born in land belonging to the British Empire, were still subjects of the crown. With meager naval resources, the U.S. government often had little recourse to address the matter.\textsuperscript{121} Although the issue of citizenship (wrought through impressments) was one of the factors leading the War of 1812, the peace negotiations had provided a resolution.\textsuperscript{122} In 1865, when British authorities suspended Habeas Corpus in Ireland, the debate over citizenship became a central focus for Irish Americans. Irish authorities had arrested all suspected Irish nationalists, including several men who claimed they were American citizens.

In the spring of 1866, Secretary of State, William Seward quickly grew concerned that Americans in Ireland suspected of supporting the I.R.B. were

\begin{footnotes}
\item[119] The Irish People (Dublin) May 30, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
\item[120] Ibid.
\item[121] See William P. Leeman, The Long Road to Annapolis: The Founding of the Naval Academy and the Emerging American Republic (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
\end{footnotes}
being arrested and had not been given “protection as citizens of the United States.” Charles Francis Adams, the U.S. Ambassador in London, voiced his frustration to British diplomats that Irishmen who had proved their naturalization in the United States were being arrested, treated as British subjects, and were then not respected as citizens of the United States when there was no reason given for their confinement. Adams maintained that there was no distinction between native Americans—people he referred to as those born in the United States—and naturalized Irishmen. He believed that the British handling of Irish in this matter had been incorrect with no consideration “being paid to the fact of their naturalization in the United States.” In complete disagreement, British diplomat Lord Clarendon asserted that allegiance of native subjects “could not be divested by any act of their own.” But even if they could, he argued that immigrants had come from the United States to Ireland “in such numbers and we found in Ireland with money and arms plotting against the government.” Adams responded that because the British suspended Habeas Corpus, people were swept up in prison with no reason, no evidence, and no charges made. He argued that this posed a hardship that was not something citizens of a foreign state should be subjugated to. Adams then connected the issue to Fenianism,

126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
and concluded that the British policy was only helping to make Irish nationalism agitation worse.\textsuperscript{128}

In the aftermath of the Fenian invasions of Canada, the U.S. government once again attempted to assert its authority on the issue of citizenship. Although President Johnson had released a proclamation ordering Americans to obey the Neutrality Laws, Secretary of State William Seward instructed Adams to pressure the British government for clemency for the Fenians who were held as prisoners in Canada.\textsuperscript{129} As added leverage in negotiations with his English counterparts, Adams likened the Fenian actions in Canada to the group of British men who had aided the South during the American Civil War.\textsuperscript{130} The diplomatic wrangling concerning citizenship was not immediately resolved.\textsuperscript{131} But the hard-line stance taken by the U.S. government against a British imperial policy that had been in place for centuries was significant. Once again, American citizenship afforded the Fenians protections and government support that Irish nationalists elsewhere did not enjoy.

This is not to say that the U.S. government did not imprison the Fenians they captured on the Niagara River. In fact, American authorities persecuted the Brotherhood’s leadership including “all who claim the rank of officers, subjects them, under the laws of the United States, to a fine of three thousand dollars, and imprisonment for three years.”\textsuperscript{132} On June 6, 1866, General Sweeny and Patrick

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} William Seward to C.F. Adams, No. 1779, Jun 9, 1866. Papers relating to the foreign relations of the United States, 134.
\textsuperscript{130} The Hastings Chronicle (Ottawa) June 14, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
\textsuperscript{131} This issue is examined in greater detail in chapter five of this dissertation.
\textsuperscript{132} “The Invasion,” The Daily Leader (Toronto) June 9, 1866.
Meehan, Colonel of Engineers and Chief of Staff of the Fenians, were apprehended in St. Alban’s, Vermont. Sweeny’s bail was set at $20,000 and Meehan’s at $5,000. In Malone, several Fenian officers were arrested. In Buffalo, six officers were officially charged with violating U.S. neutrality laws and required bail of $5,000 each. John O’Neil was among them, but his bail was set at $8,000 for his leadership in the attack. The next day, New York authorities took President Roberts into custody. Roberts’ warrant stated that he had been engaged in “fitting out armed expeditions against the two Canada provinces of the country of Great Britain, a foreign State.”

Other arrests included: Generals Murphy and Hefferman, Captain Lyndsay, Colonel Relly of Rochester; Lieutenant Obrien of New York; Colonel Eason of New Jersey; Colonel Quinn of Albany; Captain Quinn of Titusville, PA.; Captain Murphy, Major Kinnealy of Albany; Major Connelly of New Jersey; Captain Fallon, Captain Greavy, and Captain Glass. By enforcing the law, the U.S. government was setting an example, avoiding diplomatic conflict with England, and sending a message to the Fenian leadership that they could not dictate American foreign policy.

In Canada, several captured Fenians were not only treated as American citizens but Canadians as well. Canadians John Maguire and David D. Hammil were charged with violating the Military Act for being found with Fenian songbooks on their person and were known to attend Hibernian processions—another Irish nationalist society. At trial, a witness testified that John Maguire was an innkeeper in Toronto and had joined with “certain lawless persons,

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133 The Irish American (New York) June 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
134 “Fenians in this City,” The Intelligencer (Bellville) June 6, 1866.
commonly called Fenians, citizens of a foreign state, that is to say, the United States of America, at present at peace with Her Majesty the Queen."\textsuperscript{135} Hammil and Maguire were just two of the hundreds of Canadian Fenians who were suspected of treasonable practices. Canadian newspapers reported that four hundred armed members of the organization had gathered in Toronto prior to the invasion and “drilled like soldiers... for no peaceable purpose.”\textsuperscript{136} Pikes had been found in the houses of those with suspected connections to the Brotherhood and the Toronto Fenians had a direct connection to the branch in Buffalo who had “procured boxes of pistols for their Toronto Brethren.”\textsuperscript{137} These discoveries, and the arrest and trial of Canadian members underscore the reach of the Fenian Brotherhood and transnational nature of the organization.

Though another one hundred Fenians were arrested in Canada, many residents there felt that the captured men did not deserve due process. \textit{The Intelligencer} concluded that the war “these scoundrels make on us is no common war. It is a most blood thirsty, fiendish, and diabolical war... There should be no parley with the men engaged in it.”\textsuperscript{138} Letters to the editor echoed these sentiments. One resident concluded that there was only “one opinion,” concerning the prisoners in custody, “establish their guilt, then give them short shrift and long rope. It is well to be merciful, and it would be the highest attribute of mercy to rid the world of these miserable cut-throats who invade our land.”\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} “Fenianism” \textit{The Intelligencer} (Bellville) June 6, 1866.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{138} “The Fenian Prisoners,” \textit{The Intelligencer} (Bellville) June 8, 1866.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
To support their demands, residents pointed to the applicable law of Upper Canada that allowed the Governor of the province to order a court martial for:

Any person, being a citizen or subject of any foreign state or country at peace with Her Majesty, be or continues in arms against Her Majesty within Upper Canada, or commits any acts of hostility therein, or enters Upper Canada with design or intent to levy war against Her Majesty, or to commit any felony therein, for which any person would, by the laws of Upper Canada, be liable to suffer death.  

Canadians felt that the Fenians had clearly violated the law by launching an attack across the border into their homeland. Death was the only just punishment, and they worried that those men who were captured by U.S. authorities after retreating back across the Niagara River would be treated too leniently.

These concerns were valid, given that several American newspapers reported on the attacks without condemning the Fenians, and pointed to the good fortune of those who were caught on the American side of the border. Canadians paid careful attention to American newspapers, and even reprinted accounts from the *New York Evening Post*, which reported that the “warlike and chivalrous leader of the Fenian army of invasions has been arrested [and] took good care that his arrest should not occur on the other side of the Canada line.” In response, Canadian newspaper *The Daily Leader*, asked “what designation are the prisoners who fell into the hands of the American Government, as they were retreating to the States from their murderous expedition?” Canadians became even more disturbed when the *New York Tribune* labeled those Fenians “political

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140 Applicable Laws of Upper Canada, as printed in *The Intelligencer* (Bellville) June 8, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
142 “Political Fugitives?” *The Daily Leader* (Toronto) June 8, 1866.
“fugitives,” and stated that it knew of “no treaty under which they could be surrendered to the Canadian authorities.”\textsuperscript{143} It was a significant acknowledgement. As political fugitives, the Fenians appeared more like victims escaping persecution from an oppressive regime than filibusterers who had perpetrated acts of violence with premeditation.

It is worth noting that not every American newspaper agreed. \textit{The Daily Leader} posted excerpts from \textit{The New York Journal of Commerce} that argued against referring to the Fenians as political fugitives because it “set a precedent for any other band of men in the United States to go into Canada, murdering and robbing, then escape into this country and avoid all responsibility.”\textsuperscript{144} Protecting the filibusters of the world, the paper added, was not desirable because “how would it comport with our dignity to shield from punishment all the men who may fit out piratical expeditions from this country against the commerce of the various nations of the world?”\textsuperscript{145} For \textit{The Daily Leader}, the Fenians were nothing more than murderers and filibusterers. Their politics were irrelevant to the crimes they had committed.

And yet when it came to punishment, other American newspapers did not see cause for extraditing the imprisoned Fenians to Canada. \textit{The New York Journal} concluded:

\begin{quote}
The best thing that can happen to the men now in custody is to be punished by the United States courts for violations of the United States laws. This may save them from more severe punishment, which they
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{144} The \textit{New York Journal of Commerce} went on to suggest that other causes would then be used as justifications for filibustering attacks, such as the “freedom of Scotland, the prevention of Canadian annexation, the liberations of Jerusalem, or any other Quixotic purpose?” Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
would receive if handed to the Canadian authorities. The only form in which a demand for their surrender can come is in the ordinary course under the treaty… It would probably be difficult for the Canadian authorities to find personal proof of crime against many of the Fenians, and if they are satisfied that the United States will punish a few as examples for violation of the neutrality laws, it is hardly likely that they will trouble themselves to ask for the extradition of any. They want us to keep them out instead of sending them into Canada.\textsuperscript{146}

The statement was another acknowledgement of the Brotherhood’s privileged status in the United States. It was also an admission that the U.S. government would likely only punish a few of the Fenians in order to set an example, reinforcing the tone set by American politicians whereby Fenian action was largely above the law.

But it was precisely this kind of thinking that led the Fenians down a dangerous path. They came to rely too heavily on an American system without considering its limits. As many American newspapers had pointed out, the Fenians were in less danger in the United States, but this did not mean they had the leverage and power that they assumed. American Empire was full of risks and the Irish American Fenian filibusters had gambled with their lives. They had aligned themselves with an ideology and assumed state support, but by taking charge, they faced disaster. Nonetheless, Fenian leaders who were involved in the Canadian attacks were not finished. American Empire had imbued them with a confidence that would not be shaken.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
Fenian Hubris-

Over a week after the Fenians were captured in Canada, *The Irish American* declared its hope that Secretary of State, William Seward, would demand that Canada surrender to the U.S. as a “wink at connivance between American citizens and the Fenian conquerors.”\(^{147}\) With considerable faith, the newspaper went on to predict that in a year, “the dominion of the Brotherhood north of the St. Lawrence will be formally acknowledged by the United States, Russia, and each of the American republics.”\(^{148}\) Such confidence was not completely unfounded. Seward had publically proclaimed his intent to annex Canada, as he ardently believed that the mission of the U.S. was to “spread and counter the despotism of European countries.”\(^{149}\) The Fenians had not given up hope of being Seward’s bargaining chip. But in the days following the attacks of Canada, Seward no longer asserted this position. His inaction did not surprise the British, who viewed Seward as a “man of words rather than action, full of bluster and empty threats.”\(^{150}\) Lord Lyons, the British Ambassador in Washington remarked that Seward was “disposed to play the old game of seeking popularity here [the United States] by displaying violence towards us.”\(^{151}\) Seward may have also been playing a more strategic diplomatic game with the British in hopes of securing better relations between the two countries in the aftermath of the American Civil War.\(^{152}\) Nonetheless, the Fenians, it seems, had been duped by

\(^{147}\) *The Irish American* (New York) June 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.

\(^{148}\) Ibid.

\(^{149}\) Reid, op cited, 54.

\(^{150}\) Ibid, 47.


\(^{152}\) Chapter five of this dissertation examines the Anglo-American move towards rapprochement.
the rhetoric of American Empire that influential politicians like Seward often propagate.

For their failures in Canada, the Fenians directed most of their anger and frustration at the U.S. government. Although not all Brotherhood members had supported the attacks of Canada, the majority of them felt utterly betrayed. In astonishment, they declared that never before had such “perfidy been perpetrated as has been committed against us in this case. We have enriched this country with genius and industry; we have added glory and renown to the American flag.” In return, the Fenians felt that they had received “insult and ridicule.” They singled out Seward, who they felt had used them “in the claim negotiations with England.” To some members of the organization, Seward had only begun to suppress the Fenian movement after the Civil War in order to pressure England to pay claims for her aid to the Confederacy. They warned Seward that he had “never made a greater mistake.” Although they had become pawns in the political negotiations between the U.S. and Britain, the Fenians were determined not to become victims of empire.

In public at least, the Fenians appeared undeterred. The arrest of Roberts and Sweeny caused the “wildest excitement” among members in New York City. Several other leaders of the Brotherhood publicly denounced the authorities in Washington, and charged that they had “played the Irish people...
false.”

At other meetings in the city, members passed resolutions denouncing President Johnson, and declared that the Irish population “will not support him hereafter.” The reaction also became the perfect fulcrum to not only raise funds, but push for more attacks into Canada. When Fenian speakers announced that more money was needed, members quickly raised $5,000. On the night of Roberts’ arrest, a mass meeting of Fenians came together in Manhattan, raising more money for arms and resources to be sent to the Canadian frontier. According to witnesses, all of the Manhattan District circles were represented, as was many “of the fair sex, many of whom, in token of the interest they felt in the cause, wore a strip of green ribbon on the breast.”

Speaking to the large congregation of members and supporters, Colonel Steiger of Philadelphia compared the Fenian attempts in Canada to the “course pursued by the people of Texas in their struggle for liberty.” He suggested that there would be difficulties ahead but that the American people would be sympathetic because this was “a war for freedom, for nationality, and not a war against the English people.” Furthering his comparison to the independence movement in Texas, Steiger also reminded the crowd that they had an ally in the French Canadians because “they do not like the British Government a bit.” The presence of Irish Americans living in Canada strengthened Steiger’s arguments. Toronto native, John Maguire, revealed that other Canadians like him had joined

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158 “The Fenian Invasion,” The Daily Leader (Toronto) June 9, 1866.
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid. The Irish American (New York) June 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
the Fenian Brotherhood of the U.S. “with intent and design to assist them in their
said unlawful purpose, and is otherwise guilty of treasonable practices.”\(^{164}\) For
many members of the organization, Texas was a perfect model to emulate. They
believed that because French Canadians and Canadian Fenians wanted
independence from Britain, once American Fenians took control of the province,
the U.S. government should invite them to become an American state. In other
words, the Fenians believed that Canadian independence from the British Empire
and subsequent annexation to the U. S. was still an attainable goal.

Another example of continued support for the Fenians to return to Canada
in the weeks following the attacks was in Utica, New York, where the streets
were “overflowing with enthusiastic Irishmen, all bound to sustain the war in
Canada.”\(^{165}\) At a large Fenian gathering there, members came forward with
donations and resolved to move past the differences that had split the
organization and unite against their “hatred and treacherous enemy… to unite in
assisting and supporting by men and means, those noble, self-sacrificing men,
who have gone forth as pioneers in the struggle.”\(^{166}\) Moving forward, they hoped
the U.S. government would pay the same consideration to the neutrality laws that
the English had during the Civil War, which is to say not at all.\(^{167}\)

Roberts also seized the moment to fan the flames and build on the
groundswell of support. Although a few wealthy Irish Americans offered to pay
his bail of $10,000, Roberts declined, stating that he desired a speedy trial and

\(^{164}\) “The Fenians in this City,” *The Intelligencer* (Ottawa) June 6, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
\(^{165}\) Ibid.
\(^{166}\) Ibid.
\(^{167}\) Ibid.
“did not intend to give any bonds whatever.”\textsuperscript{168} From prison, he wrote letters that were published in the popular newspaper, \textit{The Irish American}, for members across the country. Addressing the Brotherhood, Roberts reminded his brothers that theirs was “the cause of oppressed Ireland, of humanity, justice, liberty… of Divinity itself,” and that the “great body of American born citizens despise England and her power.”\textsuperscript{169} He called upon supporters to send more donations to the headquarters in New York, because, he maintained, a “great undertaking like ours requires a great deal of money, and we are certain to succeed if you sustain us with it.”\textsuperscript{170} For Roberts, the moment was also an opportunity to recruit new members. He asked all Irish Americans to create Fenian circles:

\begin{quote}
Let men and women go round and solicit from all, particularly our wealthy countrymen, who have done so little heretofore. Come forward all with your subscriptions and prove to mankind that you are prepared to make as many sacrifices for the cause of freedom as any people on earth.\textsuperscript{171}
\end{quote}

Even from prison, Roberts campaigned by using the failed attacks in Canada as momentum to further the cause. In his mind, the Fenians were still victims, and he a martyr.

At his arraignment, Roberts remained defiant, again refusing bail because he did not want to be arrested for “for the same thing.”\textsuperscript{172} After three hours of examinations and witnesses who did not provide any testimony against him, his supporters argued that he was only being held by the “complaint of a wretched...
informer,” who never showed up in court. And yet, when asked if he intended to proceed in violating the neutrality laws again, Roberts responded “certainly,” subsequently maintaining that Fenian business will go on and the organization will not be made a “catspaw” from the government. When the court informed Roberts that Sweeny had also been arrested, Roberts did not vacillate. Instead, he declared that there were “as good men as General Sweeny left, perhaps better. Our work will go on and must succeed… I intend doing a great deal more than that which I have done.” Because American authorities had done very little to thwart his plans in Canada prior to his arrest, Roberts was confident that he could continue to lead the Brotherhood and return to Canada.

Nor did Roberts’ imprisonment deter supporters in the organization who believed that invading Canada was still a good idea. On June 7th, over two thousand Fenians left Franklin, Vermont and arrived on the Canadian border. Fenian Brotherhood General Spear led the men and pointed north to “the enemy of your country.” Spear then marched the men across the border and set up camp. To thwart his efforts, U.S. Brigadier, General F. Barry, issued general orders from Buffalo that stated “transportation by roads, by water, or other modes of public conveyance of any persons or material of war, designed or supposed to be designed to violate the neutrality laws is forbidden.” The order effectively shut off supply reinforcements to Spear and persuaded General Sweeny to stop sending men to the front. In defeat, Sweeny conceded that the “stringent

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172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 The Irish American (New York) June 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
176 Ibid.
177 Orders from United States Brigadier, General F. Barry, June 7th, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
measures of the U.S. government had rendered success impossible at the present."\textsuperscript{178} Authorities then seized large supplies of arms and ammunition headed for Fenians who were assembled in Malone and Potsdam, New York, and in St. Albans, Vermont. Suspected Fenians were also arrested in Cleveland, Ohio. The U.S. Marshall there “took possession” of the headquarters and arrested several members of the organization.\textsuperscript{179}

Before receiving the news, a small band of Fenians already in Canada moved to occupy territory. Captain O’Hara and twenty men of the third cavalry Brotherhood army advanced from St. Armand on Freligsburg, Quebec where they met a force of British soldiers. The Fenians were able to capture the British flag and send it to their headquarters in New York where it then hung underneath the Green Flag of the Brotherhood. They also entered the Custom House in Frelighsburg and seized official papers. But General Spear was unable to reinforce the men at Frelighsburg because American authorities had already begun seizing the organization’s arms and arresting men. In fact, if it had not been for General Meade stopping the inflow of arms and munitions, Fenian attacks in Canada would have likely continued. Meade had taken control of $300,000 to $500,000 worth of arms and other munitions heading to the border.\textsuperscript{180} Within days, Spear had little choice but to retreat back across to St. Albans. As the Fenians left their campgrounds, over two hundred Canadian troops charged at them, killing one. The remaining men escaped into the woods and back across the border. John Meehan then advised all Fenians to return to

\textsuperscript{178} *The Irish American* (New York) June 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid. Similar events occurred in St. Louis.
\textsuperscript{180} “The Fenian Raid,” *The Intelligencer* (Ottawa) June 6, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
their homes.\textsuperscript{181} President Johnson’s proclamation had achieved its intended results.

Two days later in Malone, New York, U.S. Army General Meade issued an official order demanding that anyone who was gathering in connection with, and in the aid of, the Fenian Brotherhood for the purpose of invading Canada, desist and disband.\textsuperscript{182} In an effort to clear the area of Fenians, Meade made it clear that the men who could not afford to return to their homes would be provided with transportation. He hoped that these “liberal efforts” would have great effect in causing the expedition “to be quietly abandoned.”\textsuperscript{183} When Meade apprehended the men at the Niagara River days before, he had also given the Fenian brass two hours to explain the state of affairs to their men, and to “counsel submission to the authorities and to accept means of transportation to their homes.”\textsuperscript{184} For Meade, the policy was motivated largely by logistics. If he could return the Fenian men to their homes and prevent trains from transporting them back to the border, the matter would resolve itself.

Although the U.S. government was seemingly cracking down on Fenian activity, U.S. authorities continued to back away from punishing them with any severity. In addition to not prosecuting the majority of rank and file members involved in the attacks while providing them transportation to their homes, the

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} “Latest American Despatches,” The Tribune (New York) June 8, 1866. Fenian military leaders involved in the Fort Erie attack included such as Generals Murphy and Hefferman, Captain Lyndsay, Colonel Relly of Rochester; Lieutenant O'Brien of New York; Colonel Eason of New Jersey; Colonel Quinn of Albany; Captain Quinn of Titusville, PA.; Captain Murphy, Major Kinnealy of Albany; Major Connelly of New Jersey; Captain Fallon, Captain Greavy, and Captain Glass.
United States government appeared lenient to several Fenian leaders as well.

One striking example was General Sweeny, who, after his release, was allowed to return to service in the U.S. Army. The lack of consequences did not sit well with Canadians, who noted the following:

The Washington Government ought certainly to get the Fenian vote. Its latest act towards this end is the most extraordinary of all that it has committed. General Sweeny was dismissed the regular service for disobedience of orders, which resulted from his joining the Fenian organization. Having served in that body until he became tired of desultory service and the Fenians became tired of him; and having made an attempt to take Canada for the marauders in which he failed, he is now reinstated at his own request to his old position in the United States army.¹⁸⁵

Sweeny’s reinstatement was certainly noteworthy given his leadership in the Fenian attacks in Canada—a clear violation of neutrality laws—and in light of how Fenians continued to publically voice their intentions to return to Canada. Though initially it appeared that the U.S. government was enforcing neutrality laws by arresting Fenian leaders, its subsequent leniency was a confusing contradiction. These mixed messages appeared to only embolden Fenian hubris.

Fenian military general John O’Neil was another example of a Brotherhood leader who was released from jail and then vowed to continue the fight in Canada. Days after his release, at his home in Nashville, Tennessee, O’Neil quickly began preparing for a another attack of Canada, violating the terms of his parole. O’Neil’s hubris was striking. While he had commended the Queen’s Own for bravery during the battle at Ridgeway, he also concluded that they “over-estimated the power of their numbers and their discipline, and they

under-estimated the courage and unyielding spirit of their opponents.” The failure in Canada, he explained, was a result of not having enough men on the ground at the necessary time, and not having enough ammunitions and arms for the men who did fight. O'Neil also maintained that many leaders of the Brotherhood hurt the cause, and he pointed to the split within the organization as having a deep impact on the ability to access resources and men. Although he felt that the majority of Fenians were in earnest, he claimed that there were a few “designing knaves and political tricksters” who succeeded in demoralizing the Brotherhood at a critical moment. These men, O'Neil argued:

Knew how to sow the seeds of dissension and distrust, and to vilify those who had embarked their whole fortunes in the undertaking. They did this to paralyze the efforts of earnest men and to keep the Brotherhood as a mere machine to help them in working out their own political plans and purposes. O’Neil may have been referring to O’Mahony and others who opposed the attack on Canada, but he also had strong words for Roberts and his advisors who made the decision to invade Canada because he felt that they had “done much to bring about the failure.” And while O’Neil did not completely avoid accountability, he maintained that the Canadian plan was the policy of the Brotherhood before he became a member and continued to be policy after the “abortive attempt of 1866,” not by just a fringe group within the organization. As evidence, he pointed to the previous annual Fenian congressional meetings that endorsed the

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186 “Thanks to the Volunteers,” *The Intelligencer*, June 6, 1866.
188 Ibid.
189 Ibid.
policy and declared a determination to carry out the plan. O'Neil felt that he had simply been the “agent” in carrying out the policy of the Fenian Brotherhood.\footnote{Ibid.}

For O'Neil, Canada remained a frontier to conquer. Canadians, he maintained, were still his enemies, because they “recognized the English government as their government and the English flag as their flag.”\footnote{Ibid, 30.} O'Neil made it clear that although the organization was ready to combat and kill anyone fighting in defense of Canada and England, Fenians were not interested in murdering Canadian citizens or pillaging their property. He pointed to the fact that hundreds of Fenian men were on Canadian soil for two days and only a few cases of pillaging were reported. He also noted that he would have punished men who pillaged if the campaign had succeeded in Canada. Directly appealing to Canadians, O'Neil also declared that if they should prefer to join the “great family of Uncle Sam,” he would be delighted to receive and recognize them as brothers.\footnote{Ibid, 29.} O'Neil appeared to not just be speaking on behalf of the Irish nationalist movement, but for an American expansionist cause as well.

Thus, the failed attacks did not stop the Fenians from trying again to appeal to the U. S. government for support. In newspapers, leaders of the Brotherhood reminded American politicians that England had been a major threat during the Civil War by attempting to break up the U.S. and by making Canada the “lurking place of the murderers of Mr. Lincoln.”\footnote{The Irish American (New York) June 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.} The Fenians also claimed that the government should have supported them in Canada because of what the
Irish had sacrificed for the United States, or at the very least that it was “hardly fair that those who bore the American flag in triumph and prevented it from being trailed in the dust, should be interfered with.” The Fenian alignment with American ideals and economic, social, and political institutions had proved successful in building a national organization—one that was capable of raising millions of dollars and powerful enough to publically declare its intentions to violate international law. But the Fenians had pushed too far. The project of American Empire had its own timeline and changing needs.

Thus, the Americanization of the Irish nationalist movement had contributed to its success, but also led to its decline. The Fenians, it seems, were too ambitious in their imperial aims. Although they benefitted from the political, economic, and social resources in the U.S., the organization ultimately paid the price for getting too close to the imperial sun. The political environment in the U.S. had changed, and the Fenians had not paid close enough attention. Furthermore, while the Fenians had overestimated American willingness to go to war with England, they also failed to consider the possibility that the majority of Canadians would not only solidify a position in the British Empire, but fight to protect it. To the surprise of Irish American nationalists, the majority of Canadians did not want to be American.

\[^{194}\text{Ibid.}\]
On June 8, 1866, *The Toronto Globe* printed an article from *The Buffalo Express* that seemed rather impressed with the Fenian invasion of Canada. The American newspaper noted that the incident had exposed Canada as weak and unable to “maintain herself as a British dependency [and that] the time may come when a knowledge of this fact may be useful.”¹ The Canadian newspaper indignantly responded that the invasions had proved nothing of the sort, and went on to insist that the Canadian Volunteers and soldiers from the Queen’s Own had bravely and effectively protected the provinces.² Indeed, the Fenian attacks had spurred British North Americans to unite for their homeland with a fervent nationalism that was rooted in British imperialism. The mobilization of Canadian and Royal forces had forced O’Neil and his men to retreat from their occupation of Fort Erie. Of course, the U.S. military’s capture of Fenians at the Niagara River also put an end to the attacks. With six Canadians dead at the hands of Fenian raiders, and after months of the organizations’ leaders publically declaring their intent to invade British North America, many Canadians wondered what had taken the United States government so long.

This question is significant considering the history of American politicians’ designs on Canada from the days of the Paris Peace Conference in 1783

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¹ *The Toronto Globe* as printed in the *Intelligencer*, June 8, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
² Ibid.
through the American Civil War. In this period, Canada had become an object of desire for many Americans, an imperial space for expansion and conquest, a loose end of the British Empire's hold on the North American continent that was open for the taking. And yet, the majority of Canadians rejected this premise. The Fenian attacks thus propelled many Canadians to become greater proponents of imperial nationalism—further entrenching themselves within the British Empire. They refused to be conquered by Irish American nationalists or become a forgone conclusion in the United States' attempt at continental hegemony. This process is worthy of study. Although scholars have examined the Fenian invasions as one of several factors that led to Canadian Confederation in 1867, most have not considered this event as a reaction to American Empire that was perpetuated by the Fenian Brotherhood. Analyzing the fervently nationalistic reaction to the Fenian invasions by both Canadian residents and politicians is essential to understanding the role the attacks played in further entrenching the provinces into the British imperial fold.

Examining the Canadian response also underscores the significance of the relationship between colonization and immigration. In 2001, historian Adele Perry used this methodological approach to look at race and gender in the making of British Columbia. Perry argued that too often, colonization and

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3 This history is outlined in chapter one of this dissertation.
4 The majority of work on this subject tends to focus on the political process. For example see Reginald Stuart op cit; Brian Jenkins, op. cit; Robin Winks, *The Civil War Years; Canada and the United States* (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998); C.P. Stacey’s 1981, *Canada in the Age of Conflict*, op. cited, begins with the Confederation and only examines it briefly.
immigration were “presented as wholly separate topics with little in common.”\(^6\)

Scholars of American history such as Mathew Frye Jacobson have also reminded us of what can be revealed when looking at the dynamic between colonization and immigration.\(^7\) This chapter seeks to further this work by offering a look into the relationship between Irish immigrants who created a transnational political organization and Canada as a British imperial frontier.

A history of turbulence-

The Fenian attacks sparked outrage in Canada and further embroiled long-term tensions between Protestants and Irish Catholics there. The immigration of famine Irish to the British North American colonies in the 1840s had spurred a nativist reaction similar to the response in the United States.\(^8\) As historian Scott W. See notes, Protestant anxiety over the “global spread of Roman Catholicism and an antipathy to Celtic peoples” largely fueled the animosity towards famine Irish immigrants in Canada.\(^9\) Prior to the famine migrations, the British North American colonies were considerably homogeneous—with pockets of native peoples, blacks, and European migrants as only a fraction of the population compared to Anglo Saxon and Gallic people.\(^10\) The first major wave of immigration in Canada had occurred between

\(^6\) Ibid, 19.
\(^7\) Jacobson, op. cited.
\(^8\) See chapter two of this dissertation.
\(^10\) Ibid.
1776 and 1783 when almost fifty thousand loyalists fled the thirteen rebellious colonies during the American Revolution. The migrants largely settled in the Maritimes and the province of Quebec along the Upper St. Lawrence River and lower Great Lakes. In subsequent decades, more Americans emigrated from New England to Canada in search of available land. And, like the loyalist immigrants, the majority of them were English speaking Protestants, many originating from Britain. The division of Canada into two provinces in 1791 established Lower Canada as a majority French speaking region between Montreal and Quebec, and Upper Canada—mostly populated with English loyalists from the Ottawa River west to the Detroit River.

White Protestant Canadian ethnicity was largely shaped by the significance of the outsider and 'other'—the slave, the Native American, the immigrant, or the Catholic. The Irish Catholic held a particularly low place in this worldview, in part because, as renowned historian of Irish Immigration Kerby Miller has discovered, Irish Catholicism was more than just a religion, it was a culture, ethnicity, and a worldview. Miller found that Irish Catholics immigrants consistently painted themselves as exiles more because of a religious and cultural identity than due to any concrete experience of alienation in America. Miller’s findings are significant to this study because they reveal the extent to

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12 Ibid. Today Upper Canada is known as Ontario and Lower Canada is known as Quebec.
13 Miller, op. cited.
which Irish Catholic immigrants appeared threatening to Anglo Saxons in both the United States and British North America.

The Irish were the largest immigrant community in Canada during the nineteenth century. Despite the rush of famine migrants, the majority of Irish arrived before 1847. Trade between Ireland and Canada had generated specific migration communities in British North America. It also played a role in separating Irish Protestant and Irish Catholic communities from one another, while simultaneously assimilating them with Canadian culture. Nonetheless, with the onset of the potato blight and subsequent famine in Ireland, the Irish in Canada significantly expanded by the middle of the 1840s. According to Donald Harman Akenson, in 1847 alone, “Canada absorbed approximately one hundred thousand arrivals, of whom roughly ninety percent were Roman Catholics.”

Migration slowed down after 1848, but then spiked again in 1855. By the end of the 1850s (when migration decreased again), thousands of Irish Catholics had flooded Canadian cities, and many had spread into rural communities. Similar to New York’s Ellis Island and California’s Angel Island decades later, New Brunswick residents established a quarantine station in the St. John harbor called Partridge Island. Although many Irish used New Brunswick as a stopping point on their way to the United States, half of those who arrived settled in the provinces following the Saint John, the Miramichi, and the St. Croix Rivers to

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16 Ibid.
farms in need of labor—migration patterns that had long been followed by both earlier Protestant and Catholic Irish immigrants.\(^\text{17}\)

A striking example of this experience was in Quebec, where the majority of immigrants to Canada landed due to its location on the St. Lawrence River. Between 1844 and 1852, the Irish population in Quebec increased from 44,000 to 51,499.\(^\text{18}\) Though Quebec City experienced an 800-percent growth of Irish between 1821 and 1851, historian Scott See noted that the “legacy of the famine migration” also affected Montreal where Irish Catholics outnumbered the Protestant Irish, Scots, and English combined by the early 1860s.\(^\text{19}\) When jobs were filled on farms, immigrants moved back into the cities, making them even more crowded. The concentration of Irish in Canadian urban centers such as Montreal and Quebec led to greater nativist reactions there compared to rural areas where the Irish Catholics settled in communities less populated with Protestants.\(^\text{20}\) Even before the famine migration had taken hold, Britain’s Lord Durham noted that the failed Canadian Rebellions of 1837-1838 revealed a “general spirit of intolerance and disfavor towards all [Catholic] persons.”\(^\text{21}\) In his report of the events, Durham found that Catholics petitioners had complained about persistent political discrimination in Ontario at the hands of Protestant officials. The nativist Protestant Loyal Orange Order, Durham concluded, had been responsible for most of the anti-Catholicism throughout the region.\(^\text{22}\)

\(^{17}\) Scott See, Ibid.

\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.


\(^{22}\) Ibid.
Though not to the same extent as Irish Catholics, many Irish Protestants in Canada had experienced land discrimination in Ireland, which was the reason they fled to North America in the first place. Through his research of almost eight hundred Irish Protestant families who migrated to the upper part of Canada in the four decades following the Napoleonic War, historian Bruce Elliot found that while many non-landowning Protestant Irish families held favorable leases with wealthy Protestant absentee landlords, economic conditions in Europe after the war led landlords to raise rents. Following chain migration patterns established by trade and kinship ties to communities already in Canada, Irish Protestants left their homeland. And yet, despite suffering a version of economic exile, Protestant Irish Canadians who had migrated after the Napoleonic Wars did not display considerable empathy to later famine migrants. As early as 1847, *The Toronto Globe* warned of the potential influx of Irish spilling over from the United States, and alerted its readers that thousands of “unenlightened and bigoted Romanists might slip northward across the border.” As fearful as such a prospect may have seemed to its readers, *The Globe* went even further, predicting that famine immigration would produce a “great calamity, dangerous to our civil liberty, a calamity which every true patriot, Protestant, as well as Roman Catholic should endeavor, by all means in his power to avert.” *The Globe* both reflected and exacerbated the fear most Canadians felt about whether the new wave of immigrants would be able to assimilate. By calling on Roman Catholics already

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24 *The Toronto Globe*, July 3, 1847; and February 9, 1856.
25 Ibid.
living in Canada to prevent the influx of famine migrants, the newspaper also played a role in dividing immigrants not by religion, but according to the circumstances of their arrival.

It is not surprising, then, that Canadian nativism eventually led to outbreaks of violence against Irish immigrants. Scott W. See studied the riots that occurred Canada during the 1840s and found that the British North American colonies experienced social upheaval that “easily matched the virulence of episodes in England, Wales, France, Ireland, and the United States in the same period.” Much of the hostility was carried out by members of the Orange Order—an organization that originated in Northern Ireland with the mission to advance Protestant dominance throughout the world. As with its other outposts outside of Ireland, the Orange Order in Canada had a paramilitary arm. But the Canadian faction was unique in that it not only wanted to ensure Protestant ascendancy and loyalist principles, but also maintain British colonial order. For example, in New Brunswick, branches of the Order operated within the context of loyalism and anti-Catholicism of the parent organization, while also constituting a “distinctively Canadian organization.” Most of its members were born in New Brunswick, and those that originated in Ireland had lived in New Brunswick for a considerable time. See found that both the native born and immigrant Protestant communities in New Brunswick “articulated and defended a British colonial nationalism” by marginalizing Irish famine migrants and viewing them as a threat

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27 Ibid, 12.
28 Ibid, 75.
to the uniformity of the British colonial nation. To be Canadian, according to the Orange Order, was to be Protestant and British. When nativist violence against Irish immigrants declined in the 1850s, it was not only due to improved economic conditions and a decline in Irish-Catholic immigration, but also as a result of the increased power of the Orange Order and a reestablishment of “Protestant hegemony” thanks to the help of the Canadian military, politicians, and courts. The establishment had reasserted its authority and regained control. Understanding this process is important to the analysis of the Canadian response to the Fenian attacks. By then, nativism and nationalism were deep intertwined.

Mobilizing to defend the border-

The 1866 Fenian attacks bolstered Canadian patriotism and imperial nationalism. Its citizens mobilized in large numbers and revealed their desire to reinforce borders and remain connected to the British Empire. This reaction was even evident months before the capture of Fort Erie when, in November of 1865, a group of men identifying themselves as Fenians entered Sarnia, Ontario—a Canadian border town sixty-five miles north of Detroit. According to a Canadian soldier stationed at the nearby barracks, the Fenians “caused trouble” at a local hotel and then entered a town store where they stole a few items and stabbed a man who tried to stop them. When the Canadian Governor General’s Office

29 Ibid, 11.
30 Ibid, 12.
31 Newton to Alonzo, Oak Grove Barrack, Sarnia, November 30, 1865, F4354-6-0-52, Wolverton files, AO, University of Toronto, York, Ontario.
received hundreds of letters from residents fearing another attack, the Executive Council of the Provincial Government in Upper Canada approved the organization of nine Companies of Volunteer Militia of the Province to be stationed on the frontier. Canadian State Department records highlight the decision as “a matter of precaution against hostile incursions of Fenians from the United States.” On paper at least, it appeared that Canadian officials were mobilizing to defend the border against American encroachment.

But letters from Canadian border residents reveal that volunteer companies were too small in size to be of influence, which left most Canadians to fend for themselves. In February of 1866, another Fenian disturbance occurred in Sarnia. This time, residents did not take any chances. Proprietors closed their shops and clerks, according to one resident, “prepared for war.” What is more, Sarnian residents packed up their belongings and headed north out of fear that the Fenians, or ‘Finegans’ as some Canadians referred to them, were testing Canadian fortification on the border and that subsequent attacks were imminent. Residents believed that leaving town was their best option because they did not have the resources to defend against even a modest sized Fenian army.

Although many Canadians fled for safer ground, others remained and joined local militias. In Huntington, Ontario, one hundred and forty miles east of

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32 Sir John Michel to Mr. Cardwell, November 10, 1865. Correspondence Relating to the Fenian Invasion of Canada and the Rebellion of the Southern States, Department of State (Ottawa: Hunter Rose & Co., 1869), 139.
33 Robert Rodgers to Isabella Waddell, February 2, 1866, folder 533, Rodgers Family Letters, Wolverton Files. York University, Toronto.
34 Ibid.
Sarnia, over four hundred Canadian men volunteered to defend the border in March when fear spread of more attacks. “Fenian fever,” wrote one local, “is raging at a fearful pitch… [and] is hanging over us, ready to burst at any moment.” Such sentiments were likely referring to both the danger of Fenians coming across the border and to local Irish Canadians who were either members of the organization or those who supported the cause.

Requests for weapons and men flooded the office of the Adjutant General’s Office in Ottawa. The mayors, councilors, magistrates, and residents of the Saint-George-de-Clarenceville and Saint Thomas, Ontario reported that they were situated at one of the most exposed points on the frontier with parishes on a neck of land between Missisquoi Bay on the East, the Richelieu River on the west, and Vermont to the south. The men claimed that they were left without protection and feared that raids originating from Vermont, would be “no fault of their own.” Residents of Saint-George-de-Clarenceville and Saint Thomas noted that they had two companies of volunteers ready, but lacked weapons. They asked for official recognition of the volunteers, for the government to properly equip the men, or for a force from some other area of the frontier that is less exposed to attack. The Fenian disturbance in Sarnia had achieved its desired results by making residents in other Canadian border towns shudder in fear. But the event had also stirred the spirit of Canadian nationalism, and

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35 Robert Rodgers to Isabella Waddell, March 16, 1866, folder 533, Rodgers Family Letters, Wolverton Files. York University, Toronto.
37 Ibid.
mobilized many borderland residents to turn to their imperial government for greater protection against the aggressive Americans.

Even Canadian towns that economically relied on maintaining a fluid border turned to the Canadian imperial government for greater defense. In letters to the Adjutant General’s Office, residents of Abercorn, Ontario—a village on the border of Vermont—expressed concern about their exposure to possible attacks. Abercorn was particularly vulnerable because, as one resident noted, the main highway of “great travel traffic” ran from Vermont through the village, and continued north.\textsuperscript{38} The ‘highway,’ once a celebrated thoroughfare for trade and travel, had become a possible conduit for terror. Residents worried about trains providing easy access for potential Fenian attacks. A representative from St. Alban’s, Vermont called attention to the town’s vulnerability due to its location just south of the border on the train route, and requested greater defense to protect “so great a thoroughfare to the Province.”\textsuperscript{39} The letter also asked for permission to organize a volunteer company for defense and included the signed names of twenty-two men who had already offered their services.\textsuperscript{40} The requests represented a groundswell, one that sent a clear message to politicians in Ottawa that a stronger national defense was needed.

While some of the letters that continued to pour into the Adjutant General’s Office in Ottawa were from town officials, others were sent from private citizens who had grown frustrated at the lack of response from government

\textsuperscript{38} B. Yeaton to the Adjutant General’s Office, March 24, 1866, folder 3508, vol. 240, R.G. 9. IC1, Adjutant General’s Office, Letters Received, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
officials and were willing to take matters into their own hands. Bruce Wackerton had already gathered a small force of men he named the “Wackerton Volunteers,” and asked the government for ammunition and money to defend the frontier, and instructions about how to proceed. Letters from men in towns along the border reveal a similarly desperate call for help—residents asking for permission to form volunteer companies and pleading for guns, clothing, coat straps, and knapsacks. But officials in Ottawa never responded to these requests, forcing those in borderland towns to send second and even third letters where they often noted that they had not received a reply from the Adjutant General’s Office for previous letters sent. Government officials in Ottawa were overwhelmed and underprepared.

For Canadians, Fenianism was not just an external threat. As historian David Wilson points out, viewing the Fenian Brotherhood as distinct to the United States “misses the much more interesting issue of the Fenian movement within Canada and its connection to those American Fenians who wanted to emancipate Canadians from British imperialism.” For several years prior to the attacks in the summer of 1866, Fenian General Tom Sweeny, an Irish American who served in the Mexican and Civil Wars, had created an underground army of Fenian Canadians—men who would be willing to “cut telegraph lines, destroy the railway bridge that connected Canada West and Canada East, infiltrate the

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
Canadian militia, bribe British soldiers, and burn down government buildings."45

The numbers of sworn Canadian Fenians—men like Patrick McAndrew and Richard Slattery—were not considerable. Even in heavily immigrant-populated cities such as Toronto and Montreal, the members of the Brotherhood amounted to less than one thousand in 1865—only five percent of the Irish Catholic population in both cities. But this small cohort of rebels were nonetheless effective in disrupting the nation’s infrastructure, and more importantly, in courting wide support for their cause.46

The reasons for a support network of Fenianism in Canada are varied. Wilson points to three of the strongest possibilities. First, the Fenians played an integral role in organizing the yearly St. Patrick Day parades in cities such as Toronto, Ottawa, and Quebec. Second, Irish nationalist newspapers were extremely popular in Canada. *The Irish Canadian* was based out of Toronto, and New York’s *The Irish American* and Dublin’s *The Irish People* were both circulated in Canada. When the Dublin police raided the offices of *The Irish People* in September of 1865, they found a list of subscribers from the cities of Quebec and Halifax.47 Third, small towns and rural areas also harbored support for the cause but were simply far less vocal. For example, St. Catharines on Lake Ontario just outside of Niagara, and Brockville along the St. Lawrence River were known as Fenian supporters among their Irish immigrants.48

46 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
Evidence of the Fenian reach in Canada points to an organization that had a noticeable impact in both small towns and large cities. The *Toronto Globe* reported that the town of Guelph, eighty miles west of Toronto, was “the central point for Fenian operations in Ontario.”\(^4^9\) But the organization was also strong in Toronto. *The Louisville Democrat* noted that the Fenians launched an attack on the city in January of 1865.\(^5^0\) Fenian supporters were also laborers, merchants, and skilled artisans in rural communities such as Adjala and Puslinch—both located within one hundred miles of Toronto. According to Wilson, the township of Aberfoyle was known as “little Ireland.”\(^5^1\) These pockets of support were part of a larger North American network of the Fenian Brotherhood, and their connection to circles in the United States made them more impactful. Canadian politician D’Arcy McGee was stymied by the political significance of the organization in Canada, despite its small numbers. But this discrepancy, Wilson notes, “helps to explain why McGee could dismiss them as a contemptible minority, yet simultaneously treat them as a major source of danger to the Canadian state and to his vision of Canadian nationality.”\(^5^2\) In modern terms, the Fenians in Canada were “sleeper cells”—ready to move into action when the organization’s leadership called on them.

As much as Irish famine migration to Canada spurred a nativist response, the conflict that ensued between Protestants and Catholics led to the deeper radicalization of Irish Catholic Canadians. Toronto was the birthplace of

\(^{4^9}\) The *Toronto Globe*, May 6, 1868, folder A8, FBF, NAI.
\(^{5^0}\) *The Louisville Democrat*. January 20, 1865, folder A8, FBF, NAI.
\(^{5^1}\) Wilson, 2.
\(^{5^2}\) Ibid.
Canadian Fenianism where, in 1858 during the St. Patrick’s Day Parade, Protestant rioters attacked a group of Irish Catholics at the National Hotel. Because the police force was largely populated with Orange Order nativists, no charges were filed against the perpetrators. Angered by the lack of response, Michael Murphy, an Irish Catholic resident of Toronto, created the Hibernian Benevolent Society (H.B.S.)—a club designed to combat the Orangeism throughout the city. Eventually, the H.B.S. evolved into the Fenian Brotherhood. By 1865, the organization had become enough of a threat to the Protestant establishment that the Canadian secret police assigned spies to infiltrate its ranks. These covert agents were even dispatched to New York in order to gather information about potential Fenian plans in British North America. And when Brotherhood members began causing trouble in Canadian cities in the spring of 1866, nativist response was swift. After drawing a revolver on a constable, one Fenian experienced such a fate when he was subdued by “an excited crowd,” and marched off to jail.53 Prior to the invasions in the summer of 1866, the Fenians in Canada appeared to be agitators. But it was the transnational nature of the movement that caused the most anxiety amongst Canadians. When coupled with their American brethren, the Canadian members of the Brotherhood posed a greater threat.

Even when reports of American Fenian activity were unverified, they stirred a reaction in Canada. In March of 1866, an American newspaper reported that ten thousand Fenians had taken control of Navy Island, which was located

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53 The World, March 9, 1866, folder A29, FBF, NAI.
on the Canadian side of the Niagara River.\textsuperscript{54} Though the numbers were likely exaggerated, the news spurred Canadian officials to take action. A council convened in Montreal and concluded the following:

In view of present circumstances and the vast amount of property at stake… and the protection of our fellow subjects along the frontier, exposed to the marauding operations of the Fenians. It was resolved to call out ten thousand volunteers for the protection and defense of the Canadian frontier.\textsuperscript{55}

The measure was precautionary, but council members felt that it was better to have the men on hand in case there was an emergency.

And yet, despite such efforts and the warning signs of impending Fenian agitation in the months leading up to the attacks in June of 1866, Canadian authorities were not prepared. According to \textit{The Ottawa Citizen}, some Canadians were “inclined to look upon the whole thing as a grand joke.”\textsuperscript{56} This is startling given that letters from Canadian border towns continued to flood the War Office in Ottawa, pleading for men and weapons to protect against potential Fenian threats. Even an Admiral in the British navy requested a greater naval force on the St. Lawrence River, stating that it “would be of great value in preventing any predatory attempts that might be threatened from the south.”\textsuperscript{57} The Admiral then suggested that the armaments needed could be supplied from Her Majesty’s ships stationed in the river nearby. But the War Office refused to increase naval defenses, simply because it was “not the present intention of the Provincial

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} “Another Fenian Expedition,” \textit{The Ottawa Citizen}. May 30th, 1866.
\textsuperscript{57} Admiral Romaine to the Military Secretary’s Office, April 18, 1866, vol. 185, p. 49, RG 8 C Series, C2779, Letters of the Adjutant General’s Office: Letters Received, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
Government to place any armed Provincial vessels on the upper St. Lawrence.”

The refusal made it clear that there were limits to the kind of protection the Canadian government would provide. At this point, the Fenian threat only warranted the mobilization of volunteers.

Without any assistance from the central government in Ottawa then, border town residents hired and fitted steamers as gunboats for service on the St. Lawrence. Local officials in Toronto also took matters into their own hands by swearing in one thousand official constables and furnishing them with batons. In London, Ontario, volunteers signed up for the 7th Battalion Infantry in May.

There, soldiers took the following oath:

I do sincerely promise and swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, her heirs and her successors. That I will faithfully serve Her Majesty in Canada in defense of the same against all her enemies and opposes whomsoever, according to the conditions of my service. So help me God.

The oath is notable for its imperial vernacular, and serves as a reminder that Canadian militiamen were British subjects first and foremost. Canada was a nation only in so much as it existed within the British Empire.

Despite these efforts, localized action was not enough. By May 30, 1866, over two thousand Fenian soldiers had arrived in Buffalo. Worried that the Fenians would then take control of the railways, the British Consul requested that the Great Western Railway stop all trains between Hamilton, Ontario and the

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58 Military Secretary to Colonel Earle, May 10, 1866, vol. 185, p. 82, RG 8 C Series, C2779. Archives of Canada, Ottawa.
61 “Another Fenian Expedition,” The Ottawa Citizen, May 30th, 1866.
bridge. It was too little too late. With apparent ease, the Fenians moved ammunition and supplies across the mile-long stretch of the Niagara River before raising the green flag of the Brotherhood at Fort Erie. It was the first and last successful invasion into Canada by a foreign organization since the provinces had been established at the Paris Peace Conference in 1783.

Even after O’Neil and his men retreated back across the Niagara River where American authorities detained them, Canadians worried that more Fenian attacks were imminent at other points along the borderland and that they were ill prepared to defend against them. In a letter to her brother on June 2nd—the same day O’Neil and his men left Fort Erie for Ridgeway—Ontario resident, Mary Cassady made note of the sizable gathering of volunteers, stating that there were as many as one thousand official constables “furnished with batons.” But Cassidy feared that because there were also Fenians living in Toronto—who were planning for a battle to come—men armed with batons would simply not be enough. Who else in Toronto, Cassady wondered, had cut telegraph lines in the middle of the night? The next day, Cassidy wrote again to her brother that she was sad to report Canadian men already “been killed.” The Toronto Leader reported that one steamer and two schooners had been seen off the harbor at Goderich, a town on Lake Huron facing the thumb of Michigan’s glove. The activity was considered suspicious because no vessels were due at the harbor and were “acting in a mysterious manner.” The Leader then claimed that the

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62 Mary Cassidy to James Rodgers, June 2, 1866, folder 533, Rodger Family Letters, Wolverton Files, AO, York University, Ontario.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
boats were likely part of the “Fenian flotilla” waiting for darkness to land in Canada. In Cornwall, Ontario—a St. Lawrence River town—the land and water patrol on the frontier was active day and night. A telegram to *The Daily Leader* from the town reported that large bodies of Fenians were still “hovering” about on the American shore across the river.\(^6\)

The Upper Canadian government finally sprang into action. Governor General of British North America, Charles Monck, declared that it was time the Government proved “to the people of the Province, as well as to those who might entertain the notion of invading it, that substantial provision had been made to protecting the former and repelling any attack that might be attempted.”\(^7\) Monck claimed that over eight thousand Canadian men were waiting for instruction and resources from Canadian officials. Shortly after the Fenian attacks, this number, according to Monk, more than doubled, as over twenty thousand Canadian men were “under arms,” and prepared to fight.\(^8\) Even if this estimate was inflated, it was clear that Canadian residents were motivated to defend their homeland, rather than turn on the provincial government and support annexation to the United States. On June 4\(^{th}\), they had repelled the Fenian advance and captured sixty-five of its members, holding them as prisoners in Toronto. Afterwards, the Provincial Government finally charted a “flotilla of steamers” and fitted them as gun boats to patrol the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River.\(^9\) With six Canadian Volunteers dead and thirty-one wounded, the Fenian attacks had mobilized

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\(^{7}\) Lord Monck to Mr. Cardewell, June 8, 1866, *Correspondence Relating to the Fenian Invasion of Canada*, op. cited, 141.  
\(^{8}\) Ibid.  
\(^{9}\) Ibid.
Canadians to firmly assert their nationalism as distinct from that of their southern neighbors. This process was often delayed and haphazard, but the Canadian government finally responded to residents’ demands for complete protection.

The Canadian press played a role in facilitating this shift by keeping its readers on high alert. A few weeks after the attacks, The Bellville Intelligencer warned that Fenianism was far from dead, and that Fenians were quietly plotting something far more dangerous than any public declarations.⁷⁰ The Brotherhood, the newspaper declared, is as “complete as ever, [but its members] are working more secretly, and we hear less of what they are doing.”⁷¹ The newspaper went on to say that it had “private advisors” who revealed that the Fenians were being as “vigorous” in their planning as they were before the raid.⁷² The Hastings Chronicle argued similarly, and pointed to a proclamation made days earlier by William Roberts, the President of the Brotherhood, who advised all members of the “Irish Republican Army” to return to their homes until “a fresh campaign can be inaugurated at no far distant day.”⁷³ In addition to printing Roberts’ entire speech, The Intelligencer noted that the Fenian leader had boasted of how he had not given up on the idea of conquering Canada, but that in the future, his secrets would be better kept.⁷⁴ The Intelligencer took Robert’s threat seriously and wondered whether the U.S. government would do their job to stop the Fenians before they launched another attack. Would American authorities, the

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⁷⁰ The Bellville Intelligencer. July 6, 1866, folder 28, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
⁷¹ Ibid.
⁷² Ibid.
⁷³ The Hastings Chronicle, June 20, 1866, folder 80, OA, York University, Ontario.
⁷⁴ Ibid.
paper asked, be willing to “close their eyes and hands” as they had with the earlier raids? The government in Ottawa, *The Intelligencer* added, needed to keep its volunteers on the border and drilling regularly.

The Canadians were justified in their fear. Roberts’ declaration was part of a speech he delivered on July 4th at the Fenian Brotherhood headquarters in New York City. He celebrated the recent campaigns at Fort Erie and Ridgeway as successes and championed a new effort to return to Canada. He also revealed the growing divide between Irish nationalists and Irish American nationalists, in particular, by blaming the I.R.B. for infighting and failures. His statements made it clear that the Fenians could not be controlled by anyone and that Canada would always remain a target. Because Canada had once been a battleground for France, England, and the U.S., it would also be the space for liberating Ireland from English tyranny. As such, Roberts displayed little sympathy for the Canadian people, using the term “crocodile tears” to describe those who were upset over “a few casualties.” He continued to defend the decision to attack Canada, claiming that it was the closest place to reach British soldiers, who “wore the uniform and bore the arms of the nation who had crushed the souls of Irishmen for years.” His final warning to Canadians was ominous—if they were found supporting the British, they would be considered enemies of the Irish race.

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75 Ibid.
76 Roberts speech to the Senate of the Fenian Brotherhood as printed in “The Fenians Again!” *The Daily Leader*, July 4, 1866.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
Roberts’ words were even more threatening because he once again aligned his cause with American ideals—appealing to a broad audience in the U.S. that had been sympathetic to such claims in the past. His rhetoric was particularly strategic given that he delivered his speech on the fourth of July, in the midst of patriotic celebrations. Expecting that newspapers across the country and in Canada would print his speech word for word, Roberts pandered by declaring “freedom and equal rights for all” as his mission; and that with the sympathy of the free people of the United States, the Fenians would be able to “bid defiance to our foes, and to conquer the lost liberties of which we have been unjustly deprived.” 79 He also reminded Irish Americans that, as soldiers in service of almost every nation, their valor and capacity were inferior to none. The task before his fellow brothers, he maintained, was as noble as the one that was “presented to the patriots of the American revolution.” Roberts then asked his fellow citizens:

Had we not as good a right to strike a blow for Irish liberty in the English province of Canada as Washington when he struck England in the same province to secure the independence of those United States? Have we not as good a right to go to Canada as England has when she made war on the French nation on Canadian soil? 80

For Roberts, Canada was a not a sovereign space, it was a battleground for liberty, where he could rid the continent of British imperialism. In his worldview, the Canadians were passive subjects who would have little say in the matter. The Fenians were carrying Washington’s torch, and Roberts believed that there was no more righteous cause.

79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
Of course, Roberts blamed England for placing Canada in his path. England, he argued, drove the Irish into foreign lands and tried to “extinguish the race by starvation, exile, and murder in their native land.”\textsuperscript{81} Canada would continue to be their “lever,” because it was the “readiest” place from where they could “redress the wrongs which England has for 700 years heaped upon our race; and as long as the Saxon oppressor shall endeavor to rule our land, so long shall our operations be continued.”\textsuperscript{82} The Fenians then, were redressing the British occupation of Ireland in Canada. Given the difficulty that the Irish faction of the Fenian Brotherhood faced trying to reclaim Ireland from the British, Roberts’ Canadian plan was not completely unrealistic, especially when considering how much faith he placed in the U.S. government and his fellow Americans. Roberts was confident that the American people were behind his mission. For evidence, he often pointed to members of congress who criticized the “foreign despotism” of Great Britain.\textsuperscript{83} Such statements certainly made it appear that the Fenians were gaining in strength and support, and that another attack was likely.

Roberts’s hubris was bolstered by widespread Fenian enthusiasm throughout the country. Only weeks earlier in Norwalk, Connecticut, hundreds of Fenian supporters paraded through the streets with “green and the American flag flying,” to celebrate the events in Canada and to protest the arrest of those involved.\textsuperscript{84} News dispatches reported that eighty-three recruits from Norwalk and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[81] Ibid.
\item[82] Ibid.
\item[83] Ibid.
\item[84] The New York Times, June 8, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
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surrounding towns volunteered for the Fenian army, hoping to be transported to the “front line.” Newspapers from other cities in the northeast reported similar occurrences. Fenian supporters in Syracuse, New York, raised six hundred dollars and put over one hundred men on a train bound for the border. Despite the groundswell of support to continue the Canadian plan, American authorities quickly moved in and thwarted any subsequent action. General George Meade issued a proclamation forbidding railroad companies from transporting “companies, arms, and munitions of war to be used in aid of any unlawful combination or enterprise.” Following orders, railroad officials removed suspected Fenians from trains in several northern towns. In Watertown and Antwerp, New York—towns roughly thirty miles from the St Lawrence River—officials kicked off two carloads of Fenians. Although American officials appeared to be taking action that would prevent another attack, these occurrences reveal a level of Fenian support that surpasses the membership of a secretive organization. Reports from Philadelphia sustain this claim. There a deputation of “colored men offered the services of over one hundred men who had all fought in the American Civil War and were willing to march to the Canadian border and fight for Irish liberty and independence.” The Fenians were not just a fringe group of radical immigrants, and their actions in Canada had not yet isolated them from their fellow citizens.

Many Canadians criticized the U.S. government for fostering such a subversive environment, encouraging Fenianism, and for not taking action

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85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
against the Fenians until after the invasion of Canada. “No one seems to think of calling in the United States to foot the bill,” wrote one resident of Elore, Canada—a small town roughly sixty miles west of Toronto. Canadian newspapers proclaimed that the U.S. House of Representatives had shown “a most hostile feeling to Canada” by dismantling the Reciprocity Treaty with Canada and passing joint resolutions in the Committee on Foreign Relations—one to recognize the Fenians as belligerents, and the other to repeal the Neutrality Laws. Some Canadians even accused the U.S. of not adequately punishing the members of the Brotherhood, arguing that arresting, imprisoning, and accepting bail in the case of the Fenians was “nothing but a transparent farce intended to please the people of this Province on the one hand while giving the last possible umbrage to the large Irish element of the United States on the other.” For Canadians, the U.S. government had fostered a culture of lawlessness, and had emboldened groups like the Fenians to take illegal action with little concern for adverse consequences.

In the days after the attacks, American politicians gave credence to this position. On June 11, 1866, while the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs debated whether to revoke the Neutrality Act of 1818, representatives discussed the recent events in Canada. Pennsylvania Congressman, Sydenham Ancona defended the Fenians aims, and argued that members of the Brotherhood were moved by a “patriotic purpose to assert independence and re-establish the

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88 Charles Clark, WP Newman to Clark, June 27, 1866, The Wolverton files, AO, York University, Ontario.
89 The Hastings’ Chronicle. June 14, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
nationality of Ireland.”91 The “sympathies” of the people of the United States, he maintained, were “naturally with all men who struggle to achieve such ends, more especially when those engaged therein are acknowledged friends of our government, as are the Irish race.”92 Ancona went on to describe how the Irish had shed blood in defense of the American flag in every war and that Britain had already nullified the neutrality laws with her actions during the American Civil War. He then moved for an official revocation of the Neutrality Laws.93 Although Ancona’s bill eventually failed to gain momentum, his words reached Canadian newspapers and contributed to the belief among its citizens that the American government supported the Fenians.94

Despite the strident words by American politicians such as Ancona, some Canadians hoped that the Fenian raids had finally motivated the U.S. government to enforce the neutrality laws. For the first time, *The Toronto Leader* reported, the President of the United States and his cabinet paid serious attention to the matter.95 The Canadian newspaper was referring to the fact that on June 6, 1866, President Johnson proclaimed:

> Whereas it has become known to me that certain evil-disposed persons have, within the territory and jurisdiction of the United States, begun and set on foot, and have provided and prepared, and are still engaged in providing and preparing, means for a military expedition and enterprise, which expedition and enterprise is to be carried on from the territory and jurisdiction of the United States against colonies, districts, and people of British North America, within the Dominions of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with which said colonies, districts, and people,

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91 *United States House of Representatives House Journal*, June 11, 1866, preamble and resolution.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
95 *The Toronto Leader*, June 20, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
and kingdom the United States are at peace...for the purpose of
preventing the carrying on of the unlawful expedition and enterprise
aforesaid, from the territory and jurisdiction of the United States, and to
maintain the public peace, as well as the national honor, and enforce
obedience and respect to the laws of the United States, I, Andrew
Johnson, President of the United States, do admonish and warn all good
citizens of the United States against taking part in or in any wise aiding,
countenancing, or abetting said unlawful proceedings, and I do exhort all
judges, magistrates, marshals, and officers in the service of the United
States, to employ all the awful authority and power to prevent and defeat
the aforesaid unlawful proceedings, and to arrest and bring to justice all
persons who may be engages therein.96

Johnson’s words were a clear indication that the U.S. would respect the
sovereignty of British North America. But the President also took further action,
authorizing General George G. Meade, commander of the Military Division of the
Atlantic, to use land and naval forces to arrest the Fenians and prevent further
attacks against Canada. The President also asked the U.S. Attorney General,
James Speed to circulate a copy of his order to all District Attorneys and
Marshals of the United States. Speed included his own order, which required the
arrest of all “prominent, leading, or conspicuous persons called Fenians whom
you may have probable cause to believe have been or may be guilty of violations
of the neutrality laws of the United States.”97 In public, at least, the United States’
government was cracking down on filibustering.

*The Toronto Leader* asked why this was not done earlier. The Fenians,
*The Leader* argued, had been planning a “warlike expedition” against Canada,
made a public display of their plans, and for months had “a sort of dual

96 Edward McPherson. *The Political History of the United States of America During the Period of
Reconstruction: (from April 15, 1865, to July 15, 1870,) Including a Classified Summary of the
Legislation of the Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, and Forty-first Congresses. With the Votes Thereon;
97 Ibid.
government of a Soap-Bubble Irish Republic, in New York, where bonds were issued, contributions in money and arms received, and men enlisted for the invasion of British territory both on this continent and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{98} The Toronto based newspaper also argued that Fenian leaders openly declared their intentions through the press and that the Brotherhood’s collections of arms had “long notoriously” been going on.\textsuperscript{99} By ignoring these activities, Canadians felt that the Fenian Brotherhood was a proxy for the U.S. government’s plan to conquer Canada. The newspaper concluded that in waiting until “an overt act had been committed and the soil of Canada invaded, the American government, against whose laws all these offences had been committed, could strike with more certainty and effect.”\textsuperscript{100} It is possible the American authorities did not believe that the Fenians would go through with their plans to invade Canada. But this explanation does not hold weight in light of the evidence that points to how serious the members of the Brotherhood were and how often they publically declared their intentions.

Thus, for many Canadians, the U.S. government was more to blame than the Fenians themselves. For example, Leo Sheppard, a Canadian writing from New York City, argued that the members of the Brotherhood were merely “poor tools” and thus “scarcely worth the expense of hanging when caught.”\textsuperscript{101} Sheppard also warned family and friends back home that the Fenian plan to

\textsuperscript{98} The Toronto Leader, June 20, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Leo Sheppard to Charles Clarke, June 30, 1866, Wolverton Files, AO, York University, Ontario.
invade their homeland had not been abandoned and that Fenianism was a “living power in this country [that] politicians will for their own purposes nourish.” But it was Sheppard’s conclusion that the U.S. government was complicit in the attacks that was most striking. He accused American politicians of passing neutrality laws, not to deter the kind of attacks the Fenians planned into Canada, but to suit Fenian ends because it was “popular in the United States to do whatever threatens England.” Sheppard had made it clear that Canadians understood how little both the Fenians and the U.S. government thought of British North Americans.

Most of the Fenians involved in the attacks had been apprehended on American territory and were imprisoned there. But this did not sit well with many Canadians who argued that the men involved in the attack were not detained by those who “had the right to deal summarily with them as the British authorities would have been thoroughly justified in doing.” Adding fuel to the fire, Buffalo authorities freed most of the Fenian soldiers captured from the steamer Michigan by giving their own recognizance, though the penalty for the offense with which they stood charged was a heavy fine and lengthy imprisonment if convicted.

Indeed, the majority of Fenians who participated in the invasion of Canada never served any time in prison. Canadians felt that this was one more example of how American authorities pandered to the Irish for political purposes, and perpetuated an environment that did not respect the sovereignty of other nations.

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102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
on the American continent.\textsuperscript{105} Although the \textit{H.M.S. Aurora} of the Royal Marines arrived off the port of Toronto on June 5\textsuperscript{th}, the very next day, reports reached Canadian newspapers that the men who had been detained under General Meade had been released in Buffalo and were roaming the streets.\textsuperscript{106} For the Canadians, the U.S. officials appeared as corrupt as the Fenians themselves. Canadian anger and nationalism then, was not just spurred by the Brotherhood’s actions alone, it was also motivated by the U.S. government’s response to Fenianism.

\textbf{Imperial Nationalism-}

Anger at the U.S. government prompted many Canadian to turn more favorably to the colonial authorities in Ottawa and proudly identify with the British Empire. As such, Canadian politicians were impressed with the loyalty of the Canadian people “to the throne, of their appreciation of the free institutions under which they live, and of their readiness at all times to prove their sense of value of those institutions.”\textsuperscript{107} Within a few hours of the Fenian capture of Fort Erie, Canadian papers proudly proclaimed that a “British and colonial force capable of dealing with ten times their numbers were on the spot.”\textsuperscript{108} It seemed that the

\textsuperscript{106} “The Fenians,” \textit{The Ottawa Citizen}, June 6, 1866.
\textsuperscript{107} Lord Monck to Mr. Cardwell, June 14, 1866, no. 53, \textit{Correspondence Relating to the Fenian Invasion of Canada and the Rebellion of the Southern States}, 144.
Fenians had underestimated the extent to which an attack on Canadian soil would embolden British North American nationalism.

While both Ireland and Canada were under Britain’s imperial rule, their respective relationship with the metropole was quite different. Canadian nationalism in the nineteenth century was heavily imbued with British identity while Irish nationalism was based on independence from Britain. With Quebec as an exception, there was little shared sentiment between the Irish and Canadian nationalists. Further evidence of this difference was illustrated in a letter to the editor of the *Toronto Canadian Freeman* from Canadian politician Thomas D’Arcy McGee who complained that the Fenians dared to “assail our frontier in the abused name of Ireland and the Irish people.”\(^{109}\) The Fenians, McGee argued, were “totally ignorant of the true state of Canada, crammed full of falsehoods as to the discontent of our population and the French Canadians.”\(^{110}\) He then declared:

> All classes and orders in Canada will unitedly do their duty, and their whole duty, by their country. Native Canadians, whether of French or British origin, will rally to a man for their homes and their altars. The emigrant population—British, German, and Norwegian—have all given proofs of their love for their adopted country. The remnant of the brave aborigines have placed their services at the command of the Government. The youth of our schools and colleges have left their quiet halls and playgrounds to offer the first fruits of their valor.\(^{111}\)

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\(^{109}\) “Thomas D’Arcy McGee Letter to the Editor,” *The Toronto Canadian Freeman*, June 20, 1866.

\(^{110}\) Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Ibid.
Even the “aborigines,” McGee claimed, had placed their “services at the command of the government.”\textsuperscript{112} Echoing a prominent eighth century bishop who commented on the viciousness of a Viking attack on the eastern coast of Northumbria at Lindisfarne, McGee then declared that a “more wanton, immoral, unjustifiable assault was never made upon a peaceful people.”\textsuperscript{113} For McGee, the Fenian invasions had spurred a movement of unity in Canada, one that ensured the confederation of the Canadian provinces.

Additional articles in the Toronto Canadian Freeman supported McGee’s statements. They charged that American journalists had misled Americans about whether Canadians disliked British rule. As evidence, one newspaper pointed to the thousands of Belleville citizens who accompanied “the gallant bands of Volunteers to the train station and bid them God speed on their perilous but noble journey.”\textsuperscript{114} Other reports highlighted how quickly Canadians banded together. In the week following the Fenian attacks, between eight and nine hundred men left Bellville for the front, with Ontario towns of Trenton and Shannonville and Canifton, Stirling and Mado—also supplying Volunteers. The warden of Madoc, Ontario noted that he had never before witnessed such “enthusiasm and indignation.”\textsuperscript{115} While it is not surprising that Canadians would defend their homeland, the Fenian attack was a watershed moment in the evolution of Canadian nationalism. As Canadian newspapers had reported,

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid. Bishop Alcuin of York’s words were, “It is nearly 350 years that we and our fathers have inhabited this most lovely land, and never before has such terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race.”

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{114} “Rally from Belleville,” The Intelligencer, June 8, 1866.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
British North American citizens came together and mobilized in numbers never before seen.

The patriotic fervor even extended to Canadians living in the United States. The British Consul in New York reported that a large number of Canadians residing there “were prepared to abandon their occupations and come to assist in the repulse of the invaders.” ¹¹⁶ Fifty-six Canadian residents of Chicago arrived in Toronto and “tendered their services on behalf of their native country.” ¹¹⁷ According to The Intelligencer, the Canadians in Chicago left “lucrative situations” there in an effort to protect their homeland. ¹¹⁸ Another article reported that “500 negroes” offered their services to the committee, appointed by British residents in Chicago to fight (for Canada) against the Fenians. In addition to the men who had already left for Toronto, more British patriots living in Chicago gathered at St. George’s Hall in the city to express deep sympathy for the people of Canada and pledge substantial aid and men. Canadian newspapers confirmed that the Chicago group made good on their promises and sent several more Companies of Volunteers across the border. ¹¹⁹

Leaders of the Six Nations—the Mohawks, Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, Senecas, and the Tuscaroras—also offered three hundred warriors to the Canadian government. ¹²⁰ The Oneidas specifically offered their assistance “for the defense of the country against the threatened invasion of the Fenians,”

¹¹⁶ Lord Monck to Mr. Cadlwell, June 14, 1866, no 55, Correspondence Relating to the Fenian Invasion of Canada and the Rebellion of the Southern States, 146.
¹¹⁷ Ibid.
¹¹⁸ Ibid.
¹¹⁹ Ibid.
with a company of over fifty able-bodied men to drill immediately. The offer signified a greater loyalty among the tribes of the six nations to British North America than to the United States. Neither the British nor the American government had treated the tribes (once known as the Iroquois) favorably since the Paris Peace Treaty in 1783. But the British had granted land to the Iroquois who fought the Americans during the Revolution in the Haldimand Proclamation days after the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784 when the Iroquois were forced to cede a considerable amount of land in the Ohio territory to the Americans. Members of the Six Nations had settled in Ontario territory over the years, and their response to the Fenian invasions revealed a desire to defend their territory against Irish American encroachment.

Canadian towns across the province joined the movement to further protect the border. The Mayor of Lachine, Ontario—a town just outside of Montreal—begged the Adjutant General’s Office for weapons, as his town had formed a company of “home guards” and that it was in need of arms to protect themselves. A letter from Mount Pleasant, Ontario described how residents were “threatened with invasions by a party called Fenians” a few months before the attacks in June. Although a volunteer company had then gathered in the town, it had stopped meeting because the government never sent a drill

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122 See chapter one of this dissertation.
125 James McLeod to the Adjutant General’s Office, June 6, 1866, file 1098, vol. 230, Adjutant General’s Office Letter’s Received, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
instructor. Nonetheless, residents wanted to furnish another company and begged the government to provide clothing and arms.\textsuperscript{126} A Colonel in Gananoque Ontario, a manufacturing town along the St. Lawrence River, pleaded for troops to protect the factories there.\textsuperscript{127} But once again, the Militia Office in Ottawa refused and denied other requests to “arm farmers on the frontier.”\textsuperscript{128} The Fenian attacks had not only made it abundantly clear to Canadians how vulnerable they were, but also how the government in Ottawa lacked the resources to adequately protect them.

It wasn’t until after the Fenian invasions when Canadian politicians acted to rectify this situation. By June 8\textsuperscript{th}, the Canadian government in Ottawa had made it lawful to arrest anyone who “entered this Province with design or intent to levy war against Her Majesty.”\textsuperscript{129} That same day, John MacDonald, the Premier of the United Province of Canada, introduced two bills to the House of Assembly in order to apprehend and punish the Fenians. The first Act authorized absolute power to Canadian authorities:

The apprehension and detention for one year of such persons as shall be suspected of committing acts of hostility or conspiring against Her Majesty’s Person and Government. Any acts of hostility to Her Majesty’s Government or charged with high treason, or suspicion of High Treason, may be detained without Bail. Such persons may be arrested without warrant by officers and non-commissioned officers of the army and navy or the militia and volunteer forces.\textsuperscript{130}

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Letter to Minister of Militia from a Colonel in Gananoque. June 7, 1866, vol. 185, p. 125, series C2779, Adjutant General’s Office Letter’s Received, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
\textsuperscript{128} Letter from Militia Office, Ottawa, vol. 185, p. 146, series C2779, Adjutant General’s Office Letter’s Received, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
\textsuperscript{129} “Legislative Council Chambers,” The Canada Gazette, Ottawa, June 8, 1866.
\textsuperscript{130} “Another Fenian Raid,” The Ottawa Citizen, June 11, 1866.
This act essentially suspended habeas corpus by allowing for the detention of anyone suspected of conspiring against ‘Her Majesty’s Person and Government’ without bail and without warrant. It was an extreme measure, but one that the British imperial government had also used on multiple occasions against nationalists in Ireland.

The second bill that MacDonald proposed was titled, “An Act to protect the inhabitants of Lower Canada against lawlessness aggressions from subjects of foreign counties at peace with Her Majesty.” The policy stipulated that citizens or subjects of foreign powers at peace with Her Majesty who “may be taken in arms against Her Majesty” would therefore be adjudicated by a militia general court and be “liable to the penalty of death.” The language in this bill revoked due process for prisoners such as the Fenians, preventing them from a jury trial. Neither of the two pieces of legislation faced debate nor opposition, and both passed through all stages including assent by the Governor-General. The Toronto Leader supported such measures, arguing that although there was no authority to trial by court martial, “such a power, in presence of a threatened invasion, was absolutely necessary.” For the Canadians, the Fenians were not prisoners of war and did not warrant protections that such a distinction afforded. While Canadian officials may have faltered in adequately preparing to defend against the Fenians, they would no longer show weakness in their punishment of the men held prisoner.

131 “The Fenians,” The Ottawa Citizen, June 11, 1866.  
132 The Toronto Leader, June 20, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
In the wake of the Fenian invasions, the Canadian government took other measures to strengthen its national defense. In August of 1866, Charles Monck, the Governor General of Canada, approved the formation of volunteer companies. The Committee of the Executive Council of Ontario stated that it had finally considered the “subject of uneasiness prevailing in the western portion of the Province in consequence of the rumors existing of received attempts being made by the Fenians to invade this country.” The council agreed that the establishment of a “volunteer camp of exercise” was necessary in the Niagara District, somewhere in the neighborhood of the falls. The camp was to consist of one thousand to twelve hundred volunteers, to be formed with “as little delay as possible,” be continued until October, and non-commissioned officers be paid for their duties. In supporting these orders, the council provided an estimate of expenses that totaled $80,000—including the transport of volunteers, allowances for non-commissioned officers, rations, and contingencies. A permanent military presence on the border came too late for the dead and injured Canadians at the hands of the Fenians, but the government hoped that it would help prevent further attacks.

And yet, this response was not enough for some Canadians who called for attacking the Fenians across the border. “It is plain that if the raids are to be put a stop to, it must be by fighting,” wrote one Ontario resident. Such an outlook was based on the belief that the Brotherhood would continue to “alight upon” any part

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133 Order in Council regarding St Catharine’s Camp, Ottawa, August 13, 1866, file 3531, vol. 240, Adjutant General’s Office Letter’s Received, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.
134 Ibid.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
of Canadian territory if they knew that they could “return home in safety before [Canadian] troops can be thrown upon them.”\textsuperscript{136} By late June, the push to cross the border in pursuit of the Fenians gained support when a Toronto-area newspaper reported that members of the Brotherhood were once again launching an attack, this time from St. Albans, Vermont. According to the report, the Fenians told residents in St. Albans that the British had come across the border to pursue them and that Americans should be fearful of future British aggressions.\textsuperscript{137} The Canadian newspaper, \textit{The Hastings Chronicle}, tried to diffuse American anger by admitting that although a battalion of British regulars had pursued some of the Fenians at the border, it was just a few “zealous” soldiers.\textsuperscript{138} In defense of these soldiers, the newspaper also claimed that the Fenians were intentionally trying to draw British troops onto American soil in order to disrupt peace between the U.S. and Britain, and warned reporters that rumors about large numbers of British soldiers crossing the border unprovoked were unfounded. For evidence, \textit{The Chronicle} claimed that it had corroborated its findings with Colonel Livingston of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} U.S. Artillery.\textsuperscript{139} Nonetheless, for Americans and residents of St. Albans in particular, the incident recalled the Civil War during which Confederate forces used Canadian territory to launch attacks on the Vermont town.

Canadians were appalled at such comparisons. “We are at peace with the whole world,” wrote the \textit{Hastings Chronicle}, “and in broad daylight, with the

\textsuperscript{136} “A Review Reviewed,” \textit{The Daily Telegraph} (Toronto), June 26, 1866.
\textsuperscript{137} \textit{The Hastings Chronicle}, June 20, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
approbation of Senators, Judges, Members of Congress—the Fenian Brotherhood have been openly engaged in making preparations to levy war on England and Canada." Canadian politician Thomas McGee agreed, and maintained that comparisons between attacks on Canada and the British aid of the south during the American Civil War were unfair. The Confederate raid on St. Albans was not the same as the Fenian raids into Canada, McGee argued, because England had recognized the Southerners as belligerents. For McGee and his fellow Canadians, England had offered assistance to the Union to put down the southern rebellion so that England’s reliance on Southern cotton would not be disrupted, but the North had refused. McGee also pointed out that the raid from Canadian towns by confederate troops during the Civil War was committed by American citizens on an “American village, secretly from Canada, during a time of war.” The Fenian attacks, McGee contrasted, were conducted by “American citizens, and ex-American soldiers, North and South, openly upon a people, with whom their nation is at peace, and with whom they have no cause of quarrel, while thousands of the citizens of Buffalo lined the shore, and cheered them on to their bloody work.” For McGee and his fellow citizens, there was no reasonable justification for the Fenian invasions.

_The Commercial Advertiser_ furthered these claims, and argued that comparisons between the Fenians and the Southern rebels in Canada were without merit because the Fenians had “no foothold anywhere, no ‘nation’ no

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140 _The Hastings Chronicle_. June 14, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
recognized belligerency.” To illustrate its point, the paper stated that if a few Southerners or Northerners in Canada had organized an expedition against Maine or Michigan and then escaped back into Canada, Americans would have “demanded them as marauders.”144 Such inconsistencies fanned the flames of animosity that many Canadians felt towards the U.S. government. In fact, the Canadian Hastings Chronicle blamed American politicians for perpetuating the notion that the current situation was similar to the St. Albans raid, and the “interpretation to which England gave her neutrality laws in acknowledging the southerners as belligerents.”145 The newspaper echoed McGee’s sentiments that England had in fact offered assistance, “through her Ministers, as a good neighbor, to put down the rebellion in the South,” but that help was refused.146 Nonetheless, while some American politicians may have turned a blind eye to Fenian plans as a way to secure the Irish vote; others might have hoped that the Fenians were the tip of the spear for American annexation of Canada. Remarkably, both the Fenians and Canadians believed that American politicians supported the Brotherhood’s cause.

From the Canadian perspective, the Fenians had been acting on behalf of the U.S. government. Armed Fenians had paraded through the streets of several American cities, organized public meetings where leaders had urged men to the attack Canada, and held bazaars in which they openly declared their intent to

146 Ibid.
liberate Ireland. All of this occurred without any reprisals from American officials. But McGee went further, accusing the U.S. government of allowing members of the Brotherhood to purchase arms from government arsenals, and asserting that regiments of the organization were armed at the expense of the state. He also insisted that when these regiments were finally stopped, they were driven back into the “protection of Uncle Sam [and] released upon their personal recognizance.” McGee was referring to the U.S. government’s release of Fenian leaders of the invasions—O’Neil, Roberts, and Sweeny—in addition to rank and file members.

Canadian newspapers agreed with McGee that the U.S. government had allowed the Fenian attacks. “The long threatened invasion,” The Intelligencer reported, “by the band of ruffians who under the protection of the American Government, have organized their forces and matured their plans, has taken place.” The Fenians had purchased arms and ammunitions, placed them along the border, gathered “hundreds and thousands” of men, transported these men to border towns on trains, and then landed over two thousand men on Canadian soil “without the first serious effort on the part of the United States Government to put a stop to it.” Already, many Canadians claimed that the U.S. had not renewed the reciprocity agreement with Canada out of spite. Still, Canadians hoped that the Americans had finally come to their senses. The Hastings’

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147 See chapters two and three of this dissertation for greater detail.
149 See chapter three of this dissertation.
150 “American Sympathy,” The Intelligencer. June 8, 1866.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
Chronicle hoped that the U.S. government had learned that “they could not drive a hard bargain with us, and that the loss of reciprocity had no effect in driving us into annexations, as the Potter school of politicians vainly imagined.” The Canadian newspaper even reprinted statistics from the U.S. Treasury Department that supported their claims, and pointed out that in 1865, Canada’s trade with the United States was second only to Great Britain. Even The New York Times described the economic significance of this relationship, concluding that the “provinces are not only absolutely the second best customer of the United States, but relatively the best of all their customers.” If the U.S. government was trying to punish British North America by trade or through a paramilitary group, they had misjudged Canadian resolve.

But while many Canadians directed blame at the U.S. government, they also turned their ire on the American press—criticizing multiple news outlets for not condemning the Fenians, and thus emboldening their movement. “The American press,” declared The Hastings’ Chronicle, “almost without an exception, take the present occasion to vent their spite against England for her neutrality during the late deplorable rebellion in the southern states.” While acknowledging that there were a few “respectable journals” that “denounced the Fenian swindle,” The Chronicle nonetheless argued that the vast majority of American papers pandered to American politicians for the purpose of securing the Irish votes and presented the Fenian attacks as “retributive justice.” The

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153 “Coming to their Senses,” The Hastings Chronicle, June 27, 1866.
154 The New York Times, as quoted in Ibid.
155 “Coming to their Senses,” The Hastings Chronicle, June 27, 1866.
156 Ibid.
Intelligencer agreed, claiming that “with but a few exceptions, the American press has given more or less countenance to the Fenian movement.”\(^{157}\) The New York Times was one of the exceptions, condemning the raids and describing the Fenians as being “drawn from a class of men who are the curse of Americans society, and a perpetual, social and political scourge upon the American people.”\(^{158}\) The Times concluded that the Fenians would be lying and stealing in the states if they were not raiding in Canada.\(^{159}\) The New York based Evening Post also called upon the U.S. Government to use every means to prevent a breach of the neutrality laws.\(^{160}\)

However, Canadian newspapers pointed out that the majority of New York papers had failed to denounce the Fenian movement “from its inception to the present time.”\(^{161}\) Too many American newspapers, The Intelligencer maintained, had “openly advocated” for the Fenians, and some had even urged “the enforcement of the Fenians on our frontier, while others express great sympathy for the “poor deluded people.”\(^{162}\) The Hastings Chronicle accused the American Journal of Commerce of making a “false pretense of disapproving the raid.”\(^{163}\) The Canadian newspaper also called New York’s The Herald insolent for its claim that the failure of the Fenian attacks had been a “genuine blow for Irish liberty,” and for its speculations that the Fenians could indeed capture and hold

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\(^{157}\) “American Sympathy,” The Intelligencer, June 8, 1866.

\(^{158}\) The New York Times, as quoted in “Coming to their Senses,” The Hastings Chronicle, June 27, 1866.


\(^{160}\) “American Sympathy,” The Intelligencer, June 8, 1866.

\(^{161}\) Ibid.

\(^{162}\) Ibid.

Canada in the future. These examples were enough to convince Canadians that the American press as a whole played a role in nurturing Fenianism.

Even American newspapers that did not harshly criticize the attacks made headlines in Canadian newspapers. *The Hastings Chronicle* printed excerpts from another New York newspaper, *The Tribune*, because it acknowledged that the spirit of Fenianism would live on despite the failure of the current raid until “England does justice to Ireland.”* The Tribune* also made news in Canada for adding its voice to Americans who compared the Fenian raids in Canada to the Confederate raids from Canada into Vermont during the Civil War. Once again, *The Hastings Chronicle* refuted these claims, arguing that no Canadian “gave even the slightest aid and all were ignorant until after it was over.” Where was the condemnation, *The Intelligencer* asked, from the American press for the “wickedness or the criminality of the invasion,” or for the “scoundrels who have committed the most atrocious act known in the annals of crime?” By posing such questions, Canadian newspapers made it clear that their anger and frustration extended well beyond the Fenians.

Canadians even lambasted American newspapers such as *The Sun, The World*, and *The Journal of Commerce* for pointing out the foolishness of the Fenian raiders but not the “wickedness” of the raid itself. “They think Sweeny was very foolish for striking so soon as he did,” *The Intelligencer* said of the American press, “and for violating the neutrality laws, and express their sorrow

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164 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 “American Sympathy,” *The Intelligencer*, June 8, 1866.
that he met with such a reverse on the Niagara frontier.” The American papers, argued the Hastings Chronicle, “concede that the Fenians violated Neutrality Laws and that the United States’ government should do something about it, but they have no words of censor for the Fenians themselves.” For many Canadians then, the Fenian attacks were a symptom of the even greater threat of American expansion and empire building.

As further evidence of the imperial designs Americans had on Canada and the support American newspapers offered this policy, The Hastings Chronicle reprinted an article from The Chicago Times that advocated for the annexation of British North America:

Canada is getting to be such an obstacle. In time of war it becomes a refuge for draft skedaddlers, and the cradle in which are nurtured hostile movements against our banks, our silver spoons, plate, and peace of mind. When we have peace, the uneasy Irish element sadly spoiling for a fight, will require to be repressed at an immense expense in the way of time, trouble, and money. In view, therefore, of the past, present, and future; in view of the rising hate of republicanism, which already chafes angrily against the Canadian boundaries—we think we shall have to take possession of the British provinces. Our destiny, our comfort, our convenience, our necessities, all require it. We want the St. Lawrence.

The statement was unequivocal in its objective, clearly defining the reasons why Canada should become part of the United States. Not only did a greater force of destiny ‘require’ it, but so did ‘convenience’ and ‘comfort.’ This rationalization may have seemed logical to The Chicago Times, but it was presumptuous and insulting to Canadians who had no intention of acquiescing to American convenience or comfort. It was exactly this kind of reporting by American

169 Ibid.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
newspapers after the Fenian invasions that spurred even greater Canadian nationalism, connecting the province deeper to its imperial roots and deepening the divide with its southern neighbor.

_The Chicago Times_ article reinforced a belief among many Canadians that the American newspapers were victims of a “system of Fenian falsehood, and were “organs” for men who are the “curse of American society.””^{172} The Fenians, in other words, had used the American press to inflame Irish American hatred of the British and to create sympathy among all Americans for the Irish cause. “The respectable journals,” Canadian papers argued, “would not be guilty of deliberate falsehood, but they are all too ready to accept any fable as true, without the least inquiry and in the face of every probability.”^{173} Even those who did not openly support the Fenian raids, declared _The Hastings Chronicle_, incorrectly alluded to the border troubles “as a specimen of retributive justice.”^{174} For Canadians, the great majority of American newspapers openly sustained the Fenians in their raid on Canada, and pandered to political leaders “for the purpose of securing the Irish vote in the next presidential election.”^{175} Not only do these sentiments underscore the belief that Feniansim was a symptom of American Empire, they also reveal the extent to which the Irish had evolved from a marginalized immigrant community to a political force that influenced the American political process.

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^{172} “The Chicago Times Says…” _Hastings Chronicle_, June 27, 1866.
^{173} Ibid.
^{174} _The Hastings Chronicle_, June 20, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
^{175} _The Hastings Chronicle_ June 16, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
As further proof of the American press’ alleged support of the Fenian movement, The Toronto Leader published an excerpt from the American evening newspaper, Commercial Advertiser, which accused the Canadians of “following the example set them by the mother country”—trying the Fenian prisoners by court martial and “deliberately shooting them down.”\textsuperscript{176} The Commercial Advertiser then claimed that the “first of the poor fellows that was cruelly hurried under the sod,” left behind a wife and five children in New York City.\textsuperscript{177} Such actions, the newspaper went on to say, only made Americans more sympathetic to the Fenian cause. In response, The Toronto Leader vehemently denied that the members of the Brotherhood had been tried by court martial and that anyone had been shot. Nonetheless, at a Fenian meeting in Buffalo, it was revealed that the body of a member who had been killed at Ridgeway was returned for burial and had been scalped and his breast staved in. The Toronto Leader voiced frustration that such a “fabrication” was “faithfully reported by a sympathizing press.”\textsuperscript{178} The Ottawa Post defended Canadian action by blaming “American citizens who entered Canada at Fort Erie and murdered our citizens, robbed our merchants, and despoiled that section of Canada.”\textsuperscript{179} For Canadians, the terms were straightforward, “piracy, robbery and murder, on the part of American citizens on one side, and the defense of property, home and life, on the part of Canadians.”\textsuperscript{180}

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} The Toronto Daily Leader, June 8, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
\textsuperscript{179} The Ottawa Post as printed in the Hastings Chronicle, June 27, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
press from a population that seemed to encourage an “organ of pirates and murders.” *The Ottawa Post* went on to conclude that a large portion of the American press was “equally corrupt and demoralized” as the Fenians themselves. Canadian anger after the Fenian invasion is not surprising. But the extent to which Canadians indicted American politicians and newspapers is striking. This resentment of American institutions for the role they played in empowering Fenians was certainly part of the fabric of Canadian nationalism.

Canadians also pointed to American businesses that appeared to aid the members of the Fenian Brotherhood. *The Toronto Leader* claimed that while all other railways in the U.S. chartered “whole trains to the Fenians at reduced rates for carrying men and munitions of war,” only the Michigan Central and the Michigan Southern railways refused to “enter into any such contracts,” and declined to sell tickets to individual Fenians who were “believed to be on the way to aid in an attack upon this country.”\(^\text{181}\) *The Montreal Witness* did credit the U.S. government with “good faith and efficient effort” in not proceeding with a full invasion of a “friendly country,” but also concluded that the Fenians who had been placed under arrest by General Meade were “covering the American government with reproaches for luring them on by implied, if not expressed hopes of non-interference with their schemes.”\(^\text{182}\) According to Canadians, American businesses, press, and government had either conspired or tacitly supported the Fenian attacks.

\(^{181}\) *The Toronto Daily Leader*, June 8, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.

This outlook even played a role in how Canadians viewed Irish Canadians after the Fenian attacks. In one example, the Catholic Church sent a request to Thomas D'Arcy McGee, asking him to use his influence and save Terence McDonald, a pastor from Waterbury, Connecticut and a Fenian imprisoned in Canada. Though McGee acknowledged that he had great recollections of the people and pastor of Waterbury, he also stated that he could not reconcile his personal feelings with the anger he felt over the attacks. “Like the rest of his comrades,” McGee argued, “[McDonald] left his home, his family duties… to come several hundreds of miles to murder our border people—for this Fenian filibustering was murder, not war.”

McGee emphatically concluded that Terence McDonald was one of the men who “sought out people, on our soil, and maimed and slew as many as they could; and those who sent them have exulted in the exploit. They must take, therefore, the consequences of their own act.” The Fenians had killed six Canadian volunteers and wounded thirty-one more. McGee and his colleagues were not overly concerned with showing leniency to the captured men responsible for such carnage.

In light of this response, Irish Canadian Catholics worried that they needed to prove their loyalty to British North America. Hoping to publically affirm Catholic Canadian nationalism as synonymous with Canadian imperial nationalism, James Kennedy—a resident of Bellville, Ontario—beseeched his fellow Canadians:

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183 “Fate of the Fenian Prisoners,” The Hastings Chronicle, June 14, 1866.
184 Ibid.
185 Lord Monck to Mr. Cardwell, June 14, 1866, no. 53, Correspondence Relating to the Fenian Invasion of Canada, 144.
No one pretending to be a Catholic in name or feeling, has any sympathy with Fenianism, or with the enemies of our government, in the remotest degree. We are satisfied with our Government and laws; our interests are identified with the rest of the community, and we could not contemplate, much less carry into effect any design against our government, without injury to ourselves. Further, our religion teaches us to abhor all secret societies, banded together for any purpose, political or otherwise.¹⁸⁶

A letter to the editor of The Hastings Chronicle furthered these sentiments, and declared that Roman Catholics should not be “repudiated” any longer when they “earnestly deny any connection or sympathy with the Fenians.”¹⁸⁷ These statements may have been hyperbolic, as not all Catholics ‘repudiated’ Fenianism. Nonetheless, the attempts made by some Irish Catholic Canadians to align themselves more closely with the state reveals the limits of Irish nationalism in North America. For many Irish Catholics, assimilating into their new communities was of greater importance than loyalty to the cause of Irish nationalism. The Fenian attacks, and the subsequent Canadian imperial nationalism that resulted, had made allegiance to British North America paramount and created an environment that left little room for marginalized voices or those with differing beliefs.

The declarations made by Irish Catholic Canadians reveal how the Fenian attacks had become a turning point, forcing residents to prove their loyalty to the state and crown. The attacks also marked a vital moment in Canadian history when resistance against the American project of expansion deepened. American northern encroachment, whereby American citizens were the ‘tip of the spear’ to eventual state endorsed annexation, forced Canadians to take a clear stand.

¹⁸⁶ “James Kennedy, Letter to the Editor,” The Intelligencer, January 10, 1865.
¹⁸⁷ “A Letter to the Editor,” Hastings Chronicle, June 27, 1866.
American Empire building across the continent had often followed this pattern in places such as Texas and Oregon. Based on their reaction to the Fenian attacks, Canadians were not interested in becoming another American state. Thus, Canadians did not direct their anger only at the Fenians. The U.S. government, the press, and American business all received blame. At the time, it was a perception that played heavily into Canadian nationalism and pushed the country towards reorganization within the British Empire. Though there were still continentalists in Canada—most of whom comprised the Liberal party—after the Fenian attacks, the majority of Canadians had made their alliance with the Tory-Conservative Party that favored a tighter association with England. Canadian confederation and Dominion status in the British Empire were the next steps.

The Canadian reaction to the Fenian attacks is a reminder of the varied ways in which immigrants can influence empire. In this case, a faction of Irish American immigrants pushed Canadians further into the British imperial fold. Although the Fenians had certainly hoped for a different outcome, the Canadian response is not all that surprising. What is more remarkable is the extent to which the Fenian attacks and the U.S. government response to Fenianism influenced Canadian nationalism. In December of 1866, delegates from the Province of Canada, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia traveled to London to begin discussions concerning greater organization under the English crown. It was an unusual consequence of American Empire. Unfortunately for the Fenians, Canadian solidification with the British marked the beginning of their end. Shifting

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188 Lord Monck to Mr. Cardwell, June 8, 1866, Correspondence Relating to the Fenian Invasion of Canada. Department of State, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., 141.
189 Averill to Seward, March 15, 1867, National Archives.
American international relations and foreign relations policy needs superseded
Irish American nationalist interests.
By June 21, 1866, the last bastion of Fenian Brotherhood members stationed along the U.S. side of the border dispersed and left the area.¹ Charles Monk, the Governor General of the Province of Canada, was content that the U.S. government had prevented further hostilities in “observance of their international obligations and their own municipal law.”² The American officials had finally proven to the Canadians that “those classes in America from whom Sweeny, Roberts, and Mahoney have hitherto drawn supplies” were no longer a threat.³ But Canadians were wary and felt strongly that the best guarantee of their safety required vigilance because the length of the “common frontier” made it almost impossible to prevent “the passage of small bodies of armed men from one territory to the other.”⁴ The path to a stable bilateral partnership with the United States required a “display of a determination on each side to punish breaches of neutrality laws.”⁵ But at the time, this goal seemed almost impossible. The Fenian attacks had brought Canada and the United States to the most animus point in their relationship. As a result, the Canadians further aligned themselves and their identity with British imperial roots in North America. Before

¹ Lord Monck to Mr. Caldwell. No 64. June 21, 1866, folder 146, FBF, NAI.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁵ Ibid.
the end of the year, Canadian delegates would meet in London to begin the process of Confederation, and establish their official Dominion status in the British Empire—transitioning from a colony to a nation in Great Britain.\textsuperscript{6} It was an ironic outcome for the Fenians who had once ardently believed that majority of Canadians wanted to become Americans.

Although it appeared that the U.S. had not fully given up on acquiring all of North America—as indicated by the purchase of Alaska in March of 1867—Anglo-American relations had already begun to thaw and the American thirst for continental hegemony gave way to other more pressing political needs. The Treaty of Washington in 1871 marked a major turning point for England and the United States in this process. While members of the Fenian Brotherhood threatened to return to Canada, they could no longer rely on an American political environment that prioritized continental domination. The Brotherhood had largely staked its success on the continued deterioration of Anglo-American relations, but their fortunes had turned. Empire had promised so much for the Fenians, but it ultimately betrayed them.

Scholars have examined the Canadian Confederation, the Great Rapprochement, and the Fenian decline separately, often with very little overlap.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{6} Chantal Allan, \textit{Bomb Canada: And other Unkind Remarks in the American Media} (Edmonton: AU Press, 2009), 1.

While this approach has yielded several important studies, it has also precluded a deeper look into the connections among these events. Canadian Confederation and the improvement of Anglo-American relations that eventually led to the Great Rapprochement played a significant role in the decline of the Fenian Brotherhood. This chapter explores this causal relationship, and reveals how empire ultimately reigned supreme against the Irish American nationalist challenge. It was a severe blow to the Brotherhood’s cause, but also one that other Irish American organizations learned from to develop new strategies. Thus, although the Fenians once again appeared to be the victims of empire, Irish American nationalism survived. Canada, however, was never again a target as it had been under the Fenians. The imperial moment of American continental expansion that members of the organization hoped to take advantage of had passed. In the decades following the Civil War, U.S. diplomatic and business expansion interests in Central America and Asia occupied the imperial imagination of American politicians. Empire had struck back, and rendered the Fenians virtually powerless. The outcome was a stark reminder that the leverage marginalized organizations could mount in the imperial process was limited.

Canadians move towards Confederation—

In 1862, the Canadian border township of Picton sent requests to the Adjutant General’s Office in Ottawa to raise cavalries for protection against potential threats from the United States. Canadians officials responded that they were “unwilling to enter into any new engagements,” and that they wished to postpone the consideration of applications for defense of the province until the colonial government could agree on the proper form defense should take. Just four years later, the Fenian attacks altered this policy and forced the Canadian government to assert greater authority over the provinces. As the one Canadian newspaper concluded, the attacks also mobilized Canadian citizens and ideologically “banded the British American Provinces more closely together by a sense of common danger, and a desire for mutual co-operation and defense.”

The Fenians helped push many residents of the Canadian provinces towards the “Confederation scheme, drawing England and her North American colonies into great mutual sympathy and affectation.” Canadians also argued that the Fenians had placed the Irish in Canada in a “very cruel position—forcing them to either rebel against a government under which they enjoy liberty, equality, peace and prosperity; or to fight against their own kin.” In other words, the Fenians had created an environment in Canada where lines were drawn. Irish Canadians

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8 Letter from Lt. Colonel, Deputy Adjutant General Militia, Canada. Adjutant General’s Office to P Frinlay McLaig, Picton. January 31, 1862, Adjutant General’s Office, Letters Received. R.G. 9., I C 1, vol. 230. Library and Archives Canada. From now on Library and Archives Canada will be abbreviated to LAC.
9 “What the Fenians have accomplished,” The Hastings Chronicle, June 20, 1866.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
who may have previously supported Irish nationalism had to assimilate further into the Canadian imperial state and accept British authority so as not to risk being ostracized. Unintentionally, the attacks had advanced British Empire.

Although the Fenians may have hoped to inspire Canadians to revolt against the colonial government, the opposite had occurred. A few weeks after the attacks in the summer of 1866, Canadian politician Thomas McGee argued in a speech at the Gallery of the Assembly in Ottawa that Irish Canadians had proved their devotion to Canada.\(^\text{12}\) An Irish Canadian himself, McGee noted to his fellow Irish Canadians that their responsibility was great because they were "belied as a class" by men (Fenians) he called scoundrels, and that they needed to demonstrate their loyalty to "the freest country left to Irishmen on the face of the globe."\(^\text{13}\) To further prove his Canadian nationalism, McGee called for public money to maintain volunteers of the frontier and used bombastic rhetoric to describe the Fenian organization and their "miserable puny efforts as compared with the might and majesty of Great Britain with whom they had the hardihood and sublime impudence to enter into a contest."\(^\text{14}\) Those who witnessed McGee's speech reported that he "brought the house down," especially when he claimed that the brave Canadian men who volunteered prevented the "ruthless invaders" from securing a permanent foothold on their soil, and thus represented the most "magnificent spectacle of the rising of a people in defense of their country and

\(^{12}\) "Special Correspondent," *The Daily Telegraph*, June 25, 1866.

\(^{13}\) "Thomas D'Arcy McGee Letter to the Editor," *The Toronto Canadian Freeman*, June 20, 1866.

\(^{14}\) "Special Correspondent," *The Daily Telegraph*, June 25, 1866.
their nationality.” With his speech, McGee had repudiated Irish American nationalism and aligned Canadian nationalism with British imperialism.

The Fenian invasions altered how Canadians viewed the provinces and their relationship to the British Empire. Just weeks after the attacks, The Ottawa Citizen clarified this point by concluding that “the people of British America recognize the great necessity of a consolidation of British interest on this continent; and believe that it can be obtained by Union only.” The solution of a confederation or union of the Provinces would not only strengthen the country, it would offer a more efficient and organized relationship to the imperial metropole in London. As an example, The Hastings Chronicle advised the Canadian government to enact a passport system in order to “keep a check on the miscreants.” In other words, the Fenian attacks had prompted Canadians to feel that confederation would provide a lasting peace, because it was only with the aid of the Queen’s Own that Canadians saw the demise of the Fenians. The Ottawa Citizen felt confident in its promotion of confederation within the British Empire, and claimed that the peace “which now reigns upon our frontier, will no doubt be preserved and the failed Fenian invasions would be a lesson in the “futility of needlessly messing with a free people.” Despite the courage displayed by the volunteers, Canadians were confident that peace would be maintained only by solidifying their British imperial ties.

16 “The Fenians, Special Correspondence,” The Ottawa Citizen, June 12, 1866.
17 The Hastings Chronicle, June 14, 1866, folder 46, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
18 “Special From Toronto,” The Ottawa Citizen, June 14, 1866.
In Ottawa, there was considerable support to strengthen the British colonial arrangement. With his speech to open the fifth session of the eighth Parliament of the Province of Canada, Charles Monck, the Governor General of Canada, extolled the new buildings erected in the city as “chosen by Her Majesty” for public business and for the future of the country.\textsuperscript{19} He then discussed the termination of the reciprocity treaty with the U.S. and the negotiations concerning the subject of our “commercial relations with that country.”\textsuperscript{20} Monck emphasized the importance of opening trade with new markets and with other nations. He also took advantage of the colonial relationship to England by announcing that he had already sent a request to London to place a diplomat representing the British North American Colonies in the West Indies and Brazil in order the develop and extend commercial relations with other countries. Though Monk may have believed that such actions were for the benefit of Canada, as a colonial elite, he also had much to personally gain from the imperial relationship.

Nonetheless, the Fenian attacks had also made the defense of Canada a priority for citizens and politicians as it became abundantly clear that the existing system of protecting the border was insufficient.\textsuperscript{21} Even newspapers across the Atlantic, such as the \textit{Glasgow Morning Journal}, pointed out that the Queen’s Own did not have any support in Canada, and that the regulars and artillery from Chippewa, Ontario only arrived in Fort Erie after the U.S. military under General Meade had already returned the Fenians to Buffalo. The newspaper went on to

\textsuperscript{19} Charles Monck, June 8, 1866, speech printed in the \textit{Toronto Daily Leader}, June 20, 1866.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} See chapter four of this dissertation.
argue that if the regular troops had come up in time they would have “cleared the field of Fenians and saved the Queen’s Own.” The author exposed a clear vulnerability on the frontier of the British Empire, especially with a southern neighbor who seemed determined to make Canada her own.

Canadian newspapers understood this vulnerability, and complained that despite the courage the volunteers displayed, the men were woefully unprepared to defend the border. To further this point, The Intelligencer pointed out that Colonel Booker, commander of the 13th Battalion of Hamilton Volunteers in Ontario, had made a tactical error in his advance on the Fenians. It was the Queen’s Own of Toronto, York, and the Caldeonia Companies, whose sharpshooters saved the Canadian Volunteer regiment from a much greater loss. The Queen’s Own regiments also demonstrated their training and experience when they followed the Fenians upon their retreat, “maneuvering as if on parade, and keeping up a continuous fire, which the raiders admit to have been of the most vigorous and galling kind, and which they could not stand in the open field.” In contrast to the tactical superiority of the Queen’s Own, The Hastings Chronicle reported that the local volunteers were sent off from Toronto and Hamilton “wholly unprepared in respect of equipments to stand the hardships of a campaign.” The Canadian press made a strong case that without British imperial forces, the Fenian invasions could have been much worse.

22 The Glasgow Morning Journal as printed in “The ‘Queen’s Own,'” The Intelligencer, June 6, 1866.
24 “Raid on Niagara Frontier,” The Intelligencer, June 8, 1866.
In the days following the attacks, Charles Monck gave weight to this perspective when he called on the Royal Artillery Force stationed in Canada to increase by “three of four additional batteries” and asked the colonial military for a supply of Armstrong guns.\(^{26}\) Monck felt that these regiments were the most difficult for volunteers to fill and acquire proficiency, but that they were necessary for the defense and safety of the Canadian people. Although he believed that the Fenian threat had been lowered, Monck also wanted to be prepared in case of future attacks. His actions reflect the desperate position his people faced, relying heavily on the British imperial military to defend the border. If the Canadians were going to be able to defend themselves against the Americans, they would need to strengthen their own government and military.

Although it became clear that Canadians were unable to defend their border without British help, the Fenian attacks did reveal a widespread willingness by Canadian citizens to fight for their homeland. Thus, while Monck understood the necessity of Royal forces, he also made a point of commending the bravery of the volunteers. Even the Queen had voiced her pleasure with her North American colony, noting the "spirit displayed by the people, and their ready response to my proclamation, have received the well merited approval of Her Majesty’s government."\(^{27}\) Canadian men were willing to give their lives in “defense of their country,” and Monck declared that it must be apparent to all that the “whole resources of the country both in men and means, will at any moment

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\(^{26}\) Ibid.

\(^{27}\) Queen Victoria’s response as quoted in Ibid.
be cheerfully given in repelling any invasion of their homes.” For Monck, the Canadian efforts in this case demonstrated the support for the union of the provinces, and he hoped that by the next time parliament met, they would be meeting not only as representatives of Canada, but to embrace all of the colonies of British North America. Because the smaller Provinces needed even greater stability and protection, Monck concluded that they should therefore conduct their local governments on the Parliamentary system. This system, he argued “which has worked well in United Canada, will probably be the best for each of the Provinces, under the new order of things.” As a colonial governor who benefitted from the imperial relationship, Monck understood that advantages of the political expediency of the moment.

Several British newspapers supported Monck’s claims by making it clear how important Canada was to the British Empire. The London Morning Herald declared that it had never agreed with those who “unpatriotically” argued for the Canadians to “go their own way, fight their own battles, hold their own against their invaders if they could, or become a northern province of a great conquering power with its seat of government at Washington.” The newspaper went on to explain the deep affections of the mother country for her colonists, and that her greatest duty was of protection. The Herald also maintained that the eager and loyal Canadians who gathered to defend the border revealed the desire for “perpetuation of British rule, and desiring rather the formation and maintenance of the Canadian Confederation, on the basis of allegiance to a constitutional

28 Ibid.
29 “The Governor General’s Speech,” The Daily Leader, June 9, 1866.
30 The London Morning Herald as printed in “The Fenian Raid,” The Intelligencer, June 6, 1866.
monarchy.”\textsuperscript{31} The event had demonstrated that the strength of the colonists attachment been “so severely tested, and never till now had we the means of knowing how much the traditions of British rule are prized, how dearly the continuance of that rule is desired.”\textsuperscript{32} For many Britons, Canadians had shown the world that they wanted to remain part of the British Empire, not become part of an American one.

Canadian newspapers reaffirmed this notion. Resentment towards the U.S. government and Americans had grown too strong. Many Canadians felt that it was impossible for the Fenians to have organized forces, purchased arms and ammunition and send them to a “hundred points along the United States frontier” without assistance from the American authorities.\textsuperscript{33} At the very least, one Canadian newspaper noted, the U.S. government had not made a “serious” effort to stop the Fenians from transporting “hundreds and thousands” of armed men by “public conveyances” to frontier towns, nor had it prevented those men from landing on Canadian soil.\textsuperscript{34} This “gross outrage on international law,” prompted many Canadians to protect and preserve the “rights of Canada as an integral part of the British Empire.”\textsuperscript{35} The Intelligencer concluded that the first days of June 1866 would be memorable because people “rose as one man, and gathered round the good old Union Jack,” displaying “devotion and attachment to our country and our country’s Queen.”\textsuperscript{36}

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\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} “Raid on Niagara Frontier,” The Intelligencer. June 8, 1866.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
land is not surprising. But the extent to which Canadians held the U.S. as a whole responsible for the attacks is significant, and it played a role in the province’s momentum towards Canadian Confederation.

Further proof of this outlook came from other Canadian newspapers and residents who also responded to the Fenian attacks with a heightened patriotism for Canada. An article in *The Hastings Chronicle* titled, “What the Fenians have accomplished?” concluded that the Irish American nationalists had only succeeded at drawing “the parent country and her North American colonies into great mutual sympathy and affection… banded the British American Provinces more closely together by a sense of common danger, and a desire for mutual co-operation and defense…[and] greatly promoted the Confederation scheme.”37 Residents of Elore, Ontario charged that the U.S. government had fostered Fenianism and only acted according to international law after members of the Brotherhood invaded Canada.38 One resident, who was convinced that the American government and its people were the “real invaders,” even maintained that the Fenians were not even “worth the expense of hanging.”39 Other residents directed their concerns at the fact that the attacks had revealed the “helplessness of the province” against the United States.40 Joseph Wilde, the pastor of a Methodist Episcopal church in Belleville, Ontario stressed how the Fenian attacks had led to the growth of “Canadian nationality.”41 Based on these reports, Canadian nationalism appeared heavily connected to an opposition against

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37 “What Have the Fenians Accomplished?” *The Hastings Chronicle*, June 27, 1866.
38 WP Newman to Clark. June 27, 1866, Wolverton Files, OA.
39 Ibid.
40 Leo Sheppard to Clarke. July 30, 1866, Wolverton Files, OA.
41 *The Hastings Chronicle*, June 6, 1866, folder 82, Wolverton Files, OA.
American encroachment. Solidifying ties between the provinces and within the British Empire was one way to better ensure stronger resistance to U.S. encroachment.

There was precedent for such an approach as consolidating colonial power in Canada had previously helped maintain peace after turbulent times. In 1837, colonial administrator, John George Lambton, 1st Earl of Durham, had arrived in British North America to examine the causes of the Rebellions of 1837-1838 that had taken place in Upper and Lower Canada. In his *Report on the Affairs of British North America*, Lord Durham recommended a political union of Upper and Lower Canada into one province to ensure order and prevent future hostilities. The Act of Union, passed in 1841, abolished the legislatures of Upper and Lower Canada, and created a united Province of Canada. One legislative assembly governed with representatives from Canada East (formerly Lower Canada) and Canada West (formerly Upper Canada), making local laws and imposing taxes that were subject to the approval of the Governor General, the Executive Council, and the Legislative Council (who were all appointed by the Governor General). The Union also gave greater control of the colony to the English because the English-speaking representatives constituted the majority when Canada East and Canada West were combined. Although one of the more obvious intentions of the act was to encourage greater assimilation of citizens so as to unite the country, the legislation undermined the power of

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42 See chapter one of this dissertation.
44 *The Union Act: An Act to reunite the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada and for the government of Canada*, 3 and 4 Vict., c. 35, July 23, 1840.
French-speaking Canadians because they were a minority, and most of the decisions were still made by appointed (not elected) members. The government answered to the Governor General (a colonial official), not the people. Nonetheless, from the British imperial perspective, the Act created a more efficient colonial structure.

Canadian elites and politicians hoped to accomplish the same outcome with the confederation in 1867. In their efforts, they seized the nationalistic fervor that spread across the Province after the Fenian attacks. It is important to note that the debate over the confederation in Canada did not originate in 1867. In 1858, John A. Macdonald became the premier of Canada and made confederation a priority of his administration. In his speeches to parliament, MacDonald claimed that the measure was looked upon with “favor by the country. But the issue did not become official business of the government until 1864, when delegates from Upper and Lower Canadian provinces and the Maritimes met several times to discuss terms for a federal union “under the crown of Great Britain.” At one conference in Quebec, politicians passed seventy-two resolutions that established the framework for a constitution and a centralized government modeled after the British Constitution for the “perpetuation” of a “connection with the Mother Country.” Other provisions included an Executive Authority “vested in the Sovereign of the United Kingdom

46 Quebec Conference, The Seventy-Two Resolutions, October 29, 1864, LAC.
47 Ibid.
of Great Britain,” to act as the commander-in-chief. The legislature of Canada voted to approve the union, but the bill stalled in the Maritime Provinces. It was not until 1866, only months after the Fenian attacks occurred, when Nova Scotia and New Brunswick finally adopted the measure.

By December of 1866, representatives from Canada, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia traveled to London to begin negotiations with the British government in determining the terms of a federal union, referred to as the British North America Act. The delegates agreed that the Provinces of Canada, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick “shall form and be One Dominion under the name of Canada.” Two months later, both the British House of Lords and the House of Commons voted to approve the act. Queen Victoria herself was pleased to see the Canadians exhibit “so much loyalty,” and she made Canadian confederation official when she granted royal assent just over one month after Parliament approved the measure. As historian Thomas Bender has noted, England was one of several imperial powers in the second half of the nineteenth century that reconfigured “their structures to create a combinations of empire and modern nation-state.” Through this new arrangement, Britain was able to maintain its empire while allowing Canada to become a nation with its own federal system of government.

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48 Ibid.
49 Alan Rayburn, Naming Canada: Stories about Canadian Place Names. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) 19.
Thus, while Canada continued to “adhere to the monarchical principle,” it also instituted a federal system, one that was very much inspired by the American republic. The provinces retained local administrations but adhered to a centralized government with legislative, executive, and judicial branches. And yet, in a speech to the Canadian legislative assembly, John MacDonald explained how Canada had improved upon the American system by avoiding “one defect inherent in the Constitution of the United States.” MacDonald was referring to the election of the America President by a “majority and for a short period,” whereby he is “never looked up to by the whole people as the head and front of the nation.” The U.S. President, MacDonald believed, was a despot because he had control of the military, a considerable amount of patronage as head of the Executive, and the veto power equal to the legislature. For MacDonald, the Canadian system was superior because the representative of the Sovereign (prime minister) could only act on the advice of ministers elected by Parliament. Even when MacDonald complimented American political institutions for the lessons they offered his new country, he noted that they had been largely modeled after what he considered the more superior British system. In many ways then, the reorganization of Canada in 1867 was a repudiation of the American political system. Unlike their southern neighbors, the Canadians had not sought independence from England. Instead, they had extolled the virtues of the British system by adopting similar political structures

53 Ibid, 33.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
and by maintaining an imperial relationship. The British could still effectively veto any piece of legislation passed by the Canadian Parliament.

For the British, the consolidation of power in Canada was certainly advantageous. Although an inter-colonial railway could have been built without a political union of the provinces, the British were hopeful about the economic prospects the union provided in creating more efficient pathways to Asian markets. Ernest Watkin, a representative of the British Grand Trunk Railroad—that ran through Quebec, Ontario, and the American states of Connecticut, Maine, Michigan, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont—concluded that “our augmenting interests in the East, demand for reasons of both empire and of trade, access to Asia less dangerous than by Cape Horn, less circuitous even than by Panama, less dependant [sic] than Suez and the Red Sea.”

The British North American Act of 1867 also marked the beginning of a series of measures that permitted the Canadian government to add additional western lands as provinces to the confederation. As such, the process of confederation, which began with the British North American Act of 1867, served to strengthen the British presence on the Continent.

The U.S. government’s response to the British consolidation of power in North America revealed that it had not relinquished hope of making the entire continent its own, a sign to Canadians that Britain was even more vital to their

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57 In 1871, the British and Canadian Parliaments passed another British North American Act that admitted new territories and provinces into Canada. Between 1867 and 1982 over twenty additional Acts were passed, eventually patriating all legislative and constitutional powers to Canada.
sovereignty. In January of 1867, William Averell, the U.S. Consul to British North America stationed in Montreal, sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State William Seward, identifying the Tory-Conservative Party in Canada as the Confederation Party “cooperating with Britain for imperial consolidation in North America.”

Averell then recommended that the United States financially support the Liberal Party in Canada during the elections “on the grounds that Liberals were continentalists rather than imperialists in outlook.” Historian Gordon Stewart argues that Averell’s findings were “signs of the ongoing American concern about Canada’s stubborn adherence to imperial ways when America kept expecting her to develop a North American view of the world.” It is difficult to ascertain whether the State Department fully supported Averell’s recommendations. Nonetheless, President Grant declared that the continued British presence in Canada was “unnatural and inexpedient.”

Perhaps the clearest example of this perspective was in March of 1867 when Seward arranged for the purchase of Alaska from Russia. Seward’s motivation was to counter British power in North America and achieve greater access to the Pacific Rim. In a letter to President Johnson, he admitted that the acquisition of Alaska was part of a policy to “check British Canadian imperial expansion.” In other words, the American desire to control Canada had not dissipated. However, in 1867 Seward was faced with the predicament that the Fenian attacks and the subsequent Canadian and British

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58 Averill to Seward, March 15, 1867, National Archives.
59 Ibid.
61 Stewart asserts that there was never any carefully planned American policy concerning Canada.
62 Memorandum on relations between the United States and Great Britain, January, 1870.
63 Seward to Johnson, July 2, 1868, National Archives.
response had made it far more difficult for the U.S. to solidify its continental hegemony.

The Canadian perception that the U.S. government was responsible for the Fenian attacks—and therefore continued to pose a threat to its sovereignty—played an integral role in the push for Canadian Confederation. As historian Ged Martin has concluded, other arguments that try to explain the motivations for Confederation are often “exaggerated” and “misleading.”64 One such perspective that examines the extent to which the provinces wanted to promote inter-colonial trade through confederation is worth considering, especially because the U.S. government abrogated the Reciprocity Treaty with Canada in 1866 to make Canadian goods subject to a tax. Thus, due to the fact that Canadians could no longer rely on open trade to the south, Canadian politicians were forced to look inward and across the Atlantic to strengthen their economic standing. This consequence ultimately led to the “self governing, but still colonial, Dominion of Canada.”65 Yet, as Martin points out, the evidence for these factors is underwhelming. British North American trade figures, Martin argues, “do not suggest that in 1861 the provinces were in the process of economic integration as the precursor to political unity.”66 Even three years later, the provinces did not largely trade with one another, mainly because they produced “virtually identical products.”67 The provinces also did not need to unite in order a build an inter-colonial railway, or to acquire additional lands as a solution to the population

65 Bothwell, op. cited, 6.
66 Ibid, 11.
67 Ibid.
overflow from Upper Canada (although once confederation occurred both became more practical).  

Furthermore, the external threat to Canada posed by the United States was the most powerful motivation for confederation, and the Fenian attacks were the last straw. The 1861 Trent Affair had already made Canadians aware just how vulnerable they were. When the Union navy stopped the British steamer, the Trent, and arrested two Confederate envoys on their way to Europe, the threat of an Anglo-American war had loomed. The British sent regiments to the provinces to prepare for American military repercussions, but it proved to be an inefficient method to ensure protection of the border against what could have been a sizable U.S. military presence there. “The real lesson of the Trent crisis,” Martin argues, “was that Britain simply could not respond in time to defend the provinces against American attack.” As head of the Canadian ministry, John MacDonald responded with a proposal to address the issue and reform the Canadian militia. But in 1862, the Canadian Assembly rejected the measure. The provinces did not come together and push for confederation after the Trent Affair. The defeat of the Canadian militia reform bill in 1862 even points to a lack of cohesion and response. It was this vulnerability that the Fenians tried to exploit.

The Confederate raid from Canada into St. Albans, Vermont in 1864 also stirred concerns of an American reprisal in Canada. The incident raised questions, once again, about how the British North American provinces would

68 Ibid, 6.
69 Martin, 17.
70 John, A. MacDonald, Parliamentary Debates on the Subject of the Confederation of the British North American Provinces, op. cited.
adequately protect themselves. Confederate agents had not only robbed several banks in St. Albans and attempted to set fire to the city, they escaped back into Canada after local police pursued them. Canadian authorities arrested the Confederate men, but the court ruled that because they were soldiers under military order, and Canada was a “neutral” party to the Civil War, they could not extradite them to the United States for punishment.71 Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Canada remained tense after the raid and Canadian Governor General Monck sent dispatches to Washington with hopes that “no act should be done by any civil or military officer of the United States which might bear the construction of being an infraction of Her Majesty, or a violation of Her dominions.”72 But it was only after the Fenians moved across the border that Canadians finally decided to support political confederation. It was then that Lower Canadian politicians, along with former outliers New Brunswick and the Maritimes, accompanied colonial elites from Upper Canada to support the confederation in London. The consequences of empire—Fenian attempts to conquer Canada with the hopes that the U.S. government would follow through on its talk of annexation—had forced the British North American provinces to respond, and they chose to deepen their connection to the British.

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72 Lord Monck to Mr. Barnley, October 26, 1864, *Correspondence Relating to the Fenian Invasion of Canada*, 133.
Rapprochement on the horizon-

Immediately following the Fenian attacks, the U.S. government appeared to enforce the neutrality laws. U.S. General Gordon Meade issued orders for Brevet Major General Barry to “use the force at your command to preserve the neutrality by preventing the crossing or armed bodies, by cutting off reinforcements or supplies, by seizing all arms, munitions, which you have reason to believe are destined to be used unlawfully.” Meade then authorized Barry to “employ vessels, tugs, or others, such as can be procured, for watching the river and lake shores, and taking all such measures as in your judgment the emergency requires.” This response was a clear sign that the U.S. government was not interested in a war with Britain. The settlement of the Fenian crisis was the first step in easing tense relations between the two countries.

Members of the Fenian Brotherhood had largely overestimated the extent of Anglo-American animosity. To be fair, during the American Civil War, it did appear that tensions between the two countries had reached a level where war was possible, if not probable. As noted earlier, the Trent Affair and the St. Albans raids had outraged Americans. What is more, the St. Albans raids had not been the first time Confederate agents attempted to use the provinces to disrupt the Northern American states. Seward had even paid “special operatives” to monitor the border beginning in 1861 as part of an intelligence network. But the border was too extensive to thwart all illegal activity. As a result, Confederate agents, in

73 “Raid on Niagara Frontier,” The Intelligencer, June 8, 1866.
74 Ibid.
75 Stuart, op. cited, 178.
September 1864, took control of a provincial steamer off Winsor, and seized its weapons. The men intended to attack the USS Michigan in order to turn its guns on the nearby Johnson Island where the Union held Confederate prisoners of war.\textsuperscript{76} Provincial authorities foiled the plot before the men reached the Michigan, but the incident held greater meaning when the St. Albans raid occurred one month later.

Perhaps no American statesman played a greater role in emboldening Fenian beliefs of U.S. government aims in Canada than William Seward, Secretary of State under presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson. In an analysis of American expansion from 1860-1898, Walter LaFeber argues that Seward was filled with a clear vision of American Empire, based on the belief that expansion could only emanate from a “strong consolidated base on the American continent.”\textsuperscript{77} Wary of over committing military forces, Seward chose to avoid building American colonies in Latin America. Instead, he wanted informal protectorates in the Caribbean where the United States could establish “strategic bases to protect an Isthmian route to the Pacific and also prevent European powers from dabbling in the area of the North American coastline.”\textsuperscript{78} Mexico, Seward believed, would become a state as more Americans settled there, and he even saw the possibility of relocating the capital from D.C. to Mexico City. Seward viewed Canada and Alaska in much the same manner. In a study of Anglo-American relations during the era of the Civil War, historian Brian Holden Reid contends that Seward believed “an American absorption of Canada was
inevitable.” Although he had very little diplomatic experience before becoming Secretary of State, Seward had set a clear ideological tone in his approach to foreign policy concerning the American continent.

And yet, although Seward declared near the end of the American Civil War that “nature designs that this whole continent shall be, sooner or later, within the magic circle of the American Union,” even he did not aggressively push for measures to bring that about with the Canadian provinces. His approach was often more inconsistent. In response to the St. Albans raid, Seward applied punitive measures by instituting a passport system for Canadians trying to cross the border and by canceling the Reciprocity Treaty between Canada and the U.S. After Seward negotiated the purchase of Alaska in 1867, he hoped to pressure Britain to relinquish British Colombia as reparation for the damage inflicted by the British built Confederate raider, Alabama. But as historian Reginald Stuart argues, Seward “never considered the provincial fear of absorption by the United States,” and he overestimated Britain’s willingness to “even consider trading colonies for claims.” Seward backed down, as he was not inclined to use force in order to achieve American continental hegemony. In the aftermath of a destructive civil conflict, the United States could not afford to fight another war.

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80 Prior to his tenure as Secretary of State, Seward was a state Senator, then Governor, and then United States Senator—all in his home state of New York.
81 Reid, 5.
82 Stuart, 219.
Thus, the American Civil War was not only a crucible for the survival of the American nation, but one for Anglo-American relations as well. Historian Brian Holden Reid noted that Americans had often criticized Britain’s policy during the war as “expedient and morally bankrupt because it tended to be partial towards the defeated south.” But a more balanced examination of the matter—one that includes the perspective of British historians—reveals a precarious British geopolitical position. According to Reid, the British “successfully pursued a policy of deterrence,” whereby they recognized belligerent right of the Confederate States, quickly mobilized forces during the Trent Affair, and refused to guarantee the safety of American maritime commerce. By going on the offensive, as Reid argues, the British prevented the United States from being the aggressors. What is more, the British government did not officially take sides in the war; instead they favored whatever side “would have ruptured the splendor of the American democratic experiment.” Ultimately though, becoming embroiled in the American conflict was not of interest for the British who were more concerned with the balance of power in Europe. Reid contends that a “central pillar of British policy in the Americas was the exclusion of rival European powers from the Western Hemisphere,” which is why Britain “colluded in the maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine by providing the naval power that alone gave it weight.” In other words, through the exploitation of the Monroe Doctrine, Britain was able to maintain its colonies in North America.

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83 Reid, op. cited, 46.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid, 48.
Despite Anglo-American tensions that arose during the Civil War, the U.S. government was also less interested in another conflict. Even as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Charles Sumner, claimed that the British policy during the Civil War had “doubled the length of the war and the expense to win it,” American politicians never endorsed a belligerent policy for reprisals against Britain.\textsuperscript{86} Sumner, who was considered a friend to Britain when Seward was the antagonist, often talked privately of annexing Canada and did not want to antagonize Britain.\textsuperscript{87} In the wake of a costly civil war, American politicians may have talked tough about making England pay, but they lacked the military power to do anything about it. The U.S. Army and Navy were still small, a great disadvantage compared to British forces.\textsuperscript{88} What is more, British Prime Minister Lord John Russell pledged that the Crown would defend the Queen's Dominions in North America.\textsuperscript{89} In the end, both sides back down from the aggressive tone of their rhetoric. The British in particular, according to Reid, had grasped the “full extent of American potential which offered opportunities for increased trade, but also the great danger to the future security of the British Empire should a hostile European power see an alliance with the United States.”\textsuperscript{90} A mutual desire for a balance of power in the western hemisphere motivated both sides to push for a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{86} D. Donald, Charles Sumner and the Rights of Man (New York: Random House, 1970), 376.
\bibitem{87} Robin Winks, The Civil War Years: Canada and the United States, op. cited, 28.
\bibitem{89} Earl Russell, \textit{Recollections and Suggestions 1813-1873} (London: Roberts Brothers, 1875), 441.
\bibitem{90} Reid, 71.
\end{thebibliography}
rapprochement. Another factor that slowed the push for U.S. northern expansion were tensions of party politics. Although American expansion was popular before the Civil War, it often stalled due to a split in the Democratic Party. According to historian Reginald Stuart, this predicament did not change after the war largely because national expansion was “not popular during Reconstruction.”

The national debt had reached $2.5 billion, President Johnson’s domestic policies antagonized Republicans in Congress, and national projects such as the Pacific Railroad and the Plains Indians War drew attention westward. These issues took precedence over the American annexation of Canada.

Thus, while the Fenian Brotherhood found that many of their fellow Americans supported their cause, they ultimately overestimated the desire by the United States and Great Britain to go to war with one another over Canada. Over six hundred thousand American men had died in the Civil War. American resources were strained. But it was also the commercial relationship between the two countries that made war less probable. The United States had succeeded in making England more dependent on American cotton during the decades leading up to the American Civil War, and it appeared as though this commercial relationship would trump any push for war by jingoist politicians and Irish American nationalist agitators. Although many American politicians had talked openly of annexing Canada, a consensus had never developed. Popular and political support for immediate expansionism also waned because many

91 Stuart, 220.
92 Ibid.
93 Hietala, op. cited. Hietala argues this in a chapter called “Coercion through Empire,” concluding that the United States worked to create a monopoly of sorts for raw materials such as cotton.
Americans believed that conquest was antithetical to republicanism, and that an American-provincial union was inevitable.\(^9^4\) Even for the outspoken Seward, Canadian annexation was not worth fighting for because he believed it would happen as part of a natural progression of republican advancement across the continent. Though Seward and his ilk wanted Canada to become part of the United States, they wanted to avoid confrontation with England even more.

One of the first major examples of this conciliatory approach occurred in the summer of 1868 when the U.S. Congress passed the Expatriation Act, which granted a person’s right to renounce one’s citizenship and effectively ended the practice of perpetual allegiance. The issue of expatriation had continued to produce tensions between the United States and Britain after the Civil War, particularly in 1867 when the British arrested Fenians and naturalized American citizens Augustine Costello and John Warren in Ireland under the Treason Felony Act of 1848.\(^9^5\) Seward instructed his London diplomat, Charles Francis Adams, to raise the naturalization issue with his British counterparts as the “most important questions requiring attention” between the two countries.\(^9^6\) But the Britain had already created a Royal Commission to address the question of a Naturalization Treaty that no longer held to the doctrine of “indefeasible

\(^9^4\) Stuart, 224. Stuart also includes examples of American reaction to Canadian Confederation on pages 238-247. While some Americans in the press did react negatively, Stuart notes in these pages that a strident American belief in the ‘convergence theory’—the belief that in time the United States and Canada would unite—prevailed.

\(^9^5\) Sim, op. cited, 115-120.

allegiance.” It was a remarkable shift for a nation that had largely built its empire on such a doctrine, but British politicians clearly understood what was at stake. If they were to build a stable relationship with the U.S., the issue of citizenship had to be resolved. For the Americans, the passage of the Expatriation Act had set the legal framework for a foreign treaty by declaring that the right of expatriation was a “natural and inherent right of all people.” As historian David Sim argues, with a new agreement on naturalization, the British and U.S. governments “intended to close off a trans-Atlantic category of citizen—the migrant Irishman, adopted as a citizen of the United States—whose allegiance was claimed by Great Britain but who demanded the protection of the United States.” This type of ‘citizen’ had caused much tension in Anglo-American relations. But in the fall of 1868, that would end as both sides signed the naturalization accord, and marked a significant step towards improved relations.

Only months later, Seward led a second attempt to advance Anglo-American relations when he negotiated the Johnson-Clarendon Act with British diplomats and agreed to assign commissioners to arbitrate the Alabama claims. Oddly, the treaty only made future arrangements for individual claims against the British, not for national claims. In other words, under the terms of the

97 Lord Stanley to Mr. Thornton, June 16, 1868, Correspondence Respecting the Negotiations with the United States’ Government on the Questions of the “Alabama” and British Claims, Naturalizations, and San Juan Water Boundary, May, 1869.
98 Text of Expatriation Act, July 27, 1868, Fortieth Congress, session II, ch. 249, 250. The Fourteenth Amendment also addressed citizenship and was passed within days of the Expatriation Act.
99 Sim, 125.
agreement, there was no ground for the United States to file a complaint as a nation. The terms infuriated Senator Charles Sumner, who argued that the treaty was a “snare” because “the massive grievance under which our country suffered for years is left untouched.” Sumner was also disappointed that the treaty did not contain any words of regret, recognition, or even compensation by the British. The Senator maintained that it was essential for the U.S. to seek justice “as the foundation of a good understanding with Great Britain.” After Sumner’s fiery speech, the treaty was not ratified. Nonetheless, Seward’s efforts underscore the push by Johnson administration to improve Anglo-American relations.

Hamilton Fish, Secretary of State under President Grant, continued Seward’s policy of diplomacy and pacification. Fish informed British officials that the U.S. government was interested in entering negotiations for more auspicious relations and that the Grant administration would work to “secure a favorable result”, even if it involved a conflict with Sumner. Pleased with the overture, the Gladstone ministry in London sent notice to Fish of interest in resolving any issues between the two countries. In March of 1871, American and British delegates met in Washington to discuss remaining issues concerning the Canadian border and the Alabama Claims. One of the British delegates was newly appointed Canadian Prime Minister, John MacDonald, whose enlistment

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102 Ibid, 4.
implied that the Dominion of Canada was an important party to the issues being discussed. As Stuart has noted, it also signaled a symbolic recognition of “Canadian’s semiautonomy.”\textsuperscript{105} And yet, despite his presence, MacDonald was worried that his country’s interests would be overlooked at the expense of British and American ambitions.\textsuperscript{106} Indeed, the negotiations and resulting treaty validated his concerns.

The Treaty of Washington established multiple commissions to address financial claims concerning the Alabama Claims and provided compensation to the British for American fishing privileges in the Atlantic Ocean off Canada and Newfoundland. The Americans had won the fishing concessions without having to acquiesce to Canadian demands for renewing the Reciprocity Treaty (angering MacDonald). Although U.S. officials also pushed to renegotiate the boundary west of the Rockies, the British would only agree to arbitration over the San Juan boundary. During the convention, MacDonald demanded reparations for the Fenian attacks and lobbied for a renewal of the reciprocity treaty. When the talks stalled, the British agreed instead to foot the bill to Canada for loses incurred at the hands of the Fenians. Despite MacDonald’s push to represent Canada’s interests, he was dismayed to find that the British approached negotiations with a “global perspective.”\textsuperscript{107} Concerned about communications with the Far East, about Russia’s future actions, and about Prussia’s 1870 “humiliation” of France, MacDonald lamented that an Anglo-American accord took precedence as it

\textsuperscript{105} Stuart, 252.
\textsuperscript{106} John. A. MacDonald, \textit{Parliamentary Debates on the Subject of the Confederation of the British North American Provinces}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} Session, 8\textsuperscript{th} Provincial Parliament of Canada (Quebec: Hunter & Rose, 1865), 25. Also see Stuart, 253.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
became essential to Great Britain’s “imperial security” in 1871. With the Treaty of Washington, the British even agreed to withdraw troops from the St. Lawrence River. This concession then allowed the U.S government to police the border themselves.

Thus, the Treaty of Washington confirmed that neither England nor the U.S. had any interest in going to war. “Despite inflammatory language,” Reid concluded, “in reality both powers reached a level of accommodation, compromise and affinity that was unusual in the nineteenth century.”

After the Civil War, stability became a priority and an Anglo-American alliance made a partnership between the U.S. and another European power less likely. The British also “grasped the full extent of American potential which offered opportunities for increased trade.” British diplomats even remained in Washington D.C. while the treaty was reviewed in the Senate to “influence” certain members in order and ensure its passage.

President Grant also made an effort to help push ratification along, in March of 1871, by making his support for the treaty known to other republican Senators. As a result, Charles Sumner was “disposed by his senatorial colleagues from the chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.” A few months later, with far less legislative objection, the treaty was ratified. The following year, a tribunal ordered Britain to pay over fifteen millions dollars to the U.S. for the Alabama Claims, and in 1877

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108 Ibid.
109 Reid, 45.
110 Ibid, 71.
111 Ibid.
the fisheries commission required the U.S. government to pay over five millions dollars to the British as compensation for fishing rights off British North American coast. The Treaty of Washington had created a template for resolving future issues. It set in motion a new Anglo-American relationship, one that eventually culminated in an alliance by the turn of the century.

While ethnic and linguistic similarities may have played a role in the growing affinity between the two empires, geopolitical and economic motivations were more likely the cause.\textsuperscript{113} With the balance of power in Europe on unstable ground as a result of the Franco-Prussian War, Great Britain saw the importance of a stable friendship with the United States. Although Reconstruction did occupy a good deal of American attention, a “program of expansion” eventually returned to American foreign policy.\textsuperscript{114} According to historian Thomas Schoonover, economic panics—occurring in each of the last three decades of the nineteenth century in the U.S. and throughout the world—also spurred political, business, and military leaders to “expand through colonialism and informal imperialism.”\textsuperscript{115} As long as this expansion was not directed to the north, the British did not offer much in opposition. In fact, during the Spanish-American War, they not only officially remained neutral, but were not particularly secretive of their support for


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
the U.S.\textsuperscript{116} A few years later, the British also agreed to nullify the Clay-Bulwar Treaty of 1850, which had restricted both countries from exclusive control of the proposed canal across the Nicaraguan isthmus. Anglo-American relations showed even greater signs of accommodation to respective imperial designs with the 1901 Hay-Pauncefote Treaty, which granted the United States the ability to build and control a canal across the Central American isthmus.\textsuperscript{117} That same year, influential British newspaper editor William Stead even suggested that a unification of Britain and the United States would ensure stability and influence for English speaking people.\textsuperscript{118} Prominent American businessmen such as Andrew Carnegie agreed, and espoused a “reunion of the Anglo-Saxon peoples.”\textsuperscript{119} Although Britain’s aggressive policy in border negotiations with Venezuela in 1895 and its naval blockade of the south American country in 1902 reignited resentment by some Americans, the incidents did not greatly alter official political relations.\textsuperscript{120} The British had supported the U.S. Open Door policy in China and both nations were part of the Eight-Nation Alliance that suppressed the Boxer Rebellion there in 1900.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[120] British politicians reassured Americans that they had no intention of conquering territory in South America. See “Britain Seeks No Territory: Lord Lansdowne Declares there is no Intention of Landing a British Force in Venezuela,” \textit{The New York Times}, Dec. 17, 1902.
\end{footnotes}
Thus, in the post-Civil War era, geopolitical and economic concerns swayed American and British statesmen to overcome personal animosity, and the tense—and often acrimonious—history between the two empires. The Fenians had not accounted for the possibility of such a diplomatic shift. As David Sim noted, they had relied on creating “international instability” but their actions had instead “brought about a hardening (even institutionalization) of the structures of Anglo-American relations.” Consequently, the Fenians returned to a marginalized status as the empires they attempted to navigate ultimately shunned them. Failure in Canada led to the decline of the Brotherhood and a temporary lull in the Irish American nationalist movement. For the Fenians, the price of empire was steep.

The Fenian Decline-

While the Fenian Brotherhood’s attempt to conquer Canada ultimately led to its demise, the organization was still able to remain influential in American political life for a few months after the raids. During this time, several American congressmen continued to openly support the militant extension of the Irish American nationalist movement. With federal elections only months away, the Irish vote was still too powerful and Reconstruction politicians needed as much support as they could garner in order to dominate southern resistance. For example, U.S. Representative and Pennsylvania Democrat, Sydenham E. Ancona, submitted a bill that asked his colleagues in the House of

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121 Sim, 129.
Representatives to review the Neutrality Act. Although the bill received some bipartisan support—particularly from a Republican who was also a Union army general—it did not make it out of committee.\textsuperscript{122} In another show of political leniency to the Fenians, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Schuyler Colfax, escorted William Roberts on a tour of Washington D.C., just days after Roberts was released from jail. Weeks later, U.S. Congressman from Massachusetts, Nathaniel Banks, proposed legislation to annex eastern Canada to the United States.\textsuperscript{123} The House Foreign Affairs Committee rejected the bill but a resolution passed Congress that supported the release of Fenian prisoners in Canada. This agreement also allowed the Brotherhood to use a federal building in Washington for “organizational activities.”\textsuperscript{124} By such measures, the Fenians still appeared to have some influence with the U.S. government. It was a remarkable achievement considering the Brotherhood had just violated neutrality laws and it was a testament to just how powerful the organization had become. The Fenian decline did not occur overnight.

Further evidence of Fenian influence is apparent in the continued threat they posed to the border after U.S. military forces thwarted the larger invasion at Fort Erie in early June of 1866. A few weeks after O’Neil and his men crossed the Niagara River, Canadian newspapers warned that Fenianism was far from dead and that Brotherhood was working in secret to implement plans for another

\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Congressional Globe, Thirty-Ninth Congress, First Session} (July 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1866), 3548.
\textsuperscript{124} Steward and McGovern, op. cited, 137.
attack.\textsuperscript{125} \textit{The Intelligencer} made its understanding of Fenianisms in America known, concluding that members of the Brotherhood would no longer be able to keep things secret from Washington authorities “unless those authorities are willing to close their eyes and their hands.”\textsuperscript{126} Warning that there were rumors of a Fenian demonstration on the Lake Huron shore, the newspaper concluded that it was not improbable “that the Fenians in the west, who are said to be well supplied with vessels and munitions of war, will attempt to effect a landing at some point on the western frontier.”\textsuperscript{127} Although no large-scale western attack occurred, continued Canadian fears pointed to the extent to which the Fenian Brotherhood had become a persistent international force.

But while the Fenians had reached a measure of political and social power, they felt that the U.S. government had misled them. Roberts accused the American government of leading the organization on, “with promises of neutrality, and when they found the affair a failure, exercising undue severity in stopping provisions and other necessaries from reaching them.”\textsuperscript{128} Members of the Brotherhood responded with strident warnings to President Johnson when he ordered the military to strictly enforce the Neutrality Laws. Publically, Sweeny cautioned the president to “keep his paws out of this struggle.”\textsuperscript{129} The Irish people in America, Sweeny announced, would make life very difficult for Johnson if he prevented them from achieving their goals. Sweeny viewed Johnson’s

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{The Intelligencer}, July 6, 1866, folder 28, The Fenian Trials (TFT), OA.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{128} William Roberts Speech as printed in \textit{The Irish American}, June 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
neutrality laws as similar to those of the “old monarchies,” and was convinced that such policies “impeded the progress of freedom.” For Roberts, Sweeny, and their followers, the mission of United States was to aid every people “in their attempt at liberty, and to strike down despotism.” In a federal election year, threats of swaying the Irish American vote held considerable currency.

As with congressional politicians, Johnson did make an effort to court the Irish American vote for the 1866 mid-term elections. In so doing, he emboldened claims that the U.S. government fostered Fenianism and further angered Canadians. Johnson pardoned all Fenians still under indictment for violating American neutrality laws and asked the State Department to advocate on behalf of Irish American citizens charged with treason in Canada and Ireland. Johnson also issued an executive order to return all weapons that the Army had seized from the Fenians as long as the men agreed never to again use them in violation of federal law. Though such measures were politically motivated, they had the appearance of governmental leniency, if not endorsement of Fenian actions. Roberts advanced this perception days after spending time in Washington D.C. with Colfax when he publically urged all Fenians released from jail to return to their homes and secretly prepare for another attack. In many ways, the strength of the Brotherhood had come to depend on the promise of invading Canada, thus making such declarations essential. But Roberts’s words, on the

\[130\] Ibid.
\[131\] Ibid.
\[132\] See chapter four of this dissertation.
\[133\] William Roberts’ speech printed in The Irish American, June 16, 1866, folder A149, FBF, NAI.
heels of his D.C. tour, and Johnsons’ political appeal to Irish Americans, only strengthened the perception of U.S. government complicity in Fenian activity.

And yet, despite such appeasement, President Johnson and Secretary Seward also prioritized negotiating with the British. At a Fenian Brotherhood meeting held in August 1866, Colfax announced that Johnson had become “the friend of the English government.” Furthermore, Johnson’s efforts to gain favor with the Irish American voting block largely failed and, as historians Patrick Seward and Bryan McGovern argue, they were “unnecessary in retrospect, as the fractured Brotherhood became a fringe group within the greater expatriate community.” By the fall of 1866, Stephens was unable to command the large crowds that had once attended his rallies in the United States. He returned to Ireland vowing to lead an insurrection, but never followed through. Disillusioned members of the IRB who had grown impatient with Stephen’s inability to lead an attack in Ireland effectively dethroned him in the early months of 1867. The O’Mahony faction of the Fenian Brotherhood also fell into disarray and members eventually replaced the founding leader. Sweeney stepped down from his position as Secretary of War of the Brotherhood under Roberts’ contingent and returned to his position in the U.S. Army. Roberts was re-elected for another term as president but, according to Seward and McGovern, “had to manage with less qualified leadership and decreasing grassroots support.” In the year following the failed Canadian attacks, Fenians turned their attention to attacking British

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134 As quoted in Seward and McGovern, 138.
135 Seward and McGovern, 141.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid, 140.
outposts in Ireland because in America the organization had "lost so much political clout."\textsuperscript{138} Colfax lost re-election in the fall of 1866 and President Johnson grew less concerned with the Irish American vote as he turned his attention to diplomatic gestures with Britain.

Widespread Irish American support of the Fenian Brotherhood had also begun to wane in the months after the attacks. Most of the wealthy Irish in America had always disliked the movement because it maintained the Irish as "distinct nationality in the midst of the American population."\textsuperscript{139} In contrast, the urban poor had supported the Fenian movement en masse. The sizeable attendance at Fenian gatherings certainly attested to this. But as M.J. Sewell maintains, even urban poor Irish Americans became less supportive of Irish nationalism when they felt that the movement was slipping away from "romantic nationalist rebellion, towards the combination of social revolution and terrorism to achieve self-government."\textsuperscript{140} The irony was that as long as the Fenians "remained close to the warming sun of Irish nationalism they thrived; but when by the vary law of their being they came into contact with the divisive realities of American life, they inevitably disintegrated."\textsuperscript{141} The Fenians had gone too far. The very things that made them Irish Americans—an aggressive expansionist worldview and a self-righteousness belief that Irish and American principles were

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 177. See chapter six for a detailed examination of Fenian and IRB attempts to launch attacks in Ireland from late 1866 through 1867.
\textsuperscript{139} Brown, op. cited, 41.
\textsuperscript{141} Brown, 41
the same and were superior to all others—had ultimately turned their fellow Americans against them.

Nonetheless, the Fenians still did not completely abandon designs on Canada. In March, 1868, Canadian authorities considered lowering the naval force in the St. Lawrence River and on the Great Lakes, but then decided to maintain the status quo when reports from agents in the U.S. made it clear that the Fenian organization was “being carried on, and that some future invasion of the Canadian soil is contemplated by them.”142 President Johnson responded by increasing military presence along the border and the threat diminished.143 In Huntington, a Quebec border town, residents were still anxious in 1870 when rumors of another planned Fenian attack surfaced. Canadian border residents had grown weary of continued threats, but as one Canadian newspaper concluded, the only effective way to “save Canadians from Feniansim” was to “make the American government do its duty as international law requires, and to hold it strictly responsible for every act its citizens, whether native or naturalized.”144 Fortunately for the Canadians, president Grant did enforce neutrality laws and arrested all those involved in the planned attack, including John O’Neil who once again leading the campaign. At the time, Grant and his Secretary of State, Hamilton Fish, were hoping to obtain fishing rights off Newfoundland. According to historian Reginald Stuart, Fish “clamped down” on the Fenians to prevent another full-scale attack and refused to allow them to

142 Dispatch, March 12, 1868, Correspondence Relating to the Fenian Invasion of Canada, 164.
143 Seward and McGovern, 192.
144 The Huntington Gleamer, folder 56, OA.
disrupt the “delicate” fishery negotiations. The administration’s preemptive action was a clear indication of how American political concerns had shifted away from territorial expansion towards a focus on economic and political stability. It also underscored the extent to which Fenian power had diminished.

On trial, O’Neil explained how the Fenian Brotherhood had fared after facing such a setback in 1866 due to the failed attacks. In the first few months of 1868 after Roberts had resigned, P.J. Meehan and the other remaining leaders of the organization told O’Neil that the very existence of the brotherhood depended on his action. O’Neil claimed that Roberts and Meehan induced him to become president but he demanded that they first promise him to unite the Brotherhood for another invasion of Canada later in the year. O’Neil then spent the spring and summer of 1868 attending both private and public Fenian meetings across the northern states to increase support and raise funds. He was also present at eighteen Fenian state conventions that all endorsed the plan to again invade Canada and pledged the necessary means. Perhaps owing to his experience leading men across the Niagara and fighting at Ridgeway in 1866, O’Neil felt that he had been well received at each state gathering. Armed with this reputation, he proudly took credit for building membership numbers. He maintained that thousands joined the organization because of his account, and that thousands would have left if they did not believe he intended to fight.

Though O’Neil may have been exaggerating, his words attest to the fact that

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145 Stuart, 250.
Fenianism had not disappeared on a grassroots level despite its declining influence on the national political stage.

And yet, O’Neil’s trial also sheds light on the varied reasons for the eventual deterioration of the Fenian Brotherhood. While O’Neil was touring the country to solidify support, he claimed that Vice president of the Brotherhood, James Gibbons, P.J. Meehan, and senators of the organization, were more concerned with their own financial and political prospects, and with keeping the organization as a “mere machine to help themselves in working out their own political plans and purposes.” These men, O’Neil argued, were enthusiastic for “early movement against the enemy,” but once they gained office “they suddenly changed their tactics and became advocates of slow and cautious measures.” From O’Neil’s perspective then, James Gibbons and PJ Meehan conveniently turned on him after he was arrested by claiming that he had acted alone and did not represent the organization. “The misrepresentation practiced by some of our Irish patriots,” O’Neil concluded, “has done more the injure the cause and destroy the confidence of the people than a dozen defeats on the field.” O’Neil’s testimony reveals just how fractured the Fenian Brotherhood had become. The infighting and splintered state of the organization’s leadership that took place leading up to the attacks in 1866 had continued, and perhaps even worsened. This dynamic, coupled with the fact that the U.S. government had shifted towards

\[\text{147} \text{ Ibid, 11.} \]
\[\text{148} \text{ Ibid, 28.} \]
\[\text{149} \text{ Ibid.} \]
\[\text{150} \text{ See chapter three of this dissertation for an examination of the split that occurred before the 1866 attacks.} \]
an Anglo-American rapprochement, played an integral role in the decline of the Fenian Brotherhood.

Although his trial may have been an opportunistic moment to lay blame elsewhere, O’Neil did not entirely skirt responsibility for his role in the events. At one point during his testimony, he declared that the policy to invade Canada again was the reason that he accepted the position of the President of the Organization in January of 1868, and that he had no regrets except for trusting those who betrayed him.¹⁵¹ Not only did O’Neil agree to become president because he believed in the Canadian strategy but also because of the thousands of men who had joined the organization due to his leadership. They would have left, he argued, if they did not believe he intended to fight.

Despite his ardent passion to return to Canada, it is possible that O’Neil’s latest arrest in 1870 changed him. And although he may have been trying to reduce his punishment, O’Neil nonetheless made it clear that he would no longer pursue another invasion in Canada. The opportunity for success had passed, he concluded:

> With the United States authorities to hold you back on one side, and the vigilance and forward state of preparation (continually on the increase) of the Canadian authorities to meet you on the other, you will never be able to get a sufficient number of men with arms and ammunition across the border in time to take up a position which can be held.¹⁵²

O’Neil’s statement is telling for it pointed to the forces that had already begun to push the Brotherhood from its peak of power. The apparatus of state power in both the U.S. and in Canada had struck back, making it almost impossible for the

¹⁵¹ O’Neil, op. cited, 28.
¹⁵² Ibid, 29.
Fenians to achieve their goals. The attacks in 1866 had shifted the political environment in both countries. O’Neil did not learn this lesson back then, but he had in 1870.

In addition to the U.S. government continuing to prove that it was serious about enforcing the neutrality laws and the ‘forward state of preparation’ by the Canadians, there were other factors that contributed to the weakening of the Fenian Brotherhood. Even though President Grant pardoned those involved in the 1870 plan to attack Canada, including O’Neil, membership numbers of the Brotherhood had already begun to decline. After the Treaty of Washington, Fenian membership had decreased by ninety percent from the days of the invasion in 1866 and, according to Seward and McGovern, was “in such a state of decline that former nationalist hotbeds became progressively assimilated expatriate communities.”153 The corruption and infighting that O’Neil had testified to played a role in the creation of a rival Irish American nationalist organization called the Clan-Na-Gael, which also drew potential members away. The Clan was “committed to fulfilling the original objectives of the IRB,” a directive that was similar to the early mission of the Fenian Brotherhood.154 Having learned from its predecessor’s mistakes, the Clan taught its members how to communicate covertly and required each member to vote in favor or against the admission of new members. The new organization, with its more cautious approach, drew potential Fenian members.

153 Seward and McGovern, 201.
154 Ibid, 177.
Other political and social organizations attracted Irish American nationalists. Fenians became involved in the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union and the rising union movement such as the Knights of Labor.\textsuperscript{155} The U.S. political system also offered a new outlet for Irish American angst as some former Fenian members began to further assimilate into mainstream society. In 1870, William Roberts was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for New York’s 5\textsuperscript{th} Congressional District. It was a considerable mark of achievement for the former militant leader who had once been imprisoned for organizing an invasion of another country. Because these other avenues offered effective channels for Irish American nationalism, the already anemic Fenian Brotherhood appeared past its prime.

Thus, Irish American nationalism did not die with the downfall of the Fenian Brotherhood. But the opportunity to align Irish nationalists goals with American Empire had come and gone. When the Fenians had tried to exploit American expansion for their own gains, they were bit by the hand that fed them. American political leaders refused to have the path of expansion dictated to them, at least not by an immigrant group that challenged state power. Empire had limits for the marginalized—especially for those who tried to insert themselves into national foreign policy. Fenianism then, represented a public and more aggressive transnational organization that damaged the Irish nationalist movement, forcing it to go underground and maintain a furtive presence with the Clan-Na-Gael. The cost of empire was severe. Although the Fenian legacy inspired future Irish American nationalist groups, none would take on such an

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, 211.
assertive role in U.S. foreign relations. The irony of course, is that the Fenians unintentionally strengthened the very imperial structures they intended to destabilize. With the rapprochement, British and American Empires had reigned supreme over the challenge. Irish American nationalism would never be the same again.
Conclusion

The Fenian invasion of Canada contributed to the consolidation of the British Empire on the North American continent and led to the Brotherhood’s decline. As this dissertation has demonstrated, from the Fenian perspective these were not necessarily foreseeable consequences. Because the Brotherhood had operated with considerable impunity before the summer of 1866—with its leaders publically declaring their intentions to invade Canada and not facing any reprisals from American authorities—members believed that the U.S. government would follow through on its declarations to annex Canada. The Fenians saw themselves as the tip of the spear.

The Canadians understood this dynamic and indicted both the Fenians and the U.S. government for the invasion. In fact, Canadian politician, D’Arcy McGee, even likened the U.S. to the “State of Barbary,” and the Fenians to the Algerian pirates who had terrorized American ships in the Mediterranean.1 It was a remarkable charge given that the U.S. had condemned both the Barbary pirates and the States that harbored them.2 But a few weeks after the Fenian attacks, McGee had grown intolerant when the U.S. House of Representatives

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considered a bill that was intended to abolish the neutrality laws. Such actions by American politicians, he argued, encouraged the “mob” action of the Fenians.³ The Barbary comparison, McGee concluded, was justified because of the “different piratical and filibustering expeditions that have been organized and attempted by the citizens of the United States against peaceable neighboring people.”⁴ McGee had not only grouped the Fenians with the Barbary pirates but with the exploits of many American citizens who had launched raids into other countries throughout the nineteenth century—particularly in the antebellum era.⁵ For doing very little to prevent such actions, McGee maintained, the U.S. government was no different than the Barbary States who appeared to condone pirates attacking neutral merchant ships in the Mediterranean.

The Hastings’ Chronicle agreed with McGee’s assessment, and asked what Cuba, Texas, Nicaragua, or Canada had done to deserve American filibustering? The newspaper also compared the Fenians to the “band of pirates, which for centuries was the terror of every vessel, no matter what the nation, that had business along the coast.”⁶ For the Canadians, it was not just the Fenians who were to blame for invading Canada. If the Americans had any “old scores” remaining with England, the Hastings’ Chronicle concluded, sending “a few hundred regiments of U.S. regulars would be a more honorable way of settling

³ The Hastings’ Chronicle. June 14, 1866, folder 82, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
⁵ As discussed in the introduction of this dissertation and noted throughout other chapters, filibustering expeditions had become quite popular in antebellum America. For more on this topic see the works cited in the introduction, particular Robert E. May’s, Manifest Destiny’s Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America, op. cit.
⁶ The Hastings’ Chronicle. June 14, 1866, folder 82, F923, MU2648, B261133, OA, York University, Ontario.
the difficulty.\textsuperscript{7} Such statements were a clear indictment of an American system that the Canadians believed had sponsored filibustering and premeditated cross-border violence. Given the evidence of the Brotherhood’s ability to publically declare and plan for invading Canada, it was a valid accusation.

By likening the Fenians to the Barbary pirates and the U.S. government to the Barbary States, Canadians emphasized how important the U.S. government was to the Fenian advance. For McGee and others, the U.S. government had fostered an environment whereby expansionist and nationalist ideologues felt empowered to attack other countries with which the U.S. was formally at peace. The Fenians may have wanted to strike at England, but it was from the U.S. and into Canada where they made that happen. American expansion made the Fenian invasion of Canada possible. Although they had hoped that their efforts would make Canada an American state similar to the way of Texas, they ultimately had more in common with the U.S. filibusterers in Nicaragua who were also unable to force the annexation of the Central American country. The Fenian invasion of Canada and the earlier filibusterer exploits underscore the extent to which American expansion emboldened its citizens to be active participants in the project of empire.

The Fenian Brotherhood tried to use the expanding American Empire to its own advantage but was ultimately fooled by it. Their story is a clear example that, for the state and marginalized people, empire is a risky venture. This dissertation serves as a testament to the consequences of empire. As detailed in the first chapter, Anglo-American competition over Canada from 1783 to the summer of

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
1866 informed Fenian ideology. Members viewed Canadian territory as a frontier where they could exact revenge against the British as active participants in American expansion. They had moved from victims of one empire to agents or perpetrators of another. Although it had originated as a transnational organization, the Fenian Brotherhood took on a predominantly American identity with objectives that undermined the group’s initial objective and shattered its relationship with the I.R.B. Chapters two and three highlighted this fracture and underscored how American empire building fostered Fenian goals in Canada. Canadian imperial nationalism played a role in thwarting the Fenians as thousands of British North Americans came together to resist Fenian aggression and called for their provincial government to protect them against belligerent Americans. Chapter four examined how the Fenian invasions led to greater Canadian nationalism within the British Empire and a growing resistance against American annexation. While the Fenians benefited from American empire for a time, they were ultimately deceived by it. Fenian hubris was too much for a U.S. government that was filled with politicians who were either focused on other matters or who were in no rush to force military action in acquiring Canada because they believed in that the British North American province would eventually be annexed through a more organic process. Canadian Confederation and Anglo-American rapprochement signified a new environment that proved less conducive to Fenian goals. Chapter five examined the decline of the Fenian Brotherhood in the face of British imperial consolidation in Canada and shifting
American foreign relations objectives, but also demonstrated that Irish American nationalism did not disappear.

The historiographical implications for this study are numerous. Examining the Fenian invasion of Canada through the lens of American Empire allows for a better understanding of how immigrants in the United States asserted themselves in the project of expansion. Nongovernment people, even marginalized ones, have played a considerable role in shaping borders and foreign relations. Though not in the same manner, the Fenians were one of many immigrant groups that took advantage of the resources in the United States to better position their cause and attempt to influence foreign policy. Using empire as a methodological framework through which to examine these organizations may further expose the complexities of transnational networks and reveal whether other immigrant nationalists reconciled anti-imperialism with America Empire. It will also provide a more comprehensive look at the culture from which they emerged. The Fenian story reminds us that the aggressive reflection of manifest destiny ideology did not disappear with the Civil War. As historian Paul Kramer notes, in the post-civil war era, the U.S. was an “empire building nation.”8 The social, political and economic forces that shaped the Brotherhood in the U.S. were influenced by an expansionist worldview that so many Americans shared. More research is needed to investigate how other nongovernment people furthered American empire in the decades after the Civil War.

The Fenian invasion of Canada also directs attention to the northern border of the United States—a region that could benefit from an expansion of

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8 Kramer, op. cited, 1371.
research so as to better comprehend the culture and outlook of residents there during the nineteenth century. Considering that the United States’ borders—though mostly its southern border—have become a contested issue in the current national political debate, additional literature on the northern borderland region could help provide greater historical context. A deeper look into the earlier filibustering expeditions into Canada will also provide a more complex picture of what the border meant to Americans and Canadians during this time. As seen in throughout this dissertation, the dynamic between the state and its borderland residents was never consistent. Discovering other examples of northern border conflict, and how the state rectified these episodes, will enrich the historiographical field.

Although the Fenians were unsuccessful in their quest to conquer Canada and force its annexation to the United States, their story is vital to the history of America in the world. It exposes the repercussions of the imperial process—particularly how state expansion inspires filibustering violence among its citizens. It also underscores the importance of examining transnational movements and how they impact and are shaped by empire. The rise and fall of the Fenian Brotherhood was tied to the expansion of both the British and American empires. There is still much to learn from how organizations such as the Fenians used imperial structures and the networks they create to achieve their ends. The Fenian invasion of Canada may have led to the organization’s decline, but it served a vital purpose in how it impacted the evolution of the Irish nationalist movement both in Ireland and America.
The Fenian Legacy-

With Canada no longer a viable target after 1870, and other Irish American organizations such as the Clan-na-Gael offering an outlet for nationalist fervor, the Fenian Brotherhood faded from American society. The imperial moment in Canada that the Fenians hoped to manipulate had passed, and with it, the organizations’ momentum. In the transnational Irish nationalist movement, Irish Americans were then relegated to taking a back seat to the directives of the I.R.B. However, though the Fenians may have hindered the cause for a time, they made a lasting impact on future agitators and were an integral part of the longer movement for Irish independence.

Perhaps there is no better demonstration of this legacy than the life of Joseph McGarrity, an Irish American nationalist who rose to power in the Clan-na-Gael during the first few decades of the twentieth century. McGarrity was born on March 7, 1874, to a tenant farming Catholic family in a rural area of the Ulster region of Ireland. While McGarrity and his family were able to produce enough on their farm to make ends meet, he often witnessed the police eject neighboring tenants because they could not afford to pay what he referred to as “exorbitant rents charged by the landlord, whose ancestors in the past, came and seized the land of the people for which they gave to its owners no remuneration.”

9 Memoirs of Joseph McGarrity, 58, group 1, box 6, folder 1, Joseph McGarrity Collection, Falvey Library, Villanova University. From this point on any reference to Joseph McGarrity’s memoirs will be footnoted as Memoirs followed by the page number. The Joseph McGarrity Collection will be referred to as JMC.
memoir, McGarrity recalled that the authorities often used a battering ram to “knock down the cottage and make it impossible for the occupants to re-enter.”

Even as a young boy, McGarrity had developed a deep awareness of the socioeconomic conditions created by British colonialism.

At sixteen, McGarrity followed in the footsteps of his older siblings and immigrated to the United States. He landed in Philadelphia and soon joined a division of the Ancient Order of the Hibernians, but felt disappointed when “no mention of Ireland or Irish freedom was made during the session.” According to McGarrity, the meetings were more concerned with the immediate needs of its members, such as sick benefits, death benefits, and social events at the club’s headquarters. Noticing McGarrity’s frustration, another member asked whether he was willing to fight for Ireland and if he believed “its freedom could be secured by combat with England.” McGarrity replied that violence was the only way “it could be done and should be done.” Weeks later, McGarrity attended his first meeting of the Philadelphia Clan-Na-Gael, and from that day forward became an “active and energetic worker in the Irish Revolutionary movement.” After only one year in America, McGarrity had formally pledged to devote his life to achieving independence for his native country.

The American experience proved beneficial to McGarrity and his Irish nationalist interests. He eventually became a successful businessman (owning a whiskey distillery among other ventures), which allowed him to devote a

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10 Memoirs, 9.
11 Ibid, 42.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
considerable amount of money to the Clan-na-Gael, and gain clout among its members. In the summer of 1914, he hosted Roger Casement—a veteran of the British Consular Service who had decided to devote the rest of his life to the cause of Irish freedom. Casement was in the U.S. to raise money for the purchase of arms that Irish nationalists badly needed in order to attack British targets in Dublin.\footnote{Marie Tarpey, \textit{The Role of Joseph McGarrity in the Struggle for Irish Independence} (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 81-82.} Seizing the opportunity to gain greater support for the Irish cause, McGarrity alerted newspapers that Casement was speaking at a large meeting in Philadelphia.\footnote{Rene MacColl, \textit{Roger Casement, a New Judgment}, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956), 133.} McGarrity not only hoped that Casement’s presence would raise the morale of members of the Clan-na-Gael, but that it would build on the outrage many Irish Americans felt over recent events in Ulster.\footnote{Tarpey, 81. British soldiers had killed three civilians and wounded thirty-two more in Belfast when nationalist groups tried to dock ships in the harbor that were carrying weapons. Although British officials were allowing Protestant unionist groups import weapons into Belfast, they prohibited the same action by nationalists.}  

During World War I, McGarrity supported the German position against the British—something he claimed many Irish Americans did—and he worked diligently to convince other members of the Revolutionary Directory of the Philadelphia Clan to send Casement to Germany as an envoy to secure German military help for Ireland, influence German public opinion on the Irish Question, and organize Irish prisoners of war into a military unit to take part in the fight for Irish freedom.\footnote{Tarpey, 84.} It was bold step but not shocking given the tradition of militant action taken by Irish American nationalists, most notably by the Fenians.  

And yet, despite their efforts, Casement and McGarrity were unable to secure weapons for Irish nationalists before the Easter Rising in 1916.
Nonetheless, fifteen hundred members of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) were still able to seize multiple buildings in Dublin for several days before the British government “shelled” the city from a gunboat in the bay.\textsuperscript{19} Close to four hundred and fifty people (mostly civilians) died. Having already declared martial law, the British government did not waste any time handing out punishment. Two thousand suspected Irish nationalists were arrested and sent to internment camps in Britain, one hundred and seventy rebels were court marshaled in Dublin, and almost ninety death sentences were handed out to the captured rebels.\textsuperscript{20} One of the rebel participants, an American-born man named Eamon De Valera, made a plea to members of the Clan-na-Gael for the commutation of his death sentence.\textsuperscript{21} McGarrity immediately called on the Philadelphia Clan-Na-Gael to investigate the necessary documents to prove De Valera’s American citizenship for clemency.\textsuperscript{22} He also contacted a Philadelphia lawyer named Francis Doyle—who was a friend of President Wilson’s Secretary, Joseph Tumulty—in the hopes of securing help from the president. Days later, De Valera’s death sentence was commuted to life in prison.\textsuperscript{23} McGarrity and the Clan-na-Gael celebrated the news and relished in the power they had exerted over U.S. foreign affairs.

McGarrity’s achievement had a lasting impact in Ireland. Just two years later, De Valera led an overwhelming victory for the Sinn Fein Party (Irish

\textsuperscript{19} The Irish Republican Army was largely comprised of Irish men who refused to serve in the British military during World War I. See Peter Hart, \textit{The IRA at War, 1916-1923} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
\textsuperscript{20} Reilly, op. cited, 118-119
\textsuperscript{21} Although De Valera’s mother was from Ireland, he was born in Brooklyn New York.
\textsuperscript{22} Tarpey, 93-94.
Nationalists) in Ireland, winning seventy-three seats out of one hundred and five in the British general election—a clear majority over the twenty-six seats for the Unionists. Motivated by the election results, Irish Americans organized an ‘Irish Race Convention’ in Philadelphia where leaders made “eloquent appeals for the freedom of Ireland and bitter arraignment of England marked the opening sessions today of the Convention of the Irish Race.” McGarrity also wrote a letter to President Wilson and asked him to raise the issue of Irish independence at the Paris Peace Conference. Wilson did not heed McGarrity’s proposal or the pleas of other Irish Americans who voiced similar suggestions through committees and conventions. The question of Irish Independence was never discussed at the conference in Paris. Just had been the case with the Fenians, it seemed there was a limit to Clan-na-Gael influence of American foreign policy.

Undeterred, McGarrity pursued other avenues to further the cause of Irish independence. He used his social and economic status in the U.S. to launch the Irish Victory Fund—a bond drive with the goal of raising money for the new Irish government. Leaders of the New York Association of the Friends of Irish Freedom challenged McGaritty, and argued that the money should remain in the United States so that it could be used for “political activities in which Ireland’s

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25 The Brochure from the Race Convention is among Joseph McGarrity’s personal papers in JMC, group 1, box 3, folder 4; Joseph McGarrity to President Woodrow Wilson, group 1, box 3, folder 4, JMC.
future was involved” instead of being sent directly to Ireland.\textsuperscript{27} Disagreements over the proper use of money and resources had plagued the Irish American nationalist movement before, particularly for the Fenian Brotherhood. But in 1919, De Valera formally aligned the I.R.B. with McGarrity and the Philadelphia Clan. McGarrity then consulted attorneys, had bond certificates printed, and established separate headquarters in New York City.\textsuperscript{28}

Irish American nationalists became even more divided in January of 1921, when Michael Collins and other Irish Republican leaders negotiated a treaty with the British to recognize the independence of Ireland. De Valera suddenly opposed the treaty and amassed a following for a different platform. Collins and De Valera, former friends and compatriots in the I.R.B., then faced each other in an election. Collins won the majority and thus support for the treaty, but De Valera refused to accept the results of the election and considered the treaty invalid. A civil war between the two men and their followers ensued. Back in the United States, most Clan-Na-Gael leaders sided with Collins and the pro-treaty faction. McGarrity however, teamed up with his friend De Valera, and eventually persuaded the ten other executive members of the Philadelphia Clan to join him.\textsuperscript{29}

McGarrity’s favored status with De Valera would prove to be short lived. In December of 1922, the treaty Collins and other Irish Republican leaders negotiated with the British went into effect, officially creating the Irish Free State. One day later, six counties in the northeastern region of Ireland exercised their

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 113-114.
\textsuperscript{29} Tarpey, 157.
prerogative according to the Treaty and chose to remain part of Great Britain. The Irish Free State only consisted of twenty-six counties. Almost five months later, the De Valera led Irish Republican Army issued a proclamation suspending all hostilities and accepted the treaty. The Irish Civil War was over. In a rather sudden shift, De Valera supported the Ireland of twenty-six counties, which he had once so vehemently opposed. When it became clear over the next few years that De Valera had begun to advocate a non-violent approach to obtaining a complete Republic of Ireland, McGarrity grew increasingly confused and suspicious. The Irish Republican Army felt similarly, and in 1925 it broke from De Valera and ended its path of what historian Marie Tarpey called, “passive resistance.”

In an odd twist of events, the Clan-na-Gael and McGarrity sided with the I.R.A. against De Valera. Over the next fifteen years, McGarrity and the Clan-na-Gael’s split with De Valera deepened. In 1932, De Valera’s political party won the majority of seats in Ireland’s twenty-six-county Free State and subsequently appointed him President of the Executive Council. Because the six counties of Ulster in the northeast remained outside the Free State, McGarrity felt that there was no true Republic of Ireland. He grew impatient with De Valera’s new constitutional strategy to achieve a complete republic and was convinced that an agreement between the I.R.A and the President was essential. In a final attempt to make peace, McGarrity penned several letters to De Valera and offered to provide a peace commission to mediate between the Free State government, the I.R.A.,

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30 Tarpey, 225.
31 Tarpey, 230.
32 The deterioration of their relationship is covered in Chapter 9 of Tarpey.
and the British colonial government of the six counties of North East Ulster. De Valera refused to meet with the I.R.A. or anyone connected with them, and would not accept an American commission as a mediator. Once appointed by De Valera as his representative in America, McGarrity was now shut out, his services no longer needed.

McGarrity and the Clan-na-Gael responded by solidifying their alignment with the I.R.A., hosting one of its leaders, Sean Russell, to speak at the organization’s Convention in Philadelphia. At the event, Russell declared that the men of the I.R.A. would no longer tolerate the abuse at the hand of De Valera’s Free State government and that they were “prepared to fight” for an entirely free Ireland. Although Russell only asked for $5,000 for ammunitions, members in attendance offered the entire amount before the convention was over, and the executives of the convention agreed to raise an additional $25,000. Just as the Fenians had done, the Clan-na-Gael demonstrated that Irish Americans could gather the financial resources when needed for what they perceived was the best path for the Irish nationalist movement. Their opponent had changed, and they did not have colonial ambitions of their Fenian predecessors, but McGarrity and the Clan still tried to assert themselves into international politics.

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33 Joseph McGarrity to Cornelius F. Neenan, as printed in Tarpey, 175.
34 Joseph McGarrity’s journal, group 2, series 2, box 2, folder 6, JMC.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
Fenian rhetorical strategies also made a lasting impact. McGarrity often quoted George Washington in making his case for a fully independent Ireland. He once noted that:

Nothing short of Independence can possibly do. A peace on any other terms would be a peace of war. The injuries we have received from the British Nation were so unprovoked, and have been so great and so many that they can never be forgotten. Our fidelity as a people, our character as men are opposed to a coalition with them as subjects.  

For McGarrity, the Irish struggle was identical to the American one before independence. In addition to his appeals to Wilson, McGarrity later wrote President Franklin Roosevelt, again asking for the U.S, government to demand that the British remove all military forces from Ireland. The United States, McGarrity reminded the president, was the one “great country in the world who can, without bloodshed or rancor, achieve Ireland’s independence.” As the Fenians had often done, McGarrity invoked American history to substantiate his plea. He argued that in 1898, the President of the United States “possessed of the humane instincts or mercy and justice,” in challenging the Imperial Government of Spain to withdraw military and civilian forces from Cuba, and “leave the people of that island free to live as a nation among the nations.”

Finally, McGarrity highlighted the service that the Irish had provided to America, just as the Fenians had once done. He asked whether the people of Cuba had:

Rendered any service to America comparable to that rendered by the sons of the land we now appeal to you to use your mighty influence to set free? A people whose manhood has freely, willingly, given their blood for the Independence and security of the this glorious land from the day on

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
which the first gun was fired at Lexington to free America from domination from the same power we now appeal to you to ask to demand to leave Ireland and its people to be masters of their own identity. McGarrity’s words indicate the extent to which he believed that the Irish cause was tied to American ideals of liberty and freedom. President Wilson had enunciated these themes and promised liberty to other small nations suffering at the hands of imperializing countries, but then failed to follow through. McGarrity now placed his hopes in the new democratic president.

The Fenians had set a precedent that made the trajectory of Joseph McGarrity’s life possible. Less than a year after he immigrated to the United States in 1892, McGarrity stood before members of the Clan-Na-Gael, pledging to spend the rest of his life fighting for a free Irish Republic. He was a man loyal to his native land, but took pride in his American citizenship and all the advantages it offered. In fact, McGarrity once commented that American citizenship was the greatest gift of his life. As much as he grew impatient with the actions (or inaction) of his compatriots in Ireland, McGarrity was also cognizant of the limitation of his sacrifice compared to theirs. The Fenians too understood the benefits of American citizenship for their ability to raise money while publically advocating for the invasion of another country.

Joseph McGarrity was one of thousands of Americans who joined Irish American nationalist organizations in the decades after the Fenian Brotherhood

40 Ibid.
41 In his journal, McGarrity states that American citizenship is the greatest gift. McGarrity’s journal, Series 2, group 2, box 2, JMC.
42 McGarrity discusses the limits of his bravery in his journal compared to that of the men in Ireland. McGarrity’s journal, Series 2, group 2, box 2, JMC.
disbanded. Not all participants were able to wield the same power and influence, but many shared his hubris and impatience with Irish nationalists. It was a form of imperial paternalism that the Fenians had also displayed. The American experience had imbued them with a superiority complex—a confidence that they knew a better approach to Irish independence than Irish nationalists. While Irish Americans would never again try to invade another country as the Fenians had attempted in Canada, many often remained defiant in their righteousness and demands.

The Fenian story reminds us that empire is messy and has unintended consequences. The state must contend with marginalized groups that not only rise in power to resist imperialism, but also participate and influence the imperial system. When members of the Fenian Brotherhood invaded Canada, they were attempting to expand American Empire while diminishing British Empire. The attacks represent a crossroad or intersection of empire, a nexus where the untidy reverberations of such a governing system are exposed. Thus, although the Fenians did not ultimately succeed, they still have much to teach us about British and American empires in the nineteenth century.
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