

Upper Canadian Thermidor The Family Compact & the Counter-revolutionary Atlantic

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

This article challenges the notion that the Family Compact was a self-interested clique who stunted Upper Canada's political, social, and economic development. It argues, instead, that members of the group articulated a dynamic vision for the colony premised on the "balanced" British constitution, state-aided Anglicanism, and a vibrant agrarian economy led by a paternalistic elite. Of central importance to the Compact's vision for Upper Canada was a longstanding conservative tradition that had its roots in late-seventeenth-century England, and was reinforced a century later by a multifaceted counter-revolutionary phenomenon that manifested on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Upper Canadian Thermidor:

The Family Compact & the Counter- revolutionary Atlantic*

By Denis McKim

Introduction

The notion that the Family Compact was a corrupt clique who manipulated patronage, disdained democracy, and stunted Upper Canada's economic growth is as old as English-Canadian historiography itself. John Charles Dent articulated the anti-Compact sentiment that was well on its way to becoming a staple of English-Canadian historical scholarship when he observed, in the late nineteenth century,

that members of the group "wormed themselves into the more important offices [of the government], directed the Councils of the Sovereign's representative, and, in a word, became the power behind the Throne." For Dent, the Compact was a formidable adversary that Upper Canadian society was forced to grapple with and ultimately vanquish as it advanced toward a state of "full and assured liberty."¹

* My thanks to Jerry Bannister, Frances Beer, Donald Wright, *Ontario History's* anonymous reviewers and the participants in the "British North America's Global Age" conference held at McMaster University in April of 2012.

¹ John Charles Dent, *The Story of the Upper Canadian Rebellion* (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1885), I:73-74; 94-95. Older critiques include Richard H. Bonnycastle, *The Canadas in 1841* (London: Henry Colburn, 1841), I:169-70; and John McMullen, *The History of Canada* (Brockville: J. McMullen, 1855), 334. Contemporary observers have scarcely been more forgiving. For example, Andrew Bonthius, in discussing "the intransigent rule of the Family Compact," described the group as a "hereditary [oligarchy that] held a monopoly on land, maintained a political choke-hold on legal and political institutions, stifled religious liberty, [and] retarded the spread of public education." Bonthius, "The Patriot War of 1837-38: Locofocoism with a Gun?," *Labour/Le Travail* 52 (Fall 2003), 9-10.

Abstract

This article challenges the notion that the Family Compact was a self-interested clique who stunted Upper Canada's political, social, and economic development. It argues, instead, that members of the group articulated a dynamic vision for the colony premised on the "balanced" British constitution, state-aided Anglicanism, and a vibrant agrarian economy led by a paternalistic elite. Of central importance to the Compact's vision for Upper Canada was a longstanding conservative tradition that had its roots in late-seventeenth-century England, and was reinforced a century later by a multifaceted counter-revolutionary phenomenon that manifested on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Résumé: *Nous voulons remettre en question l'idée que le Family Compact était une clique qui opérait uniquement dans son propre intérêt et qui entravait le plein développement politique, social, et économique du Haut-Canada. Nous prétendons, au contraire, que les membres de ce groupe avaient une vision dynamique pour la colonie, principalement centrée sur la constitution "équilibrée" britannique, une Église anglicane soutenue par l'État, et une économie agricole florissante dirigée par une élite paternaliste. Au fond, cette vision reflétait celle d'une longue tradition conservatrice dont les racines se trouvaient au XVIIe siècle anglais et qui a été renforcée un siècle plus tard par le phénomène contre-révolutionnaire qui s'est manifesté des deux côtés de l'Atlantique.*

Dent's remarks were informed by a potentially misleading understanding of the past that presupposed the inherently progressive nature of history and, thus, the inevitable triumph of freedom over tyranny.² Yet they were by no means wholly inaccurate. In the early nineteenth century a close-knit group of men bound

William Allan—served as Executive and Legislative Councillors, members of the colonial judiciary and, to a lesser extent, leaders of Upper Canada's fledgling business community.³ Their virtual monopoly on an array of influential posts prompted one observer to describe the Compact as “[a] quasi-aristocracy of bureaucrats and

together by various factors, including ties of friendship and conservative ideology, rose to prominence in Upper Canada. Their detractors dubbed them the “Family Compact,” a somewhat erroneous term given that few of the group's principal members were actually related to one another. Members of the Compact—whose leading lights included John Strachan, John Beverley Robinson, Christopher Hagerman, G.H. Markland, William Dummer Powell, D'Arcy and Henry Boulton, and

² M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots, and Partisans: Historiography in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1989), 250-53.

³ For Robert E. Saunders, these eight individuals were the most influential members of a larger network, the Family Compact, whose influence extended across Upper Canada. The reason? They “were at the centre of everything”—government, law, banking, major infrastructure projects—meaning that their impact on the colony was as multifaceted as it was far-reaching. Saunders, “What was the Family Compact?,” *Ontario History* XLIX:4 (Autumn 1957), 169-78.

professional men.”⁴

The term “Family Compact” has referred to various things—a diplomatic agreement, a clique, a governing regime—over the course of its long, meandering history. It originated in 1730s Europe, where it referred to an accord struck between branches of the House of Bourbon, and surfaced in late-eighteenth-century Massachusetts, where it was deployed pejoratively by the Republican Congressman Barnabas Bidwell in reference to members of the Federalist party. Bidwell, who took flight from Massachusetts amid scandal in the early nineteenth century, imported the term to Upper Canada, where it was used as an epithet by members of the colony’s budding Reform movement in criticizing what they saw as the incestuous coterie “[who] surround the Lieutenant-Governor, and mould him, like wax, to their will”; or, alternatively, to the colonial government itself, which was routinely denounced as a corrupt vehicle for advancing the interests of a narrow elite.⁵ In the following analysis “Family Compact” will be used not as a term of opprobrium, but rather as a neutral descriptor for

the oligarchic nucleus within the colonial government that dominated Upper Canada’s political, social, and economic affairs in the early nineteenth century.⁶

The Compact’s exact composition is notoriously difficult to ascertain, not least because of its members’ unwillingness to concede that such a body even existed.⁷ (The closest members of the group came to acknowledging their involvement with a powerful clique was by referring to themselves and their associates as the Upper Canadian “gentry.”⁸) The criteria determining entry into the Compact’s ranks have proven equally elusive. An elite pedigree, for example, does not appear to have resulted in automatic admission, as evidenced by the group’s hostility toward Charles Burton Wyatt, Upper Canadian Surveyor General and scion of an august English family; and by the fact that John Strachan, an educator and clergyman whose father had been a Scots quarryman, was probably the Compact’s most influential member. Perhaps the most apt description of the group’s composition, then, was made in the 1920s by W. Stewart Wallace, who described the Compact as “a local oligarchy, composed

⁴ Saunders, “What was the Family Compact?,” 178. See also Anna Jameson, *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838) I:98-99.

⁵ Graeme Patterson, “An Enduring Myth: Responsible Government and the Family Compact,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 12:2 (Spring 1977), 4-7; William L. Mackenzie, *Sketches of Canada and the United States* (London: E. Wilson, 1833), 409.

⁶ Saunders, “What was the Family Compact?,” 167; Aileen Dunham, *Political Unrest in Upper Canada, 1815-1836* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963; orig. 1927), 41-45; R.J. Burns, “God’s Chosen People: The Origins of Toronto Society, 1793-1818,” *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers* 8:1 (1973), 213-28.

⁷ See John Beverley Robinson, *Canada, and the Canada Bill; Being an Examination of the Proposed Measure for the Future Government of Canada* (London: J. Hatchard, 1840), 25-26.

⁸ Robert Lochiel Fraser, “Like Eden in Her Summer Dress: Gentry, Economy, and Society in Upper Canada, 1812-1840” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1979), 5.

of men, some well-born, some ill-born, some brilliant, some stupid, whom the caprice of a small provincial society, with a code all its own, had pitchforked into power.”⁹

For all the uncertainty surrounding its makeup, the group’s impact on Upper Canada was inarguably profound. In addition to occupying a plethora of powerful positions in York/Toronto, members of the Compact consolidated their influence beyond the colonial capital through their control over patronage, which allowed them to install like-minded individuals in government positions across Upper Canada.¹⁰ Moreover, while the colony’s Lieutenant Governors technically had the authority to check the Compact’s initiatives, they seldom did so on account of the fact that they looked to these representatives of the colonial elite for advice, and often shared much in common with them socially and politically. This was especially true during the tenure of Peregrine Maitland, whose stint as Lieutenant Governor (1818-1828) coincided with the period in which the group’s influence peaked.¹¹

Resentment toward the Family Compact contributed to the crystallization of

an Upper Canadian Reform movement and, eventually, the outbreak of rebellion. The group’s dominance on Executive and Legislative Councils was seen as thwarting the initiatives of the Legislative Assembly; their defence of the privileges of the Church of England was viewed as an affront to the colony’s non-Anglican majority; and their purportedly self-interested support for certain banking and infrastructure projects was perceived as an impediment to the growth of Upper Canada’s economy, which many felt would be better served by such alternative initiatives as a campaign to improve the pitiful state of the colony’s roads.¹²

The idea that the Family Compact was a source of popular disaffection found expression in Lord Durham’s *Report on the Affairs of British North America*. “Radical Jack” pointedly observed that while clusters of well-connected individuals existed in all of Britain’s North American colonies, their influence was nowhere more pronounced than in Upper Canada. The “family compact,” Durham elaborated,

possess almost all the highest public offices, by means of which, and of its influence in the Executive Council, it wielded all the

⁹ W. Stewart Wallace, *The Family Compact: A Chronicle of the Rebellion in Upper Canada* (Toronto: Glasgow, Brook, 1922), 6.

¹⁰ While they were usually aligned with the Compact, these local elites were capable of exhibiting considerable autonomy. See Elva M. Richards, “The Joneses of Brockville and the Family Compact,” *Ontario History* LX:4 (December 1968), 169-84.

¹¹ Gerald M. Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years 1784-1841* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), 107-8; Patrick Brode, *Sir John Beverley Robinson: Bone and Sinew of the Compact* (Toronto: Osgoode Society/University of Toronto Press, 1984), 142-44.

¹² *Seventh Report from the Select Committee of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada on Grievances...* (Toronto: M. Reynolds, 1835); *Colonial Advocate*, 7 May 1829, n.p.; J. David Wood, *Making Ontario: Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-Creation Before the Railway* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 55.

powers of government; it maintained influence in the legislature by means of its predominance in the Legislative Council; and it disposed of the large numbers of petty posts which are in the patronage of the Government all over the Province.

He then made plain the causal relationship between the influence exerted by the Compact and the outbreak of violence in 1837. “A monopoly of power so extensive and so lasting,” Durham explained, “could not fail, in process of time, to excite envy, create dissatisfaction, and ultimately provoke attack.”¹³

This article seeks neither to diminish the accomplishments of the Compact’s Reform-oriented rivals, nor to portray Upper Canada as a Tory monolith that was somehow impervious to anti-authoritarian movements afoot elsewhere in the world. Rather, it aims to complement recent work on liberty, democracy, and the emergence of a “public sphere” in early Canada by exploring the comparatively understudied conservative forces whose power Reformers struggled to curtail.¹⁴

Accordingly, this essay focuses on the attitudes of the Family Compact—one of several early Canadian groups who, in E.A. Heaman’s words, strove to “prop up structures of power and authority throughout society”—and on the historical context from which they sprang.¹⁵ It argues that the Compact fits snugly within a conservative tradition that had its roots in late-seventeenth-century England, and that was reinforced a century later by a counter-revolutionary surge that manifested on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁶

Much like Upper Canada as a whole, the Family Compact did not exist in a vacuum. Drawing on a transatlantic tradition to which such figures as William Blackstone, Edmund Burke, and Alexander Hamilton had contributed, members of the group, as we shall see, articulated a vision for the colony that emphasized stability, piety, and prosperity. The impact of this tradition was occasionally made explicit, as reflected in the tendency of Compact members to castigate their op-

¹³ Gerald M. Craig, ed., *Lord Durham’s Report* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963), 79-83.

¹⁴ On liberty see Michel Ducharme, *Le concept de liberté au Canada à l’époque des Révolutions atlantiques, 1776-1838* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010); on democracy see Allan Greer, “Historical Roots of Canadian Democracy,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 34:1 (Spring 1999), 7-26; and on the “public sphere” see Jeffrey L. McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

¹⁵ E.A. Heaman, “Rights Talk and the Liberal Order Framework,” in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, edited by Jean-François Constant and Michel Ducharme (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 2009), 154-55. Comparable groups from other colonies include Nova Scotia’s Council of Twelve and Lower Canada’s Chateau Clique.

¹⁶ Jerry Bannister has argued that British North America’s counter-revolution was a flexible phenomenon that encompassed diverse peoples and ideological traditions, and was predicated on “[a] rejection of rebellion against the Crown as a justifiable means of pursuing a political goal.” Yet while conservative groups like the Family Compact were not alone in opposing revolutionary republicanism, they did constitute a key ingredient in Upper Canada’s counter-revolutionary stew. “Canada as Counter-Revolution: The Loyalist Order Framework in Canadian History, 1750-1840,” in *Liberalism and Hegemony*, 126.

ponents as ideological descendants of American revolutionaries or, simply, “Jacobins.”¹⁷ More often, though, it was implicit in a rhetorical emphasis—for instance, on the dangers inherent in hasty constitutional change—that bespoke an intimate familiarity with powerful currents in transatlantic conservative thought.¹⁸

The Compact’s vision was based on three pillars: the “balanced” British constitution, state-aided Anglicanism, and the economic leadership of the colonial elite—the Family Compact itself. To be sure, the group’s members were by no means the only Upper Canadians to emphasize such phenomena. Cumulatively, however, they constituted the conceptual foundations on which the Compact’s outlook rested.

By taking into account both the attitudes that influenced the group’s actions and the historical circumstances from

which those attitudes flowed one can see the Compact’s members not as obstacles to Upper Canada’s advancement, but instead as exponents of an alternative model of colonial development that attested to the influence of early modern English conservatism and a “Counter-revolutionary Atlantic.”¹⁹ This model differed significantly from the vision put forth by their Reform-oriented counterparts, a diverse body whose most radical elements emphasized constitutional liberalization, the eradication of state-sanctioned religious hierarchy, and a colonial economy geared toward the interests of yeoman farmers.²⁰

Compact conservatism was not borne out in reactionary absolutism; instead, it expressed itself in the relatively moderate ethos of “British constitutionalism,” which stressed the sacrosanct nature of private property and the freedom of individuals to amass wealth.²¹ This

¹⁷ William Dummer Powell, *Letters from an American Loyalist in Upper Canada to His Friend in England: On a Pamphlet Published by John Mills Jackson, Esquire...* (Halifax: n.p., 1810), 55-56; Terry Cook, “John Beverley Robinson and the Conservative Blueprint for the Upper Canadian Community,” *Ontario History* LXIV:2 (June 1972), 80-84; Saunders, “What was the Family Compact?,” 172.

¹⁸ Dunham, *Political Unrest in Upper Canada*, 45.

¹⁹ On this topic see Eliga H. Gould, “Revolution and Counter-revolution,” in *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, Second Ed., edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 214-31.

²⁰ S.J.R. Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers: Ontario Society and Politics, 1791-1896* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 91-92; J.K. Johnson, *Becoming Prominent: Regional Leadership in Upper Canada* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 143. S.F. Wise opened one of his best-known essays by alluding to the contributions to Upper Canadian political culture of such iconic metropolitan conservatives as Blackstone and Burke. However, in the following analysis he concentrates overwhelmingly on domestic issues, according scant attention to Upper Canadian conservatism’s transatlantic dimension. Wise, “Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition,” in *God’s Peculiar Peoples: Essays on Political Culture in Nineteenth-Century Canada*, edited by A.B. McKillop and Paul Romney (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993), 169-84.

²¹ Michel Ducharme, “Canada in the Age of Revolutions: Rethinking Canadian Intellectual History in an Atlantic Perspective,” in *Contesting Clio’s Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*, edited by Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson (London: Institute for the Study

orientation meshes with the characteristics of the “Court party” that dominated eighteenth-century British politics and advocated a strong central government bolstered by an aristocratic elite; and it differs from the “Country party” that criticized the Court faction’s alleged corruption and decadence and advocated as antidotes such classical virtues as simplicity and frugality.²²

Yet the fact that the Family Compact’s outlook accorded with British constitutionalism and the priorities of the Court community should not obscure the unmistakably conservative principles—hierarchy, deference, and contempt for popular sovereignty—that informed the group’s worldview. Indeed, the epistemological usefulness of such terms as “British constitutionalism” and “Court party” should not be overstated, for they are inflexible categories that can potentially project a misleading sense of conceptual tidiness backwards onto the past.²³

Ultimately, it is hoped that an exploration of the *mentalité* of Upper Canada’s ruling elite will contribute to a fuller understanding of transatlantic conservatism’s importance to the colony’s history. To downplay its significance in Upper Canada is to offer a distorted account of Ontario’s past, one in which reactionary

Tories were fated to succumb to progressive Reformers.

Early Modern Conservatism & the Counter-revolutionary Atlantic

The Family Compact’s views were shaped by a durable conservative tradition that originated in early modern England. The arch-Toryism that circulated in that country following the Restoration—as exhibited, for example, in the writings of Robert Filmer, who espoused such doctrines as absolute monarchical authority—gave way after the Glorious Revolution to a comparatively moderate form of conservatism. Tories reluctant to embrace the Jacobite insurgency had little choice but to abandon several bedrock convictions—including a belief in absolutism—as a result of the toppling of James II and the ascendancy of William and Mary, whose rise to power was accompanied by a permanent diminution in arbitrary monarchical power. Yet it would be a mistake to conclude that English conservatives simply jettisoned their commitment to a hierarchical social order and an authoritarian political culture. On the contrary, numerous Tories beginning in the late seventeenth century opted to transfer their allegiance

of the Americas, 2009), 169.

²² Carol Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada, 1800-1850* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 9; Gordon T. Stewart, *The Origins of Canadian Politics: A Comparative Approach* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1986), 11-12; H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1977), 125-54; 169-72.

²³ Gordon S. Wood, “Ideology and the Origins of Liberal America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 44:3 (July 1987), 634.

from the monarch to the balanced constitution of King, Lords, and Commons while retaining their essential conservative convictions.²⁴

English conservatives, many of whom were large landowners, increasingly accepted the argument that the nation's post-1688 "mixed" government included the best aspects of the three irreducible forms of political authority—the decisiveness of monarchy, the wisdom of aristocracy, the liberty of democracy—and excluded the negative traits that each of these systems could potentially display on their own—autocratic tyranny, oligarchic corruption, mob rule. Indeed, Tories in ever-expanding numbers came to feel that the balanced constitution could do a better job of preserving social stability and private property than unchecked monarchy. The reason, the logic ran, was that under the balanced constitution the influence wielded by any one governmental component—including monarchy—could be offset by the authority of the other components, whereas under conditions of absolutist rule Lords and Commons would have little meaningful opportunity to modify the monarch's behaviour, however reckless it might be. Thus, William Blackstone, the influential conservative jurist, identified the balanced constitution's capacity for checking the authority of its constituent parts

as "the true excellence of the English government."²⁵

Tories also looked to the nation's Christian establishment, the Church of England, as a mechanism by which social hierarchy and political authoritarianism could be perpetuated post-1688. As before the Glorious Revolution, conservatives relied on Anglican clergymen to instil in their parishioners' minds the importance of deference to father and husband, squire and monarch. The Church, for its part, received from the state reliable financial support and legal privileges, benefits that consolidated the mutually beneficial affiliation that had existed between these two pillars of English society since the sixteenth century. So close was the relationship between the Church of England and the forces of early modern conservatism that Samuel Johnson, in his *Dictionary* of 1755, defined the word "Tory" as "One who adheres to the ancient constitution of the state, and the apostolic hierarchy of the Church of England."²⁶

Based as it was on the balanced constitution and the established English Church, the governmental system that took root in England in the late seventeenth century proved durable. Indeed, its fundamental characteristics—which included a powerful aristocracy and a permanently endowed church—re-

²⁴ Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 476; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 13-46.

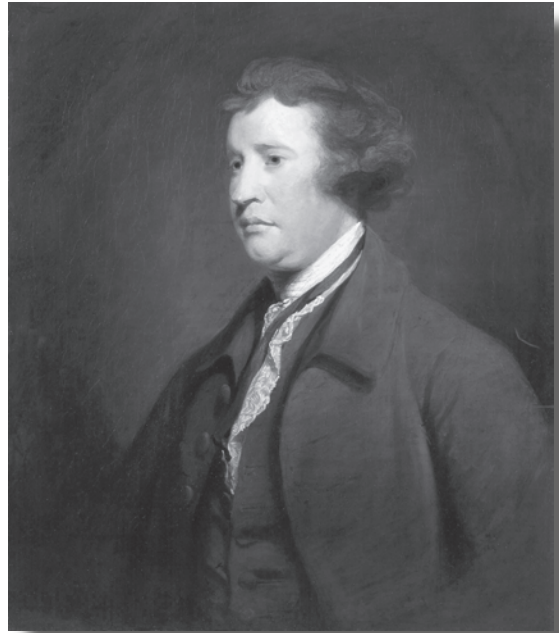
²⁵ William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765), I:150-51.

²⁶ James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 35.

Portrait of Edmund Burke, by Sir Joshua Reynolds. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

mained firmly intact until the early nineteenth century when, quite rapidly, it began to crumble as a result of such developments as the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, which extended full civil liberties to Protestant Dissenters; and the Reform Act of 1832, which undermined the dominance of traditional elites through the broadening of the British franchise. That Whig politicians occupied the commanding heights of the English (and, after 1707, British) government for much of the eighteenth century should not disguise the fact that the post-1688 social and political order was predicated on a conservative desire to perpetuate hierarchy and render private property secure.²⁷

Bolstering the *status quo* in late-eighteenth-century Britain was a multifaceted counter-revolutionary phenomenon, the emergence of which coincided with the unfolding of the French Revolution. An early sense of optimism for the events of 1789 and the emancipating principles for which they were thought to stand was largely eclipsed in the 1790s by disenchantment regarding the chaos and brutality associated with, *inter alia*, the blood-drenched Reign of Terror. Conservative intellectuals critiqued radical theories that helped spark the Revolu-



tion's outbreak, as evidenced by Edmund Burke's scathing dismissal of the Rousseauist notion that human beings are naturally equal as a "monstrous fiction."²⁸ The 1790s also saw the rise of what could fairly be described as a popular culture of counter-revolutionary conservatism. This culture manifested in the formation of organizations like the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers, which played a pivotal role in propagating conservative writings across British society; and in the activities of "church and king" mobs that lashed out at allegedly disloyal Protestant Dissenters.²⁹

²⁷ J.C.D. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics During the Ancien Régime*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁸ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, edited by L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 37.

²⁹ Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad & Dangerous People? England, 1783-1846* (Oxford: Clarendon

Counter-revolutionary sentiments also circulated in the early American republic. Substantial anxiety existed among prominent public figures in the 1780s over the United States' first constitution, the Articles of Confederation, which was denounced by conservatives for dispersing authority across elective state legislatures in which executive power was tightly constrained. Critics called for the creation of a strong central government capable of offsetting, in Alexander Hamilton's words, "the amazing violence and turbulence of the democratic spirit," and of implementing coherent national policies on issues like international diplomacy. Such sentiments featured prominently in the Constitutional Convention of 1787, which was responsible for creating a governmental mechanism that included a powerful executive and a system of checks and balances expressly designed to neutralize the "follies of democracy."³⁰

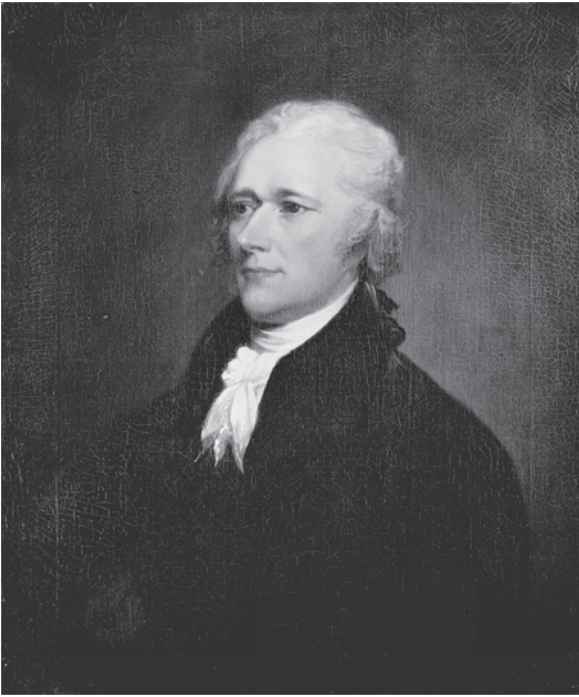
Counter-revolutionary conservatism was also on display in the early republic during the French Revolution. Americans

found themselves divided over the radical developments occurring in France, as the enthusiasm that initially greeted events like the Storming of the Bastille was tempered by a burgeoning scepticism regarding the evermore-chaotic developments of the 1790s. Differences of opinion tended to mirror the nascent partisan rivalry that lay at the heart of the early republic's politics. Backers of the Republican Party, led by the radical Francophile Thomas Jefferson, continued to support the Revolution, while their rivals in the Federalist Party, of which Hamilton was a prominent member, were rather more ambivalent about what they saw as an anarchic assault on order, authority, and tradition. American counter-revolutionaries gained the upper hand in this rivalry as a result of such events as the controversy surrounding "Citizen" Edmond Charles Genet, a French official who ruffled feathers in the United States as a result of his attempts to elicit American support for Revolutionary France's military campaigns.³¹

Press, 2006), 58-68; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 272-302; Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), II: 353; Mark Philp, ed., *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Upper Canada was no stranger to outbursts of popular conservatism. For example, in the early nineteenth century young members of the colonial elite destroyed William Lyon Mackenzie's printing press, while colonists drawn from more modest backgrounds who shared the rioter's conservatism (including members of the Orange Order) engaged in effigy burnings and acts of electoral violence. The frequency of such unruly behaviour increased markedly in the 1820s and 1830s, due largely to the emergence of a Reform movement. See Paul Romney, "From the Types Riot to the Rebellion: Elite Ideology, Anti-legal Sentiment, Political Violence, and the Rule of Law in Upper Canada," *Ontario History* LXXIX:2 (June 1987), 113-44; Carol Wilton, "'Lawless Law': Conservative Political Violence in Upper Canada, 1818-1842," *Law and History Review* 13:1 (Spring 1995), 111-36; and Wilton, *Popular Politics and Political Culture*, 13.

³⁰ Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: 'The People,' the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 176-80; Larry E. Tise, *The American Counter-revolution: A Retreat from Liberty, 1783-1800* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1998), 399-409.

³¹ Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early*



Alexander Hamilton. Collection of The New-York Historical Society, accession no. 1867.305.

in 1789 that the British government's objective "[was] to assimilate the Constitution of that Province to that of Great Britain, as nearly as the... situation of the Province will admit." Accordingly, he advocated the creation of an appointive "Upper branch," the Legislative Council, whose members, similar to British Lords, would occupy their posts for life and offset the democratic character of the colony's Assembly. Such an arrangement, Grenville reasoned, would inoculate Upper Canada against the radical contagion

The transatlantic counter-revolutionary phenomenon was instrumental to the development of Upper Canada. The Constitutional Act, which ushered the colony into existence in 1791, was informed by a desire to establish a social and political order patterned on the conservative metropolitan model.³² William Grenville, the British Colonial Secretary responsible for crafting the Act, stated

that had emerged in colonial America, where the authority of the colonies' upper houses had been curtailed. By vesting in the Legislative Council "a greater degree of weight and consequence than was possessed by the Councils in the old Colonial Governments," the essence of the British constitution could be preserved in British North America.³³

Imperial policymakers also sought to

Republic (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 82; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 309-57; Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 174-208.

³² Clark, *English Society*, 300-301.

³³ Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds., *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1759-1791* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1918), II:988-89. As Michel Ducharme has argued, the Constitutional Act cannot be seen as a reactionary document, since it established in the Canadas democratic institutions—namely, elective assemblies—that had not existed in the old colony of Quebec. Still, as Alan Taylor has argued, the Act *can* be seen as counter-revolutionary. For instance, it set aside substantial Crown lands whose revenues, it was hoped, would pay government officials'

equip the Anglican Church in post-revolutionary British North America with government assistance, due chiefly to the belief that Dissenting Protestantism—whose associations with religious disorder and political subversion date at least as far back as the English Civil War—had contributed to the outbreak of the American Revolution.³⁴ The outpouring of evangelical enthusiasm associated with events like the Great Awakening had purportedly fomented in colonial Americans a distressing tendency to challenge authorities, whether religious or civil. British authorities, in response, looked to that age-old conservative bulwark, the Church of England, as a means by which deference and loyalty could be ingrained in the consciousness of post-revolutionary British North Americans. Consequently, an alliance between the English Church and the state came to be seen as an instrument for “combatting and repressing the prevailing disposition of the Colonies to republicanism, and exciting in them an esteem for monarchy.”³⁵

Such notions informed the Constitutional Act. While it ambiguously called for Crown lands to be set aside for the

benefit of “a Protestant Clergy”—Anglicans insisted that “Protestant Clergy” implicitly meant Church of England, while Dissenters maintained that the lands, which came to be known as Clergy Reserves, should either be made available to other denominations or liquidated and devoted to public education—a subsequent clause within the Act demonstrated that imperial authorities were determined to confer on Upper Canadian Anglicans the benefits of state support. The clause, which called for the creation in every town of “One or more Parsonage or Rectory... according to the Establishment of the Church of England,” reveals imperial policymakers’ determination to entrench in Upper Canada another component of the conservative metropolitan order.³⁶

Expressions of counter-revolutionary conservatism were put forth by influential elements within Upper Canada following the colony’s creation. John Graves Simcoe, Upper Canada’s first lieutenant governor, denounced the “French Nation” for having “so unjustly” plunged several states, including Great Britain, into the maelstrom of war. Yet he also

salaries, thus ensuring their independence from elected representatives who had allegedly grown too powerful in the thirteen colonies as a result of their control over the “power of the purse.” This aspect of the Act attests to Grenville’s yearning to avoid in Upper Canada “those defects which hastened the independence of our antient possession in America.” Ducharme, “Canada in the Age of Revolutions,” 177-78; Taylor, “The Late Loyalists: Northern Reflections of the Early American Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27:1 (Spring 2007), 12-15.

³⁴ Judith Fingard, *The Anglican Design in Loyalist Nova Scotia, 1783-1816* (London: SPCK, 1972), 2-3.

³⁵ William Knox, *Extra Official State Papers: Addressed to The Right Hon. Lord Rawdon....* (London, 1789), 73-74.

³⁶ Shortt and Doughty, eds., *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada*, II:1045; Curtis Fahey, *In His Name: The Anglican Experience in Upper Canada, 1791-1854* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991), 4-9.

expressed confidence that Britain, “the Protector of the Liberties of Mankind,” would prevail in its struggle with Revolutionary France, and repel “all modern aggressions upon those equitable principles... our ancestors so wisely contributed to establish.”³⁷

Simcoe was also convinced that state-aided Anglicanism could play a role in combatting radical challenges to the hierarchical society that imperial authorities had striven to create in post-revolutionary British North America. Thus, he informed British Secretary of State Henry Dundas that, “I have always been extremely anxious... that the Church of England should be essentially established in Upper Canada.” Providing the English Church with material assistance and symbolic recognition, Simcoe explained, would go a considerable distance in countering the incursions into Upper Canada “of every kind of Sectaries”—by which he meant such Dissenting denominations as the Episcopal Methodists, an evangelical group linked to the United States—“many of whom are hostile... to the British Constitution.”³⁸

Contributing to Upper Canada’s counter-revolutionary ethos was the close relationship that developed between the colony’s inhabitants and their Federal-

ist counterparts in neighbouring states. Many Upper Canadians (and, especially, members of the elite) looked favourably on the Federalists’ critique of radicalism, which demonstrates that the pro-British loyalism that flourished across the colony was by no means incompatible with sympathy for aspects of American society.³⁹ Strengthening bonds between Upper Canadians and American Federalists were the pro-British sentiments espoused by the latter as the conflict between Britain and France wore on. Such views, which cropped up repeatedly in Federalist newspapers, were reprinted by Upper Canadian publications for British North American consumption. Consider the following example, which initially appeared in the *Gazette of the United States* in the late 1790s, regarding the righteousness of the British cause and the affinities that fused Britain and the United States. The article highlighted the “glorious and successful stand that Great-Britain” had made against “the ferocious and desolating tyranny of France,” and expressed gratitude to the “great nation, from which we derive our natural and political existence.”⁴⁰

Upper Canadians continued to sympathize with the Federalists in the early nineteenth century despite the party’s

³⁷ *Upper Canada Gazette*, 6 June 1793, n.p.

³⁸ E.A. Cruikshank, ed., *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1923), I:251-52.

³⁹ Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987), 7; Jane Errington and George Rawlyk, “The Loyalist-Federalist Alliance in Upper Canada,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* XIV:2 (Summer 1984), 158-65. On “Britishness” and Canadian history see Phillip Buckner, “Whatever Happened to the British Empire?,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 4:1 (1993), 3-32.

⁴⁰ *Upper Canada Gazette*, 18 May 1799, n.p. See also *ibid.*, 7 February 1801, 2031.

waning influence in American society, a trend that was reflected in the Republicans' victory in the election of 1800. One observer, writing in the *Kingston Gazette* in 1812, expressed "pity" at the plight of "virtuous and well disposed" Federalists who were supposedly languishing "under the unjust and unprincipled measures" of Republican demagogues.⁴¹

An Alternative Model for Colonial Development

The Family Compact's vision for Upper Canada—which featured political, religious, and economic dimensions—cannot be accurately understood in isolation from the transatlantic conservative tradition from which it emerged, and by which it was repeatedly replenished. Members of the group, who were deeply committed to the British Crown, objected to the revolutionary surge that traversed the Atlantic World beginning in the late eighteenth century, in part, because it threatened to sever the connective constitutional tissues that linked Upper Canada to the metropolitan state. Yet the Compact's concerns over radical republicanism were not limited to its capacity for effecting fundamental political change. Much like their conservative counterparts elsewhere in the world, members of the group were equally (if not more) alarmed by revolutionary radicalism's capacity for effecting

fundamental *social* change.

Gordon S. Wood has argued that, due to the transformations that it wrought in terms of social relationships, the violent conflict that engendered the American republic was "as radical and revolutionary as any in history."⁴² His interpretation hinges on the notion that the Revolution eradicated the culture of deference that compelled ordinary Americans to accept their subordination to their supposed social betters—as reflected, for example, in the automatic tendency of college students to doff their caps at increasingly large distances as they approached tutors, professors, and college presidents. Replacing this culture was an alternative ethos that, while replete with double standards in terms of race, class, and gender, embraced the *idea* of egalitarianism.⁴³ (That such developments were thought to be a factor in Upper Canada can be seen in the remarks of Susanna Moodie, who referred disdainfully to the "ultra-republican spirit" evinced by the colony's "low-born Yankee[s]" and "Yankeeified British peasantry."⁴⁴) One need not accept Wood's argument in its entirety to recognize that, as a result of its capacity for toppling elites, revolutionary radicalism threatened hierarchical relationships across the Atlantic World.

Anxieties over radical threats to hierarchy featured prominently in the psyche of the Family Compact. John Strachan,

⁴¹ Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, 44-46.

⁴² Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 5.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 12-21; 234.

⁴⁴ Moodie quoted in John Thurston, "'The Dust of Toryism': Monarchism and Republicanism in Upper Canadian Travel and Immigration Texts," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 30:4 (Winter 1995-96), 79.

writing in the early nineteenth century, declared that, “The rage for equality which the American and French revolutions have introduced,” has promoted many “false and mischievous” notions. Chief among them was the belief that ordinary people were no longer obliged to submit to elites. “Persons of high rank have not only been refused the respect and deference to which they were entitled,” Strachan observed in reference to the social upheaval unleashed on both sides of the Atlantic, “but republican ferocity [has] delighted to deprive them of [their] reputation and talents.”⁴⁵ The importance of such concerns to the Compact’s alternative model for colonial development can scarcely be overstated.

Of central importance to the political dimension of the Compact’s vision for Upper Canada was their support for Britain’s balanced constitution, which was celebrated as an unrivalled mechanism for promoting hierarchy and safeguarding property.⁴⁶ Similar to other constituencies elsewhere in the Empire, Compact members boasted that the British system on which the Constitutional Act was based possessed the best traits of the three ancient forms of governance—monarchy, aristocracy, democracy—

while eschewing the negative attributes that each of these forms of political authority were capable of exhibiting on their own. The result, they believed, was a “temperate medium between despotism and anarchy.”⁴⁷

Yet significant though it may have been, the Compact’s enthusiasm for the British constitution was by no means confined to this one issue. Rather, it was also meaningful for members of the group because it provided them with an opportunity to differentiate themselves from the ordinary Upper Canadians—or, in Burkean terms, “the swinish multitude”—among whom they lived. In a colony that lacked large hereditary estates and a vast tenantry, Compact conservatives looked to the constitution’s appointive elements, including the Legislative Council, as means by which they could cement their authority and foster social order.⁴⁸

Additionally, members of the group—who tended either to be the children of Loyalists (Hagerman, Robinson), or to have immigrated to Upper Canada from Britain around the turn of the nineteenth century (Allan, Strachan)—identified Upper Canada’s constitution as an indispensable link between the colony

⁴⁵ John Strachan, *Discourse on the Character of King George the Third* (Montreal: Nahum Mower, 1810), 47-48.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, John Macaulay’s letter in the *Kingston Gazette*, 28 June 1818, n.p.; and John Beverley Robinson, *Charge, of the Honourable John Beverley Robinson, Chief Justice of Upper Canada, to the Grand Jury....* (Toronto: R. Stanton, 1838), 9.

⁴⁷ *Kingston Gazette*, 23 October 1810, n.p.; *Ibid.*, 29 January 1811, n.p.

⁴⁸ Philip Girard, “Liberty, Order, and Pluralism: The Canadian Experience,” in *Exclusionary Empire: English Liberty Overseas, 1600-1900*, edited by Jack P. Greene (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 177; Cook, “John Beverley Robinson and the Conservative Blueprint for the Upper Canadian Community,” 84.

and Great Britain itself. Given that Upper Canada was located on the doorstep of a potentially hostile American republic, and that many of the colony's inhabitants (especially before 1815) were North American-born, the constitution was perceived as a vehicle by which to preserve a substantive connection between colonists and the metropolitan state.⁴⁹ To alter the constitution by, say, rendering the Legislative Council elective would thus be to sever arguably the most important bond uniting these components of the empire.⁵⁰

True, Compact conservatives were by no means unique in exalting the British constitution. On the contrary, their adversaries, the Reformers, frequently celebrated the bundle of laws, institutions, and conventions by which Britons were governed.⁵¹ However, where the Compact's interpretation of the British constitution advocated concentrating substantial power in the hands of appointed officials (often at the expense of the legislative assembly), the Reformers' interpretation called for the colony to

mirror the metropolitan state by granting substantial powers to the people's elected representatives (as epitomized by the campaign for responsible government). While it may have been technically consistent with British practice, members of the Compact maintained that the realization of the Reformers' constitutional vision would eliminate checks against North American "mobocracy" and effectively eradicate metropolitan influence in Upper Canada. Thus, the group tended to emphasize a particular interpretation of the spirit, rather than the letter, of the British constitution.⁵²

The Family Compact's views regarding liberty and aristocracy bring into focus the pronounced extent to which their political attitudes were moulded by transatlantic conservatism. John Strachan, in his *Discourse on the Character of King George the Third* (1810), asserted that, "The word liberty has been so much prostituted that we are in danger of losing its true meaning." Strachan denounced the notion that adherence to laws formulated by civil authorities invariably

⁴⁹ It should be noted that, in seeking to defend the British regime in Upper Canada, members of the Compact were capable of behaving in ways that arguably ran counter to Britain's constitutional tradition—indeed, they occasionally elicited the disapproval of metropolitan officials. For example, for his role in the repeated expulsions of William Lyon Mackenzie from the colonial legislature in the early and mid-1830s (which effectively disenfranchised many of Mackenzie's constituents), Christopher Hagerman was dismissed from his position as Solicitor General. Paul Romney, *Mr. Attorney: The Attorney General for Ontario in Court, Cabinet, and Legislature 1791-1899* (Toronto: Osgoode Society/University of Toronto Press, 1986), 155; Robert L. Fraser, "Hagerman, Christopher Alexander," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, VII <http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hagerman_christopher_alexander_7E.html> (accessed on 21 January 2014).

⁵⁰ McNairn, *Capacity to Judge*, 30-45; Fraser, "Like Eden in Her Summer Dress," 208-18; Saunders, "What was the Family Compact?," 176.

⁵¹ See, for example, *Seventh Report from the Select Committee of the House of Assembly of Upper Canada on Grievances...*, XXVI-XXVII.

⁵² Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada*, 8; Cook, "John Beverley Robinson and the Conservative Blueprint for the Upper Canadian Community," 84.

involved surrendering at least a modicum of one's "natural liberty." His denunciation flowed from the belief that the laws of the state, far from curtailing human freedom, were in fact indispensable to the attainment of genuine liberty. Laws, Strachan explained, "protect... and enlighten us; they are continually destroying or removing whatever is offensive." In a "state of nature," by contrast, "there is no liberty, for there are no laws."⁵³

Strachan's understanding of liberty differed dramatically from radical theorists, and was anchored in the belief that true freedom cannot exist in a primitive setting in which laws are non-existent and property is insecure: "We do not enjoy what another may take away—and what is secure in a rude society?" For Strachan, civil authority—"the sovereignty of good laws, the restraints of sound principles, and the commands of duty"—was essential in order to shield one's possessions from arbitrary expropriation. Great Britain, then, was the "freest nation on earth" because its government had taken pains to safeguard its inhabitants' property, which in turn stifled "the seed of oppression." Through such measures, he reasoned, "life and liberty are rendered sacred." The contrast between the genuine liberty of Britain and the perpetual insecurity of the state of nature (or, for that matter, revolutionary republics) could not have been starker.⁵⁴

Strachan also objected to the notion that a people, including citizens of France

and the United States, were free simply because they had shed the supposed yoke of monarchy and issued new constitutions proclaiming their liberty. For freedom to be meaningful, he countered, a polity needed to demonstrate the capacity to withstand the tribulations of history. "Before a people can be called free," Strachan explained, "their freedom must have been tried." By "tried" he meant that they must have been subjected to "the attacks of tyranny... and of faction." It went without saying that Britain, which had endured the rule of both tyrants and factions at differing stages of its history, had emerged from such daunting circumstances with a balanced constitution that was the envy of the world for its ability to promote liberty and stability simultaneously.⁵⁵

Strachan, much like other members of the Compact, took pride in the fact that Upper Canadians were heirs of such a glorious heritage. Rather than proclaiming their freedom and embracing a constitution drawn up by a cadre of ideologues, Upper Canadians were the beneficiaries of an ancient tradition that traced its origins backwards into the mists of time. "Our constitution," Strachan elaborated,

partakes of all the advantages which an experience of several centuries had accumulated. It is not, therefore, the work of a day; it rests upon old and tried foundations, the more durable, because visionary empiricks have not been allowed to touch them. No fine spun theories of metaphysicians, which

⁵³ Strachan, *Discourse on the Character of King George the Third*, 18-19.

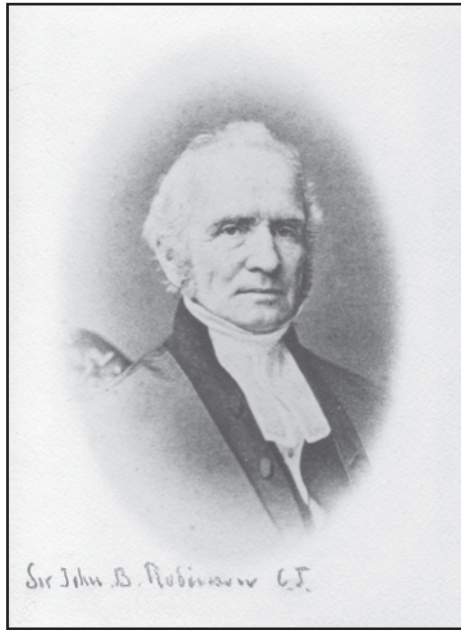
⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19-21; *Kingston Gazette*, 29 January 1811, n.p.

⁵⁵ Strachan, *Discourse*, 19-21.

promise much and end in misery, have shared in its formation; such men may destroy, but they can never build. All the privileges which Englishmen possess are ours.⁵⁶

Thus, at the heart of Strachan's appreciation for the British constitution lay a repudiation of the radical political experiments launched by American and French revolutionaries.

The Family Compact's views on aristocracy provide further evidence of the profound impact that the transatlantic conservative tradition had on the group's political outlook. *The Church*, a conservative Anglican publication whose views were usually congruent with those of the Compact, weighed in on the benefits of the British constitution's aristocratic element in the era of the Upper Canadian Rebellion. While the radical uprising's leaders, in the *Church's* estimation, "prefer the institutions of republicanism... we prefer the monarchy under which for centuries our father-land has flourished, and grown into invincible greatness." Integral to the *Church's* devotion to the British Crown was a firm belief—"an



Sir John B. Robinson, C.J., courtesy of the Law Society of Upper Canada Archives, Archives Department collection, P103.

unchangeable conviction"—in the importance of the British constitution's aristocratic branch, the Upper Canadian equivalent of which was the Legislative Council, a body on which members of the Family Compact had traditionally been fixtures. "Without an Aristocracy," the *Church* asserted, "the elements of permanence and stability are, in any government, wanting." Happily, however, such was not the case in Britain, where "[an] enlightened nobility" wielded sufficient power to counteract the "madness of the people." Aristocracy, the *Church* concluded, was largely responsible for ensuring that British society did not deteriorate "into the degenerate anarchy of a mob."⁵⁷

John Beverley Robinson, who served on both Legislative and Executive Councils in addition to acting as Upper Canada's Attorney General and Chief Justice over the course of his lengthy career, attested to the group's belief in the benefits of aristocratic authority following the publication of Lord Durham's influen-

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁵⁷ *Church*, 6 January 1838, 118-19.

tial—and decidedly reform-oriented—*Report*. Robinson's chief objection pertained to a recommendation that sought to curtail the Legislative Council's influence in Upper Canada by allowing the body's composition to be altered every eight years. To institute such a change, Robinson warned, would be to "abandon" a vital component of the British constitution.⁵⁸

Robinson's misgivings stemmed from his belief that lifetime appointments allowed the colony's Legislative Councillors to function independently of both the Lieutenant Governor, who represented the monarch, and the Assembly, who represented the populace. Such security permitted them to act in the best interests of the colony, "independent alike of the crown and of the people." "If there has been an authority in the state which could dare to do right," Robinson declared, "uninfluenced by the fear of offending any power or party, it has been the Legislative Council." Allowing the body's composition to be altered at regular intervals would compromise the Councillors' ability to act autonomously, as they would surely be tempted to avoid controversial decisions that could bring about their dismissal.⁵⁹

Such a change, for Robinson, represented an existential threat to the British constitutional tradition, as it undermined the ability of Upper Canada's aristocratic component to offset the initiatives of its monarchical and democratic counterparts. The possibility of altering the Legislative Council in this way was especially distressing in view of the fact that the forces of democracy appeared to be gathering momentum in both metropolitan and colonial settings. "Certainly it cannot be looked to as a probable advantage," Robinson lamented, if changes to the Legislative Council rendered its members "more inclined hereafter to yield to popular movements, however dangerous may be their tendency, and less able to resist the current which may be sweeping everything to destruction."⁶⁰

State-supported Anglicanism was another component of the Family Compact's vision for Upper Canada. Members of the Compact, virtually all of whom were Anglican, insisted that "the powers and privileges of... an Established Church... [belong] only to the Protestant Church of England."⁶¹ This contention derived principally from the belief that state-aided Anglicanism was enshrined in the Elizabethan Act of Supremacy,

⁵⁸ Robinson, *Canada, and the Canada Bill...*, 119-20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 120-40.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 140. One detects in Robinson's critique of Durham's *Report* the sense of pessimism that crept into the Compact's remarks in the later 1820s and 1830s as a result of the ascent of reform movements throughout the British World. Strachan struck a similar chord in the late 1820s when he criticized the Upper Canadian Reformers' campaign to make public funds traditionally controlled by the Church of England available to several denominations. Their initiative, to his way of thinking, smacked of the rising tide of "liberalism [that] is sweeping everything into disorder." George W. Spragge, ed., *The John Strachan Letter Book: 1812-1834* (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1946), 222-23.

mid-sixteenth-century legislation that established the English Church “throughout the dominions and countries then belonging to, or which afterwards should belong to... the kingdom of England.”⁶² (Significantly, in addition to a common set of “social and political assumptions,” religion was a major factor binding together members of the Compact and the overwhelmingly Anglican “local oligarchies” that they sustained across Upper Canada via their controversial handling of patronage.⁶³)

For members of the Compact it followed that the English Church was entitled to such benefits of establishment status as control over the Clergy Reserves. Strachan, who served as the Church of England’s most outspoken Upper Canadian advocate, displayed considerable dexterity in responding to critics of the Anglican Church’s establishmentarian claims. To Dissenting Protestants who asserted that the Constitutional Act had in fact not made provisions for the creation of a state church, he referred to the clause within the document that made explicit mention of benefits that were to be conferred by civil authorities on the “Establishment of the Church of Eng-

land.” And to adherents of the Church of Scotland, a “respectable” Presbyterian institution whose claim to co-establishment status in Upper Canada pivoted on the fact that they enjoyed such status in Britain, Strachan argued that recognizing the Scottish Church in this way would set a troubling precedent that could potentially be exploited by radical evangelicals in the future.⁶⁴

Yet there was more to the Family Compact’s emphasis on the importance of state-aided Anglicanism than a materialistic desire to monopolize the Reserves. Bound up with the group’s support for Anglican establishmentarianism was a hierarchical conception of the universe, which was seen as a magnificent providential arrangement in which everything from the simplest inanimate object to God Himself was ranked in ascending order. Central to this outlook were notions of paternalism, through which the strong assumed responsibility for protecting the weak, and deference, through which the weak acquiesced to the divinely ordained dominance of the strong.⁶⁵

The perpetuation of the universal hierarchy purportedly turned on the existence of a mutually reinforcing church-

⁶² *Speeches of Dr. John Rolph, and Christopher Hagerman, Esq. His Majesty’s Solicitor General, on the Bill for Appropriating the Proceeds of the Clergy Reserves to the Purposes of General Education* (Toronto: M. Reynolds, 1837), 20-21.

⁶³ Colin Read, “The London District Oligarchy in the Rebellion Era,” *Ontario History* LXXII:4 (December 1980), 195-205.

⁶⁴ *Church*, 13 January 1838, 123; Fahey, *In His Name*, 128-29; John S. Moir, “Loyalty and Respectability: The Campaign for Co-Establishment of the Church of Scotland in Canada,” in *Early Presbyterianism in Canada: Essays by John S. Moir*, edited by Paul Laverdure (Gravelbourg, SK: Gravelbooks, 2003), 89-94.

⁶⁵ Fahey, *In His Name*, 113-22; G. Blaine Baker, “‘So Elegant a Web’: Providential Order and the Rule of Secular Law in Early Nineteenth-Century Upper Canada,” *University of Toronto Law Journal* 38:2 (Spring 1988), 196-200.

state relationship. The church strengthened the system by enjoining the strong to nurture and defend the weak, and by reminding the weak that their subordination to the strong was providentially sanctioned. The church also bolstered the universal order by informing its adherents that challenges to the *status quo* ran counter to God's will. The state, for its part, assisted the church by endowing its clergy with financial assistance and legal privileges, and by implementing laws that discouraged popular irreligion. Members of the Family Compact were convinced that the Church of England, which had existed since its inception as a bulwark of the metropolitan state, was ideally suited to reinforce the divinely ordained order in Upper Canada.⁶⁶

Transatlantic conservatism influenced the Family Compact's religious views, as evidenced by their staunch support for Christian establishments. Strachan, in a provocative mid-1820s sermon, stressed the benefits bestowed on Britain by its state churches. (His reluctance to recognize the Church of Scotland as an established entity in Upper Canada did not prevent Strachan from acknowledging—indeed, celebrating—the fact that the institution received civil assistance overseas.) “The religious establishments of England and Scotland,” he observed, “have... been the great promoters of all

that is great and good, in those happy Countries.” Among the most important accomplishments of Britain's state churches, Strachan declared, was their capacity for inculcating in the popular consciousness a sense of “duty to God and man, [which] is every moment forcing itself into notice, and... [which] condemns every species of wrong.” Britain's religious establishments, in view of their salutary impact on the masses, had vaulted the nation to the heights of international greatness: the British nation, in Strachan's opinion, “is the most intellectual, and moral in Europe.... the light of freedom burns with the greatest radiance [among Britons], and the rights and liberties of man are the best understood and most abundantly enjoyed.”⁶⁷

Strachan contrasted the beneficial impact of religious establishments on British society with the religious apathy that, in his view, proliferated in the United States. With few exceptions—one of which was the American “Episcopal Church”—religion in the American republic “is found to languish,” a phenomenon that was especially acute in sparsely populated rural communities where formal ministrations were scarce.⁶⁸ The reason, for Strachan, was that American governments had taken pains after the Revolution to enact stipulations prohibiting religious establishments. Conse-

⁶⁶ William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 22.

⁶⁷ John Strachan, *A Sermon, Preached at York, Upper Canada, Third of July, 1825, On the Death of the Late Lord Bishop of Quebec* (Kingston: James MacFarlane, 1826), 16.

⁶⁸ Strachan was disdainful of the Christianity that did exist in the United States, which he associated with the emotionally unbridled, politically subversive ethos of radical evangelicalism. *Ibid.*, 26.

quently, funds to support the efforts of a “standing Ministry” were often insufficient, particularly in remote settings. Such developments prompted Strachan to declare “that no country can be called Christian, which does not give public support to Christianity.” To deprive a given state’s churches of reliable government aid, in other words, was to hobble its ability to instil religious precepts—including the sacred nature of hierarchy—in its inhabitants’ minds. The eradication of state-supported religion was thus one of the American Revolution’s most deplorable legacies.⁶⁹

Christopher Hagerman, a member of the Family Compact who served as Solicitor General and “chief defender of High Tory principles in the [Upper Canadian] Legislature,” echoed Strachan in extolling the virtues of government-supported religion.⁷⁰ He was adamant that it was “the duty of every government to shew reverence and maintain respect for the holiest and highest duties imposed on man by his Creator.” Hagerman was equally adamant that governments were duty-bound to enforce “laws for the punishment of blasphemy,” the absence of which would surely result in the populace becoming mired in “moral and religious degradation.” Such had allegedly occurred in France (albeit temporarily) and the American republic. Focusing on

the latter, Hagerman referred with patent dismay to a “public meeting” held in Rochester, New York in 1837 in which the legal requirement that “one day in seven... be kept holy” had been castigated as “an infringement of... [Americans’] constitutional liberty.” Hagerman denounced the United States for permitting its citizens to engage in such audacious displays of irreligion, which were predicated in his opinion on the scandalous belief that “man is not accountable to his Creator for his conduct, and... is bound by no other rule... than such as his own vicious and corrupt nature may suggest.”⁷¹ Implicit in his remarks was the belief that blasphemous behaviour would not be tolerated in British-controlled Upper Canada, where the principle of state-aided Christianity was enmeshed in the very fabric of the colony.

Economics constituted the third component of the Family Compact’s vision for Upper Canada. Members of the group, in seeking to stimulate the colony’s economy, advocated the exploitation of its agricultural resources. They also advocated canal-building as a crucial means by which this objective could be realized. The Compact’s economic outlook was enunciated in response to a pervasive anxiety over the state of the Upper Canadian economy that bubbled to the surface in the late 1810s. This anxiety was trig-

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁰ S.F. Wise, “The Rise of Christopher Hagerman,” in *God’s Peculiar Peoples*, 61-62.

⁷¹ *Speeches of Dr. John Rolph and Christopher Hagerman, Esq. ...*, 21. In seeking to portray the United States as intrinsically irreligious, Hagerman studiously ignored the fact that many American evangelicals shared his views on Sabbath observance. See James Hutson, *Forgotten Features of the Founding: The Recovery of Religious Themes in the Early American Republic* (New York: Lexington, 2003), 62.

gered by such developments as the intensification of an international economic malaise following the Napoleonic Wars, and from which the colony was by no means immune; the construction of the Erie Canal, a major American undertaking that helped propel New York City to economic dominance in North America, and that elicited frustration from Upper Canadians regarding the absence within their own jurisdiction of similarly ambitious projects; and the agitation fomented by Robert Gourlay, whose activities brought to the fore popular disenchantment over the colony's lack of economic progress.⁷²

Responding to such developments, a commission headed by John Macaulay, one of the Compact's few merchants, was charged with crafting a long-term strategy for Upper Canada's economy.⁷³ A joint committee of the colonial Assembly and Legislative Council chaired by Strachan and Robinson approved the commission's

plan in 1825. That the strategy contained the essence of the Compact's vision for Upper Canada's economic development is hardly surprising, since its members played a pivotal role in determining its content. It focused on the importance of exploiting the colony's agricultural resources, which reflects the Compact's belief that providence had gifted Upper Canada with fertile soil and a temperate climate that "[smiled] like Eden in her summer dress," and laid the foundation for a prosperous colonial economy.⁷⁴

To take advantage of Upper Canada's natural endowments members of the Compact championed infrastructure projects—notably the Welland Canal, which opened in 1829—that would allow agricultural commodities to be transported efficiently from farms to colonial and metropolitan markets. Such projects, in Macaulay's view, were of "infinite importance" to Upper Canada's economic growth.⁷⁵

⁷² Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 34-42; Robert Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada*, edited by S.R. Mealing (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 28.

⁷³ According to Hugh G. Aitken, "none of the leading members of the Compact were business men, and... the system of values typical of the Compact accorded scant respect to business wealth as such." Moreover, according to Robert L. Fraser, even Macaulay "longed to cut his mercantile ties" and adopt a more genteel lifestyle. Aitken, "The Family Compact and the Welland Canal Company," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 18:1 (February 1952), 76; Fraser, "Like Eden in Her Summer Dress," 9-10.

⁷⁴ *Kingston Gazette*, 28 June 1818, n.p.

⁷⁵ John Macaulay, *Address Delivered by John Macaulay, Esq. To the Public Meeting Convened in Kingston to "Consider... the Practicality of Establishing Water Privileges at Kingston"* (Kingston: British Whig, 1834), 12. See also *Kingston Chronicle*, 26 February, 5 March, 19 March, 26 March, 16 April 1819, n.p.; Fraser, "Like Eden in Her Summer Dress," 9-12. An "unapologetic elitist," Macaulay attested to transatlantic conservatism's impact on the Compact in the pages of the *Chronicle* after assuming control of the publication (along with Alexander Pringle) in 1819. Specifically, he invoked Blackstone in expressing astonishment at the fact that, while "the science of legislation [is] the noblest and most difficult of any," it was the only one for which "some method of instruction... [was] not looked upon as requisite." Singling out the United States for criticism, he added that in that

Integral to the Family Compact's economic outlook was their belief that an allegedly disinterested elite—themselves—should assume responsibility for promoting Upper Canada's agricultural development, and their suspicion of excessive financial speculation, which purportedly threatened hierarchy. Both views reveal the impact of transatlantic conservatism on the Compact's economic vision, which was informed by a deep-seated desire to counter outcroppings of "democratic anarchy" in post-revolutionary British North America.⁷⁶

Members of the Family Compact were emphatic that Upper Canada's economic development strategy, which essentially dismissed manufacturing, should be led by what they saw as the broad-minded gentlemen who comprised the colonial elite—the Compact itself. Members of the group believed that, unlike Upper Canada's allegedly self-interested businessmen, they possessed the requisite independence to nurture the colonial economy. This was so, they felt, because they were ensconced in government positions that shielded them from the volatility of the market. They were also convinced that, due to their exalted status as the colonial "gentry," their behaviour was animated by nobler priorities than what

they saw as the vulgar materialism that spurred Upper Canada's business class. The latter, who were far more likely to support manufacturing, were linked in the Compact's consciousness to a destabilizing ethos of bourgeois ambition and social fluidity that imperilled hierarchical order. That members of the Compact also happened to be intimately involved in potentially lucrative economic ventures, including the Welland Canal and Bank of Upper Canada, paradoxically did not undermine their belief that they were uniquely equipped to act as disinterested stewards of the Upper Canadian economy.⁷⁷

Indicative of this conviction are remarks made by Robinson in 1824 to William Hamilton Merritt, the Welland Canal's principal booster, who hoped to secure support from the Compact for the large-scale undertaking with which he was associated. (Gaining the group's backing would prove a boon to the project, as their influence in the colonial government resulted in the implementation of measures that facilitated the canal's completion.) Robinson reacted sympathetically to Merritt's overtures: "it seemed your earnest wish to have the direction of the Company committed to gentlemen whom you could not hope to

nation, "even the common street beggar thinks himself qualified to give... opinions, on the science of legislation, though his abilities and judgment have been totally inadequate to the task of... keeping himself from rags and starvation." Robert L. Fraser, "Macaulay, John," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, VIII <http://biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=4036> (accessed on 19 April 2012).

⁷⁶ John Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 46-49.

⁷⁷ Fraser, "Like Eden in Her Summer Dress," 220-22; Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers*, 121-23; Aitken, "The Family Compact and the Welland Canal Company," 76.

bend to anything unworthy.”⁷⁸ Robinson’s assertion attests to the Compact’s belief that, on account of its professional security and disinterested patriotism, it was ideally suited to assume responsibility for guiding Upper Canada’s economic development.⁷⁹

Henry Boulton expressed comparable views the following year in a dispatch to Wilmot Horton, British Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, regarding the Bank of Upper Canada. Boulton boasted that, while banks in the United States were controlled by businessmen interested in enriching themselves and their friends, the Bank of Upper Canada was guided by “government officers”—including Compact fixtures—whose primary motivation was not material gain, but rather public service. Given their professional security, Boulton implied, members of the group could be trusted to steer the colony’s economy responsibly.⁸⁰

For additional evidence of the ways in which conservative beliefs influenced the Compact’s economic outlook one need look only to their attitudes toward financial speculation. William Allan, the Compact’s “entrepreneurial leader,” sat on the boards of several major compa-

nies and served as President of the Bank of Upper Canada in addition to acting as an Executive and Legislative Councillor. His scepticism toward speculation, which Allan saw as an unstable foundation for the colonial economy, throws into relief the Compact’s support for a hierarchical society led by a paternalistic elite.⁸¹ (It should be noted that the Compact invested heavily in land—witness the fact that members of the group held at least one-tenth of all territory in Peel County between 1820 and 1840 as absentee proprietors. This fact suggests that members of the group were comfortable with certain forms of speculative activity, including ones that augmented their wealth, provided they did not jeopardize their vision of a stratified agrarian order.⁸²)

Allan presided over the city of Toronto’s first foray into railway promotion in the late 1830s. The venture, which ended in failure, left him dismayed by what he saw as the irresponsible behaviour of several individuals involved in the initiative. Particularly troubling was the fact that subscribers to the venture, including people “of large property and some consideration in society,” had defaulted on their payments. For Allan, their behaviour laid

⁷⁸ Aitken, “The Family Compact and the Welland Canal Company,” 65.

⁷⁹ The Compact’s economic attitudes comport with the characteristics of “gentlemanly capitalism,” which blended support for hierarchy with enthusiasm for enterprise. See P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, “Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I. The Old Colonial System, 1688-1850,” *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser. XXXIX:4 (1986), 501-25.

⁸⁰ Carol Lawrie Vaughan, “The Bank of Upper Canada in Politics, 1817–1840,” *Ontario History* 60:4 (December 1968), 188.

⁸¹ In Collaboration, “Allan, William,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, VIII <http://biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&cid_nbr=3743> (accessed on 19 April 2012).

⁸² David Gagan, “Property and ‘Interest’: Some Preliminary Evidence of Land Speculation by the ‘Family Compact’ in Upper Canada, 1820-1840,” *Ontario History* 70:1 (March 1978), 69.

bare the increasingly prevalent tendency of Upper Canadians to behave in a reckless manner in hopes of attaining wealth easily. "Such conduct," he stated, "cannot be too severely censured."⁸³

While Allan's remarks were likely influenced by a sense of disappointment in the venture's failure, they also reflect his concerns regarding dependence on speculation. Fuelling Allan's suspicion of this type of economic activity was his conviction that hard work was the only legitimate means by which wealth could be generated. Reliance on speculation, by contrast, militated against virtuous behaviour by encouraging individuals to believe that wealth could be gained without concerted effort. Moreover, speculation's capacity for creating dramatic fluctuations in wealth—which could seemingly leave one affluent one day, impoverished the next—threatened to upset the hierarchical design that Compact conservatives had taken such pains to entrench.⁸⁴ One could infer from Allan's remarks that, for this Compact member, speculation was acceptable when it supplemented wealth based on hard work, unacceptable when it became an economic focal point that encouraged unscrupulous behaviour and social fluidity.

Robinson conveyed similar senti-

ments in a mid-nineteenth-century pamphlet through which, among other things, he expressed scepticism toward the United States' supposed economic dynamism. While he did not deny that Americans were "energetic, active, and enterprising"—traits, Robinson observed, they shared with their "racial" counterparts in English-speaking British North America—he insisted that inhabitants of the United States had yet to grasp "the secret of attaining real wealth." Instead, they had been altogether too reliant on risky phenomena like financial speculation. Such behaviour had precipitated a sharp economic downturn in the United States in the late 1830s, which in turn brought the nation's progress to a screeching halt.⁸⁵

The stalling of the American economy, from Robinson's perspective, furnished Upper Canadians frustrated with their colony's sluggish economic growth with an invaluable lesson. Tumultuous circumstances south of the border demonstrated that, "wealth must consist of the gradual accumulation of labour." To erect an economy on alternate foundations, including speculation, would ultimately prove "disastrous." What is more, Robinson maintained that whatever progress had occurred in the Ameri-

⁸³ Peter A. Baskerville, "Entrepreneurship and the Family Compact: York-Toronto, 1822-55," *Urban History Review* 9:3 (February 1981), 20.

⁸⁴ Although they were skeptical of the Compact's graded social vision, many Reformers (including radicals like William Lyon Mackenzie) shared the group's belief in the importance of a vibrant agrarian economy. Additionally, it should be mentioned that several Compact members shed their apprehensions regarding such activities as railway speculation following the economic transformations of the mid-nineteenth century. Greer, "Historical Roots of Canadian Democracy," 18-19; Baskerville, "Entrepreneurship and the Family Compact," 20-28.

⁸⁵ Robinson, *Canada, and the Canada Bill...*, 59-60.

can republic prior to the downturn had not been based on wealth generated by American exertion. Instead, it had been based on revenue derived from the hard work of Britons over many years, which in turn allowed British financiers to fund ventures launched in the United States. America's economic growth, then, "was not the fruit of past labour in the United States, but was the accumulated earnings of a greater quantity of patient and enduring industry in England." "If a country," Robinson concluded, "desires to grow rich, she must expect to do so by the patient labour of her people." Alternative approaches to economic development, including risky speculative schemes that threatened to undermine the divinely ordained order, would invariably end in failure.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Historians have long been aware of the "Revolutionary Atlantic"—a sprawling network of ideas, individuals, and institutions that propagated radical sentiments on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and contributed to the outbreak of

such significant events as the American, French, and Haitian Revolutions.⁸⁷ More recently, they have drawn attention to a Counter-revolutionary Atlantic—a pattern of imperial reconfiguration and persistence that occurred in the aftermath of the revolutionary era's various uprisings.⁸⁸ The counter-revolutionary phenomenon reinforced a durable conservative tradition that originated in England after the Glorious Revolution, and derived much of its strength from an influential aristocracy and an established Anglican Church.

Such was the historical context from which the Family Compact's principal values—including hierarchy, deference, and disdain for unchecked democracy—emerged. Seeking to stifle radical republicanism, members of the group articulated a vision for Upper Canada's future that attested to the importance of transatlantic conservatism. Esteeming stability, piety, and prosperity, this vision rested on three pillars: a particular interpretation of Britain's constitution, Anglican establishmentarianism, and an agrarian economy led by a paternalistic elite. The contrast between the Compact's pri-

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 60-61; Cook, "John Beverley Robinson and the Conservative Blueprint for Upper Canada," 84.

⁸⁷ Rusty Bittermann, *Sailor's Hope: The Life and Times of William Cooper, Agrarian Radical in an Age of Revolutions* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); Michel Ducharme, "Closing the Last Chapter of the Atlantic Revolution: The 1837-1838 Rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 116:2 (2006), 413-30; Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

⁸⁸ Nancy Christie, "'He is the master of his house': Families and Political Authority in Counter-revolutionary Montreal," *William and Mary Quarterly* 70:2 (April 2013), 341-70; Jonathan Den Hartog, "Trans-Atlantic Anti-Jacobinism: Reaction and Religion," *Early American Studies* 11:1 (Winter 2013), 133-45; Jeremy Adelman, "An Age of Imperial Revolutions," *American Historical Review*, 113:2 (April 2008), 319-40.

orities and those of their Reform-oriented critics—the most thoroughgoing of which advocated starkly opposed political, religious, and economic objectives—brings into focus the deep divisions that lie at the heart of Ontario’s history.

In much the same way that developments like the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the passing of the Great Reform Bill eroded the foundations of British conservatism, phenomena like the Union of the Canadas and the granting of Responsible Government diminished the authority exerted in Up-

per Canada by the Family Compact. Yet the fact that the group finally succumbed to its Reform-oriented adversaries should not obscure the tremendous power that it wielded for most of the colony’s history. The Compact, in the final analysis, were not simply obstacles to Upper Canadian progress. Rather, they advocated an alternative model of colonial development based on the legacy of post-1688 metropolitan conservatism and the Counter-revolutionary Atlantic. Only in hindsight can the Reformers’ victory be seen as inevitable.

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