

**Dreams of a Tropical Canada: Race, Nation, and
Canadian Aspirations in the Caribbean Basin, 1883-1919**

by

Paula Pears Hastings

Department of History
Duke University

Date: _____

Approved:

John Herd Thompson, Supervisor

Susan Thorne

D. Barry Gaspar

Philip J. Stern

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of
History in the Graduate School
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

Dreams of a “tropical Canada” that included the West Indies occupied the thoughts of many Canadians over a period spanning nearly forty years. From the expansionist fever of the late nineteenth century to the redistribution of German territories immediately following the First World War, Canadians of varying backgrounds campaigned vigorously for Canada-West Indies union. Their efforts generated a transatlantic discourse that raised larger questions about Canada’s national trajectory, imperial organization, and the state of Britain’s Empire in the twentieth century.

This dissertation explores the key ideas, tensions, and contradictions that shaped the union discourse over time. Race, nation and empire were central to this discourse. Canadian expansionists’ efforts to gain free access to tropical territory, consolidate British possessions in the Western hemisphere, and negotiate the terms under which West Indians of color would enter the Canadian federation reflected and perpetuated logics that were simultaneously racial, national, and imperial.

Canada-West Indies union campaigns raise important questions about the processes at work in the ideological and material formation of the Canadian “nation” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Employing a wide range of public and private manuscript material, diaries, travelogues, and newspapers, this dissertation argues that Canadians’ expansionist aspirations in the West Indies were inextricably connected to a national vision. To the campaign’s advocates, acquiring colonial satellites – particularly in tropical regions – was a defining feature of nation-state formation.

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1. Introduction

Dreams of a Tropical Canada

A Dominion stretching from South America to the Pacific Ocean! To many it may sound like a dream. It would give Canada just that which is needed to round off the Confederation. All we lack now is a bit of tropical territory. . . .The beautiful West Indies would be a grand addition to Canada. We have gone as far west and north as we can. If the time has not arrived for our going south . . . it is certainly time we were looking that way.

– W.D. Taunton, *The Canadian Century*, 1912

Nova Scotia journalist W.D. Taunton radiated enthusiasm about the prospect of a political union of Canada and the British West Indies. An advocate of union since his visit to Demerara ten years earlier, Taunton extolled the advantages to both parties in such an arrangement. Canada could “round off” the present Confederation of temperate provinces with tropical appendages, badges of national status that would announce the Dominion’s international importance, and union would stimulate West Indian development. Canadian capital would flow into the region and West Indian producers and merchants would enjoy secure access to Canada’s rapidly expanding market. Union would provide a winter base for the young Royal Canadian Navy, pre-empt United States’ influence in the region, and consolidate British territory in the Western hemisphere. “The West Indies have long since lost their charm for English eyes,” Taunton wrote, “but they must be maintained as British colonies. By assuming control of the British West Indies, Canada would relieve Britain of this responsibility and at the same time could give the colonies to the south a better and cheaper form of government.” The “British West Indian,” Taunton concluded, “is a distinctively and

intensely loyal subject. The British flag is more to him than any other Britisher." With Canada-West Indies union "the heritage of the flag would be perpetuated" and "[t]here would be no 'swopping' of West Indies territory with Uncle Sam or any other nation."¹

The chief obstacle to union, according to Taunton, was that "the British West Indian" was also, by and large, a black subject. "The percentage of white people in the British West Indies is very small, and many people believe that Canada would make a mistake in adding a million or two of blacks or coloured people to her population." But to Taunton this racial composition need not pose an insurmountable barrier to union. The West Indian was not only "loyal, peaceful, and god-fearing," but more importantly, "[o]ver 2,000 miles of salt sea separate[d] him from Canada." White Canadians could thus rest assured knowing West Indians of color "could never over-run Canada." Taunton conceded that governing West Indians of color was a serious matter that required judicious consideration. Yet if the imperial government could do it, he observed, why not the Canadian?²

¹ W.D. Taunton, "Should Canada Annex the British West Indies[?]" *The Canadian Magazine* (February 1912), 6, as cited in the *Nassau Tribune*, 28 February 1912.

² Taunton, "Should Canada Annex the British West Indies[?]" Contemporaries in Britain and the West Indies, as well as advocates for union in Canada, often employed the terms "black" and "coloured" indiscriminately. Yet as Caribbean scholars have pointed out, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were often distinctions made between those of African descent and those of mixed African and European descent. My use of the terms black and "coloured" mirrors their usage in the historical documents consulted. On racial and social divisions in West Indian societies see for example Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Brian L. Moore, *Cultural Power, resistance, and pluralism: colonial Guyana, 1838-1900* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 1995); and Gail Saunders, "The Role of the Coloured Middle Class in Nassau, Bahamas, 1890-1942," in Saunders, *Bahamian society after emancipation: essays in nineteenth and early twentieth century Bahamian history* (Nassau: D. Gail Saunders, 1990), 77-112.

Such dreams of a “tropical Canada” that included the West Indies occupied the thoughts of many Canadians for almost four decades. From the scramble for colonies in the late nineteenth century to the redistribution of German territories immediately following the First World War, Canadians of varying backgrounds campaigned vigorously for Canada-West Indies union. These campaigns were broadly based. Proponents (and opponents) included merchants and investors, politicians and planters, and intellectuals and journalists from Canada, Britain and the West Indies. They included prominent personalities from Canadian banks, universities, steamship and railway companies, commercial organizations in Canada, Britain and the West Indies, as well as the Government of Canada, the imperial government, and the colonial governments of Jamaica and the Bahamas. Canadian advocates were Conservative and Liberal, English and French-speaking, Protestant and Catholic, and they hailed from different parts of Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, and the Maritime provinces. They formed the Canada-West Indies League in 1911 to foster closer relations between the two regions and launched two principal newspapers to promote their agendas, *The Canada-West Indies Magazine* and *By-Water Magazine*. They also published articles in literally dozens of Canadian, West Indian, and British newspapers.

Canada’s established and developing commercial ties with the West Indies buttressed these campaigns. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, several Canadian banks and investment companies expanded in the West Indies, including the Royal Bank of Canada, the Bank of Nova Scotia, the Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada, W.C. Pitfeld and Company, and the Royal Securities Corporation of Montreal. Canadian National Steamships,

the Canadian National Railway, Pickford and Black Steamship Company of Halifax, and the Ocean Dominion Steamship Corporation of Montreal forged ocean links. The opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 made it possible for the Canadian Transport Company of Vancouver to establish a route to the West Indies. Businesses in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, and especially in the Maritime cities of Halifax, Yarmouth, and Saint John, exported flour, fish, and lumber, and imported sugar and citrus products. Canadian businessmen also established utility companies in the West Indies and Latin America, specializing in hydroelectricity, tramways, lights, and telecommunications.³

Canadians' growing involvement in the Caribbean provided the context for Taunton's dream of "a Dominion stretching from South America to the Pacific Ocean." The *Canadian Century* highlights the ideas, tensions, and contradictions that shaped the union discourse over time. Race, nation and empire were central. Canadian expansionists' efforts to acquire tropical territory, consolidate British possessions in the Western hemisphere, and negotiate the terms under which West Indians of color would enter the Canadian federation reflected and perpetuated logics that were simultaneously racial, national and imperial. Their union fantasies were premised on common, interconnected theories about progress and modern civilization. Anglo-Saxon racial superiority undergirded these theories. As in Britain, Anglo-Saxon populations elsewhere in the Empire were thought to possess the unique characteristics

³ Neil C. Quigley, "The Bank of Nova Scotia in the Caribbean, 1889-1940," *Business History Review* 63, 4 (1989), 797-838; Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles, *Southern Exposure: Canadian Promoters in Latin America and the Caribbean 1896-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); R.A. Shields, "Canada, The Foreign Office and the Caribbean Market 1884-1895," *Dalhousie Review* 58, 4 (1978-79), 703-722; and Peter K. Newman, "Canada's Role in West Indian Trade Before 1912," *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 14, 1 (1960), 25-49.

necessary to advance civilization to its highest stage and “enlighten” the darker races of the world.⁴ These racial constructs simultaneously bolstered and undermined Canada-West Indies union schemes. Canadian expansionists identified union as a crucial national imperative, but this imperative often clashed with competing visions of “nation” in Canada, with different imperial agendas in Britain, and with the varied interests of white, black and “colored” West Indians. These conflicting interests were brought sharply into focus by shifting global circumstances, not least of which was the United States’ growing influence in the world.

Despite enduring debates about Canada-West Indies union from the 1880s through the 1910s, few historians have interrogated its significance. The few studies that have broached the subject have been dismissive, superficial and fragmentary. Described as an “intermittent flirtation” and a “minuet,” the subject sometimes receives marginal attention in larger narratives of Canadian-West Indian relations.⁵ Studies that attend more specifically to the issue of union provide a chronology of events that is more descriptive than analytical, and they focus

⁴ On the Anglo-Saxon ideal in Britain, see Peter Mandler, *The English National Character*, esp. ch. 3 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Julia Stapleton, “Citizenship versus patriotism in twentieth-century England,” *Historical Journal* 48,1 (2005), 151-178; and Paul Rich, *Race and the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), ch. 1. In the Canadian context see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 128-133.

⁵ These include Trevor A. Carmichael, *Passport to the Heart: Reflections on Canada Caribbean Relations* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001), and Robert Chodos, *The Caribbean Connection* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1977). In general, the literature that explores Canada’s relationship with the British West Indies focuses on commerce and trade, and does not consider sufficiently (or explicitly) the implications of these commercial relations for the structure and maintenance of British imperial power. See Brian Tennyson, “The British West Indies and Mackenzie King’s National Policy in the 1920s,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 24/1 (1990): 65-88; Quigley, “The Bank of Nova Scotia”; Selwyn Carrington, “The United States and Canada: The Struggle for the British West Indian Trade,” *Social and Economic Studies* [Jamaica] 37 (1988): 69-105; Armstrong and Nelles, *Southern Exposure*; Shields, “Canada, The Foreign Office and the Caribbean Market”; and Newman, “Canada’s Role in West Indian Trade Before 1912.”

primarily on Canadian perspectives. The scarcity of studies can be explained, in part, by the unpopularity of imperialism and colonialism (and their histories) in the latter half of the twentieth century. As dependencies decolonized and the British Dominions extracted themselves more decisively from the imperial embrace, nationalism became one of the chief mobilizing impulses of the post-colonial condition.⁶ Although the response to decolonization in the British West Indies was mixed, and nationalism lacked the intensity of that experienced in Asia or Africa, a distinct national consciousness had emerged by the end of the 1940s.⁷ While the islands continued to look outside the region for commercial alliances to bolster their struggling economies, they increasingly sought to define themselves outside the colonial frame.⁸

⁶ See J.E. Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-1971* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005); Stuart Ward, "Transcending the Nation: A Global Imperial History," in Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham: DUP, 2003), 44-56; and Selwyn Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society* (Toronto: UTP, 1972).

⁷ Howard Johnson, "The British Caribbean from Demobilization to Constitutional Decolonization," in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Twentieth Century* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 617.

⁸ Of course there is no consensus among Caribbean historians about the extent to which nationalism was asserted in the decades following the Second World War. Samuel J. Horwitz, "The Federation of the West Indies: A Study in Nationalisms," *The Journal of British Studies* 6, 1 (Nov. 1966), 139-168, concluded that the British West Indies lacked the conditions necessary for the development of nationalism, and that most West Indians were generally too preoccupied with their daily subsistence to concern themselves with any form of nationalist identification. He went so far as to suggest that there "is no proud heritage to uphold or even to be nostalgic about, no sense of community or destiny. The West Indies have no tradition of resentment or oppression by an alien power which might bring them together against a common enemy; there has been no movement to defend or promote indigenous culture in face of encroachment of an alien one. There is no legal discrimination, and such expressions of racial and color prejudice as do occur are attributed not to external but to local influences." Other historians have identified the rise of national sentiment in the latter half of the twentieth century (or well before, by some accounts), and their work suggests that West Indian resentment toward Britain was not a necessary precondition for the development of nationalism. Often transcending the geographical and political boundaries of individual islands, this nationalism has been defined broadly to include economic, cultural, ethnic, and political varieties. On Creole nationalism and the work of West Indian intellectuals, see Ivar Oxaal, *Black*

The way in which nationalist agendas have obscured Canadian interest in annexing the West Indies is more apparent in the Canadian context. While expressions of Canadian nationalism were manifest since Confederation in 1867, it was only after the Second World War that this nationalism was widely identified as incompatible with British imperialism.⁹ In the latter half of the twentieth century, Canadian nationalists constructed a distinct national identity, and the absence of imperial designs in Canadian history was one of its defining features. Unlike Britain and America, whose histories were rife with aggression, militarism, and imperialism, Canadians identified their role in the world, in contrast, as a “helpful fixer”

Intellectuals Come to Power: The Rise of Creole Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Co., 1968). The connection between race and nationalism in the post-war decades has been explored in Selwyn Ryan, *Race and Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago: A Study of Decolonization in a Multiracial Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972). On the cultural dimension of nationalism, see Timothy Rommen, “Nationalism and the Soul: Gospelypso as Independence,” *Black Music Research Journal* 22/1 (Spring 2002), 37-63; Warren R. Pinckney Jr., “Jazz in Barbados,” *American Music* 12, 1 (Spring 1994), 58-87, Louis Regis, *The Political Calypso: True Opposition in Trinidad and Tobago 1962-1987* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999); and Anita M. Waters, *Race, Class and Political Symbols: Rastafari and Reggae in Jamaican Politics* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1985). Economic nationalism is explored in Hugh W. Springer, *Reflections on the Failure of the West Indian Federation* (Cambridge, MA: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1962). Springer demonstrates how the development of the bauxite and tourist industries in Jamaica stimulated Jamaican nationalism. A helpful summary of the rise of nationalism (in its economic, political and cultural dimensions) can also be found in Ken Post, *Arise Ye Starvelings: The Jamaican Labour Rebellion of 1938 and its Aftermath* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978), 205-225.

⁹ Although there were several Canadian critics of British imperialism before the war, most notably French-speaking Canadians, the “dissolution of English-speaking Canada’s self-representation as a ‘British’ nation,” as José Igartua and others have argued, occurred in the period from the Second World War through the mid 1950s. See Igartua, “‘Ready, Aye, Ready’ No More? Canada, Britain, and the Suez Crisis in the Canadian Press,” in Phillip Buckner, *Canada and the End of Empire* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 49-50. See also Norman Hillmer and J.L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire* (Toronto, Irwin Publishing, 2000), 181-238. The classic study on the relationship between nationalism and imperialism is Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1970).

and a “friendly peacekeeper.”¹⁰ Canadian aspirations in the West Indies ran counter to these national constructs, and were consequently dispensed with in dominant narratives of Canadian history. As Robin Winks observed in his historical pamphlet *Canadian-West Indian Union: A Forty-Year Minuet*, published in 1968, “writing at substantially greater length upon so fragile a subject may not be the best use of one’s time.”¹¹ Even Winks, who was a bold pioneer of black history in Canada, was influenced by the politically charged period in which he wrote. The dearth of literature published since Winks highlighted the “fragile” nature of the subject matter in 1968 indicates that scholars heeded his advice. Political sensitivity, it seems, has relegated the subject to the margins of history.

Canadian-West Indian Union remains the most notable study on the subject to date.

Winks outlined Canada’s relations with the British West Indies from the 1880s to the 1960s and he was particularly interested in assessing why union was unsuccessful. Union was principally a commercial question, he suggested, “and it would be misleading to imply that the withered results should be attributed principally to race, for the advocates of union would very probably have failed on economic and Imperial grounds alone.” Although Winks appreciated that the

¹⁰ See Granatstein and Hillmer, *Empire to Umpire*, 311, and Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English, *Canada Since 1945: Power, Politics, and Provincialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984 [reprint of 1981 ed.]), 373. Of course these representations have been compromised, more recently, by Canada’s participation in the Gulf War in the early 1990s and the atrocities committed by peacekeeping forces in Somalia. See Hillmer and Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire*, 321-323. On Canadians’ “sense of national moral superiority” in relation to the United States, see John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Ambivalent Allies: Canada and the United States* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 2002 [1994]), 125. The importance of the United States in Canadian identity formation is also explored in J.L. Granatstein, *Yankee Go Home: Canada and Anti-Americanism* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1996).

¹¹ Robin W. Winks, *Canadian-West Indian Union: A Forty-Year Minuet*, University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Commonwealth Papers, vol. xi (London: The Athlone Press, 1968), 54.

“racial element was always present to condition discussion,” his cursory consideration of this “element” was principally confined to the Canadian context.¹²

By identifying West Indian experiences and perspectives as a central part of the union story, this project departs markedly from the conclusions drawn in the few studies that treat union schemes – most notably Winks’ study, but also those by Alice Stewart, Brinsley Samaroo, and P.J. Wigley.¹³ In these studies, opposition to union on racial grounds is usually explained in the context of Canada’s history of racism toward African-descended peoples. Canadian reluctance to govern a region with a majority of black subjects is not surprising; it is taken for granted rather than interrogated. Canada’s history of racism is certainly crucial to an understanding of the union question, but studies that fail to differentiate between racially based opposition to union in the 1880s and 1910s, for example, obscure the historical specificity of race. More problematically, they elide the role of West Indians as key interlocutors in the union discourse. In ideological and geographical terms, the discourse generated about the racial implications of union – like the discourse of union itself – was multi-directional and multi-constitutive. Politicians, merchants and labourers from each colonial site participated in the

¹² See Winks, *Canadian-West Indian Union*. This publication came out of Winks’ larger research project in the late 1960s that outlined the history of blacks in Canada from the seventeenth-century origins of slavery in New France. See Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1971). Brinsley Samaroo, “The Politics of Disharmony: The Debate on the Political Union of the British West Indies & Canada, 1884-1921,” *Revista Interamericana* 7, 1 (1977), 46-59, similarly presents a largely descriptive account that focuses primarily (though not exclusively) on the Canadians who supported union.

¹³ Alice Stewart, “Canadian-West Indian Union, 1884-1885,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 31, 4 (December 1950), 369-389; Samaroo, “The Politics of Disharmony,” 46-59; P.G. Wigley, “Canada and Imperialism: West Indian Aspirations and the First World War,” in ed., Brian Douglas Tennyson, *Canada and the Commonwealth Caribbean* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 215-255.

discussion. As their ideas circulated from Demerara to Montreal to Manchester, and from Ottawa to London to Port of Spain, racial formations in twentieth-century Canada were simultaneously challenged and remade.

And the fact that union never materialized also explains the absence of attention to an important subject. Historians concern themselves with causes and consequences: historical transformations – revolutions, wars, successful political and social movements – receive greater attention than historical phenomena with less transparent consequences. Yet although Canada-West Indies union campaigns failed, the regional, political and economic impulses that inspired them raise several important questions about Canadian society in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. There is much at stake in laying bare the history of Canadian designs in the Caribbean. Agendas to acquire tropical colonies and to effectively re-colonize West Indian subjects in a racially stratified system of governance belie the absence of imperial ambitions in contemporary understandings of Canadian history. The global unpopularity of imperialism and colonialism in the latter half of the twentieth century prompted the creation of staunchly nationalist historiographies world-wide. In Canada, this inward-looking focus obscured global processes and interactions that had crucial implications for a wide range of phenomena from Canadian race relations to the formation of national identities.

Canada-West Indies union campaigns raise important questions about the processes at work in the ideological and material formation of the Canadian “nation” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To what extent were Canadian dreams of union invested in a national vision? How did union advocates relate their expansionist plans in the West Indies to

Canada's westward expansion into the British possessions that Canada annexed as the North-West territories? How did they reconcile the "color question" – as it was commonly termed by proponents of union – with their concept of the Canadian "nation."? I argue that Canadians' expansionist aspirations in the West Indies were inextricably connected to a national vision. To the campaign's advocates, acquiring colonial satellites – particularly satellites in tropical regions – was a defining feature of nation-state formation.

The debates about Canada-West Indies union also speak to the structure and operation of Britain's Empire in the period between 1880 and 1919. In constitutional and ideological terms, what did it mean for one colony to annex another? Did the political and commercial maneuverings of unionists threaten the balance of power within the Empire? What does the imperial government's response to these campaigns reveal about the positioning and value of Canada and the West Indies within existing networks of imperial trade? More generally, what does this response suggest about the state of the Empire during this period? What was at stake for all three regions? I argue that campaigns for Canada-West Indies union reveal a more complicated picture of Empire than recent (and conventional) interpretive frameworks allow.

The next two sections of this introduction locate the arguments outlined above in relation to Canadian and British imperial historiographies. The final section of the introduction sketches the chapter structure of the dissertation.

1.1 Constructing 'Nation' from within and from without

Nation-state formation in the nineteenth and twentieth century was a thoroughly imperial enterprise. As world historians – and particularly scholars of world-systems theory –

have long argued, capitalism was a product of competition between nation-states for global resources.¹⁴ The competitive system of the old European states – dominated from the seventeenth century by the Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, French and the British – was challenged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by newer territorial states that included, most notably, the United States, Germany and Japan, but also Belgium, Italy, Canada and Australia. As “settlement colonies” within Britain’s empire, Canada and Australia might seem to fit awkwardly in this list; I will argue, however, that the impulses that animated Canadian ambitions in the Caribbean shared much in common with the impulses that incited the expansionist agendas of these other new territorial states. Unlike the old European states, whose global competitiveness arose from their success in first acquiring and controlling resources outside the continent, the new states first mobilized resources within continental boundaries before looking outward. After exhausting the possibilities of continental expansion and exploitation, the new states sought varying forms of commercial, military and racial dominion over territories in Africa, the Pacific Rim, the Caribbean, and in Latin America. While the impulses driving these expansionist projects varied widely in different political, geographic, and temporal contexts, they were all implicated – albeit differently – in nationalist agendas.¹⁵

¹⁴ The seminal study on the world-systems framework is Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

¹⁵ See for example Marius B. Jansen, “Japanese Imperialism: Late Meiji Perspectives,” in eds. Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984, 61-79; Bradley Naranch, “Made in China: Austro-Prussian Overseas Rivalry and the Global Unification of the German Nation,” unpublished paper delivered at the annual conference of the Australian Association of European Historians, State Library of South Australia, Adelaide, 6 July 2009; Roger C. Thompson, *Australian Expansion in the Pacific* (Melbourne: MUP, 1980), does not directly link Australian expansion in the South Pacific to nationalism or nation-building, but the connection is implicit.

Nation-state history thus does not stand in opposition to global history; they are mutually-constitutive.¹⁶ Global processes in this period were shaped by nation-building projects, ranging from national economic policies to the mass migrations spurred by a nation-state's ethnic, racial or religious exclusions. The evolution of the nation-state, in turn, was very much a global process, in which competition for colonial acquisitions was thought indispensable to national development.

Dreams of a tropical Canada defy conventional narratives of twentieth-century Canadian history. Historians who examine the creation and subsequent reinventions of the Canadian "nation" from Confederation to the Second World War focus on the country's domestic circumstances, its evolving relationship with Britain and, to a lesser extent, the United States. From Arthur Lower's 1946 classic narrative, *Colony to Nation*, to Doug Owsram's seminal *Promise of Eden*, published in 1980, to Jason Kaufman's recently published *The Origins of Canadian and American political differences*, the "nation" is constituted by British influence, an enduring and sometimes teleological interplay of internal conflict and cooperation (e.g. between regions, political parties, French and English-speaking populations), and a keen anti-Americanism. Visions of commercial, geographic and political expansion, as key nation-building processes, are generally coterminous with British North America above the 49th parallel. Narratives of Canadian expansion commence with the appropriation of the Hudson's

See also Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 308.

¹⁶ On the mutually-reinforcing relationship between nation-states and globalization see A.G. Hopkins, "Introduction: Globalization – An Agenda for Historians," in Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 6.

Bay Territory in 1869, two years after the Confederation, the annexation of British Columbia in 1871, Prince Edward Island two years later, and protracted efforts to bring Newfoundland into the union, eventually realized in 1949. State-formation and the imagined trajectories of “nation” are entirely continental, as is the displacement and colonization of indigenous peoples upon which these national formations depended.¹⁷

This conceptualization neglects the profound ways in which an increasingly interconnected world altered geographical and, by extension, national imaginations. Late nineteenth-century technological advances in communication and travel moved people, ideas, and commodities across formerly disconnected geographies. Individuals, communities, and

¹⁷ Arthur Lower, *Colony to Nation: a history of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1946); Doug Owsram, *Promise of Eden: the Canadian expansionist movement and the idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Jason Kaufman, *The Origins of Canadian and American political differences* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2009); Kenneth Coates, *Canada's Colonies: a history of the Yukon and Northwest Territories* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1985); Allan Smith, ed., *Canada: an American nation?: essays on continentalism, identity and the Canadian frame of mind* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974); J.L. Granatstein, *Nation: Canada since Confederation* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1990); Kenneth D. McRae, *State formation and nation building in Canada* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1970); W.L. Morton, *The Canadian Identity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961). Morris Zaslow, *The Northward Expansion of Canada 1914-1967* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988); Berger, *The Sense of Power*; Norman Hillmer and J.L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing Ltd., 2000 [1994, Copp Clark Longman]). H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Of course there is also a rich, developing literature on the intersections of nation, gender and race in Canadian history. See for example, Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008); Denyse Baillargeon, *Babies for the nation: the medicalization of motherhood in Quebec, 1910-1970* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009); Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus, eds., *One step over the line: toward a history of women in the North American Wests* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008); Mariana Valverde, *The Age of light, soap, and water: moral reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008 [McClelland and Stewart, 1991]); and Carol Bacchi, *Liberation deferred? the ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragettes* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

nation-states became more aware of how events in one part of the world could resonate in their own. In this context, the prerequisites and possibilities of “nation” were redefined.¹⁸

By placing Canada, Britain and the West Indies in the same interpretive frame, this project is inspired by the work of Allan Greer, Katie Pickles, Adele Perry and other scholars who have urged the importance of locating Canada’s histories – which were always plural and contested – in wider trans-Atlantic, trans-national, and global contexts.¹⁹ Adopting such an approach does not mean rebuffing the nation-state as “an object of inquiry,” but rather tracing and examining “its makings and un-makings.”²⁰ To this end, I define “nation” as a mutable, historically-specific construct that is always fraught with tension. I define the nation-state, on

¹⁸ Yet located within a global context of expansionist projects, Canadian efforts to annex territories in the West Indies were not peculiar. As the examples of Japan, Germany, Australia, the United States and others demonstrate, nations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were imperial entities, and nationalism was frequently deployed to justify imperial expansion. See footnote 14 herein.

¹⁹ Allan Greer, “Canadian History is so Boring,” *National Post*, 20 August 2005; Adele Perry, “Nation, Empire and the Writing of History in Canada in English,” 123-140; Katie Pickles, *Transnational Intentions and Cultural Cringe: History Beyond National Boundaries*, 141-161; and Michel Ducharme, “Canada in the Age of Revolutions: Rethinking Canadian Intellectual History in an Atlantic Perspective,” 162-186, in Christopher Dummit and Michael Dawson, eds., *Contesting Clío’s Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History* (London: University of London, Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009).

²⁰ Perry, “Nation, Empire, and the Writing of History,” 139. Perry draws insight here from Mariana Valverde, “Poststructuralist Gender Historians: Are We Those Names?” *Labour/Le Travail*, 25 (Spring 1990), 228. On the utility of the nation as an explanatory concept see Prasenjit Duara, “Transnationalism and the Challenge to National Histories,” in ed. Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 25-46; Antoinette Burton, ed., *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2003); David Thelen, “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” *Journal of American History* 86, 3 (December 1999), 965-975; and Antoinette Burton, “Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating ‘British’ History.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 10, 3 (September 1997), 227-248. For an instructive discussion of this question in the Australian context, see Neville Meaney, “Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian Historiography.” *Australian Historical Studies* 32, 116 (April 2001), 76-90; Jane Connors, “Response: Identity and History.” *Australian Historical Studies* 32, 116 (April 2001), 132-135; and John Rickard, “Response: Imagining the Unimaginable?” *Australian Historical Studies* 32, 116 (April 2001), 128-131.

the other hand, as a geo-political body that exercises sovereignty within defined territorial boundaries. Both the nation and the nation-state are conceived as sites of ideological domination that functioned to legitimize a general and usually homogenous vision of a particular community (which is defined by its exclusions just as much as its inclusions). "Dreams of a Tropical Canada" is concerned with both the "nation" and the nation-state because both were implicated in Canada-West Indies union campaigns. While often pursued beyond national boundaries, union advocates' efforts to access resources, secure commercial and strategic advantages, and fulfill the "white man's burden" in the West Indies were nonetheless inspired by national impulses. In effect, "nation" was defined as much from without as from within.

1.2 Race and the Structure of Empire

Scholars of the British Empire have long identified the period between 1880 and 1914 as one of territorial expansion, marked most notably by the "scramble for Africa." The period was also characterized by heightened anxiety and insecurity throughout the Empire. The United States' swift rebound after the Civil War, Germany's alarming rise following unification in 1871, Russia's foreboding presence in the East, and Japan's shocking victory in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, all threatened Britain's global power. Turmoil in the metropole compounded these anxieties: divisive debates about the expansion of the franchise and Irish Home Rule, fears of "socialism," and growing doubts about the power of free trade to quell international rivalries.²¹

²¹ See Duncan Bell, "Victorian visions of global order: an introduction," 5-10, in Bell, eds., *Victorian Visions of Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

While historians generally agree with this characterization of the period, they share little consensus about how the Empire functioned within this context. We consequently have several interpretive frameworks at our disposal to make sense of the impulses that generated imperial expansion and the processes by which British subjects world-wide interacted and understood one another. But none of these frameworks alone explain Canada-West Indies union campaigns.

Two seminal studies of British imperial expansion compete to inform our understanding of the Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (1961), and Peter Cain and Anthony Hopkins' *British Imperialism: innovation and expansion 1688-1914*.²² For Robinson and Gallagher, the expansionist impulse was centripetal, moving from the periphery to the center. Crises on the periphery, often prompted by imperial rivalries or indigenous peoples' resistance, compelled the imperial government to intervene. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, this intervention marked a transition from informal imperialism (economic dominance) to formal imperialism (direct rule).

Cain and Hopkins challenged this model with their theory of "gentlemanly capitalism." In many ways a reiteration of pre-Robinson and Gallagher interpretations, Cain and Hopkins argued that expansion was set in motion by "impulses emanating from the centre."²³ This

²² Robinson and Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1961); P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: innovation and expansion 1688-1914* (Harlow: Longman, 1993).

²³ Cain and Hopkins, 5.

centrifugal approach privileges the metropole, and more specifically the “gentlemen” inhabiting London’s financial and service sectors. The interests and demands of the metropolitan economy, then, provided the impetus for imperial expansion.

Campaigns for Canada-West Indies union elude both these models. While some Canadian bankers with financial investments in the West Indies supported union, they were only one segment of a diverse group of union advocates that included, as noted above, intellectuals, journalists, tourists, politicians, and a wide range of commercial interests. Nor was the expansionist impulse centrifugal. Union campaigns originated in Canada, but they often gained momentum from an expanding group of union proponents in the West Indies and Britain.

By emphasizing expansionist impulses on the periphery, Robinson and Gallagher’s thesis comes closer to explaining what some historians have called “sub-imperialism.”²⁴ Campaigns for Canadian expansion in the West Indies, like Australian and New Zealander designs on the South Pacific, Indian aspirations in the Middle East and eastern Africa, and South African dreams in Basutoland, Bechuanaland, Swaziland, and Rhodesia, originated on the periphery. And in each case, the imperial government was compelled, often reluctantly, to respond. Depending on the context, this response ranged from outright disapproval, to the

²⁴ See for example Colin Newbury, “Spoils of War: Sub-imperial Collaboration in South West Africa and New Guinea,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 16 (1988); Thompson, *Australian Expansion in the Pacific*; Robert Blythe, *Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

establishment of formal British control, to the transfer of existing British territories to the colonial/Dominion government in question.

But as an explanation of Canadian aspirations in the West Indies (and arguably in the other contexts as well) “sub-imperialism” is an equally deficient framework. The theory of sub-imperialism was first developed by Brazilian sociologist Ruy Mauro Marini in the 1960s to describe Brazilian complicity in U.S. imperialism in Latin America. In his interpretation, Brazil was a “surrogate” or “agent” of U.S. imperialism.²⁵ British imperial and Dominion historians have since adapted the concept to explain what might appropriately be termed lateral expansion initiatives within the British Empire. Like Marini, these historians identified and assessed the tensions between the two collaborating states (eg. between South Africa and Britain, or New Zealand and Britain) in their analyses. I argue, however, that in the Canada-West Indies case these tensions render the “sub” in “sub-imperialism” inappropriate. Canadian expansionists were not acting as agents of Britain (though they frequently framed their campaigns in terms that would be appealing to the imperial government). Their aspirations were very much inspired by a Canadian national project, a vision of a “Greater Canada” that included the West Indies. This vision strengthened over the forty year history of union initiatives, in step with Canada’s constitutional evolution.

²⁵ Ruy Mauro Marini, “Brazilian ‘interdependence’ and imperialist integration,” *Monthly Review* 17, 7 (December, 1965), 10-29; and Marini, “Brazilian subimperialism,” *Monthly Review* 23, 9 (January, 1972), 14-24. See also Daniel Zirker, “Brazilian Foreign Policy and Subimperialism During the Political Transition of the 1980s: A Review and Reapplication of Marini’s Theory,” *Latin American Perspectives* 21, 1 (Winter 1994), 115-131.

The most troubling omission within the sub-imperial literature is the general failure to problematize the coexistence of Dominion sub-imperialism with Dominion allegiance to the British Empire. Australian historian Raymond Evans has suggested, for example, that Australia “was interested in creating its own Pacific Island Empire.” But he concludes paradoxically that “Australian nationalism was not separate from loyalty to the British Empire.” Australia is at once a staunch – and sometimes ruthless – imperialist, and a loyal British colony whose interests and actions are generally consistent with those of Britain. But if Australia was interested in creating its own empire, how can this be reconciled with British interests? As Evans points out, the British government was reluctant to approve Australia’s expansionist inclinations in New Guinea, insisting that “the colonies were not at liberty to annex their own colonies.”²⁶ What then, did it mean for one colony to annex another? How could “sub-imperialists” in Canada, India, and the other Dominions be simultaneously loyal British subjects?

Studies of “sub-imperialism” also fail to capture the multi-directionality of imperial relationships. They tend towards a top-down approach that obscures the agency of subject peoples. Roger Thompson’s *Australian Expansion in the Pacific: The Expansionist Era 1820-1920* and Angus Ross’s *New Zealand aspirations in Pacific in the nineteenth century*, for example, overlook the role of subject peoples as key interlocutors in the renegotiation of imperial

²⁶ Raymond Evans, Clive Moore, Kay Saunders and Bryan Jamison, *1901: Our Future’s Past: Documenting Australia’s Federation* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 1997), 184-185. See also Roger C. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific: The Expansionist Era 1820-1920* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980).

relations.²⁷ My project addresses these deficiencies by analyzing West Indian complicity in, and resistance to, Canadians' expansionist plans in the West Indies.

"Sub-imperialism" and other unidirectional configurations of Empire were complicated by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler's call to bring metropole and colony "into one analytic field" in 1997, and, more recently by Tony Ballantyne, Alan Lester, and David Lambert's conception of Empire as a constellation of lateral circuits, networks, or webs. These latter studies have challenged the explanatory primacy of the metropole-colony framework that characterized British imperial history in the 1980s and 1990s. Ballantyne's insightful notion of an imperial "web" has been particularly influential. "At a general level," he argues, the web metaphor "underscores that the empire was a *structure*, a complex fabrication fashioned out of a great number of disparate parts that were brought together into a variety of new relationships." People, commodities, and ideas moved in and through different parts of the empire, refashioning imperial experiences, structures, and identities in myriad ways.²⁸

²⁷ Roger Thompson, *Australian Expansion in the Pacific*; Angus Ross, *New Zealand aspirations in the Pacific in the nineteenth century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

²⁸ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Tony Ballantyne, "Race and the webs of empire" *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 2, 3 (2001), para 39, 38, viewed 10 June 2007, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v002/2.3ballantyne.html; Alan Lester, "British Settler Discourse and the Circuits of Empire," *History Workshop Journal* 54 (2002), 25-48; Simon J. Potter, "Webs, Networks, and Systems: Globalization and the Mass Media in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire," *Journal of British Studies* 46 (July 2007), 621-646. See also David Lambert and Alan Lester, "Introduction: Imperial spaces, imperial subjects." In Lambert and Lester, eds. *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Angela Woollacott, *Gender and Empire* (Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); and Zoë Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections 1815-45: Patronage, The Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester:

The networked conception of Empire has much to recommend it, however it too fails to provide an adequate interpretive structure to explain Canada-West Indies union schemes. The union discourse circulated from different cities in Canada, Britain and the West Indies, and was reconstituted in the process. The imperial structure was thus more triangular than web-like. Moreover, with a conceptually and geographically expansive frame that criss-crosses throughout the Empire, it is also difficult to capture the complexities and specificities of any one particular space. As Lester and Lambert recognize themselves, “[s]cholars who have recently proposed a networked conception of empire generally consider it more useful to try to examine multiple meanings, projects, material practices, performances and experiences of colonial relations rather than locate their putative root causes, whether they are ‘economic’, ‘political’ or, indeed, ‘cultural’.”²⁹ While “Dreams of a Tropical Canada” does not claim to provide definitive

Manchester University Press, 2005). Of course inter-colonial connections have long been explored by scholars of migration. On inter-island migration in the British Caribbean see Howard Johnson, “Barbadian Immigrants in Trinidad, 1870-1897,” *Caribbean Studies* 13, 3 (1973), 5-30, and Bonham Richardson, *Caribbean Migrants: Environment and Human Survival on St. Kitts and Nevis* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983). On inter-island migration in the Pacific see for example, T. Damon Salesa, “Travel-Happy Samoa: Colonialism, Samoan Migration and a ‘Brown Pacific’,” *New Zealand Journal of History* 37, 2 (2003), 171-188. On indentured labour migration from Asia to the Caribbean, see Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Ron Ramdin, *Arising From Bondage: A History of the Indo-Caribbean People* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Madhavi Kale, “Projecting Identities: Empire and Indentured Labor Migration from India to Trinidad and British Guiana, 1836-1885,” in Peter van der Veer, ed., *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 73-92.

²⁹ Lambert and Lester, “Imperial spaces, imperial subjects,” 8.

answers, it is concerned with causation and change over time. Tracking accountability in the imperial past is of crucial import to the post-colonial present.

Lester and Lambert's critique of the center/periphery binary that ultimately inspired a more networked historical approach is nonetheless instructive. "The unquestioning use" of these categories, they argue, "serves not so much to describe, as to reify and perpetuate some of the many spatial distinctions enacted through colonial (and other) unequal relations. At its most damaging . . . this reproduction of a language of spatial primacy helps to bolster attitudes and practices of social/racial superiority."³⁰ My project pushes this observation further by insisting on the importance of destabilizing the juxtaposition between "white" and "non-white" colonies that has become entrenched and subsequently reified in colonial studies. Responses to Canadian expansion schemes were not divided neatly along racial, class and geographic lines. West Indian laborers of African descent, the islands' growing middle classes – comprised largely of West Indians of mixed European and African descent, and white subjects in Canada and the West Indies often reacted to union proposals in ways that defied the imperial logic of racial and geographic exclusivity. This is not to suggest that material and cultural disparities were mitigated by a common resistance or advocacy for trans-colonial union schemes. Such disparity meant, rather, that similar responses across racial and class boundaries were articulated in different ways, and often for different reasons.³¹

³⁰ Lambert and Lester, "Imperial spaces, imperial subjects," 8. See also Gyan Prakesh, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *The American Historical Review* 99, 5 (December 1994), 1475-1490.

³¹ The complicity of scholars in reifying race was articulated over 25 years ago by Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in J. M. Kousser and J. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford, 1982), 144.

To be sure, many contemporaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century constructed imperial geographies along racial lines. But these divisions are too often accepted uncritically by imperial historians, as well as Dominion historians who situate their work in a broader imperial context. This divide has come under greater scrutiny in recent years. "Tidy divisions between "colonies of settlement" and "colonies of occupation," argues Adele Perry, negate the fact that all colonies are ones of occupation . . . and risks erasing the politics of dispossession" in 'settler colonies'.³² The obfuscating work of this divide is equally evident in the main thrust of the "British World" historiography.³³ Developed over the past decade in response to the expanded scholarly attention given to Asia and Africa in the mainstream historiography of the British Empire, British World scholars have sought to relocate the settlement colonies at the center of British imperial history. They have focused almost exclusively on European (especially British) settlers, and have emphasized questions of identity formation and kinship ties across white settler populations in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada. In highlighting these connections and ignoring Euro-settler interactions with other colonies whose populations were comprised primarily of indigenous or African-descended peoples, British World scholars have assumed racial affinities and subsequently naturalized racial difference. These studies need to be expanded to include not only the

³² Adele Perry, "The State of Empire: Reproducing Colonialism in British Columbia, 1849-1871," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 2,2 (2001), para. 5, viewed 20 August 2006, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v002/2.2perry.html.

³³ See for example Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: UCP, 2005), Buckner and Carl Bridge, "Reinventing the British World," *The Round Table* (2003), 77-88, and Carl Bridge and Kent Fedorowich, eds., *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

linkages between the “white Dominions,” but also the circuits of empire that linked them to other areas of the world.

Processes of identity formation in Canada were not informed solely by the cultural and commercial relations forged with Britain and the other Dominions, but by an elaborate web of exchange that brought many Canadians in contact with Barbadians, Jamaicans, and Bahamians, to name only a few. The specificity and variability of these exchanges in different contexts of empire should remind us to historicize the apparent affinities that bound the “white settlement” Dominions and the metropole together. The transience of colonial subjects, their movements as laborers, tourists, and merchants between Jamaica and Ontario, or Barbados and Nova Scotia, produced geographically expansive networks that confounded the imperial logic of racial difference.³⁴

The difficulty of locating Canada-West Indies union campaigns in conventional frameworks of British imperial history underlines the complexity and messiness of Empire. It also highlights the need for a new framework that captures this complexity without reifying spatial and racial binaries, nor forfeiting causation, change over time, and local specificity.

³⁴ Nor were dreams of extra-continental expansion confined to settler colonies with majority white settler populations. From the First World War through the mid 1920s, a strain of Indian nationalists conducted a vigorous campaign to bring German East Africa under the Indian government’s control. See Robert Blythe, *Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and Thomas Metcalf, *Imperial Connections: India in the Indian Ocean Arena, 1860-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). India’s extensive contribution to the Allied war effort was instrumental to this campaign. Indian nationalists, like their Australian and Canadian counterparts, identified new colonial acquisitions as due compensation for their war contributions and a crucial indicator of national status. Imperial expansion was initiated and directed by the Indian government, often without the support (or knowledge) of imperial authorities in London. In this way, India’s sub-imperial activities were not unlike the late nineteenth century expansionist projects initiated by colonial governments in other parts of the Empire, such as those in southern Africa, Australia, and New Zealand.

“Dreams of a Tropical Canada” proposes an explanatory structure that is a hybrid of colonial studies (to account for local and material particularities) and the more recent circuitous approach to Empire (to destabilize imperial binaries and recognize the multiple “centers” of Empire). In attending to (but not re-centering) imperial power in London, this project also draws insights from more traditional approaches to Empire. Played out within the British imperial context, Canada-West Indies union campaigns could only go so far without the imperial government’s approval. Canadian annexationists leveraged what they believed gave them power – the Dominion’s national status and presumed “destiny” in the Western hemisphere, and their Anglo-Saxon “responsibility” to develop tropical regions and govern the “darker races” who inhabited them. But this power was always held in check – and most often quashed – by British interests in London.

1.3 Project Outline

“Dreams of a Tropical Canada” charts the rise and fall of Canada-West Indies union campaigns from 1883 to 1919. The first chapter following the introduction, chapter two, explores the impulses that stimulated the first union campaign in the mid-1880s. Led primarily by a contingent of commercial interests in Canada and supported by white planters in Jamaica and Barbados, the campaign arose from depressed economic conditions that were regionally specific. While the chief impetus was commercial, Canadian advocates couched their expansionist designs in broader national and imperial contexts.

Their campaign suffered from a limited support base and lacked official endorsement in each site, but it nevertheless generated considerable discussion in Canada, Britain and the West

Indies about the prerequisites and possibilities of extra-territorial governance. This is the focus of chapter three. Canadian aspirations in the West Indies are assessed in relation to Queenslanders' designs on eastern New Guinea in order to foreground the significance of nation-state status in determining a settler society's readiness for external "responsibilities." As a constitutional federation, Canada was theoretically more entitled than colonial Queensland to make extra-territorial claims. But at the same time, Canada was still considered a "child" in the imperial family and thus not ready for additional responsibilities. When the first campaign launched in 1883, Canada was less than two decades old and the government in Ottawa was preoccupied with a host of domestic problems. Regional discontent in British Columbia and the Maritimes, threats of secession in Nova Scotia, and mounting hostilities in the Northwest between white settlers and Aboriginal groups underlined the precarious nature of the new nation. The federal government was absorbed, moreover, with formidable schemes to settle and develop its newly-acquired western colony, the North-West Territory. Acquiring further colonies in the Caribbean was thought premature; the British and West Indian governments agreed.

Union campaigns gained momentum in the early twentieth century. Canada's unprecedented economic growth, the completion of a transcontinental railway and rapid population growth spurred westward expansion and renewed confidence in the nation-state's future. As chapter four reveals, changing geopolitical circumstances prompted some commentators to predict that the Empire's "center of gravity" would eventually shift from London to Ottawa. Rapid industrial development in Germany and the United States,

commencing in about 1870 and continuing to the outbreak of war in 1914, aroused anxieties in the British Empire about Britain's industrial supremacy.³⁵ These anxieties were compounded by the United States' increased influence in Latin America and the Caribbean after 1898. Japan's defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 also suggested that Australia and New Zealand would take on an increasingly important role in the Pacific. As the *Toronto Star* remarked in 1909, "A century ago Europe was virtually the whole world, and its ideas dominated the world. Since that time we have witnessed the rise of the United States, of Japan, of Canada, of Australia, and the awakening of China. European domination is passing away. The Monroe doctrine means the end of European domination in America. The rise of Japan means the end of the hope of European domination in Asia."³⁶ Canada's geographical position, abundant resources, and Anglo-Saxon heritage – "all the elements of greatness" – meant that Canada's "rise" would come to fruition during the twentieth century. While the nineteenth century had witnessed the rise of the United States, the twentieth century would be "Canada's century."³⁷

Support for Canada-West Indies union in the early twentieth century also stemmed from heightened discontent with Britain's administration of the islands. While the elimination of bounties on European grown beet sugar – a system that wreaked havoc on West Indian economies from 1846 – provided some relief to the sugar-producing islands, a series of events

³⁵ Geoffrey R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971): 8-10, 173.

³⁶ *Toronto Star*, 10 June 1909.

³⁷ *Toronto Star*, 16 March 1901.

provoked criticism of the imperial government in Canada, Britain, and especially in the West Indies.³⁸ In the first decade of the twentieth century, the imperial government abandoned the mail contract, exhibited little interest in the development of telegraphic and steamship services, removed white troops from the islands, and failed to address frequent episodes of racial violence against West Indian laborers in Central America (whose dislocations were, ironically, the result of Britain's long disengagement with the region). Reported widely in Canada and Britain as well, these events were an indication, as the *Toronto Star* surmised in August 1905, that the imperial government "would like to unload" its West Indian colonies.³⁹

Chapter five re-centers the discussion on the other side of the Atlantic to assess how the campaign for Canada-West Indies union reverberated in the imperial metropole. As the construction of the Panama Canal approached completion in the early twentieth century, the imperial government reassessed the economic and strategic value of its West Indian colonies. Officials in the Colonial Office anticipated the eventual transfer of these colonies to Canada, but they did not want to accelerate the process at Britain's expense. They consequently discouraged union, but framed their disapproval in humanitarian rather than economic terms. Employing the language of British imperial benevolence, colonial authorities argued that handing over the islands to Canada would constitute a "betrayal of trust" to West Indians of color. Canada's poor treatment of people of color was consistently cited as grounds for Britain retaining control

³⁸ The Brussels Convention convened in 1902 and took effect in January 1903. See Geoffrey Allen Pigman, "Hegemony and Trade Liberalization Policy: Britain and the Brussels Sugar Convention of 1902," *Review of International Studies* 23, 2 (April 1997), esp. 200-210, and Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 157-161.

³⁹ *Toronto Star*, 21 August 1905.

over the islands.⁴⁰ These claims were not without foundation. With the increased migration to Canada of West Indians, South Asians and African Americans in the years before the First World War, there was a corresponding increase in incidents of racial discrimination. These incidents aroused concerns in the West Indies as well as Britain about the feasibility of union schemes.

During the First World War, the official response to union proposals changed dramatically in both London and Ottawa. Chapter six charts this heightened interest. The Allied occupation of German colonies in Africa and the Pacific in the early years of the war generated an ongoing discussion about how the global map would be redrawn after the war. The other British Dominions had already occupied and laid claim to new territories, so Canadian advocates of union – most prominent among them Prime Minister Robert Borden himself – thought the time was apt for Canada to absorb the West Indies. Yet the form of governance envisioned in Ottawa –territorial rather than provincial status, a limited franchise, and restricted mobility to continental Canada – was incompatible with the emerging political and social milieu in the West Indies.

Chapter seven juxtaposes the war-time union momentum in Canada and Britain with the increasingly assertive demands of black subjects in Canada and the West Indies for British justice, greater political representation, and self-determination. Increased interest in London and Ottawa to place the West Indies under Canadian control occurred contemporaneously with

⁴⁰ Minutes, 4 April 1911, CO, 23/267, The National Archives of the United Kingdom; Susan Pederson, "Modernity and Trusteeship: Tensions of Empire in Britain Between the Wars," in Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger, eds., *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001), 204, 217.

the increased migration of West Indians to Canada. Hundreds of West Indians migrated to Canada as laborers, students, and soldiers. Many encountered racist attitudes and exclusionary practices that sometimes turned violent. West Indians contested these racist practices by publicizing specific episodes in the press, establishing periodicals to articulate their claims for equality, forming protective associations, and appealing to their imperial and colonial governments for redress. As West Indian soldiers demobilized and returned home during the spring and summer of 1919, the war-time promise of greater autonomy and respect for colonial peoples proved increasingly hollow. The defeat of the racial equality clause in the League of Nations covenant, demobilization riots in England and Wales, and mass unemployment, labor unrest and general lawlessness at home incited West Indians' malcontent with British colonial rule. As their faith in British justice faded, so too did the prospect of Canada-West Indies union.

2. Commerce, Nation, Empire

England, although possessing extensive dependencies which aid to absorb her surplus manufactures, is ever seeking new and additional outlets. For forty years she has preached the doctrine of Free Trade, with no other result than to excite the apprehensions of her contemporaries, who, beneath the seductive banner of philanthropy, detect the treacherous flag of National selfishness.

– Charles Levy, Jamaica, November 1884¹

In *Reminiscences of a Tour through the West Indies*, published in Saint John, New Brunswick around 1885, writer C. Colville Malton underlined the geographical and commercial logic of having the British West Indies annexed to either Canada or the United States. “By virtue of their Geographical position,” he argued, “as well as considerations which illustrate the law of economic gravitation, Barbados, Jamaica, and the other West India Islands are destined to be attracted and absorbed by one or other of the powerful States on the Continent of America.” Because the United States possessed the “greatest centripetal force,” it was “in the natural order of things” that the islands should be annexed to the Republic. Yet, on the other hand, West Indian sentiment and loyalty to Britain made absorption to Canada a logical outcome. “Canada and these islands are already to a considerable extent united by the ties of mutual accommodation and common interest. Canada supplies many useful and necessary articles; these Islands do the same for Canada. Annexation would therefore cause a great increase in trade.” With an emphasis on Jamaica, Malton furnished a brief history of the islands,

¹ Levy, Letter to the Editor, *Halifax Chronicle*, 29 November 1884, as copied in Levy, *Correspondence on Confederation with the Dominion of Canada* (Kingston, JA: DeCordova & Co., 1885), 13.

described their diverse landscapes and populations, and summarized their agricultural industries and export products.²

Malton's efforts were not isolated but rather emerged from an ongoing campaign in the mid 1880s for some form of commercial and political union of Canada and the British West Indies. His travelogue highlights the complexity of the union question – the multitude of actors (in Canada, the West Indies, and Britain) and interests (commercial, imperial, national, hemispheric) vested in the outcome of this campaign. This chapter focuses on the commercial impetus for (and implications of) union because the campaign was driven first and foremost by commercial interests. But the commercial side of the question was inextricably connected to broader concerns about nation and empire. As the first section demonstrates, Canadians identified union as a means to secure free access to West Indian export markets, agricultural resources unavailable in Canada, and to further consolidate Britain's colonies in the Americas.

The commercial impulses driving the union campaign were complicit in a national project. The abrogation of the Anglo-American reciprocity treaty in 1866, which had provided British North American colonies with access to United States' markets, had catalyzed the Canadian federation of 1867. The United States' subsequent adoption of a protectionist trade policy convinced contemporaries that the prosperity – and perhaps even the survival – of the Canadian colonies hinged on the continued consolidation of British North America. While the development of the Northwest Territories purchased in 1868 from the Hudson's Bay Company was the critical first step in this process, the West Indies rapidly assumed an important role in

² C. Colville Malton, *Reminiscences of a Tour through the West Indies* (Saint John, NB: E. J. Armstrong, c. 1885). Quotations can be found on p. 2.

Canadian plans for national development. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald's first budget included the prerogative to seek alternative export markets in the Caribbean and Latin America. Even after his Conservative government imposed a protective tariff in 1879 as part of its "National Policy," it continued to expand and strengthen Canadian trade with the West Indies. This commitment met with considerable support throughout Canada and especially the Maritimes. In the general election of 1882, in which the Macdonald Conservatives won 139 parliamentary seats to only 71 for the Liberal opposition, one of the Conservatives' effective rallying cries was to encourage trade "with all the world" and in particular with Britain's West Indian colonies.³

In this way, Canada-West Indies union was part of a larger project of national creation that looked increasingly towards the West Indies to stimulate economic growth in Canada proper. The imagined "nation" of the 1880s was constituted not only by an ideological preoccupation with the development of the Canadian West and, subsequently, east-west trade, but also by a growing fixation on the West Indies as an economic complement to Canada. This chapter thus builds on, and departs from Doug Owsram's classic study *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West 1856-1900*.⁴ In the 1880s there were, indeed, multiple promises of Eden.

³ Brian Douglas Tennyson, "Introduction," in Tennyson, ed., *Canadian-Caribbean Relations: Aspects of a Relationship* (Sydney: Centre for International Studies, Cape Breton University, 1990), 4-7. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 38-45.

⁴ Owsram, *Promise of Eden* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

West Indian advocates of union, largely white planters and merchants in Jamaica, had similar commercial motives, but their specific economic circumstances differed vastly. This is the subject of the chapter's second section. Britain's free trade policy since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 meant that West Indian sugar, which had previously depended on preferential treatment in the British market, was unable to compete with state-subsidized European-grown beet sugar.⁵ To some West Indian planters, annexation to Canada seemed to offer the best chance of economic salvation. But as the final section demonstrates, the imperial government was unwilling to endorse a constitutional arrangement that might injure British trade.

2.1 'Possessing a great South as well as a great West'

The prospect of Canada-West Indies union was first introduced in the 1870s by the short-lived "Canada First" movement. As outlined in its platform of 1875, Canada First stood for the "British Connection, Consolidation of the Empire – and in the meantime a voice in treaties affecting Canada."⁶ The imperial "consolidation" Canada Firsters sought was an

⁵ James Patterson Smith, "The Liberals, Race, and Political Reform in the British West Indies, 1866-1874," *Journal of Negro History* 79, 2 (Spring 1994), 131-146; O. Nigel Bolland, "Systems of Domination after Slavery: The Control of Land and Labor in the British West Indies after 1838," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 23, 4 (Oct., 1981), 591-619; S.B. Saul, "The British West Indies in Depression, 1880-1914," *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 12, 3 (1958), 3-25. Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), chps. 8-9.

⁶ Canada First was mobilized, in part, by the imperial government's failure to appreciate Canadian interests. Members were particularly disturbed by the Washington Treaty of 1871, wherein Britain conceded to the United States fishing rights and access to the St. Lawrence River, but failed to obtain analogous concessions from the United States' government for Canadian subjects (most notably compensation for the Fenian raids in the late 1860s and early 1870s). *Canada First: A Memorial of the Late William Foster, Q.C.* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1890), 8. R.G. Haliburton to William Foster, 29 April

“alliance of nations” in which Canada would eventually enjoy a greater voice in imperial affairs and especially in treaties affecting Canada.⁷ The second tenet of the Canada First platform, much less known among historians of Canada, was “Closer trade relations with the British West India Islands, with a view to ultimate political connection.”⁸ Consistent with the purpose of Empire consolidation, members envisioned this political connection within the wider imperial structure. But Canada First found no occasion to discuss at length the prospect of some form of political relationship between Canada and the British West Indies. The group suffered from internal divisions, changes in leadership, inconsistent membership, and, as an Ontario-centered movement, a lack of national appeal. By 1876, the movement had largely disintegrated.⁹

Proposals for a Canada-West Indies union reemerged in the 1880s. Like their predecessors in the Canada First movement, advocates were often aligned with broader schemes for imperial consolidation. Shareholders of the Montreal-based Planters’ Bank of Canada, a newly incorporated institution chartered to conduct business in the West Indies, advanced the idea of union early in 1882.¹⁰ To promote the project they enlisted as their

1878, William Alexander Foster Papers, F70-MU1058, Box B299654, Provincial Archives of Ontario. A helpful summary of the aims and objects of Canada First can also be found in the finding aid of Foster’s papers.

⁷ Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 49-77.

⁸ *Canada First*, 8.

⁹ Berger, *The Sense of Power*, 69-77.

¹⁰ The shareholders included A.W. Ogilvie, M.H. Gault, Thomas Walmsley, S.C. Stevenson, Richard Truax, T. Craig, and S.H. Ewing. *An Act to incorporate the Planters’ Bank of Canada*, Acts of the Parliament of Canada, passed in the forty-fifth year of the reign of her Majesty Queen Victoria, and in the fourth session of the fourth parliament, Ottawa, assented to 17 May 1882.

publicist A. Spencer Jones, a prolific writer with strong Conservative and protectionist views. Born in England of white Barbadian parents, Jones was effusively loyal to Britain and supported some form of imperial consolidation.¹¹ He identified the incorporation of the Planters' Bank and the Conservative government's recent approval of a steamship subsidy to develop trade between Canada and the West Indies as stages in a process toward Canada's ultimate absorption of the islands. The Planters' bank never made a loan or accepted a deposit, but Jones became one of the most outspoken voices for Canada-West Indies union.¹²

To Jones, Canada-West Indies union would serve British imperial interests by consolidating Britain's colonies in North America. Recognizing that imperial federation was impractical, however, he advocated instead "a group of allied though independent nations ruled by kindred princes [and] holding the same relations to Britain as Brazil does to Portugal," rather than imperial federation. Popular among many British Conservatives from the 1870s through the 1890s, the imperial federation movement arose from heightened anxieties about Empire disintegration. Growing unrest in the colonies, coupled with Britain's declining

¹¹ Jones, "Advantages to the Conservative Party of WI Confederation," enclosed in Jones to Macdonald, 2 August 1884, fol. 145700-01, vol. 323, M. P., LAC. Prominent advocates of imperial federation included J.A. Froude, J.R. Seeley, James Bryce, Archibald Primrose (Lord Rosebery), L.T. Hobhouse, J.A. Hobson, Joseph Chamberlain, W.T. Stead, and Cecil Rhodes. See Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. 12-20. See also Ged Martin, "The Idea of 'Imperial Federation'," in Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin, eds., *Reappraisals in British Imperial History* (London: MacMillan, 1975), 121-139, and John L. Gordon, Jr., "Canada and the Imperial Federation Movement," in Colin M. Coates, ed., *Imperial Canada 1867-1917* (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh, Centre of Canadian Studies, 1997), 43-61. Canadian League members included D'Alton McCarthy, Leonard Tilley, Israel Tarte, Archibald McGoun, J. Castell Hopkins, George T. Denison, and Frederick C. Denison.

¹² J. Castell Hopkins, ed., *Canada: an encyclopedia of the country*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Linscott Publishing Co., 1898), 484.

industrial power relative to Germany and the United States, aroused concerns about the Empire's future. To imperial federationists such as J.A. Froude, J.R. Seeley, James Bryce, J.A. Hobson, Joseph Chamberlain, and Cecil Rhodes, centralized control through some form of imperial council in Britain offered the best solution. But the movement found limited support in the self-governing colonies because it threatened to curb colonial autonomy.¹³

The consolidation of British territory in North America fit with broader agendas for imperial unity, but Canadian advocates of expansion in the West Indies cared first and foremost about Canada's future in the Western hemisphere. Expansionists anticipated a future in which Canada would assume a pre-eminent position in the hemisphere and perhaps even the Empire. Rampant political corruption and the rise of Jim Crow in the United States suggested the Republic might not endure. With America "torn by faction and honeycombed by corruption," Jones argued, "[w]e are destined to be the great Anglo-Saxon power of this continent. . . but to do this, we need a south as well as a west." Reflecting on the Prime Minister's support for the

¹³ Jones, "Advantages to the Conservative Party of WI Confederation," enclosed in Jones to Macdonald, 2 August 1884, fol. 145700-01, vol. 323, M. P., LAC. Other prominent advocates of imperial federation included Archibald Primrose (Lord Rosebery), L.T. Hobhouse, and W.T. Stead. See Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), esp. 12-20. See also Ged Martin, "The Idea of 'Imperial Federation'," in Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin, eds., *Reappraisals in British Imperial History* (London: MacMillan, 1975), 121-139. The Canadian Imperial Federation League opened its first branch in Montreal in 1885, with local branches opening soon after in Halifax, Victoria, Ottawa, Toronto, and other towns. It enjoyed the largest following in Ontario, where Empire loyalty was strongest, but it never developed popular support. The Canadian League, like its parent organization in Britain, was hampered and ultimately quashed by internal division and a lack of official sanction. and John L. Gordon, Jr., "Canada and the Imperial Federation Movement," in Colin M. Coates, ed., *Imperial Canada 1867-1917* (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh, Centre of Canadian Studies, 1997), 43-61. Canadian League members included D'Alton McCarthy, Leonard Tilley, Israel Tarte, Archibald McGoun, J. Castell Hopkins, George T. Denison, and Frederick C. Denison.

steamship subsidy in the *Toronto Mail*, Jones asked rhetorically, “[m]ay not Sir John Macdonald, with his usual farsightedness, be contemplating a day, not very distant, when increased mutual knowledge, and commercial and financial intercourse, may render West Indians desirous of becoming politically attached to Canada as Federal provinces of our Dominion?” Southward expansion, he predicted, would surely follow westward expansion. “Do I assume too much in believing that [Macdonald] sees with prophetic eye the period – not so distant – when we shall possess a great South as well as a great West[?]”¹⁴ Jones wrote to the Prime Minister in May 1883 to outline the benefits of federation and to urge him to consider the proposal. Macdonald expressed cautious interest, but advised Jones that further consideration awaited evidence of widespread West Indian support for the scheme.¹⁵

Expanding the scope of Canada’s protective tariff to the West Indies, Jones argued, would broaden the market for Canadian natural products and would assuage the farmers, fishermen and lumber producers alienated by the tariff. Canadian manufacturers would enjoy new protected markets and have opportunities to initiate new industries previously unknown in Canada, such as the cultivation of silk, indigo, and other tropical products. West Indian staple exports such as sugar and fruit would encourage the development and expansion of

¹⁴ *Toronto Mail*, 3 June 1882. See also Alice Stewart, “Canadian-West Indian Union, 1884-1885,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 31, 4 (December 1950), 372.

¹⁵ Jones to Macdonald, 22 May 1883, fol. 188077-188080, vol. 393, John A. Macdonald Papers (hereafter M.P.), Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC). The Prime Minister found none of the members of his cabinet whom he consulted particularly keen about the annexation proposal. Minister of Finance Leonard Tilley advised Macdonald that annexation, from a commercial perspective, would not benefit Canada. The Dominion conducted considerable trade with Jamaica. If customs duties on Jamaican imports were lifted, Canada would lose approximately two million dollars revenue.

sugar refineries and canning factories in Canada. The present Confederation, moreover, was weakened by a lack of climatic variation. As a result, inter-provincial trade could never be very large. "Commerce in its largest developments follows the lines of longitude, not of latitude, as is our case at present." A reciprocity agreement with the West Indies would address this imbalance somewhat, but their incorporation in the Canadian federation would secure broad and ongoing commercial interchange.¹⁶

In the summer of 1884 Jones' campaign received popular attention in the Canadian press. This heightened interest was a direct result of the trade negotiations taking place between the United States and, on behalf of the British West Indies, the British Minister to Washington. Earlier that year the United States had negotiated a trade agreement with Spain, which removed all existing duties and tariffs between the United States and Cuba and Puerto Rico. This agreement caused alarm in Ottawa, as the Spanish West Indies ranked fifth in total dollar value of Canadian exports. The British West Indies ranked fourth. Negotiations for a United States–British West Indies trade agreement threatened to shut Canada out of the West Indian market altogether.¹⁷

Canada-West Indies union seemed to provide a solution. A range of newspapers – both Liberal and Conservative – expressed enthusiasm about the idea. The *St. John Telegraph*, the *Halifax Morning Herald*, the *Ottawa Free Press*, the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Toronto Mail* published

¹⁶ "Notes on the Admission of the British West Indies and British Guiana into the Dominion," enclosed in Jones to Macdonald, 2 August 1884, fol. 145707-10, vol. 393, M.P., LAC.

¹⁷ R.A. Shields, "Canada, the Foreign Office & the Caribbean Market, 1884-1895," *Dalhousie Review* 58, 4 (1978-79), 703-704.

commercial and demographic statistics about the West Indies in an effort to highlight the merits of the proposal.¹⁸ Not surprisingly, the central Canadian newspapers emphasized the benefit to Canadian manufacturers, while the Maritime newspapers emphasized the advantages for exports of fish. The United States, the *Free Press* argued, was establishing a foothold in the West Indies in order to acquire markets for American manufactures. Why should Canada not do the same? Annexing British Guyana and the West Indian islands would increase Canada's population by one-fourth – an increase that would undoubtedly benefit Canada in general, and Canadian manufacturers in particular.¹⁹ "It is impossible we could annex over 112,000 square miles of tropical territory with a present population of over 1,500,000 exporting in abundance nearly all the tropical products that we require and purchasing largely nearly every natural and manufactured product of Canada without receiving large benefit therefrom."²⁰ With "sole control of their markets," the *Herald* observed, "we would certainly have a much better market for our fish than now. At present we have to compete on equal terms, - and in some cases, unequal terms – with the whole world, in every island of the West Indian group, no matter what its nationality." Union would provide Canada with "practically a monopoly" of the British West Indian market.²¹

¹⁸ See for example the *Halifax Morning Herald*, 17 July, 25 August, 27 August, 11 September, 1884; *Ottawa Free Press*, 16 August, 18 August, 1 November, 18 September, 1884; *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 August, 19 August, 1884; *St. John Telegraph*, as cited in the *Halifax Morning Herald*, 8 September, 1884; *Toronto Mail*, 3 September, 4 September, 1884.

¹⁹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 28 August 1884.

²⁰ *Halifax Morning Herald*, 8 September 1884.

²¹ *Halifax Morning Herald*, 30 August 1884.

To opponents of union, the commercial drawbacks outweighed the advantages.²² The *Montreal Gazette* and the *Toronto Globe* appreciated the benefits of a more diverse economy and a wider market, but these hardly compensated for the expenditure required to maintain the West Indies. Canada would have to assume the responsibility and expense for public works, the development of internal resources, the maintenance of local militia, the administration of justice, and would have to provide subsidies to the colonies.²³ *Montreal's Journal of Commerce* and the *Halifax Morning Chronicle* were more skeptical about the trade advantages. Free entry of West Indian sugar – currently subject to a high duty – would create a substantial loss of revenue, it would harm Canada's sugar refineries, and, most significantly, the Canadian market was nowhere near big enough to consume West Indian sugar.²⁴ "We cannot take free sugar from Jamaica without either depositing our revenue or putting increased duties on other articles of consumption. We cannot take from this nursemaid of the Antilles half the sweets she desires to dispose of, and she might be discontented with the discovery of our inability."²⁵

Despite these criticisms and concerns, Jones' efforts morphed into a trans-Atlantic campaign during the summer of 1884. While it is unclear whether Jones ever visited the West

²² See for example the *Toronto Globe*, 2 August, 23 August, 2 September; *Montreal Gazette*, 11 September, 15 September, 1884; the *Journal of Commerce* (Montreal), 15 August, 19 September, 26 September, 1884; *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 1 September, 4 September, 1884.

²³ *Toronto Globe*, 18 August, 1884; *Montreal Gazette*, 9 September 1884.

²⁴ *Journal of Commerce*, 29 August, 1884; *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 2 September, 1884.

²⁵ *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 2 September 1884. Opponents of federation also argued that Canadian flour did not fare well in the tropics, there was scarce demand for coffee in Canada, and, contrary to the contention of annexation advocates, Newfoundland would not be compelled to enter Confederation if Canada annexed Jamaica because Newfoundland did not rely heavily on the Jamaican market for its fish exports. *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 August 1884.

Indies, he published letters on the subject in several British West Indian newspapers and established contacts with prominent men in Jamaica and elsewhere in the region. His efforts to promote the merits of a Canada-West Indies union were persuasive. By June, 1884 the chief movers in the union campaign were white Jamaican planters and merchants.

2.2. 'Perish the colonies so long as England obtains sugar at a cheap price'

West Indian responses to the union question were animated by entirely different circumstances. Britain's commitment to free trade since the 1840s had left West Indian products largely unprotected in the world economy. Sugar producing colonies, in particular, were dealt a serious blow. Unable to compete with European grown beet sugar, their island economies were devastated. Conditions in the colonies were made direr by unrepresentative and self-interested colonial governments. Jamaica, which exemplified the political, racial and economic turmoil rampant in the British West Indies in the latter half of the nineteenth century, became the focal point of union advocates in the 1880s. The peasant uprising in the Jamaican township of Morant Bay in October 1865, and its violent suppression by Governor Edward Eyre, attracted empire-wide attention. The Morant Bay disturbance symbolized the struggle of former slaves that had persisted since emancipation in 1838. While emancipation had granted slaves their freedom, the social, political and economic structures that ordered society before the 1830s remained largely intact. The "plantocracy" and the merchant elite – aided in no small way by the colonial government – sought to maintain the pre-emancipation status quo of white privilege and black servitude. The large majority of Jamaicans were denied representation in

the island assembly and the right to vote, fair wages and respectable working conditions, and the resources to obtain freehold land.²⁶

The Colonial Office in London did little to address these blatant inequalities. By 1865, as Thomas Holt has argued, the imperial government “was deaf to any suggestion that peasant proprietorship might offer a road to economic recovery in Jamaica. That deafness reflected not only its commitment to capitalist agriculture in Jamaica but also its inability to even conceive of an alternative economy based on black initiative and enterprise.”²⁷ This triumph of self-interest and pragmatism over humanitarian concerns was reflected in the imperial government’s response to the Morant Bay disturbance. Under pressure from humanitarian and missionary groups in London, the government condemned the brutal excesses of Governor Eyre’s actions in suppressing the riot. But the reforms implemented by the imperial government failed to address the inequalities that inspired the riot in the first place. The government’s principal concern was to establish the political conditions necessary for Jamaica’s plantation economy to recover and thereby ensure the colony’s financial solvency. Rather than widen the island’s franchise to minimize the discontent caused by oligarchic rule, the government eliminated the elective assembly and expanded the powers of the Governor. Extending the franchise was

²⁶ James Patterson Smith, “The Liberals, Race, and Political Reform in the British West Indies, 1866-1874,” *Journal of Negro History* 79, 2 (Spring 1994), 131-146; Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), chps. 8-9; Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920* (Mona, JA: UWI Press, 2004), ch. 1; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 406-424, 435-441.

²⁷ Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 278-279.

dismissed as impractical primarily because the populace was thought racially unfit.²⁸ The colonial government thereafter consisted of a legislative council with six (later nine) official and six unofficial members.

Local planters and merchants expressed discontent with these reforms soon after their implementation in 1866. They wanted more control over the island's revenue and expenditure, and they petitioned the imperial government, unsuccessfully, to restore the old representative system. The imperial government was compelled to consider reforms in 1882 when the unofficial members of the legislative council resigned over dissatisfaction with the Colonial Office's ruling in the 'Florence incident'. The ruling required the colonial government to absorb half the expenditure resulting from Governor Anthony Musgrave's erroneous detention of the vessel Florence in 1887.²⁹

In 1884 the imperial government conceded a majority of elected members to the legislative council, with the proviso that the Colonial Office retained the power to increase the

²⁸ Smith, "The Liberals, Race, and Political Reform," 135.

²⁹ Under the charter of a Venezuelan General, the *Florence* was transporting armaments from Venezuela to St. Thomas in 1877 when it docked at Kingston harbor for repairs. Suspicious of the vessel's purpose, Jamaican Governor Anthony Musgrave ordered its detention. In *Musgrave v. Pulido*, the British Privy Council ruled in favor of Pulido and ordered the Jamaican government to pay half the expenditure resulting from the detention. British Parliamentary Papers (hereafter BPP), 1882, Cd. 3453, Jamaica. *Correspondence respecting the case of the ship 'Florence'*. BPP, 1884, Cd. 3840, West Indies. *Report of the Royal Commission appointed in 1882*; BPP, 1884, Cd. 3854, Jamaica. *Petition from the inhabitants of Jamaica for a change in the constitution of that colony*; BPP, 1884, Cd. 4140, Jamaica. *Further Correspondence respecting the constitution of the legislative council in Jamaica*. Ernest C. Thomas and Charles L. Attenborough, *Leading cases in constitutional law briefly stated: with introduction and notes* (London: Stevens & Haynes, 1908), 87-88. Joseph C. Ford, *The Handbook of Jamaica* (Kingston: Government Printing Office, 1890), 55.

number of official members (to secure an official majority) if necessary.³⁰ In the first elections following these reforms, the monetary requirement to hold office was set so high that it restricted eligible candidates to the planter and merchant elite. No black Jamaicans were elected, and only five council members were native to the island. At the recommendation of a Royal Commission, the franchise was also widened. But this too did little to increase black Jamaican political participation. "Electors had to be men of substantial property, qualifying by virtue of literacy, homeownership, and a payment of at least one pound in property taxes. If not a homeowner, a prospective voter had to have paid thirty shillings in direct taxes on personal property."³¹ For small-scale planters, merchants and landholders, as well as the rising professional classes who aspired to positions in government, these reforms were small consolation.

In a letter to the *Colonial Standard*, Jamaica's principal anti-government newspaper, Spencer Jones assured Jamaicans that union with Canada would correct many of the wrongs afflicted by the imperial and colonial governments. Canada would restore Jamaica's legislative assembly, administer its government with funds from Ottawa, and encourage investors to develop the island's unexploited resources.³² The *Standard* expressed interest in the idea. Union with Canada would alleviate the perils of geographic isolation and ensure that the island would

³⁰ Denis Benn, *The Caribbean: An Intellectual History 1774-2003* (Kingston, JA: Ian Randle Publishers, 2004), 65-66.

³¹ Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 340-341. The literacy requirement was waived during the first elections. See Holt, 469, fn. 87. Of Jamaica's total population of 580,805 in 1884, those registered included 98 Indians, 2,578 "mulattoes", 3,766 "African", and 1,001 European voters.

³² *Colonial Standard and Jamaica Despatch*, 4 April 1883.

no longer “be treated as a serf and an alien” by officials in London. Annexation to either the United States or Canada was inevitable, the *Standard* averred, but Canada was the preferred choice because Jamaica could remain within the Empire.³³ Such an arrangement, however, should only be entered after Jamaica attained an appropriate measure of self-government. “Jamaica must be a free agent before she can dispose of her fortunes or determine her destiny. At present she is a poor, helpless ward to whom a cruel Guardian refuses liberty of action or of choice because he wants to keep her possessions among his own needy pensioners or dependents.” Local autonomy, the *Trelawny Advertiser* concurred, must precede union with Canada.³⁴

Jamaican merchant Michael Solomon was less patient about the timeline for union. Born in London in 1818, Solomon moved to Jamaica early in life to live with his brother, a successful Kingston auctioneer. He later worked in two of the island’s commercial firms, first in Spanish town at A.N. Henriques and Coy, and later at Bravo Bros. and Coy of St. Ann’s Bay. Active in politics, he was a nominated member of the Legislative Council for several years and an ardent opponent of Crown colony government. Solomon was one of the unofficial members of the Council who resigned over the Florence incident on the grounds that “the damages were incurred in pursuance of imperial policy and objects” rather than Jamaican interests. He

³³ *Colonial Standard*, 13 April 1883.

³⁴ *Colonial Standard*, 12 March 1884; *Trelawny Advertiser* as cited in the *Colonial Standard*, 12 March 1884.

returned to the Council as an elected member following the reforms conceded by the imperial government during the Royal Commission of 1882-84.³⁵

Solomon became Jones' most tireless ally for federation. In June 1884 he travelled to London, where he discussed the proposal with Sir Charles Tupper, the Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, and members of the West India Committee. Tupper promised him that the Canadian government would encourage any scheme to advance the interests of both Jamaica and Canada, but warned that he "saw many and serious obstacles in the way" of federation, "all of which would receive careful consideration in case a formal proposal for union was made by Jamaica."³⁶ Solomon's meeting with the West India Committee was more encouraging. Several members with commercial interests in Jamaica were persuaded by his arguments and formed a sub-committee to formalize and advance the proposal. The sub-committee subsequently passed a resolution approving "the scheme for the entrance of Jamaica as a Province into the Canadian Dominion." It urged Solomon to place the proposal before the Jamaica Legislature without haste so that the Canadian government, assured of Jamaican support, could take up the matter in its own parliament. "[I]n any communication Mr. Solomon may have with Sir J[ohn] Macdonald," the resolution continued, "he may be assured of the support of the Jamaica Proprietors & Merchants in Great Britain." The sub-committee also

³⁵ National Library of Jamaica (hereafter NLJ), Kingston, Biographical Notes, Michael Solomon; *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, 6 May 1892.

³⁶ Charles Tupper to John A. Macdonald, 8 July 1884, reprinted in E.M. Saunders, ed., *The Life and Letters of the Rt. Hon. Sir Charles Tupper*, (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1916), 34. Macdonald encouraged Tupper to "continue to let Derby and the Cabinet know" of West Indian interest in joining Canada because "[i]t will serve to show them our growing importance." See Macdonald to Tupper, 4 June 1884, Saunders, *Life and Letters*.

resolved that a deputation of the West India Committee would present the proposal to the Colonial Secretary, Lord Derby.³⁷

In preparation for this meeting, the sub-committee drafted a “Memorandum on the proposal for the entrance of Jamaica as a Province into the Dominion of Canada.” The document explained the impetus for the proposal and tentatively outlined the economic and constitutional terms under which Jamaica would be annexed. The island’s proprietors and merchants were mobilized, in sum, by the “restriction of the market in the United Kingdom for Jamaica Sugar in consequence of the continental bounty system, the uncertainty of the market in the United States owing to reciprocity treaties allowing the import of a considerable quantity of [Cuban and Puerto Rican] Sugar duty free, and the possibility of a growing import of Sugar into the United States from the bounty-giving countries of Europe.” Federation with Canada would provide Jamaica with a market on “some basis of permanence” and encourage investment in the sugar industry.³⁸

Jamaica’s customs and excise duties would form part of Canada’s consolidated revenue, and in return Canada would pay Jamaica annual subsidies, absorb the costs of the Lieutenant-Governor’s office, the militia, hospitals, and penitentiary, judicial and customs offices,

³⁷ Minutes of a Meeting of Jamaican Proprietors and Merchants, 17 June, 7 August 1884, Minutes of the West India Committee, West India Committee Records, Special Collections, University of the West Indies Library, St. Augustine. Memorandum on the proposal for the entrance of Jamaica as a Province into the Dominion of Canada, enclosed in “Jamaica Re: Annexation by Canada,” undated, George Baden Powell Papers, G.B.P. 13/102, Parliamentary Archives, London.

³⁸ Memorandum on the proposal for the entrance of Jamaica as a Province into the Dominion of Canada, enclosed in “Jamaica Re: Annexation by Canada,” undated, George Baden Powell Papers, G.B.P. 13/102, Parliamentary Archives, London.

telegraphic and postal services, and assume Jamaica's debt (relative to the debts of the Canadian provinces at the time of their entry into Confederation). The memo was less clear about constitutional matters. Jamaica would maintain its own legislature and make its own special (provincial) laws, send members to sit in the Canadian Senate and House of Commons, and be subject to the Dominion's federal legislation. No mention was made of the franchise, nor to any change in Jamaica's structure of government.³⁹ As a strong opponent of Crown Colony government, Solomon no doubt envisioned a legislature with more elected members in the Council, but it is unclear whether he expected franchise reform or the return of a legislative assembly. Presumably he did, given his use of the term "province," which seems to anticipate an equality of status with the Canadian provinces. Some provinces entered Confederation without legislative councils, while others retained their councils for several years, decades, or, in the case of Quebec, a century after they joined. But all the provinces already had (or, in the case of British Columbia, were granted) responsible government and a popularly elected assembly when they entered Confederation.

At the end of August Solomon and a group of West Indian proprietors and merchants – including members of the Jamaica sub-committee formed in June – met with Derby to discuss conditions in the West Indies and how they might be improved. When the question of a "closer connection" between Canada and the West Indies arose, Derby was receptive, if only in an unofficial capacity. He could not, as reported in the *Times*, "conceive any objection on the part

³⁹ Memorandum on the proposal for the entrance of Jamaica as a Province into the Dominion of Canada, enclosed in "Jamaica Re: Annexation by Canada," undated, George Baden Powell Papers, G.B.P. 13/102, Parliamentary Archives, London.

of the Colonial Office to a drawing closer of the ties between two parts of the Colonial Empire. So far from objecting to that, it was what the Government had always desired, and what they had always promoted as far as lay in their power."⁴⁰ Satisfied he had Derby's endorsement, Solomon proceeded to Ottawa to discuss the proposal with the Canadian government.

Despite Solomon's efforts to assure Macdonald of Derby's assent, the Prime Minister informed him that the Canadian government could not proceed in any official capacity until it heard from the imperial government.⁴¹ Following Solomon's departure for Jamaica, Macdonald consulted his former Minister of Finance, Sir Francis Hincks. Having once served as Governor of Barbados and the Windward Islands, and later British Guyana, Hincks often advised Macdonald on West Indian matters. Hincks strenuously objected to the federation proposal, and the idea of annexing Jamaica in particular. He had been posted in British Guyana during the Morant Bay uprising, which seems to have left an indelible impression on him. "Canada would most assuredly be seriously embarrassed. If you adopted federation, you would have to govern a very troublesome mixed population . . . it would in my opinion be better to unite with almost any other colony than Jamaica." He thought federation was also unnecessary and "impracticable" from a commercial point of view. "At present Canada has nothing to complain of in regard to Imperial trade. All the sugar colonies British & foreign are on the same footing

⁴⁰ *The Times* (London), 29 August, 1884. The deputation included Solomon, James Ohlson (Chairman of the Jamaica Board of the West India interest), Neville Lubbock (Chairman of the West India Committee), George H. Chambers, Ernest Tinne (Chairman of the West India Association of Liverpool), Captain S. Bridges (representing the Bristol West India interest), A.P. Pittman and F. Lubbock (representing Demerara and Trinidad), and C. Washington Eaves.

⁴¹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 18 September, 1884.

and the refiners are satisfied. All our products are admitted at a low revenue." As for its impact on the West Indies, white planters would be the chief beneficiaries, while the bulk of the population would be subject to Canada's high tariff on (non-Canadian) imports. Moreover, Hincks thought the imperial government would never consent to the extension of Canada's protective tariff – already a point of contention to British free traders – to the West Indies.⁴²

Macdonald nonetheless remained open to exploring the union proposal. He met with his Cabinet following Solomon's visit, which concluded that while the question was "surrounded with difficulties," they may not be "insuperable." The Cabinet did not have enough details to express an informed opinion on the subject. When Macdonald followed up with Solomon, he encouraged him to send information about Jamaica, especially copies of the colony's tariff, customs, and excise laws. Pending the imperial government's consent, "the Government of Canada will be quite ready to enter upon the consideration of the two important questions, first of a political Union, and failing that, of a Commercial arrangement."⁴³

During the late summer and early fall of 1884, the Solicitor General of the Leeward Islands, Henry Berkeley, also urged the inclusion of the Leewards in any Canada-West Indies union scheme. He was motivated primarily by the dire state of the sugar industry in these islands. The industry, "which employs and supports more than nine-tenths of the entire population, is," he argued, "in its competition with the bounty-fed beet sugar of Europe, threatened with destruction in the immediate future. . . Should this happen, unutterable misery

⁴² Macdonald to Hincks, 18 September, 1884, vol. 526, fol. 74; Hincks to Macdonald, 20 September 1884, vol. 224, fol. 95973-76, M.P. LAC.

⁴³ Macdonald to Solomon, 25 September, 1884, vol. 323, fol. 145724, M.P., LAC.

and destitution will be entailed upon more than a million and a half of Her Majesty's subjects than whom there are none more loyal and law-abiding." Recognizing that Britain would never impose a countervailing duty on bounty-fed sugar because this would contradict free-trade principles, federation with Canada offered these islands their best chance of salvation. Berkeley appealed first to the British sub-committee of absentee proprietors and merchants that had recently passed a resolution in favor of a Canada-Jamaica federation. The sub-committee subsequently passed another resolution including the Leeward Islands, and added Berkeley's name alongside Solomon as a representative to the Canadian government.⁴⁴

In his appeal to Ottawa, Berkeley shrewdly emphasized the keen interest in both the West Indies and the United States for a reciprocal trade agreement. A "movement is on foot, strongly supported, to attain the permission of the Colonial Office for the West Indian Colonies to make reciprocal treaty arrangements with the United States . . . should such arrangements be made Canada would be practically excluded from West Indian markets either as buyer or seller" and would "be driven to the distant Brazilian market." Berkeley amended the sub-committee's original "Memorandum" to include "the Leeward Islands and Jamaica as Provinces into the Dominion of Canada," which he forwarded to Ottawa. The new document included several additional points for consideration, including the unlikelihood of a successful beet sugar industry in Canada, the strategic value of Antigua and Jamaica – the "Malta and Gibraltar of the

⁴⁴ Henry Berkeley, Letter to the Editor, *The Times* (London), 12 August 1884. Resolution of the sub-committee of Jamaica proprietors and merchants, enclosed in Henry Berkeley to O.C. Chipman, 15 September 1884, RG25, Department of External Affairs fonds (DEA hereafter), Series A-1, vol. 36, LAC

West” – and the addition of three-quarter of a million consumers to the Dominion’s population.⁴⁵

Access to the West Indian market beyond Jamaica no doubt appealed to union advocates in Canada. But it also gave further weight to a central criticism of the union campaign in the West Indies: the Canadian market was not large enough to absorb the majority of West Indian products. To Charles Levy, a prominent white planter and merchant from Jamaica’s St. Thomas Parish, Jamaicans would never join Canada if the terms of union included additional West Indian colonies. Since the proposal originated with Spencer Jones in 1882, he maintained, there “never has existed any intention of applying the measure generally to all West India Islands.” The prospect of “throw[ing] 300,000 Tons of Sugar on the Canadian market” – more than three times as much as the Dominion could consume – was impracticable and foolish. If Canadians wished to “tack on” the Leewards or any other islands to the federation arrangement, they should know that Jamaica would withdraw.⁴⁶

Levy joined the union campaign in the fall of 1884. He corresponded with Solomon and Spencer Jones, wrote letters to the press in Canada and Jamaica, and, in 1885, published *Correspondence on Confederation with the Dominion of Canada*.⁴⁷ Levy directed his proselytizing

⁴⁵ The three-quarter of a million consumers Berkeley cited included Jamaica and the Leewards. According to the Census of 1881, Jamaica’s population was 580,804, and the Leeward’s, which included the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Saint Kitts, Nevis, Barbuda, and Antigua, was 114,112. See Berkeley to Chipman, 15 September, 1884, RG25, DEA, Series A-1, vol. 36, LAC.

⁴⁶ *Port of Spain Gazette*, 25 October, 1884. Charles Levy to J.J. Stewart, editor of the *Halifax Daily Chronicle*; Charles Levy to Spencer Jones, 24 January, 1885, in Levy, *Correspondence on Confederation with the Dominion of Canada* (Kingston, JA: DeCordova & Co., 1885), 5-6, 15-16.

⁴⁷ See *Correspondence on Confederation*, 3-18.

efforts at Canadians and Jamaicans, and he does not appear to have made much effort to gain the support of imperial authorities in London. Long critical of imperial policies, he perhaps thought Whitehall was a lost cause. "The English Government and the people, absorbed in more important and domestic questions, have long ceased to regard [Jamaica] either with wisdom or justice. . . . Their interest in her prosperity has so long weakened by its attraction to other quarters, and has so gradually diminished that they fail to appreciate . . . the wants needed for her re-generation." Union with Canada was the best means to this regeneration. To be effected, however, the impetus would have to come from Jamaica and Canada.⁴⁸

Negotiations for a British West Indies–United States trade agreement, ongoing in the late fall of 1884, reminded federation proponents that Canada had a formidable rival in the West Indies. But the commercial agreement was only one aspect (and indicator) of a larger fear about the United States' growing influence in the region. Britain's long disengagement with its West Indian colonies might ultimately push these colonies into the arms of the Republic. And this prospect was not without supporters in the West Indies. Michael Solomon himself had advocated Jamaica's annexation to the United States before he was introduced to Spencer Jones' proposal.⁴⁹ Loyalty to Britain was important, but at what cost? As West Indian colonist and planter Albert P. Marryat observed,

. . . who can blame us, if sick at heart and weary of the prolonged struggle, with ruin on one side or hope on the other, we respectfully, if somewhat bitterly, exclaim, "Of your large colonial family we form a small, and in your eyes insignificant member. Loyally for years we have fought the fight of competition

⁴⁸ Levy to Stewart, 24 October, 1884, *Correspondence on Confederation*, 5-9.

⁴⁹ *New York Herald*, 14 January 1882.

with slave-grown produce, imposed on us by your Imperial policy, and after a fashion we have held our own. A new and more serious calamity, the foreign bounty system, threatens us with extinction. Practically, you say that you can do nothing to help us, though with us it is a matter of life or death. Stand alone we cannot, and hanging on to your skirts means destruction. Give us, then, leave to apply, or, if you prefer it, hand us over to our big brother who 'bosses' the Western Hemisphere, to take us under his protection. Sentiment, though it plays a part in practical politics, never yet filled empty stomachs, and ours, stepmother dear, are getting painfully empty, and let us go.⁵⁰

Marryat thought that federation with Canada would be ideal if West Indian circumstances did not demand such urgent attention. But West Indians could not "afford to wait for half-a-century" for Canada to develop its "consuming powers."⁵¹

The prospect of gaining access to the much larger "consuming powers" of the United States went a long way in defeating Solomon's first motion in Jamaica's Legislative Council at the end of October. Council members did not desire annexation to the United States, but rather some form of commercial agreement. They thought the Canada-West Indies union scheme had not been considered carefully. It was thus unwise to initiate official discussion of the question. The commercial advantages were unclear, while the political ramifications seemed impractical. Would federation entail a rise in taxes? How would small scale farmers be affected? Would the small number of Jamaican representatives sent to Ottawa possess adequate influence to promote Jamaican interests? When the vote was called to negotiate and conclude

⁵⁰ Albert P. Marryat, Letter to the Editor, *The Times* (London), 21 August, 1884, and 30 August, 1884. The former article was reprinted in Trinidad's *Port of Spain Gazette*, 13 September 1884. It is not clear in which island Marryat resided or carried on his commercial activities. He wrote these letters to the *Times* from a London address, but his reference to himself as a "colonist" seems to suggest he was not (always) an absentee planter.

⁵¹ Marryat, Letter to the Editor, *The Times*, 21 August, 1884.

“arrangements for political and commercial confederation with the Dominion of Canada,” Solomon was the only member that voted in favor.⁵²

Towards the end of the year, it became increasingly apparent that a trade reciprocity agreement with the United States was unlikely. This was largely because Britain’s Board of Trade and, consequently, the British Parliament, were unwilling to accept an arrangement that placed British manufacturers at a disadvantage in the West Indian market. The “jealousy and cupidity of England,” Levy argued, was the “Death Warrant” of reciprocity. “The Board of Trade have declared the interest of the British consumer opposed to the interest of the Colonial Producer, they refuse to countervail Bounty-fed produce[,] which is the canker worm of Free Trade, and they now impose insuperable difficulties to the realization of the only hope left to her unfortunate Colonists.”⁵³ With the reciprocity negotiations doomed to failure, Levy launched his union campaign anew.

In the early months of 1885, Levy, Solomon and Jones once again pressed their governments to consider union or, at the very least, a commercial agreement. On 26 March, Solomon introduced another motion in Jamaica’s Legislative Council. Emphasizing the failed trade negotiations with the United States, he moved that a Jamaican commission be sent to

⁵² Minutes of the Legislative Council of Jamaica, 28 October 1884 (Kingston: Government Printing Establishment, 1885), 81, University of the West Indies Library, Mona. *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, 29 October 1884. Robert G.W. Herbert to the British High Commissioner at Ottawa, 1 November 1884, vol. 36, series A-1, RG25, Department of External Affairs, LAC. Eight Legislative Council members voted against the motion.

⁵³ Charles Levy, Letter to the Editor, *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, 15 November 1884; Charles Levy, Letter to the Editor, *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 November 1884, in Levy, *Correspondence on Confederation*, 9-15. On the trade negotiations between Washington and London see John B. Moore, *A Digest of International Law*, vol. 5 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), p. 269, and Alpheus Todd, *Parliamentary Government in the British Colonies* (London: Longman’s, 1894), 272-273.

Ottawa “with the object of ascertaining what arrangements could be made with the Dominion Government on the basis of either Confederation or Reciprocity.”⁵⁴ The resolution passed by large majority. But the Colonial Office refused to sanction a commission to explore anything beyond a strictly commercial agreement.

2.3 British trade and resistance to union at Whitehall

While Derby expressed unofficial interest in union a year earlier, his stance had changed. In the absence of any explicit evidence explaining his change of heart, it is possible to conclude that Derby’s initial response was expressed without much information or time for reflection. The Colonial Secretary does not appear to have discussed the question with his colleagues prior (or immediately after) his meeting with Solomon’s sub-committee the previous August. In the months following this meeting, Derby conferred with members of the Colonial Office as well as George Baden-Powell, who had served on a Royal Commission to investigate West Indian conditions in 1882-83.⁵⁵ Powell provided the Colonial Office with lengthy reports on the union question, which he concluded was unwise for several reasons. In addition to the oft cited criticism that the Canadian market was too small to absorb West Indian sugar and other tropical products, he outlined the disadvantages for Britain in particular.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See Minutes of the Legislative Council of Jamaica, 24 June, 1885 (Kingston: Government Printing Establishment, 1885), 8, University of the West Indies Library, Mona.

⁵⁵ BPP, 1884, Cd. 3840, West Indies, *Report of the Royal Commission appointed in December 1882, to inquire into the public revenues, expenditure, debts, and liabilities of the islands of Jamaica, Grenada, St. Vincent, Tobago, and St. Lucia, and the Leeward Islands.*

⁵⁶ Colonial Office Minutes, 2 October 1884, vol. 518, CO 137, National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA). “Canadian Annexation of West Indian Islands,” 1884, file enclosed in George Baden

Baden-Powell's opposition to union was informed primarily by his staunch allegiance to free trade. If Canada's protective tariff extended to Jamaica and the other West Indian colonies, British exports might be deprived of free (or at least equal) access to West Indian markets. Complications would also arise if Canada absorbed the public debts of the West Indian colonies. These debts accrued from money advanced by British capitalists "on the express understanding that the West Indies were colonies under the immediate administration of the Crown[,] and in some cases moneys were advanced under the direct guarantee of the Imperial Government." This capital might be compromised if the West Indies passed from British to Canadian hands.⁵⁷

Baden-Powell also dismissed the suggestion that Canada would be "complete and self-sustaining" if it annexed tropical territory. This argument was nothing more than "sentimental enthusiasm" inspired by envy of the United States. "This self-sufficiency theory is developed by a certain school of Canadian politicians, inspired by jealous rivalry of the United States, into the extreme of a Canadian 'Monroe Doctrine', which would make it a national policy to join hands with the West Indies and even with Mexico behind the back of the United States." And given the strength of imperial sentiment in the West Indies, the "bulk" of West Indians would no doubt strenuously oppose a change of administration. It constituted a demotion within the British imperial system to "descend from the proud pedestal of the British Empire to the

Powell Papers, GBP 12/99A, Parliamentary Archives, London. Baden Powell, Letter to the Editor, 1 October 1884, 2 October 1884, the *Times*. The former letter was reprinted in the *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, 6 November 1884.

⁵⁷ Baden Powell, Letter to the Editor, 1 October 1884, the *London Times*.

altogether subordinate position of a province of the Canadian Dominion.” Of course this assessment belies the fact that to late nineteenth century imperialists Canada was a valued member of the Empire and was often touted as an exemplar of imperial success – a role model for fledgling colonies. It displays, nonetheless, a contemptuous attitude toward Canadian aspirations in the West Indies, especially if these aspirations threatened to envelop the West Indies in Canada’s protective tariff.⁵⁸

A strong proponent of free trade himself, Derby was likely persuaded by Baden-Powell’s arguments. Derby’s colleagues in the Colonial Office also contemplated the implications of the union question for British trade, and they witnessed, at the same time, the United States – British West Indies reciprocity agreement quashed by Britain’s manufacturing interests.⁵⁹ If the imperial government relinquished control of its West Indian colonies to Canada, the implications for British trade might be even more serious than under a trade agreement with the United States. Handing the colonies over to Canada would also mean surrendering influence over their trade policies on a permanent basis.

Without the imperial government’s assent, union advocates held out little hope for success. Neither the Jamaican nor the Canadian government would consider the question in the absence of imperial consent, and irrespective of this consent, support for the campaign was minimal. The majority of Jamaica Council members remained skeptical of the benefits of union, preferring the negotiation of a reciprocity agreement instead. Prime Minister Macdonald

⁵⁸ Baden Powell, Letter to the Editor, 2 October 1884, the London *Times*.

⁵⁹ Colonial Office Minutes, 11 June 1885, Vol. 521, CO 137, TNA.

expressed interest in the idea in 1884 and he had in fact paid Spencer Jones for his efforts, but he was always non-committal.⁶⁰ He too seems to have been swayed by Baden Powell's vigorous criticism of the proposal. In a letter to Baden Powell in October 1884, Macdonald assured him that the Canadian government had given the matter little consideration because they thought it was "scarcely practicable."⁶¹

Trade and commerce or, more appropriately, faith in the possibilities of trade and commerce, were crucial to the union campaign in the 1880s. Canadian advocates identified union as crucial step in Canada's economic – and by extension national – development, while its West Indian proponents identified union as a route to economic salvation. Commercial considerations similarly animated the imperial government's response. Union threatened to upset Britain's existing channels of trade and was consequently frowned upon at Whitehall. Yet as the next chapter reveals, there was much more to the story than the commercial side of the

⁶⁰ Jones to Macdonald, 8 January 1885, vol. 411, fol. 198283-85, M.P., LAC. He wrote to Macdonald "I would feel greatly obliged if you consider that I have any claim moral or equitable for expenses incurred in this West Indies business, that you would send by award me such a sum as you may consider reasonable for the devotion of nearly a year of my time & several journeys between Toronto and Ottawa. Order in Council, 6 August, 1885, Office of the Privy Council, RG2, LAC.

⁶¹ Macdonald to Baden Powell, 18 October 1884, GBP 12/97, Parliamentary Archives, London. A Jamaican deputation visited Ottawa in June of that year to discuss trade reciprocity, but these negotiations floundered as well. The delegates met with various trade groups in eastern and Maritime Canada, including the Halifax Chamber of Commerce and the Toronto Board of Trade, and the Montreal Board of Trade. But the negotiations were hampered by Macdonald's inability to meet with the delegates due to pressing domestic affairs, the absence of Finance Minister Tilley, and more importantly, the imperial government's refusal to sanction a trade agreement that did not include all the British West Indian colonies. The *Toronto Globe*, 11 June and 12 June 1885; *Montreal Gazette*, 17 June and 27 June 1885. Macdonald to H.H. Hocking, 25 June 1885, enclosed in Henry Norman to Frederick Stanley, 22 July 1885, CO 137/522, TNA.

question, and union was not defeated for commercial reasons alone. Perhaps inevitably, the discussion of union in Canada, Britain and the West Indies prompted larger questions about nation, empire, and the gray area in between.

3. Between Empire and Nation

The Prerequisites and Possibilities of Extra-Territorial Governance

Those who debated the problems and possibilities of the union question in the 1880s were not simply responding to the political and economic pressures of a specific historical moment. They were negotiating the terms on which their particular national or imperial formations would take shape. They were also delineating the prerequisites of inter-colonial federation or, at the very least, the appropriate conditions under which one colony might annex another. This chapter locates the discussion of Canada-West Indies union in broader discourses of Empire, nation, and race to explore how contemporaries in Britain, Canada and the West Indies negotiated the prerequisites of extra-territorial governance in the 1880s.

Studies of late nineteenth-century “sub-imperialisms” focus primarily on the impulses that inspired expansion initiatives. Our understanding of Queenslander efforts to annex the eastern portion of New Guinea, New Zealander aspirations in Samoa and Tonga, and the Indian government’s designs in Persia, for example, center on the commercial and strategic dimensions of the question.¹ Yet these phenomena have much more to tell us about how the British Empire operated in the late Victorian period. What, for example, were the constitutional implications of cross-colonial union? Was Canada’s annexation of the British West Indies possible in constitutional terms? The chapter’s first section addresses these questions by placing the

¹ See for example Roger Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific: The Expansionist Era 1820-1920* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980); Luke Trainor, *British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism: Manipulation, conflict and compromise in the late nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 41-44. Ross, *New Zealand aspirations in the Pacific in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); Robert J. Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan Publishers, 2003).

Canada-West Indies case in a comparative frame with Australian designs in New Guinea.

Unlike the Australian colonies, Canada was a constitutional federation and thus was thought more entitled to annex and administer external territories.

Yet as the next section reveals, Canada's national status simultaneously hindered the campaign for Canada-West Indies union. In anthropomorphic terms, Canada was still a "child" in the British imperial "family." Was union opportune in light of Canada's economic, political and social circumstances in the mid 1880s? Opinion was more decisive on this question. A choir of voices in Britain, Canada and the West Indies echoed a resounding "no." Regional tensions, an as-yet undeveloped North-West, and threats of secession undermined the *existing* Canadian Confederation, let alone schemes to annex the West Indies.

Race was crucial to these debates. Was the Canadian nation-state equipped (and willing) to govern large African-descended populations? What would governance look like under union? Would West Indians' political rights expand or retract? These questions are explored in the chapter's final section. There was some consensus that Canada was neither ready nor willing to assume such responsibility. In this way, racial thinking was deeply inscribed in the (white) national project.

Race and ethnic relations came to the fore at regional, provincial and federal levels of Canadian society during the 1880s. The national government imposed a "head tax" in an attempt to exclude Chinese migrants; the mixed-race Métis of the North-West territories took up arms against Canadian authority; English-Protestant majorities in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia stripped French-Catholic minorities of the right to publicly-supported schools; and Nova

Scotia reconfirmed its commitment to segregated schools for black and white children. These transformative events and policies provided a critical backdrop for the union campaign. As federal and provincial governments mapped the “poles of incorporation and differentiation” (to borrow Frederick Cooper’s phrase) within Canadian borders, the union question receded from the realm of possibilities.² The evolving Canadian nation-state, constituted more by exclusion than inclusion, rapidly became much less amenable to the incorporation of West Indians of color.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, race relations were also in a state of transition throughout the wider British Empire. Mounting instability and violent episodes of resistance in the colonies prompted a reassessment of the purpose and means of imperial rule. Understood as a rejection of British ideas and institutions, these events impelled a hardening of racial attitudes and underscored the necessity of a more rigid, coercive approach to colonial governance.³ Well in evidence before the 1880s, these hardened attitudes hindered the union campaign. To many British contemporaries, the type of governance necessary in the West Indies demanded the experienced, benevolent hand of the imperial government. To white Canadians, uncivilized West Indians of color, apparently impervious to the enlightening

² Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 154.

³ Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), 307-309; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). See also Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

influence of British values and institutions, would not make good citizens. More seriously, they might even imperil the Canadian federation.

3.1 The Nation-State Imperative: Canada, Australia, and the New Guinea Case

Debates about Canada-West Indies union in the 1880s inspired a trans-Atlantic conversation about the pre-requisites of extra-territorial governance. The imperial government had supported the Confederation of 1867, the entry of Manitoba, the North-West Territory, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island in the early 1870s, and continued to encourage, to no avail until 1949, Newfoundland's admission. From a strictly constitutional perspective, Canada was conceivably ready to assume extra-territorial responsibilities. Derby's early, unofficial endorsement of the union proposal acknowledged Canadian autonomy to initiate union with the West Indies. When the deputation of West Indian interests discussed the question with him in August 1884, the Colonial Secretary maintained that it was up to Canada to decide. Derby was apparently more concerned with the expenses required to conduct a commission of inquiry on the subject. It must be remembered "that in financial and administrative matters Canada was virtually an independent country; and, therefore, the assistance which he could give the deputation in this matter would be of a very negative character. If the West Indies and Canada could come to terms as regarded a closer connexion, he might venture to say that under hardly any conceivable circumstances would the Colonial Office desire to oppose itself to such an arrangement. But the question rested, in the first instance, with Canada; and it was to Canada that they must address themselves rather than to

the Colonial Office.”⁴ Of course Derby’s stance was not necessarily representative of Colonial Office opinion. And it was not unusual for the Colonial Office to express ambiguity and misconception about what was constitutionally appropriate or even possible. While Derby encouraged the West Indian deputation to present the federation proposal directly to Ottawa, for example, in a subsequent minute one of his colleagues identified Canada-West Indies negotiations over a strictly commercial agreement as “a new departure” in the conduct of imperial relations.⁵

Derby’s understanding of Canada as an “independent country” was crucial to his initial opinion on the union question. As a vast, self-governing confederation of provinces stretching from sea to sea, Canada had earned the constitutional and, more importantly, the “national” right to acquire and administer colonial dependencies. There was, of course, much continental development to complete, and federation would require the legislative assent of each government concerned, as well as an amendment to the British North America Act. But the significant point was that between 1867 and 1873, Canada had laid the groundwork to achieve its “geographical destiny” on the continent. In Derby’s understanding, the Dominion had transitioned from colony to nation, and it was only appropriate that (white) Canadians begin exploring their extra-continental destiny.⁶

⁴ *The Times*, 29 August 1884.

⁵ Internal Minutes, 18 April 1885, CO 137/521, TNA.

⁶ This distinction between continental and extra-continental geographical destiny is informed by Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 66-67.

The imperial government's reluctance to sanction the expansionist projects of other settler societies underlines the significance of this transition. Queensland's attempted annexation of the eastern portion of New Guinea in 1883 is particularly instructive. Mobilized by a fear of foreign (especially German) intervention in the region, and a desire to secure a ready source of indigenous labor for Queensland's developing sugar industry, Premier Thomas McIlwraith enlisted an official to hoist the Union Jack at Port Moresby on behalf of the British government.⁷ Following inquiries by the Colonial and Foreign Offices, parliamentary discussion in London, and much newspaper attention in Australia, Britain and elsewhere, Derby notified the Queensland government in July 1883 that Whitehall was unable to sanction the annexation. "It is well understood that the officers of a Colonial Government have no power or authority to act beyond the limits of their Colony, and if this constitutional principle is not carefully observed serious difficulties and complications must arise."⁸ Prime Minister W. E. Gladstone similarly deemed Queensland's action "null and void in point of law" because colonies did not have the authority to annex other colonies. Both Derby and Gladstone concluded that no foreign threat existed, and that the Australian colonies should federate before "entering upon any scheme of annexation."⁹

⁷ BPP, 1882, Cd. 3814, Western Pacific Islands, *Correspondence respecting New Guinea, the New Hebrides, and other islands in the Pacific*. Roger Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific: The Expansionist Era 1820-1920* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1980), 51-67. Luke Trainor, *British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism: Manipulation, conflict and compromise in the late nineteenth century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 41-44.

⁸ BPP, 1883, Cd. 3617 and Cd. 3691, New Guinea. *Further Correspondence respecting New Guinea*.

⁹ *Leeds Mercury*, 21 July 1883; *Brisbane Courier*, 19 April 1883; *Evening Post* (Wellington), 4 July 1883; *Glasgow Herald*, 27 August 1883; Trainor, *British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism*, 41.

The imperial government's initial opposition was based on the expense associated with territorial expansion, Queensland's record of poor treatment of Aborigines, and the rampant abuses in the Pacific labor trade, which brought thousands of indigenous islanders to the colony against their will. Australian federation would, according to Gladstone, address these problems by establishing a firmer, more accountable system of governance and minimizing Britain's financial obligation. This response prompted the Australasian colonies – most of whom shared Queensland's desire for a "South-west Pacific Monroe Doctrine" – to hold a convention in December 1883. Among other resolutions, the convention urged the importance of British hegemony in the South Pacific in general, and the need for a British protectorate in East New Guinea in particular.¹ While Derby dismissed claims for a Pacific Monroe Doctrine as "mere raving," he eventually began to fear that a British protectorate in East New Guinea was unavoidable.¹ The colonies might claim independence and secede from the Empire if the imperial government failed to address Australian concerns and establish a protectorate. It became increasingly clear, moreover, that the foreign threat was in fact very real. In April 1884 Germany claimed a protectorate over northeastern New Guinea, the Bismarck Archipelago, the Admiralty Islands, and several smaller islands. Compelled to reverse its earlier position, the imperial government established a protectorate over the southeastern portion of New Guinea in November 1884.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Ernest S. Dodge, *Islands and Empires: Western Impact on the Pacific and East Asia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 178. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific*, 89-90.

The circumstances that prompted Queensland to annex East New Guinea and Canadian schemes to absorb the West Indies were varied and complex. So too were the impulses guiding Whitehall's response. It is clear, however, that the response in both cases was consistent with Britain's defensive approach to Empire in the 1880s. From the early 1870s Britain's global supremacy was increasingly challenged by the rise of other powers, particularly Germany and the United States. No longer possessing a "monopoly of influence" outside Europe, Britain had to adapt. As Bernard Porter observes, "[t]he initiative was being taken by other powers, and the task of statesmanship now was to decide when to respond to this initiative and when not to."¹¹ Under a policy of retrenchment, Gladstone's government was eager to avoid further expansion of the Empire unless it was necessary to protect existing possessions or interests. With the exception of Egypt (and the Suez Canal in particular), where "national interests" were substantial, anyone who wanted Britain to take control of a particular region had to make a compelling case. At the same time, Britain's eroding supremacy meant that "spheres of influence" – distinguished from colonies and protectorates by the absence of obligation in the metropole – could no longer be assumed. They had to be, and indeed were, explicitly "marked out on the map" during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. Thus, despite retrenchment and the related desire to curb imperial responsibilities, Britain's formal empire expanded to unprecedented proportions in the 1880s.¹²

¹¹ Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share: A short history of British Imperialism 1850-1983* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), 112.

¹² Porter, *The Lion's Share*, 112-118. Richard Shannon, *The Crisis of Imperialism 1865-1915* (Frogmore, St. Albans: Paladin, 1974 [1st ed. Hart-Davis, MacGibbon Ltd., 1974]), 148-171.

That the imperial government responded differently to the expansionist impulses in Queensland and Canada makes sense in the context of this “reluctant imperialism.”¹³ While British and Australian traders, commercial prospectors and labor recruiters had long been active in New Guinea, the island was arguably outside Britain’s sphere of influence.¹⁴ Establishing a protectorate thus constituted an expansion of the Empire and placed the imperial government at risk of future expenditure, despite the fact that the Australian colonies had agreed to bear the costs of administration. The West Indies, on the other hand, had long been part of Britain’s formal Empire. To British contemporaries, the region had experienced its economic heyday in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 was perhaps the most blatant indicator of Britain’s growing disengagement with the region. As the nineteenth century progressed, Britain’s interests shifted to Asia and Africa and the West Indies were increasingly deemed an imperial burden. Relinquishing these colonies to Canada promised to allay this burden and the Dominion’s nation-state status legitimized this transfer. But support for a Canada-West Indies union was overshadowed by doubts about Canada’s readiness for such responsibility.

¹³ The phrase “reluctant imperialism” is derived from C. J. Lowe, *The Reluctant Imperialists: British Foreign Policy 1878-1902* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1967).

¹⁴ Deryck Scarr, *A History of the Pacific Islands: Passages through Tropical Time* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 129-161.

3.2 'Enough Irons in the Fire'

Proposals to further expand the Dominion in the West Indies placed the current state of the Canadian federation under scrutiny. A host of domestic problems, exacerbated by the onset of depression in 1883, hampered these proposals. With an undeveloped North-West and mounting regional and cultural animosities, union was perhaps neither wise nor feasible. These doubts reverberated in Canada, Britain, and the West Indies. According to Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner*, "[f]olly will have achieved its greatest triumph" if Canada annexed Jamaica.¹⁵ "If that country, which is noted for having 'nine months winter and three months bad weather out of every twelve', had anything to offer us in exchange for confederation, it would be a different matter, but they positively have scarcely anything with which to help themselves, let alone assist Jamaica." Jamaican merchant F.A. Autey concurred. "The great question of the future is what powerful nation will control the islands in the western hemisphere?" At least one thing was certain: Canada was not a contender.

At present, looking at the young dominion of Canada, by an act passed in 1867, we see the seeds of dissolution in the province of Manitoba, wishful to be annexed to the United States of America, considering after thirteen years experience the confederation has proven burdensome and one-sided. The south eastern province, Nova Scotia, is anxious to withdraw from the dominion of Canada and become an independent colony, like her eldest sister Newfoundland, who, with greater prescience would not allow herself to be absorbed into a confederation of opposing and dissimilar elements and interests.¹⁶

While somewhat exaggerated, these observations captured the growing discontent in both eastern and western Canada during the mid 1880s. In the West, declining rates of settlement

¹⁵ *Daily Gleaner*, 26 November 1884.

¹⁶ F.A. Autey, Letter to the editor, *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, 31 March 1884.

and the dramatic collapse of land prices in Winnipeg – the “gateway to the West” – beset dreams of national expansion. These events, well underway by 1884, marked the beginning of an economic downturn that plagued the Northwest until the mid 1890s. As the West “continued to prove an expensive and undeveloped burden,” Easterners increasingly criticized the costs of expansion. More vitriolic, Westerners condemned the National Policy as a product of Eastern (and especially Ontarian) self-interest. Settlers in the Northwest questioned whether Eastern Canadians were not exploiting the West for their own benefit.¹⁷ As the *Edmonton Bulletin* counseled in November 1884, “the idea that the North-West is to eastern Canada as India is to Great Britain is one that will, if not abandoned, lead to the rupture of confederation at no distant date.”¹⁸ The conviction that westward expansion would benefit both regions and strengthen the Canadian federation appeared more and more impractical.

The economic downturn similarly undermined Maritime Canada’s staple industries, and accentuated existing dissatisfaction with the Conservative government’s protectionist-based National Policy. This policy stimulated Maritime industrial growth in the 1880s, but this growth was “piecemeal and haphazard,” and Maritime enterprises (many of which were community-based, family-owned businesses) were generally unable to compete with the industrial centers in Montreal and Toronto. Moreover, the region experienced the highest rate of out-migration in Canada. Described by Judith Fingard as a decade of “paradoxes,” the 1880s were characterized by “uneven development, the sacrifice of local interests to ‘national’

¹⁷ Doug Owsram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 170-171, 173.

¹⁸ *Edmonton Bulletin*, 1 November 1884, as cited in Owsram, *Promise of Eden*, 177.

interests, renewed dissatisfaction with federal policies, increasing tensions between capital and labor, and the reinforcement of social inequalities." Dissatisfaction with the federal government was particularly marked in Nova Scotia, where Liberal William S. Fielding won the provincial election of 1886 on a secessionist platform.¹⁹

Waning confidence in Canada's future checked union enthusiasm in the 1880s, especially in Nova Scotia. To Halifax merchant Daniel Cronan, the current state of affairs in Canada made the union proposal nothing short of preposterous. Ottawa "might as well set to work and annex South America." Canada had "enough irons in the fire," and the Fathers of Confederation should have set a fixed limit on the Dominion's boundaries in 1867.²⁰ According to another Halifax merchant, Canada had suffered "much damage from Confederation," and annexing Jamaica would only make matters worse.²¹ The "increased unwieldiness of the Dominion," as Nova Scotia's *Presbyterian Witness* put it, was already cause for concern. "We are already large enough in all reason: why should we try expansion in a region so far away?"²²

¹⁹ Judith Fingard, "The 1880s: Paradoxes of Progress," in E.R. Forbes and Delphin A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 83, 82; T.W. Acheson, "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the Maritimes, 1880-1910," *Acadiensis* 1, 2 (Spring 1972), 3-31; Kris Inwood, "Maritime Industrialization from 1870 to 1910: A Review of the Evidence and Its Interpretation," in Inwood, ed., *Farm, Factory and Fortune: New Studies in the Economic History of the Maritime Provinces* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1991), 149-170. For a concise summary of the social, economic and political contours of the 1880s, see Fingard, "The 1880s: Paradoxes of Progress," 82-116.

²⁰ Daniel Cronan paraphrased in the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 August 1884.

²¹ James Butler paraphrased in the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 August 1884.

²² *Presbyterian Witness*, as cited in the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 1 September 1884. This article was later reproduced in the *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, 23 September 1884.

Halifax's *Morning Chronicle* – edited, significantly, by William Fielding – was more condemning. Assuming responsibility for Jamaica when the Dominion was “already loaded with responsibilities sufficiently difficult to bear,” would be detrimental to Canada. “Nova Scotia was dragged into confederation to help the Upper Provinces out of their difficulties. She has suffered enough already. The latest proposition to help another colony out of a scrape will be about the last straw. The burdens of the present union bear hardly enough upon our shoulders. Any addition to them, such as the annexation of Jamaica would surely bring, would about break the camel’s back.”²³

Some of these same concerns shaped British opposition to the union scheme. The difficulties facing Britain’s West Indian colonies, according to the *Manchester Guardian*, would not be solved by simply annexing them to Canada, which had enough difficulties of its own. “[T]he Canadian government has quite enough political and financial troubles to occupy its energies without taking charge of such a complicated problem as the administration of the West Indies presents.” With Nova Scotia threatening secession and the other provinces “constantly conflicting,” annexing an “entirely alien and isolated province” would only cause further tension.²⁴ George Baden-Powell similarly pointed to the current state of the Canadian federation as evidence that union was a bad idea. Union would “be a drain on the men and the money of the Dominion, and at the present the enormous fertile territories still lying undeveloped in the north and north-west and west of the Dominion itself are crying aloud for

²³ Halifax *Morning Chronicle*, as cited in the Jamaica *Daily Gleaner*, 26 November 1884; Halifax *Morning Chronicle*, 4 September 1884.

²⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 October 1884

all the men and the capital, not only that Canada can spare, but can attract from other countries.”²⁵ With the object of continental expansion far from complete, Ottawa was ill-prepared to annex external territories.

3.3. Race and Governance

To Baden-Powell, the “undeveloped” state of Canada’s Northwest was not the only indicator that the dominion was not yet ready to assume responsibility for the West Indies. More significant was white Canadians’ inexperience governing the “negro race.” The dominion government’s treatment of indigenous peoples was commendable, he thought, but it scarcely qualified white Canadians to govern black West Indians. “It is almost unnecessary to state,” he wrote to the London *Times*, “that the Dominion Government, in its admirable treatment of the Red Indians within its boundaries, has conclusively shown itself to be as thoroughly imbued with true and wise philanthropy as the Home Government itself. But the Red Indians are a doomed race – a relic of the past, and no active factor in the future.” The “negro and coloured races,” on the other hand, made up nearly 80 percent of the total West Indian population and, most significantly, “supply all the manual labor.”²⁶

²⁵ Published extract dated 17 October 1884, enclosed in George Baden Powell Papers, GBP 12/99A, File titled America – West Indies, Canadian Annexation of West Indian Islands 1884, Parliamentary Archives, London. BPP, 1884, Cd. 3840, West Indies, *Report of the Royal Commission appointed in December 1882, to inquire into the public revenues, expenditure, debts, and liabilities of the islands of Jamaica, Grenada, St. Vincent, Tobago, and St. Lucia, and the Leeward Islands.*

²⁶ George Baden-Powell, Letter to the Editor, *The Times*, 2 October 1884. Internal minutes, 2 October 1884, CO 137/518, TNA.

To be sure, Aboriginal and African-descended subjects occupied different positions in New World “regimes of difference.” As Patrick Wolfe observes, “territorial expropriation was foundational to the colonial formations into which Europeans incorporated [Aboriginal peoples].” The relationship between Europeans and Aboriginals, in other words, revolved around land. “In contrast, blacks’ relationship with their colonizers – from the colonizer’s point of view at least – centered on labor.”²⁷ In the Canadian context (not treated by Wolfe) this conceptualization is apt.²⁸ To some extent, however, it elides the continuing importance of Aboriginal labor to regional economies in the 1880s,²⁹ and the fact that black labor, though significant, was less instrumental to economic development in Canada than it was in the United States and Latin America. Black Canadians nonetheless encountered white resistance to their labor, which was invariably cheaper than white labor. But in the 1880s, a decade marked by the rise of labor radicalism in Canada, this resistance did not reverberate in national political discourse as it did in the United States. Canadian trade union leaders, especially those in

²⁷ Patrick Wolfe, “Land Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race,” Forum Essay, *American Historical Review* 106, 3 (June 2001), 867.

²⁸ See Adele Perry, “The State of Empire: Reproducing Colonialism in British Columbia, 1849-1871,” *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 2,2 (2001), para. 6, viewed 28 January 2008, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v002/2.2perry.html, who observes that “settler colonies were distinguished by their exact method of dispossession, which tended to focus on alienating Aboriginal land instead of appropriating Aboriginal labor.”

²⁹ Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 178; Alicia Muszynski, “Race and Gender: Structural Determinants in the Formation of British Columbia’s Salmon Cannery Labor Force,” in Gregory S. Kealey, ed., *Class, Gender and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology* (St. John’s: Committee on Canadian Labor History, 1988), 103-120; Rolf Knight, *Indians at Work: an informal history of native labour in British Columbia, 1848-1930* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1996).

British Columbia, were more concerned with the Chinese “menace” and its implications for white labor. Chinese migrants – comprised largely of mobile, single males – tended to work as industrial laborers, while black families more often settled in rural areas. At a “safe distance” from the industrial labor market, blacks were less threatening to white labor.³⁰

When blacks trespassed on this space, however, white attitudes could change quickly. Labor leaders were generally skeptical of immigration policies or other federal initiatives that might precipitate an influx of non-white labor. Schemes to federate white settlement dominions with colonial dependencies were thus not warmly received. In the midst of the union debate in the fall of 1884, Toronto’s *Daily News* – edited by the Knights of Labor radical E. E. Sheppard – averred that “a confederation in which a population of ignorant and half-civilized Negroes [are] to be placed on a level with the intelligent and self-governing white communities, is about the wildest scheme ever broached even in these days of amateur constitution making.”³¹ Deployed to discourage inter-colonial federation projects, constructs of the “backward Negro” subsequently functioned to keep blacks out of white industrial space.

³⁰ David Gouter, *Guarding the Gates: the Canadian labor movement and immigration, 1872-1934* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 35-59. The English Canadian labor movement’s distinction between blacks and Chinese is elaborated in Gouter, “Drawing Different Lines of Color: The Mainstream English Canadian Labor Movement’s Approach to Blacks and Chinese, 1880-1914,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, 3, 1 (2005), 55-76.

³¹ Toronto *Daily News*, 11 November 1884, as cited in Gouter, *Guarding the Gates*, 45. On Sheppard see Russell Hann, “Brainworkers and the Knights of Labor: E. E. Sheppard, Phillips Thompson, and the Toronto News, 1883-1887,” in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 35-57. On the Knights of Labor see Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

To some extent, then, Baden-Powell's reservations about a Canada-West Indies union were warranted. But his central objection, fueled by the common assumption that British imperialism was "uniquely benevolent among nations,"³² was out of touch with West Indian sentiment and the shifting concerns of Britain's humanitarian lobby in the latter half of the nineteenth century. "The English people emancipated these negroes," he argued, "and the same spirit which led them to do this still lives in the fixed determination of English public opinion to safeguard the interests of the 'subject races.' The negroes themselves appreciate the care that is taken of them by the Imperial Government, inspired as it always is by the very strong philanthropic feelings of the nation." It was "extremely doubtful," he concluded, that British humanitarians would support a change of administration in the West Indies.³³ The absence of correspondence from humanitarian groups on the subject in the Colonial Office records (a customary forum for protest), perhaps a telling silence in itself, and the diversity of humanitarian interest and sentiment in Britain make it difficult to generalize or even speculate about humanitarian opinion. It is fair to suggest, however, that during the second half of the nineteenth century, Britain's West Indian colonies no longer captivated British humanitarians as they once did.

³² See Dean Pavlakis, "The Development of British Overseas Humanitarianism and the Congo Reform Campaign," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 11, 1 (Spring 2010), para. 9, viewed 22 April 2010, http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v011/11.1.pavlakis.html.

³³ Baden-Powell, Letter to the Editor, *The Times*, 2 October 1884.

There were several reasons for this shift, most notably British Emancipation in the 1830s, which directed the anti-slavery cause (the central thrust of humanitarian activity) elsewhere. The humanitarians' position was additionally weakened by "material decline in the West Indies, the small numbers of missionary converts, the unwillingness of indigenous communities to absorb British ideas or commercial habits, and by what observers interpreted as the violent rejection of British ways evident in the Indian Mutiny, the Maori Wars, and the Morant Bay Rebellion."³⁴ The response to these events was mixed in Britain, but they nonetheless catalyzed a profound shift in ideas about "subject races" and how they should be governed. While many humanitarians and especially missionaries maintained their commitment to "enlighten" subject populations – conceding, in many cases, that this process would take much longer than originally anticipated – others saw humanitarian goals as impractical or even irrelevant.³⁵

Hardened notions of racial difference replaced the early Victorian commitment to "civilizing" colonial peoples – a commitment premised on the assumption that the Empire's varied races could progress from barbarity to civilization (albeit at different paces). "In retreating from the so-called civilizing mission of liberal imperialism," as Karuna Mantena writes, "a new emphasis on the potentially insurmountable differences between peoples came to the fore."³⁶ This emerging ethos buttressed anti-unionist arguments in the 1880s. West

³⁴ Andrew Porter, "Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism," in Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. iii, *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 213-214.

³⁵ Porter, "Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism," 214; Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 307-309; Hall, *Civilising Subjects*.

Indians were thought backward, idle, and unfit for self-government, and there was little hope for improvement. The conventional trope that rendered colonial subjects “children” that grow to adulthood (as autonomous, self-governing entities in a wider imperial family) was no longer an appropriate metaphor for non-white colonial dependencies. West Indians’ intellectual deficiency, superstition, and susceptibility to agitation, moreover, demanded austere governance. As Francis Hincks warned Macdonald in September 1884, “[i]f you adopted federation, you would have to govern a very troublesome mixed population.”³⁷ Taking on such responsibility was thought to be foolish and ultimately detrimental to the Canadian nation-state.

Consistent with hardened racial constructs in the late nineteenth century, Colville Malton’s *Reminiscences of a tour through the West Indies* presented a colonial fantasy for white Canadian readers that delineated a starkly uncivilized imperial space. While Malton’s stated purpose was to educate Canadians about the West Indies and stimulate their interest in annexing the islands, his travelogue unwittingly called the advisability of union into question

³⁶ Karuna Mantena, “The crisis of liberal imperialism,” in Duncan Bell, ed., *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 114. This argument is elaborated in Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010). See also Holt, *The Problem of Freedom*, 307-309; Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). On the nature of liberal imperialism more generally see Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), and Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

³⁷ Francis Hincks to John A. Macdonald, 20 September 1884, John A. Macdonald Papers, MG26-A, vol. 222, 95973-76, LAC.

by widening the imperial divide.³⁸ Navigating colonial space in what Mary Louise Pratt has called a “contact zone,” Malton narrated his engagement with West Indian landscapes and peoples through “highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.”³⁹ In contrast to the subject position of white Canadian readers, West Indians come to life as remote, exotic, and foreign. Commonalities across the imperial divide – British institutions and ideas – were conspicuously muted.⁴⁰

Even the language was foreign. Visiting an absentee-owned coffee plantation outside Bridgetown, Barbados, Malton described his difficulty communicating with his black guide.

At daylight a tap at my room door announced ‘cup coffee da for Massa, Busha sa mule da do tep da wait fu yu sa.’ Jumping up I intended asking the slave to be a little more explicit, as to me it sounded like so much jargon, but if I anticipated obtaining more clearly the nature of the summons, I was sadly mistaken, as the door quickly closed, and on peeping out, there was no sight of my negro friend; on however, seeing our genial host, it was made clear enough of what Sambo tried to make me aware, for there was he at the foot of the steps grinning and showing his white teeth, whilst holding the mule I was to have possession of during my stay in this delightful spot.⁴¹

Consistent with nineteenth century travel writing, the author employed stereotypes and hyperbole liberally. Such narrative strategies functioned to differentiate tourist from native,

³⁸ Malton, *Reminiscences*, 2.

³⁹ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4; Susan Bassnett, “The Empire, Travel Writing, and British Studies,” in Sachidananda Mohanty, ed., *Travel Writing and the Empire* (New Delhi, Katha, 2003), 1-21.

⁴⁰ Malton, *Reminiscences*, 4-5, makes only passing reference to representative institutions in Barbados.

⁴¹ Malton, *Reminiscences*, 8.

insider from other, black from white, colonizer from colonized, “Massa” from “slave.”⁴² Malton’s explicit use of the latter binary is particularly striking in its anachronism. Under slavery “Massa’s” rationalization of the system was, Eric Williams observed, “that the workers, both African and Indian, were inferior beings, unfit for self-government, unequal to their superior masters, permanently destined to a status of perpetual subordination, unable to achieve equality with Massa.”⁴³ An inappropriate rhetorical strategy in the humanitarian climate of the post-emancipation decades, “Massa” and “slave” resurface in the final decades of the nineteenth century – in step with hardened ideas about the immutability of race – with renewed cultural and rhetorical purchase.⁴⁴

Malton conveyed the uncivilized character of West Indian life most vividly in his description of the living conditions and spirituality of urban Jamaicans. The “[h]uts of the natives [in Kingston] are of a very rude and primitive nature, chiefly composed of 4 or 5 posts and a few sticks to support the bundles of straw of which the roof is comprised, a dash of white lime, plaster, and you have the negro hut; there are exceptions, where is to be seen a house of a shade higher class, but the exception is rare.” The crucial point on which difference was constructed (for white readers) was not that West Indians resided in crude dwellings, but that

⁴² Bassnett, “The Empire, Travel Writing, and British Studies,” 17.

⁴³ Eric Williams, “Massa Day Done,” Public Lecture at Woodford Square, 22 March 1961, *Callaloo* 20, 4 (1997), 727.

⁴⁴ While the image of “Sambo” has a long, protean genealogy in African American history, it can be argued that its function in Malton’s narrative actually counters the popular notion that “subject races” require strict governance. As the “natural, contented subordinate,” “Sambo” accepts his location in the racial hierarchy and is less likely to disrupt the status quo of white dominance. See Luther W. Spoehr, “Sambo and the Heathen Chinee: Californians’ Racial Stereotypes in the Late 1870s,” *Pacific Historical Review* 42, 2 (May 1973), 194, note 26.

they aspired to nothing more. Despite philanthropic schemes to provide “a better class of homes for the negroes,” Malton wrote, “Quashie is not disposed” to welcome such schemes. “[S]o long accustomed to his mud hut and the surroundings, he would feel miserable and out of his element in more refined quarters.”⁴⁵

Malton similarly deployed the image of the credulous, ignorant West Indian (often represented as “Quashi” in nineteenth century literature) to explain the continuing prevalence of Obeah in Jamaica. “Until very late years superstitions reigned rampart on this Island, having willing subjects in the negro.”⁴⁶ An African-based spiritual practice imported to the West Indies by slaves during the seventeenth century, Obeah was based on the belief that practitioners could summon supernatural forces for personal and often malevolent purposes. As spiritual leaders, practitioners might harness their popularity for political ends. They were consequently feared by whites for their power to incite resistance against white dominance, even after Emancipation. Local authorities enacted several laws against the practice of Obeah in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Punishments included fines, flogging, hard labor and imprisonment, with practitioners receiving more severe sentences than their patrons.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁵ Malton, *Reminiscences*, 37.

⁴⁶ Malton, *Reminiscences*, 37.

⁴⁷ Brian L. Moore and Michele A. Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven: Contesting British Cultural Imperialism in Jamaica, 1865-1920* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), 15-33. Quotation can be found on p. 15. Kenneth M. Bilby and Jerome S. Handler, “Obeah: Healing and Protection in West Indian Slave Life,” *The Journal of Caribbean History* 38, 2 (2004), 153-183; Monica Schuler, ‘Alas, Alas, Kongo’: a social history of indentured African immigration into Jamaica, 1841-1865 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 36; Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834*

practice of Obeah nevertheless persisted. “[T]hough the laws are . . . rigid,” Malton wrote, “the evil still predominates.” Black Jamaicans’ “blind ignorance” made them vulnerable to Obeah, and education was identified as the best hope of eradicating this evil.⁴⁸

Schooling became increasingly important after the rebellion at Morant Bay. Before the introduction of Crown colony government in 1866, the churches assumed sole charge of educating former slaves. The rebellion prompted the colonial state to intervene, establishing new elementary schools and providing financial assistance to existing church schools. The “barbarism” of the rebellion convinced colonial authorities that the safety of the upper classes and the prosperity of the island hinged on the “enlightenment” and “moral elevation” of the masses. But state assistance was limited and compulsory elementary education was not implemented until 1912. This was due to the high costs of schooling and official concern that compulsory education would undermine the plantation-based colonial economy by leading the laboring classes away from agricultural pursuits. Prior to the First World War, just over 25 per cent of school-aged Jamaican children attended elementary school.⁴⁹

Malton was nevertheless assured that this increased emphasis on schooling would generate “a healthy moral tone and religious sentiment” in the island, which was, until recently

(Kingston: University of the West Indies, 1998), 54-59; Robert J. Stewart, *Religion and Society in Post-Emancipation Jamaica* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 36-38.

⁴⁸ Malton, *Reminiscences*, 38.

⁴⁹ Ruby King, “Elementary Education in Early Twentieth-Century Jamaica,” *Caribbean Journal of Education* 16, 3 (1989), 224-246; Ruby King, “Education in the British Caribbean: The Legacy of the Nineteenth Century,” in Errol Miller, ed., *Educational Reform in the Commonwealth Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States, 1999), 25-45; Moore and Johnson, *Neither Led Nor Driven*, 205-228.

“a stranger” to black Jamaicans.⁵⁰ His emphasis on the elevating power of education reflected, in part, the growing pre-occupation with moral reform in Canada during the 1880s.

Industrialization and the growth of an urban working class prompted concerns about moral and racial degeneracy. “The correlate” to this growth, as Mariana Valverde has shown, was the development of an urban middle-class that initiated philanthropic schemes to “reform or ‘regenerate’ Canadian society.”⁵¹ Yet to many contemporaries, this “regeneration” was a wholly Anglo-Saxon project. “Canadian society,” as constructed by the white, English-speaking bourgeoisie, was defined by an Anglo-Saxon norm. Nation-building projects were subsequently inseparable from – and their success was contingent upon – the (white) “racial character” of the population. The *Chinese Immigration Act* of 1885, which placed a head tax on Chinese immigrants, underlined the contradictions of this ideal. Chinese laborers had played a crucial role in Canada’s foremost nation building project, the Canadian Pacific Railway. Following its completion in 1885, the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration deemed the Chinese an “inassimilable race.” Racial taxonomies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century similarly identified “the Negro” and “the East Asian” as inassimilable “alien” races. Peoples of color were undesirable citizens not for their lack of education or capital, but because they were “unlikely to lead orderly and civilized lives.” Their moral regulation thus demanded rigid and coercive measures.⁵²

⁵⁰ Malton, *Reminiscences*, 38.

⁵¹ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008 [first ed., McClelland & Stewart, 1991]), 15.

That black Jamaicans were “uncivilized” was not the central issue for Canadian unionists; more important was their apparent disinterest in advancing to a civilized state – or worse, their incapacity to do so. Taking control of the island was thus foolish and absurd. “The negroes,” according to “A Gentleman” interviewed by the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, were “the laziest creatures to be found on the face of the globe – they were of a poor, shirtless class, without any work in them and trying to live from hand to mouth.”⁵³ It was for this reason, argued Halifax merchant James Butler, they lost representative government in 1866 and “now . . . had to be governed in the most rigid manner.”⁵⁴ Jamaica’s wretched conditions were not the result of Britain’s ongoing neglect (not to mention a legacy of slavery). Nor were they a product of white planter and merchant efforts to maintain political and economic control. Blame for the debased state of Jamaica’s affairs was placed squarely at the door of black Jamaicans.

Halifax alderman W.B. McSweeney, who had visited Jamaica and was apparently well acquainted with political and social conditions on the island, was strongly averse to union. With an approximate ratio of 14,000 whites to 550,000 blacks, union would only prove a “confounded nuisance.” Here the specter of black resistance in white historical memory was crucial. Black Jamaicans, “the same kind who had created so much trouble on Hayti” during the Revolution of 1791-1804, were “impossible to satisfactorily govern.” McSweeney did not differentiate African-descended peoples in the British colonies from elsewhere. There was no

⁵² Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*, 104-105, 110-111.

⁵³ Interview of “A Gentleman,” as paraphrased by the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 August 1884.

⁵⁴ James Butler’s interview paraphrased by the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 August 1884.

good reason Canada should desire “looking after these very valueless colored citizens” who were prone to agitation and lacked the capacity to govern themselves.⁵⁵

Idleness and the inability of the “negro race” to withstand Canada’s climate were similarly constructed to challenge the idea that black Jamaicans would make productive citizens. E. C. Dacosta, a white Barbadian merchant who owned a commercial house that shipped sugar and other products to Canada, argued that union would be a mistake because black Jamaicans were not good laborers. Accustomed to living “hand to mouth,” they “work for a shilling a day and can get a good meal for eight cents.”⁵⁶ The “idea of getting cheap labor from Jamaica,” as Halifax merchant Daniel Cronan contended, “is all nonsense.” Content with their simple existence, black Jamaicans would not provide Canadian industries with productive labor, particularly given the temperate climate.⁵⁷

To Cronan, the black “nuisance” was not a distant specter threatening Canada’s national horizon, but was very much a reality. Citing the large migration of slaves and free blacks to British North America during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Cronan concluded that Canadians “had enough of that kind of thing when we got the extensive importations of them from the south years ago.” From British Emancipation in the 1830s to the end of the American Civil War in 1865, somewhere between 30,000 and 40,000 black fugitives (slave and free) migrated to British North America. That the majority of these fugitives migrated back to

⁵⁵ W.B. McSweeney’s interview paraphrased by the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 August 1884.

⁵⁶ E.C. Dacosta’s interview paraphrased by the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 August 1884.

⁵⁷ Daniel Cronan’s interview paraphrased by the *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 August 1884.

the United States during and after Reconstruction – along with thousands of African Canadians – was apparently lost on Cronan. In the 1881 census, the total number of “negro” residents in Canada had dwindled to 21,394.⁵⁸ The mid-century influx of blacks from the United States nonetheless threatened visions of a (white) national future.

Of course blacks had resided in Canada long before the antebellum period. Black servants and crew members accompanied early European explorers to the Americas, and their presence in what became Canada can be dated back to the early seventeenth century. From 1628 to British Emancipation in 1834, hundreds of Africans and indigenous peoples were enslaved in French and later British North America, though these numbers had declined considerably before Emancipation. The black population increased at the conclusion of the American Revolutionary War, as thousands of free black Loyalists (3,500) and the slaves of white Loyalists (2,000) migrated to the Maritimes, Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec). Six hundred Jamaican “Maroons” (escaped slaves) were shipped to Halifax in 1796. Prior to their relocation to Sierra Leone in 1800, they were put to work reinforcing the Halifax Citadel. During the War of 1812 thousands of escaped American slaves joined the British army and later settled in Canada. Identifying the British as “champions of black freedom and equality” – a reputation formed during the Revolutionary War – black fugitives were eager to join their Loyalist predecessors.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ James W. St. G. Walker, “African Canadians” in Paul Robert Magosci, ed., *Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples* (Toronto: Published for the Multicultural Society of Ontario by the University of Toronto), 148.

⁵⁹ Prior to the Conquest in 1760, there were approximately 1,400 African and 2,692 indigenous slaves in New France. While the large majority of loyalists migrated to Canada, some went to the West Indies,

Despite this interest in fleeing to British North America, for many black Loyalists and fugitives, the promise of freedom and equality proved hollow. Slavery and the mentality it produced perpetually identified African-descended peoples as subordinate to whites. “Over time,” as James Walker has observed, “slavery spawned many of the stereotypical characteristics applied to black people, particularly the notions of dependence, lack of initiative, and suitability only for service and unskilled employment.” When slavery ended in the British Empire in 1834, the specter of slavery and race relations in the United States continued to inform white Canadian ideas about black people. Black migrants to Canada and their descendants experienced ongoing difficulties obtaining land, which made them dependent on white landlords. They faced discrimination in the workplace – consigned to laboring and service positions – and, by extension, social discrimination.⁶⁰

Education barriers hampered opportunities for social advancement in black communities. In pre-Confederation Nova Scotia, free schools were introduced in the *Education Act* of 1864, but access was confined to children residing in the school district, which excluded a considerable number of black children who resided in isolated settlements across the province. An 1865 amendment to the *Act* authorized the Council of Public Instruction to establish

Bermuda and England. See Walker, “African Canadians,” 142-145. Quotation can be found on p. 143. Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s, 1997 [1st ed. Yale, 1971]). James W. St. G. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992 [1st ed. Longman, 1976]); John N. Grant, *The Immigration and Settlement of the Black Refugees of the War of 1812 in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick* (Dartmouth, NS: Hantsport, 1990).

⁶⁰ Walker, “African Canadians,” 142, 148-150. Quotation can be found on p. 149. See also Sharon A. Roger Hepburn, “Following the North Star: Canada as a Haven for Nineteenth-Century American Blacks,” *The Michigan Historical Review* 25, 2 (Fall 1999), 92-125.

separate schools (or separate rooms in white schools) according to race and gender. But schools for black children were only introduced in districts with significant black populations (all 3 were in Halifax), and the quality of education in these schools was drastically inferior to that provided in white schools.⁶¹ Because black settlements were geographically segregated from white settlements in “scattered enclaves across the province,” there were no free schools for black children outside Halifax.⁶²

Debates about Canada-West Indies union in 1884 occurred contemporaneously with, and were likely informed by, black Nova Scotians’ mounting dissatisfaction with separate schools. In March a delegation of black and white members urged the provincial government for reform. Black delegate Reverend Henry H. Johnson averred that the color line in education did not reflect the interests or sentiments of the wider community. Johnson was not seeking, as stated in the *Acadian Reporter*, “equality socially of the coloured people with the white, but seeking their rights as citizens to equal educational advantages with the white children on the ground that the coloured people were British subjects and had equal rights. . . He stigmatized this color line as a relic of slavery, and asked for justice for the coloured people.”⁶³ The

⁶¹ Bridglal Pachai, *The Nova Scotia Black Experience Through the Centuries* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Ltd., 2007), 128-129. Prior to this legislation schooling for black Nova Scotians was provided by missionary and philanthropic societies, most notably the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. See Robin W. Winks, “Negro School Segregation in Ontario and Nova Scotia,” *Canadian Historical Review* 50, 2 (June 1969), 167-168.

⁶² Bernice Moreau, “Black Nova Scotian Women’s Schooling and Citizenship: An Education of Violence,” in Robert Adamoski et al., *Contesting Canadian Citizenship: Historical Readings* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, Ltd., 2002), 302.

⁶³ *Acadian Recorder*, 1 April 1884, as cited in Pachai, *The Nova Scotia Black Experience*, 131-132.

delegation convinced at least one member of the Legislative Assembly that reform was necessary. Robert Hockin, Conservative Member of Parliament for Pictou, tabled a motion to amend the chapter of the Statutes of Public Instruction that authorized municipal or district commissioners to establish, at their discretion, separate schools for children of color.

Appealing, as Johnson had, to Assembly members' sense of British justice, Hockin stated that he was surprised to learn – and no doubt other members were as well – that such a “barbarous law” still existed “in this portion of the British dominions.” He feared that Canada was perhaps the only part of the Empire in which “such a blot on the British constitution” remained in evidence.⁶⁴

Hockin proposed to strike out any reference to children “of different colours” in the *Education Act*. As it stood, the Act trespassed “on the liberty of the colored people of Nova Scotia.” Hockin’s motion received some support in the Assembly, but it ultimately failed by a vote of 15 to 17. All three Halifax members voted against the resolution. Merchant Michael Power argued that while the question was not as controversial in the country districts, it would have serious consequences in Halifax, where three separate schools were already in operation. Integrating black and white students would effectively destroy the city’s public schools. Power had “nothing to say against the colored people” and did not have children himself, but doubted that any member of the House “would like to have his children occupy a position at a school desk with colored children.” Integration would “cause serious injustice to a large body of people,” by which he meant whites. Parental opposition to racial mingling would catalyze the

⁶⁴ Nova Scotia, *Debates and Proceedings of the House of Assembly*, 2nd session, 28th parliament, 28 March, 1884 (Halifax: Charles Annand, 1884), 140.

widespread withdrawal of white children from the common schools, which was nothing short of an injustice. Liberal member for Halifax William Fielding shared Power's contention that segregated schools served the "greater good" of the public. Equal access to the common schools was perhaps sensible in theory, but not in practice. "It might be admitted that men should be regarded for what they were worth, regardless of color or creed; but even in the neighboring republic – where if anywhere all men were supposed to be created equal – the prejudice existed, and, although all men were equal in the eyes of the law, they were not equal in matters of social life." The deep prejudice of white Nova Scotians, in other words, necessitated segregation.⁶⁵

Weighing in on the Canada-West Indies union question in November 1884, Fielding's *Morning Chronicle* concluded that "Jamaica has got itself in a tight place. Its trade languishes. Bad government, an idle population, lack of business shrewdness, lack of industry and improvidence have reduced it to that position which requires help." Why should Canada save them from the consequences of "their own want of ability to look after affairs."⁶⁶ When Reverend William Murray of Jamaica extolled the benefits of union during his visit to Nova Scotia in October of that year, the *Chronicle* roundly dismissed him. "It would be a foolish speculation to abolish the present reciprocal fish trade with fifty millions of people for the sake of gaining a free fish trade with a half million of darkies." Perhaps still reeling from the schools controversy, the editor took particular issue with Murray's observation that blacks in Jamaica were "as intelligent and well educated as the average population of Nova Scotia" before the

⁶⁵ Nova Scotia, Debates and Proceedings of the House of Assembly, 2nd session, 28th parliament, 28 March, 1884 (Halifax: Charles Annand, 1884), 140-141.

⁶⁶ *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, as cited in the *Daily Gleaner*, 26 November 1884.

introduction of free schools. “[T]here is not,” the *Chronicle* rebutted, “‘even sweet reasonableness’, let alone truth, in the statement.” To suggest that a society comprised largely of blacks would “progress” at the same rate as one with a predominantly white population was apparently preposterous.⁶⁷ Because Jamaicans had been “found incapable of governing themselves,” the *Chronicle* expressed amusement that they “were now anxious to have a share in governing Canadians.”⁶⁸

More receptive to the union proposal, Halifax’s *Morning Herald* did not identify race as a serious obstacle. “Twenty years ago the Imperial government, it is true, decided that the Jamaicans were unfit for self-government. But twenty years affords time enough for considerable improvement in the educational and moral status of a country; and there is reason to believe that the Jamaica of today is far in advance of the Jamaica of 1865.” Absolute self-government, moreover, should be distinguished from self-government within a federal system. “It is possible that a country may not be fit to govern itself in all things, and still be a useful member of a federation.” In this way the United States case was instructive. While there were states that “would cut a sorry figure as independent nationalities,” they were nonetheless productive members of the Republic. The terms of union would determine the extent to which Jamaicans would “share in governing Canadians.” With only 10 or 15 representatives in

⁶⁷ Murray’s interview can be found in the *Morning Herald*, 21 October 1884; *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, as cited in the *Daily Gleaner*, 26 November 1884.

⁶⁸ *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 27 August 1884.

Ottawa, there was no fear that Jamaicans would direct Canadian affairs in any significant measure.⁶⁹

Support for Jamaica assuming provincial status in the Canadian federation was otherwise scarce. In Nova Scotia and especially Halifax, constructs of African-descended peoples as backward and idle triumphed over faith in their progressive capacities. In short, black Jamaicans would not make good citizens. “The great bulk of the population,” the *Halifax Evening Mail* warned, “know nothing about political duties. They have never had anything to do with the choice of their law makers, and do not know what voting means.” It would be consequently “unsafe” to take Jamaica into the federation on the same terms as the provinces. Territorial status was a possibility, or perhaps a form of provincial government with a highly restrictive franchise to shut out the large majority of Jamaicans. “[W]e believe,” the *Mail* continued, “that the whole adult male population of Canada should enjoy the rights of citizenship, and may be safely trusted to elect members of the Canadian [H]ouse of [C]ommons. But we do not regard the natives of the West India islands in the same light.” While union would be advantageous from a commercial point of view, it could potentially “endanger” Canadian institutions.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *Morning Herald*, 27 August 1884.

⁷⁰ *Evening Mail*, as cited in the *Morning Herald*, 25 August 1884. Similar arguments were advanced in *The Globe*, 18 August, 2 September, 1884. Universal male suffrage was not, in fact, practiced in Nova Scotia. In 1884, men aged 21 years or older were required to own or in good faith occupy, property valued at a minimum of 150 dollars, or own at least 300 dollars in combined real and personal property. Government of Canada, *A History of the Vote in Canada* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 1997), 46.

Even the campaign's chief proponents did not support a union arrangement that presupposed the political equality of white Canadians and black West Indians. Responding to the *Halifax Morning Chronicle's* condemnation of union on racial grounds, Charles Levy wrote, "[s]peaking with all respect to the reasonable aspirations of my fellow-colonists, I think you over-rate their legal claim to representation in the Canadian Parliament." Beyond the legal aspect of the question, Jamaicans apparently did not desire more than one or two seats. While Jamaica's population was nearly 600,000, Levy concluded that one or two seats would be adequate representation for Jamaica's white planter and merchant interests, at least to start.⁷¹

In less diplomatic language, Spencer Jones concurred. Such equality, he maintained, would hinder national growth. In this way, the United States' example was again instructive. The Republic, "hampered by universal suffrage, and by visionary doctrines of equality, is already encumbered with nearly two million negro voters, and consequently dare not risk the swamping of her constitution by adding the semi-barbarous Mexicans or the emancipated slaves of Cuba to her list of voters." Canada, fortunately, had never "professed her belief in such dogmas," and could thus, under a restrictive franchise (based on property and education requirements), freely admit people of color.⁷² "Democratic ideals of equality are abhorrent to the white man," but whites need not worry because the small number of enfranchised West Indians

⁷¹ Levy, Letter to the Editor, *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 29 November 1884, in Levy, Levy, *Correspondence on Confederation with the Dominion of Canada* (Kingston, JA: DeCordova & Co., 1885), 15. According to the census of 1881, Jamaica's population was as follows: 14,432 white, 109,946 "coloured or half-breed," and 444,186 black. See Frederick Martin et al., *The Statesman's year-book*, vol. 28 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1891), 221.

⁷² Spencer Jones, Letter to the Editor, *Toronto Mail*, 3 June 1884.

of color would support the status quo. “[T]he negro, always imitative,” would follow the white man’s lead at the polls.⁷³ Jones’ vision of Canada-West Indies union reflected a national construct that was acutely inscribed by racial thinking. The nation-state’s well-being, by his account, depended on a racially exclusive (white) franchise. Enfranchising too many subjects of color, as the United States case allegedly demonstrated, would imperil Canada’s national future.

Canada’s status as a nation-state in the 1880s produced two divergent responses to the Canada-West Indies union campaign. This status raised critical questions about the Dominion’s preparedness for extra-territorial expansion. On the one hand, nation-state status validated Canadian aspirations in the West Indies. While on the other, the nation-state was too young and precarious; it was not mature enough to take on extra-territorial “responsibilities.” Moreover, as Baden-Powell’s assessment revealed, the responsibilities of governance in the West Indies were thought very different from those in continental Canada. Hardened constructs of racial difference and, consequently, a more rigid approach to governance in Britain’s “dependencies” had replaced the civilizing ethos so instrumental to imperial expansion and colonial relations in the mid-nineteenth century. Perhaps not surprisingly, then,

⁷³ Jones, “Advantages to the Conservative Party of WI Confederation,” enclosed in Jones to Macdonald, 2 August 1884, 145700-01, vol. 323, M. P., LAC. See also Jones to Macdonald, 20 August 1883, fol. 145721-145723, vol. 323, M.P., LAC; Jones to Macdonald, 12 September 1883, fol. 190007-10, and 20 September 1883, fol. 190131-33, vol. 396, M. P., LAC; Jones to Macdonald and enclosures, 1 November 1883, fol. 126906-16, vol. 277, M. P., LAC; Jones to Macdonald, 2 August 1884, fol. 145691-92, and enclosure, “Notes on the Admission of the British West Indies and British Guiana into the Dominion,” fol. 145693-99, vol. 393, M.P., LAC.

Canadian proponents of union lacked this ethos in the 1880s. They were motivated instead by wholly commercial impulses, as outlined in the previous chapter.

But as this chapter has demonstrated, the campaign did not fail for commercial reasons alone. To many commentators in Britain and Canada, it was not practical (nor desirable) for the Canadian nation-state to administer the West Indies, particularly under the austere form of government purportedly required. In this way, race and commerce clashed to hinder the union campaign. When the campaign re-emerged at the end of the nineteenth century, its proponents would try to reconcile the commercial and racial dimensions of union.

4. Rounding off the Confederation

Geopolitics, Tropicality, and Canada's 'Destiny' in the West Indies

No one can doubt that it is within the power of the leading European peoples of to-day – should they so desire – to parcel out the entire equatorial regions of the earth into a series of satrapies, and to administer their resources, not as in the past by a permanently resident population, but from the temperate regions, and under the direction of a relatively small European official population.

- Benjamin Kidd, *The Control of the Tropics*, 1898¹

Canada has not hitherto been considered a factor in the New World. She has been looked upon as a dependency of Great Britain, occupying a position similar to that of the American colonies before the Revolution – a young country concerned mainly with questions of internal development and expansion. But, with the steady growth of her political autonomy, her increasing population, the rapid progress of her manufacturing industries, and an ambition that is almost Imperial, she is becoming a force to be reckoned with.

-J.P. Livingstone, "The Future of the British West Indies," 1906²

Two months after the Spanish-American War won the United States Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, The New York Times asked George E. Burke, a Canadian trade agent in Jamaica, about Canada's future in the Caribbean.³ Burke wasted no words. Canada, he told the Times reporter, should annex Jamaica without hesitation. Absorbing Jamaica "would bring to the great northern country just precisely what she most needs. That is, a tropical annex." Doing so would also set the stage for future Canadian expansion in the region.

¹ Kidd, *The Control of the Tropics* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1898), 78.

² W.P. Livingstone, "The Future of the British West Indies," *The North American Review* 182, 592 (March 1906), 428.

³ While United States' authority in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines was not officially recognized until the Treaty of Paris on 10 December 1898, the islands had been under U.S. control during the summer of 1898.

Burke dismissed any need for the military intervention through which the United States had occupied Spanish territory. Jamaica was, like Canada, part of the British Empire and, according to Burke, the imperial government should be eager to relinquish its responsibilities in the region. “[W]hile [England] retained her sovereignty, her Ministers would at once be relieved of the problem of providing for the future of the islands – a problem that has, up to the present time, completely baffled them, and for which no other practical solution appears attainable.”⁴

Burke’s interview highlights the principal circumstances and anxieties guiding the union discourse in the early twentieth century. While the United States’ growing influence in the Western hemisphere was well in evidence throughout most of the nineteenth century, the Spanish-American War marked a turning point. Historians have identified the final years of the nineteenth century as a critical juncture in Anglo-American relations. The outcome of the Venezuela-British Guyana boundary dispute in 1897, arbitrated by the United States (on behalf of Venezuela) and Britain, established American hegemony in the hemisphere. More concerned with Britain’s imperial interests in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, the British government backed down easily to United States’ pressure. The Spanish-American War a year later established America’s overseas Empire and confirmed the Republic’s ascent to global power. Many Britons at home and abroad supported and even identified with America’s “civilizing

⁴ *New York Times*, 14 September 1898.

mission.” The United States’ victory was lauded as a boon to imperial security and a triumph of the Anglo-Saxon race.⁵

Burke’s enthusiasm for Canada’s annexation of Jamaica is difficult to reconcile with this narrative. That Anglo-Saxon pretensions and amity conditioned Canadian responses to the Spanish American War is clear enough, but to what extent did the war – and these pretensions – incite Canadian dreams of expansion in the Caribbean? The answer to these questions has much to do with Canada-United States trade rivalry. But it also concerns the growing importance of “the tropics” in commercial and ideological discourses at the turn of the century. The chapter’s first section elaborates this argument. European expansion in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Pacific in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century stimulated widespread interest in the tropics and a renewed fascination with the contrast between temperate and tropical regions. The development of tropical medicine after 1890 prompted a preoccupation with tropical disease and a proliferation of colonial pathologies.⁶ Steamship technologies

⁵ Assured that the United States would maintain the status quo in the hemisphere, the British could focus their energies elsewhere, most urgently in the Transvaal, where hostilities between British and Dutch settlers were escalating. Edward P. Kohn, *This Kindred People: Canadian-American Relations and the Anglo-Saxon Idea, 1895-1903* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 13-51, 92-134; John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Ambivalent Allies: Canada and the United States* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 65; Stuart Anderson, *Race and Rapprochement: Anglo-Saxonism and Anglo-American Relations, 1895-1904* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1981); Graeme S. Mount, “Friendly Liberator or Predatory Aggressor?: Some Canadian Impressions of the United States During the Spanish-American War,” *North/South: Canadian Journal of Latin American Studies* 22 (1986), 59-76.

⁶ Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in the Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); John Farley, *Bilharzia: A History of Tropical Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Helen J. Power, *Tropical Medicine in the Twentieth Century: A History of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, 1898-1990* (London & New York: Kegan Paul, 1999).

increased the circulation of commodities, ideas and people. Tourists, naturalists, artists, politicians, trade officials and others engaged tropical worlds. “Tropicality” provided, as Felix Driver and Luciana Martins observe, “a powerful imaginative foundation for a variety of scientific, aesthetic, and political projects.”⁷ It was in this context that Canadian expansionists identified, in Burke’s words, the necessity of acquiring “a tropical annex.”

Burke’s vision suggests that Canadians’ heightened interest in and engagement with the tropics was inextricably bound to a national project. As section two demonstrates, access to tropical territory was thought crucial to national development and the fulfillment of Canada’s “destiny” in the hemisphere. Acquiring this territory would, as the federal member of parliament for Pictou, Nova Scotia urged in 1901, “round out Confederation” and make British America “thoroughly self-sustaining and independent of other countries.”⁸ This particular assessment was rooted in a protectionist ideology that identified annexation as a means to commercial self-sufficiency and thus greater autonomy within the Empire and the wider world. But commercial considerations, though important, were only one aspect of a broader, transnational dialogue about Canada’s imperial future. As Britain retreated further from the hemisphere, many proposed that the Dominion pick up where Britain left off. Shifting circumstances in early twentieth century Canada – characterized by extraordinary economic development, the completion of a trans-continental railway, exponential population growth, and Western settlement – bred unprecedented optimism about Canada’s national potential.

⁷ Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, “Views and Visions of the Tropical World,” in Driver and Martins, eds., *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁸ *Toronto Star*, 16 March 1901.

Well on the way to fulfilling their much anticipated Western destiny, it was now possible for Canadians to conceive – and pursue – a southern destiny.

As the chapter's final section reveals, this imagined destiny took on new meaning and greater urgency in 1911. In January of that year Prime Minister Laurier's Liberal government finalized the details of a trade reciprocity agreement with the United States. The agreement prompted a considerable backlash against the government. Admonished by English-speaking Conservatives (and many Liberals) as a betrayal of the imperial connection and an invitation to Canada's annexation by the United States, the reciprocity agreement became the central issue in the general election that ousted the Liberals from government in September 1911. Only weeks after the government introduced the agreement, a group representing diverse commercial interests, mainly Conservative, launched a vigorous campaign to annex the Bahamas. This campaign is difficult to reconcile with our understanding of the reciprocity agreement and its aftermath. Studies of the reciprocity debates focus on the complex interplay between political and commercial interest groups in Canada, the United States, and Britain.⁹ The West Indies never enter the equation. But for those who campaigned for Canada-Bahamas union, the West Indies were critical to the Dominion's twentieth-century national trajectory.

⁹ See R.A. Shields, *Imperial Policy and Canadian-American Reciprocity, 1909-1911*, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 5 (1977), 151-171; Shields, "Imperial policy and Canadian-American commercial relations, 1880-1911," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 59 (1986), 108-121. This interpretation has recently come under scrutiny by Simon J. Potter, "The Imperial Significance of the Canadian-American Reciprocity Proposals of 1911," *The Historical Journal* 47, 1 (March 2004), 81-100.

4.1 Tropicality

On the morning of February 24th, 1902, about thirty passengers boarded the Halifax based Pickford & Black steamer *Dahome* to embark on a 42 day “tropical voyage” to Bermuda, the Leeward Islands, and British Guyana. One of the passengers, Nova Scotian newspaperman W.D. Taunton, recalled that our “little band [was] about to begin a voyage south by water; to run away, as it were, from the chilly March winds and the long, trying spring of our northern climate.” Hailing from Toronto, Montreal, New York, London, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick, the passengers included tourists, merchants, and missionaries, as well as a small contingent of imperial soldiers en route from England to Bermuda.¹⁰ Sometimes the ships would dock for 4 to 5 hours, while in other locations passengers were able to disembark and explore the islands for several days. While a novel experience for many on board, this sort of “tropical voyage” – for those with financial means – became increasingly common by the early twentieth century. Advances in steamship technology, coupled with growing investment in transport industries, allowed steamship companies to establish regular (and gradually more frequent) commercial and passenger services between Canada and the West Indies. By 1902, for example, Pickford & Black offered fortnightly steamship sailings to the West Indies on their “All-Canadian route.”¹¹

¹⁰ W.D. Taunton, *To the British West Indies via Halifax: The All Canadian Route* (Halifax: Pickford & Black, c. 1902).

¹¹ Taunton, *To the British West Indies via Halifax*.

The steamship collapsed geographic space and allowed travelers to experience Britain's far-flung Empire firsthand. It also facilitated the production of knowledge about different colonial spaces. As another steamship company described it, "[n]ot only do those in search of a pleasurable holiday find unsurpassable opportunities in Caribbean waters, but these Western Islands contain items of absorbing interest to 'all sorts of men'. Botanists, and indeed students of natural history of all descriptions, will meet many unfamiliar species The patriot and the student of history are interested at every step. Philosophers and psychologists have ample material here, whilst the artist cannot but revel in the feast of colour spread hourly before him."¹² Through steamship travel, in other words, Canada and the West Indies were "becoming better acquainted with one another."¹³

In *To the British West Indies via Halifax: The All Canadian Route*, Taunton shared his travel experiences during his 1902 voyage. While in Georgetown, British Guyana, Taunton found in the mercantile community "quite a feeling in favor of political union with Canada." Finding much merit in the idea himself (he would go on to advocate union back in Canada), he provided Canadian readers with a detailed description of the region and its peoples. The description reveals an effort to make the West Indies accessible to Canadian readers, thus enabling them to conceive of union. Georgetown was "a beautiful city" with "handsome private residences," a library, excellent social clubs, two newspapers, and "fine public

¹² *Tours in the West Indies with brief notes on points of interest* (Halifax: The Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, 1913).

¹³ "Canada and West Indies, Messrs. Pickford and Black," *West India Committee Circular*, 31 August 1903.

buildings." Bridgetown, Barbados was home to "the wealthiest of Britain's stations abroad," a parliament, market, and a "great winter resort."¹⁴ Port of Spain, Trinidad was

a flourishing up-to-date city about the size of Halifax, and the people extend a welcome hand to anything calculated to improve their condition. . . Nearly three million tons of cacao were exported during the years 1898-1900. There is not a pauper on the whole island. Certainly we saw no beggars there, as in many of the islands. On the contrary we found every evidence of prosperity and contentment, and a thoroughly wide-awake business community. Port of Spain is a beautiful city, with a fine climate. Its stores cannot be surpassed in Canada, and as the duty on British goods is only 5 per cent.; it can be readily understood why tourists are anxious to spend their money there. . . . Trinidad enjoys a tram system, one branch of which is run by electricity, and the other by mule power. Formerly it was all mule power. Then a company came along and built a road and propelled the cars by electricity. Thus there were two companies in the business. Canadians saw a good thing in electric roads and electric lighting, and gobbled up both companies. Soon the whole system will be run by electricity.¹⁵

Taunton's emphasis on the modern amenities available in the West Indies and the similarities between West Indian and Canadian urban centers coexisted uneasily with the keen sense of colonial difference that also informed his narrative. He was captivated by the "dusky negro rowers" who brought the passengers ashore at Hamilton, Bermuda, by the juxtaposition in Port of Spain's harbor of "the smart little Canadian brig" and "the majestic looking coolie ship from Calcutta," by the "pagan customs" of Georgetown's South Asian population, and by the "motley crowd of Negroes, Coolies, Chinese, French, Spanish, Portuguese and black buzzards" that populated Port-of-Spain.¹⁶ In the latter construct, Port-of-Spain's British-descended population is conspicuously absent (apparently being too refined to join such a group), while a

¹⁴ Taunton, *To the British West Indies via Halifax*, 14-16, 25-26.

¹⁵ Taunton, *To the British West Indies via Halifax*, 23-24.

¹⁶ Taunton, *To the British West Indies via Halifax*, 4, 26, 23.

wild beast of Trinidad's urban landscape (a vulture no less) is conspicuously included. The "motley crowd" thus assumes an uncivilized character.

Taunton conveys his construction of colonial difference most vividly in his description of the *Dahome's* arrival at St. Kitts. Anchored outside Basseterre harbor, Taunton and the other passengers found it curious that a medical officer came on board to inspect the passengers. The harbor master "examined the ship's papers in his own boat and then went off, announcing that he would send out the port medical officer. As his boat left the steamer's side he shouted to the various boats to 'keep back' . . . They fell back much to the amusement of the passengers. They evidently thought ours a plague ship." The amusement experienced by Taunton and his fellow passengers at being temporarily quarantined was undergirded by a sense of racial superiority. Port medical inspections were not uncommon by the early twentieth century, but the notion that white, upper middle-class travelers required inspection was an amusing inversion of colonial roles.¹⁷ White colonists embodied norms of moral and medical hygiene, while non-white subjects were suspect of varying degrees of moral and medical contamination.¹⁸

Despite the implications of Taunton's narrative, his intention in writing the travelogue was to promote Canadian tours to the West Indies on Pickford and Black's line of steamers; the proprietors had in fact enlisted Taunton for this very purpose. Yet for steamship companies

¹⁷ Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 69-70; Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 183-186.

¹⁸ David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia* (New York, Basic Books: 2003), and Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*.

like Pickford and Black, it mattered more that this growing “acquaintance” with the West Indies – and the production of knowledge about the region more generally – stimulate trade. While Canada’s tourist traffic to the West Indies increased in the first decade of the twentieth century, the commodities trade remained a more lucrative enterprise.¹⁹ The commercial and ideological purchase of “the tropics,” in particular, was buttressed by European and United States expansion at the turn of the century, and the subsequent proliferation of articles and books about the importance of the tropics to national (or regional) economies in temperate regions.²⁰

Benjamin Kidd’s widely popular *Control of the Tropics* (1898) exemplified this emerging discourse.²¹ A British civil servant and amateur naturalist, Kidd argued that the tropics had become vital to the prosperity and progress of the “civilized world.” Continued

¹⁹ Canadian tourists more commonly travelled to European or North American destinations. As Duncan McDowall, *Another World: Bermuda and the Rise of Modern Tourism* (London: MacMillan Education, 1999), 3, writes, “[w]hen the century dawned, travel was still largely the preserve of the affluent classes who wandered the beaten paths of Europe and North America.”

²⁰ See for example, Audley Gosling, “Central America and its Resources,” *The North American Review*, 162, 470 (January 1896), 96-102; Arthur Curtiss James, “Advantages of Hawaiian Annexation,” *The North American Review*, 165, 493 (December 1897), 758-760; Josiah Strong, *Expansion under New World-Conditions* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1900); J. Russell Smith, “Western South America and its Relation to American Trade,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 18 (November 1901), 56-78; James H. Wilson, *An Address on our Trade Relations with the Tropics* (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1901); E.R. Johnson, “The Trade and Industries of Western South America,” *Journal of Geography*, 1, 3 (March 1902), 109-122; O.P. Austin, “Our Trade with Hawaii and Porto Rico,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 19, 3 (1902), 47-52.

²¹ Kidd, *The Control of the Tropics* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1898). The content of this book first appeared as a series of articles in the *London Times*, 29 July, 13 August, 15 August, 1898. On Kidd’s influence see Rod Edmond, “Returning Fears: Tropical Disease and the Metropolis,” in Felix Driver and Luciana Martins, eds., *Tropical Visions in an Age of Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 178-179.

industrialization and rapid population growth in the world's temperate regions necessitated increased trade with tropical regions. This trend was already in evidence. Trade between the world's temperate and tropical countries had increased rapidly over the past few years and would continue to do so. In 1895-96, a whopping 44 percent of Britain and the United States' combined world trade took place with the tropics.²² "With the filling up of the temperate regions and the continued development of industrialism throughout the civilized world the rivalry and struggle for the trade of the tropics will, beyond doubt, be the permanent underlying fact in the foreign relations of the Western nations in the twentieth century." The "complex life of the modern world" rested, in short, on the "production of the tropics."²³

The fate of the "modern world" thus hinged on the development of the tropics. The centuries-old approach to colonial commerce, based on the object of "exploiting any tropical region by regarding it primarily as an estate to be worked for gain," was no longer appropriate. Tropical regions possessed enormous potential, but this potential could only be realized through an earnest approach to development. "It is not to be expected that existing nations will, in the future, continue to acknowledge any rights in the tropics which are not based both on the intention and the ability to develop these regions."²⁴ The "natural" inhabitants of the tropics, backward and uncivilized, were incapable of either initiating or consummating this development. "If we look to the native social systems of the tropical East, to the primitive

²² Kidd, *Control of the Tropics*, 13-14. Kidd calculated this combined trade from Britain's annual trade statistics in 1896, and the United States' trade in 1895.

²³ Kidd, *Control of the Tropics*, 46-47, 17.

²⁴ Kidd, *Control of the Tropics*, 49, 47.

savagery of Central Africa, to the West Indian Islands in the past in process of being assisted into the position of modern States by Great Britain, to the Black Republic of Hayti in the present, or to modern Liberia in the future, the lesson seems everywhere the same; it is that there will be no development of the resources of the tropics under native government."²⁵ This development was part of what Kipling would later summarize in poetry as "the white man's burden."²⁶

But therein lay the problem for Kidd and his contemporaries. While the European or "white race" (and more specifically, the white *male*) was charged with this development, whites were thought incapable of thriving – or perhaps even surviving – in the tropics for a long period of time.²⁷ While temperate climes – of which Canada was a quintessential example – were spaces in which modern (white) civilization could progress rapidly and thrive, tropical spaces were (as Taunton's travelogue had implied) sites of stagnation and degeneracy epitomized above all by disease.²⁸ As Ontario clergyman Dean Harris wrote after spending four years travelling through the West Indies, the Azores, South and Central America, Mexico, and the southern United States, a "high material civilization can only be developed in temperate regions. In tropical and torrid zones, the great heat and humidity, the abundance of fruits and vegetable[s] . . . and man's few wants, kill all energy and ambition and unfit him for hard and

²⁵ Kidd, *Control of the Tropics*, 52.

²⁶ Kipling, "The White Man's Burden," *McClure's*, February 1899.

²⁷ For an elaboration of this tension see Edmond, "Returning Fears," 175-194.

²⁸ James Bryce, "British Experience in the Government of Colonies," *The Century* (New York), 57, 5 (March 1899), 718-728; Kidd, *Control of the Tropics*, 54, 57.

continuous work.”²⁹ The only solution, according to Kidd, was for whites to govern the tropics from afar. When they “completed the colonization of temperate regions,” they could then set to work administering and developing the tropics.³⁰

To London’s *St. James’ Gazette*, white Canadians were, like white settlers in other self-governing colonies, part of this process. Responding to the recent publication of *Control of the Tropics* in October 1898, the *Gazette* concurred that the “English-speaking race” had a special mission, “in the interests of civilization,” to administer tropical countries. “Properly considered, it is part of our Imperialist mission; and as it grows it seems probable that our great self-governing colonies must take their share directly in so great a work.”³¹ Canada’s northern geography, moreover, was thought to produce distinctive racial characteristics that made Canadians especially apt to carry out this mission. “Northern” symbolized “energy, strength, self-reliance, health, and purity,” while its opposite, “southern,” was often associated with “decay and effeminacy, even libertinism and disease.” Of all the British Dominions, Canada was the only one situated entirely above the forty-fifth parallel, giving weight to the argument that Canada was “pre-destined” to fulfill an important role in the world.³² Although northern

²⁹ Dean Harris, *Days and Nights in the Tropics* (Toronto: Morang & Company, 1905). 2. An Irish Catholic clergyman and author from Ontario, Harris left his parish to embark on his travels in 1901. Michael Power, “William Richard Harris,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography On-line*, http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=8184&&PHPSESSID=nfxmivhsumpcx (viewed 24 May 2009).

³⁰ Kidd, *Control of the Tropics*, 57, 86.

³¹ *St. James Gazette*, as cited in the *Jamaica Daily Gleaner*, 5 November 1898.

³² Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 128-133. Quotations can be found on pp. 129, 133.

in latitude, even Britain's climate, described by one contemporary as "warm [and] moisture-laden," could not match the "tonic properties" of Canada's crisp, clear air.³³

The argument that Canada was perhaps better suited than Britain to "control" the West Indies was based on more than climatic and geographic considerations. According to Kidd's logic, temperate regions undergoing rapid economic development – marked most importantly by industrial and population growth – played (or would play) a particularly instrumental role in the administration and development of the tropics. Of course Canada in the early twentieth century, the Dominion's industrial production came nowhere near to that of Britain or the United States. But Canadian optimists expected the Dominion to catch up to (and perhaps even surpass) the industrial output of other industrialized economies during the course of the twentieth century. The grounds for such claims were arguably scarce, particularly in the United States' case. The oft-cited notion that the twentieth century would be Canada's century (just as the nineteenth century had belonged to the United States) was fuelled primarily by naïve optimism and continental rivalry.³⁴

In the British context, however, economic trends seemed to support this forecast, at least to some extent. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the British economy remained in

³³ Arnold Haultain, "A Winter's Walk in Canada," *Nineteenth Century and After* (September 1901), 558, as cited in Berger, *The Sense of Power*, 130.

³⁴ On this unbridled optimism see Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 49-82, and Michael Bliss, *Northern Enterprise: Five Centuries of Canadian Business* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 313-314. On the questionable grounds on which this optimism was based see Tim Lougheed, "A prediction that belonged to the 20th century," *University of Ottawa Gazette*, 2 June 2000.

relative decline. During the 1890s, British steel production fell behind that of the United States and Germany, and in the three decades before the war, Britain's share of international trade in manufactured goods decreased 11.7 per cent, while German and American shares each rose over 5 per cent. In the same period, Britain also experienced lesser population growth relative to other European states.³⁵ Canada, on the other hand, had the world's fastest growing economy in the first decade of the twentieth century (the Gross National Product more than doubled) and the population increased from 5,371,000 to 7,879,000 in the period between 1901 and 1914.³⁶ Foreign investment poured into Canada, chiefly from Britain and the United States. Mining, coal, and other mineral extraction industries, and the pulp and paper, iron and steel, and hydro-electric industries flourished. Cities grew across the country, and two new western provinces – Alberta and Saskatchewan – were created in 1905.³⁷

This growth and optimism spilled over into Canada's relations with the West Indies. Canadian banks and life insurance companies continued to expand throughout the islands in the first decade of the twentieth century; the Royal Bank alone had eighteen Caribbean branches by 1911. Canadian businessmen and petroleum engineers played an instrumental role in the

³⁵ Geoffrey R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971): 8-12, 173.

³⁶ Angus Maddison, *The World Economy in the 20th Century* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 1989), 43. CANSIM, table 075-0001, Estimated Population of Canada, Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/98-187-x/4151287-eng.htm#table2>, viewed 8 May 2010.

³⁷ Bliss, *Northern Enterprise*, 313-343. Jaydeep Balakrishnan, Janice B. Eliasson, Timothy R.C. Sweet, "Factors affecting the evolution of manufacturing in Canada: An historical perspective," *Journal of Operations Management* 25 (2007), 265, 268, 273-274. See also H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario: 1849-1911* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974).

development of Trinidad's petroleum industry at the turn of the century. Canadian-owned (or part-owned) street railway and lighting companies cropped up in Trinidad, Jamaica, British Guyana, as well as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico and Brazil. And between 1897 and 1908, Canada's sugar imports from the British West Indies increased – with the help of Canada's rapidly expanding population and a trade preference of 33 per cent – from 11,000 tons to 185,000 tons.³⁸

In this atmosphere of spectacular growth and increased involvement in the Caribbean, many wondered whether Canada's destiny lay in the West Indies. In the ten years before the First World War, the Maritime Board of Trade, the Canadian Manufacturers Association and the grain and flour section of the Toronto Board of Trade advocated Canada's annexation of the British West Indies. A Canada-West Indies League was established in Montreal in 1911 to foster improved commercial relations between the two regions, and many prominent League members (including the founder himself) promoted the annexation proposal vigorously in Canada, Britain and the West Indies. These pre-war campaigns led many to wonder if Canada

³⁸ On the expansion of Canadian banking in the West Indies see Neil C. Quigley, "The Bank of Nova Scotia in the Caribbean, 1889-1940," *Business History Review* 63/4 (1989): 797-838, and Duncan McDowall, *Quick to the Frontier: Canada's Royal Bank* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993). Canadian involvement in the development of Trinidad's petroleum industry is outlined in "The Petroleum Industry, Early Photographs," Rec. 1, Randolph Rust Collection, West Indiana and Special Collections, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. The history of Canadian utilities companies in the region is treated in Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles, *Southern Exposure: Canadian Promoters in Latin America and the Caribbean 1896-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), and Duncan McDowall, *The Light: Brazilian Traction, Light and Power Company Limited, 1899-1945*. On Canada-West Indies trade in the early twentieth century see Peter K. Newman, "Canada's Role in West Indian Trade Before 1912," *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 14/1 (1960): 25-49, and R.A. Falconer, "Canada and the West Indies," *Proceedings of the Canadian Club*, Toronto, 1910-1911 (Toronto: Warwick Bros. & Rutter, 1911), 165-167.

would take up where Britain had failed. Proponents of annexation argued that Canada could do more for the West Indies than Britain. But there was an underlying tension here; was union in the interests of *both* Empire and nation? As contemporaries on both sides of the Atlantic grappled with this question, they raised larger questions about the state of the Empire, and Canada's destiny within it.

4.2 Canada's 'destiny'

That the West Indies "problem" continued to "completely baffle" the imperial government was, to George Burke, good reason to consider a transfer of administration from London to Ottawa. The outcome of the Venezuela boundary dispute not only confirmed United States' hegemony in the hemisphere; it was also a testament to Britain's long-standing disengagement from the West Indies. Events in the first decade of the twentieth century further underlined this disengagement. While bounties on European-grown beet sugar were removed following the Brussels Convention of 1902 (which allowed West Indian sugar to compete in European markets),³⁹ Britain's involvement with the West Indies was characterized by indifference and retreat. The imperial government abandoned the mail contract in 1905 (after 60 years), offered scant support for the development of telegraphic and steamship services, and abolished the West Indian Department of Agriculture (which subsidized agricultural development schemes). Officials in the Foreign and Colonial Offices also expressed a general disregard for the unlawful and often violent treatment of British West Indian laborers in

³⁹ Frank Trentmann, *Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 157-159.

Venezuela, Mexico, Costa Rica and Panama – despite a plethora of petitions to the Colonial Office, and, in the face of vitriolic protest, withdrew white troops from the region in 1906.⁴⁰

To many West Indians, the withdrawal of white troops was a blatant indication of the imperial government's disinterest in the West Indies. "To reverse this policy now," stated the petition from the Barbados House of Assembly, "after it has been consistently pursued for so many years, is liable to be interpreted as indicating the cessation of England's interest in the

⁴⁰ Jamaica *Daily Gleaner*, 8 September 1902; *West India Committee Circular*, 31 January, 28 February, 9 May, 6 June, 31 August, 14 September, 27 October, 1905; *Toronto Star*, 20 January 1906; West India Committee to the Colonial Office, 1 January, 10 April, 7 June, 1906, CO 318/315, TNA; British troops were also removed from Halifax, Esquimalt and Bermuda between 1904 and 1907. See Samuel F. Wells, Jr., "British Strategic Withdrawal from the Western Hemisphere, 1904-1906," *Canadian Historical Review* 49,4 (December 1968), 335-356. See Naval and Military Changes in the West Indies, no. 2967, 21 January 1905; War Office to Colonial Office, 20 March, 12 July, 3 August, 1905, CO 318/313, TNA. The response of the imperial government and British Consuls in Latin America and the Caribbean to the petitions of British West Indian laborers has not received sufficient attention. As Jorge L. Giovannetti, "Black British Caribbean Migrants in Cuba: Resistance, Opposition, and Strategic Identity in the Early Twentieth Century," in eds. Annette Insanally, Mark Clifford and Sean Sheriff, *Regional Footprints: The Travels and Travails of Early Caribbean Migrants* (Mona, JA: Latin American-Caribbean Centre, University of the West Indies, 2006), 111-112, has pointed out, studies of British West Indian migrant labor assume that British subjects were better positioned in the "social ladder" of migrant labor because British consulates provided recourse for their grievances. But this assumption requires interrogation. CO 318 is overflowing with petitions from West Indians in Central and South America, Mexico, and other non-British Caribbean islands. In the large majority of cases, the Colonial Office dismissed or discounted the petitioners' claims. See CO 318/274, 275, 300, 312, 314, 316, 317, 326, 327, 328, 338, 339, 341, 342, 343, 346; CO 137/704, 707, 724; and CO 152/353, CO 295/443. On British West Indian labor migration in the Caribbean region see Velma Newton, *The Silver Men: West Indian Labour Migration to Panama 1850-1914* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1984); Bonham C. Richardson, *Panama Money in Barbados, 1900-1920* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); Trevor W. Purcell, *Banana Fallout: Class, Color, and Culture among West Indians in Costa Rica* (Los Angeles: University of California, Center for Afro-American Studies Publications, 1993); Marc C. McLeod, "Undesirable Aliens: Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Comparison of Haitian and British West Indian Immigrant Workers in Cuba, 1912-1939," *Journal of Social History*, 31, 3 (1998), 603-614.

welfare of this colony.”⁴¹ Forster Alleyne, who tabled the resolution in the House, thought the withdrawal of white troops was particularly alarming in the context of the United States recent (and continuing) expansion in the region. Who would have thought that the

islands for which Nelson fought and Rodney fell were to be denuded of the support of the Mother Country, and were to be dependent in the time of danger on the assistance of a single cruiser, summoned by telegraph . . . from heaven knows where. Could there be a greater humiliation than this? What sort of Imperialism was this? If Great Britain intended to maintain her sway over the West Indies, was this a time to loosen her grasp? The United States had already laid their hands on Cuba and Porto Rico, and St. Domingo and the Danish Islands would soon follow.⁴²

Moreover, whites feared the implications of this withdrawal on domestic order in the colonies.

“The negro race are acknowledged to be excitable,” the *West India Committee Circular* warned, “and when their passions are roused neither reason nor interest will keep them in check.” Not surprisingly, members of London’s West India Committee worried that the withdrawal would compromise their property and investments in the region. Without white troops, what would be the fate of “the planters, merchants, shopkeepers, and the property owning part of the population?” It was not that much to ask, the *Circular* averred, that an adequate number of troops remain to protect (white) West Indians and their property.⁴³ The imperial government disagreed. The cost of maintaining the troops was too great a burden on the British taxpayer.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Petition of the Barbados House of Assembly, as cited in the *West India Committee Circular*, 6 June 1905.

⁴² *West India Committee Circular*, 9 May 1905.

⁴³ *West India Committee Circular*, 14 September 1905.

⁴⁴ *West India Committee Circular*, 28 February 1905. The cost of maintaining and administering the West Indies was a subject of growing concern to the imperial government. See also *West India Committee Circular*, 18 August 1907.

Others in London expressed similar concerns about the implications of Britain's retreat from the Caribbean. Edward Davson, who held significant commercial interests in British Guyana, was much alarmed by Britain's "tacit acquiescence" to the United States' growing intervention in the region. "The balance of power in the Caribbean is undergoing a subtle change, which, it must be admitted, is not altogether in favour of England."⁴⁵ How would this shifting balance of power affect absentee planters and British investors in the West Indies? Would these colonies ultimately be annexed to the United States? There was reason to believe that many of them would. Not only were many of the British West Indian colonies of growing commercial importance to the United States, but of strategic importance as well. The United States was, warned J. Kemplay in a letter to the *Circular*, acquiring a foothold in all those positions American Naval Captain Alfred Mahan identified as strategically valuable, and Jamaica was among them.⁴⁶ When the Panama Canal opened, Jamaica would be, in Mahan's estimation, the "key to the Caribbean."⁴⁷

In light of the imperial government's continued disengagement with the region – and its complacent attitude towards United States expansion – Canada seemed to offer the last, best chance to keep the West Indies in the Empire. As Conservative Member of Parliament Ian Malcolm argued in the British House of Commons in May 1905, the imperial government

⁴⁵ Edward R. Davson, Letter to the Editor, *West India Committee Circular*, 1 January 1905. Davson, "British Guiana and its Development," *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute*, 39 (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1908), 229.

⁴⁶ J. Kemplay, Letter to the Editor, *West India Committee Circular*, 14 March 1905.

⁴⁷ Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Mahan on Naval Warfare: Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred T. Mahan* (Mineola, NY: Courier Dover Publications, 1999), 109.

should encourage Canada to take control of the colonies. Such an arrangement would benefit Canada, the West Indies, and the Empire. "If the West India Islands were attached to Canada they would form something like a southern zone for the Dominion. The reorganization and the revitalizing of the West Indies would result; and the alteration would add enormously to our Imperial strength on the strategic highway of the world and in the commercial centre of the New World."⁴⁸ Malcolm received scarce support in the House, but he did have grounds for optimism only a few months later when Canada's Maritime Board of Trade endorsed the proposal, followed soon after by the Canadian Manufacturing Association and the grain and flour section of the Toronto Board of Trade.

W.D. Taunton played no small role in persuading the Maritime Board of Trade to consider the proposal. Following his visit to the West Indies in 1902, he became a strong proponent of union. Allegedly inspired by the considerable support he found for the proposal in Georgetown, he returned to Halifax with union on his mind. He already had a fellow advocate in Member of Parliament Adam Bell, who had brought the proposal before the House of Commons in March 1901. Bell argued that Canada should take in the West Indies "to make it a perfect government, to give it all those diversities of climate, soil and product which will make it a self-supporting and practically independent part of the world."⁴⁹ Bell's proposal

⁴⁸ Hansard, Britain, House of Commons Debates, 17 May 1905, vol. 146, pp. 709-710.

⁴⁹ Canada, House of Commons Debates, 15 March 1901, first sess., ninth parl. (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1901), 1530. J. Castell Hopkins, ed., *Morang's Annual Register 1902* (Toronto: George Morang & Co., 1902), 161-162.

stimulated little interest in Ottawa. When he lost his seat in the federal election of 1904, he joined forces with Taunton to drum up support in the Maritimes.

The Maritime Board of Trade provided an ideal venue for Bell and Taunton to promote their agenda. As an official member of the Board, Bell was well positioned to rally support for annexation. Yet the Board probably did not require much persuasion. Annexation was likely appealing to many Board members because it promised to address two of the Board's central concerns in 1904-05: the need for improved steamship services between Canada and the West Indies, and the absorption of Newfoundland in the Canadian federation. If the West Indies formed part of Canada, the federal government would be compelled to subsidize a more frequent steamship service between Maritime Canada and the West Indies. This, in turn, would compel Newfoundland to enter Confederation. To avoid the risk of being shut out of the already significant North-South trade, and to take advantage of the newly inaugurated steamship service, Newfoundland would have no other alternative. At the Board's annual meeting in Yarmouth in August, Taunton, Bell, and other Board members from each of the three Maritime provinces spoke in favor of annexation.⁵⁰ They "made strong speeches in support of the scheme," the London *Times* reported, arguing that "it was desirable for Canada that this confederation should be effected, as it would give the Dominion tropical territory."⁵¹ The Board

⁵⁰ Minutes of the Maritime Board of Trade, 16 August, 17 August, 1905, Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, as cited in the *Halifax Chronicle*, 17 August, 18 August, 1905. The other board members who spoke were W.S. Fisher of Saint John, N.B., Melville G. DeWolfe of Kentville, NS, Captain Reid of Summerside, PEI, and E.B. Elderkin.

⁵¹ *The Times*, 21 August 1905. See also the *Toronto Star*, 18 August 1905. As of 1900, there were 138 boards of trade in Canada, with 39 in the Maritime provinces (26 in Nova Scotia, 10 in New Brunswick, and 3 in

subsequently resolved, in unanimity, to urge the Canadian government “to take steps to secure the confederation” of Canada and the British West Indies.⁵²

The day after the Maritime Board of Trade’s resolution was publicized, the *London Mail* waxed sentimental about Canada’s auspicious future. “Of all the great states that go to make up this might empire there is none that gives so great a promise of a brilliant future as the Dominion of Canada.” Covering 3,619,819 square miles, Canada was over one half a million square miles larger than Australia and, with the Dominion’s lakes included, nearly thirty times the size of the United Kingdom. “Followed to its logical conclusion it cannot fail to ensure for Canada a future no less glorious and honorable than the history of the mother country has been and may even, with her greatest resources and natural advantages, carry her to a pinnacle of power which even this might isle has fallen short of.” To further underscore this “brilliant future,” the *Mail* extracted a verse from Rudyard Kipling’s poem “A Song for the Dead” and published it in the same article under the title: “Canada, the Gem of the Empire.”

Follow after – follow after! We
Have watered the root,
And the bud has come to blossom
That ripens fruit!⁵³

Prince Edward Island). Minutes of the Sixth Annual Session of the Board of Trade of the Maritime Provinces held in the Young Men’s Christian Association Hall, Kentville, Nova Scotia, August 1900, MS-2.241, file 4.23, George Major Creed fonds, Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections.

⁵² Minutes of the Maritime Board of Trade, 17 August 1905, as cited in the *Halifax Chronicle*, 18 August 1905.

⁵³ *London Mail*, as cited in the *Halifax Chronicle*, 19 August 1905.

The London *Times* was more explicit about Canada's "destiny" in the West Indies. "It is recognized both in the Dominion and in the West Indies that Canada has a great future before her as the United States." Just as the United States "is acquiring tropical possessions to supply her people with the products that now enter so largely into their daily diet," so too must Canada "obtain a tropical annexe, in order to safeguard her own position and complete her existence as a nation." Recent trends suggested that Canada was already moving in this direction, including the Dominion's "generous fiscal attitude" towards the West Indies and the rapid development of its manufacturing industries, Canadians' vigorous "invasion" of West Indian markets, United States' expansion in the region, and the "extraordinary tide of immigration which is swelling her population and increasing her consuming power." Anyone well acquainted with trade patterns in the Americas could see that Canada's future, the *Times* concluded, lay in the West Indies. There was nothing new in the idea; Canada was "simply taking a leaf out of America's book."⁵⁴

Ian C. Hannah, President of Nova Scotia's King's College, argued that Canada-West Indies union made sense in light of Britain's long disengagement with the region and Canada's relative proximity to the West Indies. "No one can say this Government from London has been a brilliant success. Canada is nearer and her circumstances are in many ways more similar." Administration from Ottawa was at least worth a trial. No harm could be done, after all, and Britain would soon realize that Canada could do much more for the West Indies than "anything else that England could bestow." Hannah's remarks reveal a tension between annexation for

⁵⁴ *The Times* (London), 24 August 1905.

imperial ends, and annexation for (Canadian) national purposes. Being “entrusted with some of our [own] tropical territory,” he argued, would stimulate “Canada’s rapidly growing sense of nationality; I can imagine nothing more calculated to make her forget the Alaska boundary and other frontier awards of the same kind, or to bind her more closely to the Empire as a whole.”⁵⁵ The Alaska boundary settlement of 1903 had cut off access to the Pacific Ocean from northern British Columbia and the Yukon. Arbitrated by a commission of three Americans, two Canadians and a British appointee, Lord Alverstone, the outcome was swayed in favor of the United States’ when Alverstone voted with the United States’ members. To many Canadians, Britain had “sold out” Canada to preserve good Anglo-American relations.⁵⁶ Territorial acquisitions (or “frontier awards”) and, more importantly, the “responsibilities” that come with these acquisitions, were inextricably connected to constructs of “the nation.” Acquiring a West Indian frontier would thus, in Hannah’s logic, repair and revive the “sense of nationality” injured in 1903.

The *West India Committee Circular* agreed that Canada might, in the near future, “be in a position to do for the West Indies what the United States is doing for Cuba and Puerto Rico.” But the *Circular* was hesitant to endorse annexation. While it was true that the imperial government’s administration of the West Indies had not, “of late years in particular, been

⁵⁵ Ian C. Hannah, Letter to the Editor, *The Times* (London), 26 August 1905.

⁵⁶ J.A. Munro (ed), *The Alaska Boundary Dispute* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1970); N. Penlington, *The Alaska Boundary Dispute: A Critical Reappraisal* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1972). John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies* (Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 3rd ed., 2002 [1st ed. 1994]), 66-69.

marked with conspicuous ability," proposals for Canada-West Indies federation required careful consideration. Construction of the Panama Canal was proceeding apace. When it opened, the West Indies would assume renewed commercial and strategic importance. The *Circular* thus welcomed the Maritime Board of Trade's recent resolution to the extent that it might awaken the imperial government to the value of the West Indies.⁵⁷

The Canadian Manufacturers' Association (CMA) passed a similar resolution the following month. CMA members were motivated primarily by a desire for improved steamship services, a broader market for their products, and competition with United States' manufacturers. Secretary C.D. Davies had toured the West Indies on behalf of the CMA in 1902. He had found Canada's trade prospects encouraging, but competition with the United States keen. A large volume of Canadian exports were shipped through American ports, which placed Canadian manufacturers at a disadvantage. Greater distances, "excessive terminus charges, bonding and other expenses," Davies reported, added "immensely to the cost of the Canadian article." A weekly steamship service was thus crucial to the successful development of the Canada-West Indies trade.⁵⁸ When the federal government failed to provide adequate subsidies for this purpose in the succeeding years, annexation seemed to offer a solution.

⁵⁷ *West India Committee Circular*, 31 August 1905.

⁵⁸ *West India Committee Circular*, 6 June 1905. J. Castell Hopkins, ed., *Morang's Annual Register 1902* (Toronto: George Morang & Co. Ltd., 1902), 164-165. The CMA advocated "adequate protection" not only to manufacturers, but to "all Canadian producers." R. J. Yonge, *Tariff Notice*, 14 October 1902, *Tariffs and Elections Correspondence, 1900-1912*, vol. 149, MG28-I230, Canadian Manufacturers' Association fonds, LAC.

At the annual meeting on 20 September 1905, the CMA passed a resolution in favor of annexation. The Association “looks with favour upon the proposition to secure the admission of the British West India Islands and Newfoundland into the Canadian Confederation and would respectfully ask the Federal Government to give the matter early consideration.” Citing the “lack of proper transportation services” and a desire for broader markets, William S. Fisher argued that the West Indies “require our manufactured goods, they require our lumber and fish and many things of that kind. We in turn produce none of the goods they produce. We have for them a constantly growing market for the tropical productions of those islands.”⁵⁹ As a member of both the Maritime Board of Trade and the CMA, Fisher was no doubt instrumental in bringing the proposal before the CMA.

The grain and flour section of Toronto’s Board of Trade followed suit a few months later. Inspired by competition with the United States for West Indian markets and a desire for free access to tropical products, the Board passed a resolution at the end of February, 1906. The *Toronto Daily Star* reproduced the text of the resolution under the heading “Greater Canada.” “[I]t is highly desirable that the boundaries of the Dominion be extended by the admission of Newfoundland and the British West India Islands into the Confederation.” If this could be done, Canada would produce “within its borders” a variety of tropical products to which Canadians would enjoy free access. New markets – currently dominated by the United States –

⁵⁹ Minutes of the Convention of the Canadian Manufacturers’ Association, 20 September 1905, as cited in J. Castell Hopkins, ed., *Canadian Annual Review for 1905* (Toronto: Annual Review Pub. Co., 1906), 492. William Kirkpatrick McNaught seconded Fisher’s resolution. Fisher owned the Enterprise Foundry in Sackville, New Brunswick.

would open up for Canada's agricultural products without the payment of heavy duties.

Moreover, if Canada annexed the West Indies, Newfoundland would surely follow.

Annexation would provide Newfoundland with free access to wider markets for their fish, and, as part of a larger federation, better position Newfoundland to contest United States' fishery claims.⁶⁰

Despite this annexation momentum, however, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal government was reluctant to entertain annexation proposals. Addressing the House of Commons in March 1906, Laurier stated that the government was always willing to discuss the incorporation of Newfoundland in the Canadian federation, but it was "not prepared at this time to invite or encourage political union" with the West Indies.⁶¹ While Laurier appreciated the British connection, he and his government were generally skeptical of schemes that aimed (or appeared to aim) to consolidate or centralize the Empire. In subsequent years (and ultimately to the detriment of his government), Laurier would spend more time cultivating a commercial relationship with the United States.

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Toronto Board of Trade, as cited in the *Toronto Daily Star*, 27 February 1906. Disputes over American access to Newfoundland's fisheries had been an issue of contention since the American Revolution. These disputes escalated in the early twentieth century as Newfoundland attempted to regain control over the fisheries. Thompson and Randall, *Canada and the United States*, 77-78. The history of this dispute up to 1906 is outlined in P.T. McGrath, "The Newfoundland Fishery Dispute," *The North American Review*, 183, 604 (7 December 1906), 1134-1143.

⁶¹ Canada, House of Commons Debates, 19 March 1906, second sess., tenth parl. (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1906), 334. The subject of annexation was raised by Queen's, P.E.I. M.P. Alexander Martin (Conservative). *Toronto Daily Star*, 20 March 1906; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 March 1906.

4.3 National designs in the Bahamas

A dynamic interplay of domestic, imperial, and international circumstances shifted the impetus for, and response to annexation over time. The material and ideological import of the “tropics” continued to inform the annexation discourse in the years leading up to the First World War, as did assertions of Canadian “destiny” in the West Indies. Early in 1911 the introduction of a draft Canada-United States reciprocity agreement mobilized a new contingent of annexation campaigners. Their designs to absorb the West Indies in the Canadian federation were in large part a response to the reciprocity agreement, but for often conflicting reasons. To some, the agreement positioned Canada to expand in the West Indies by offering West Indians free access to the United States market as well as the Canadian market. For others, this expansion promised to strengthen Canada’s imperial connection by consolidating the Empire. Both responses were implicated in a particular though always mutable and contested national project or “destiny”. Campaigners may have disagreed about the route to this destiny, but they united on one crucial point: the West Indies would play a central role in Canada’s twentieth-century trajectory.

Not long after Canada’s Minister of Finance released a draft of the reciprocity agreement in January 1911, a group of Canadians assembled at Nassau, Bahamas to launch a campaign for Canada-West Indies union. Thomas Bassett Macaulay, the managing director of the Montreal-based Sun Life Assurance Company of Canada – which opened several West Indian branches in

the 1880s, including one in Nassau – initiated the campaign.⁶² Other campaigners included Archibald de Léry Macdonald, mayor of Rigaud, Quebec and Conservative hopeful for Vaudreuil in the federal election of 1911; Edward Nicholson, a wholesale grocery merchant and broker from Winnipeg; and Duncan John McIntyre, a Whitby, Ontario judge and former member of the provincial parliament (Liberal) for Victoria, Ontario.⁶³

In February the group travelled throughout the islands and tried to stir up interest in the union scheme. While they informed Bahamians that their visit (and their agenda) was not officially sanctioned by the Canadian government, they were nonetheless inspired, in Macaulay's words, "by the authority which every British subject has to speak out . . . for the good of the Empire." Canada's absorption of the Bahamas was in the interest of the Empire, he argued, and thus it was his duty to outline the innumerable benefits of union for the Bahamian public.⁶⁴ Having aroused considerable interest in the proposal by the middle of February, the campaigners organized a public meeting at Nassau's St. Andrew's Hall on 20 February.

According to the *Nassau Guardian*, the meeting "was attended by one of the largest and most

⁶² *The Sun Life of Canada Almanac: A Chronicle of Company and World Events 1865-1946*, enclosed in file titled "Territories-General," Box 289, Corporate Archives of the Sun Life Insurance Company of Canada, Mississauga. Branches were opened in the Bahamas, British Guyana, Barbados, and Trinidad and Tobago in 1880; Bermuda in 1881; and British Honduras (Belize) in 1886.

⁶³ Thomas Bassett Macaulay to Wilfrid Laurier, 20 February 1911, fol. 182001, vol. 668, Series A, Laurier Papers (hereafter L.P.), Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC); "Nicholson, Edward" and "McIntyre, His Honour Duncan John," *Who's Who in Canada: an illustrated biographical record of men and women of the time*, vols. 6-7 (Toronto: International Press, 1914), 951, 973; *The Washington Post*, 3 March 1911.

⁶⁴ "The Great Public Meeting at Nassau, February 20th, 1911," copied in *Sunshine*, May 1911, 50, 58.

representative audiences ever seen in this city.” Merchants and planters, politicians and laborers, packed into the Hall to learn more about becoming the “Florida of Canada.”⁶⁵

Macdonald focused on the practical implications of union when he addressed the Nassau audience on 20 February. The recent appointment of a Royal Commission on trade relations between Canada and the West Indies was a testament to Canada’s growing interest in strengthening ties with the region. So too was the Canadian Pacific Railway Company’s recent announcement that they intended to run their “Empress” line of steamers to Bermuda and Jamaica and establish hotels in these islands. If the Bahamas joined the Canadian federation, they too would be included in these plans. Under the tutelage of Ottawa, the Bahamas would “rapidly develop” into a “sister province” worthy of the Canadian federation. The Bahamian government would continue to exercise autonomy in local affairs, while the Canadian government would take control of federal works such as customs and post office revenues.⁶⁶

A French-speaking Quebec politician of Scottish descent, Macdonald was an interesting personality. His effusive enthusiasm for the British Empire destabilizes the common assumption that Canada’s early twentieth century “imperialists” were English-speaking Canadians.⁶⁷ According to Macaulay’s description of him in a letter to Laurier (written the same

⁶⁵ *Nassau Guardian*, 22 February 1911; “The Great Public Meeting at Nassau,” 50.

⁶⁶ “The Great Public Meeting at Nassau,” 50.

⁶⁷ This common assumption is confronted in H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 16-17; and John Herd Thompson, “Canada and the ‘Third British Empire’, 1901-1939,” in Phillip Buckner, ed., *Canada and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 87-106.

day as the Nassau meeting), Macdonald was a Conservative with “strong Bourassa leanings.”⁶⁸ Henri Bourassa was a French-speaking politician who gained considerable notice in 1899 when he resigned his federal seat (independent Liberal for Labelle County) in protest of Ottawa’s decision to send a (volunteer) contingent of soldiers to fight in the South African war. To offset what he identified as the pernicious consequences of imperialism, he founded the Nationalist League in 1903 to foster a nationalist spirit among French-speaking Canadians. He opposed the creation of a Canadian navy in 1911 and would later protest Canada’s participation in the First World War.⁶⁹ Despite Macdonald’s sympathy for Bourassa’s Nationalistes, “his imagination and his national pride,” in Macaulay’s words, have “been captivated with the vision of a larger and greater Canada, and he admits enthusiastically that if [the Bahamas] were a part of Canada the need [for] the navy would be as evident that no person could properly object.”⁷⁰ Macaulay’s assessment of Macdonald’s interest proved accurate. In a subsequent letter to the *Nassau Guardian*, Macdonald argued that Canada’s possession of the Bahamas “would be an additional justification [for] the establishment of a Navy.” In Canada’s cold winter months, the islands would provide an ideal naval base.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Macaulay to Laurier, 20 February 1911, fol. 182001, Series A, L.P., LAC.

⁶⁹ Joseph Levitt, *Henri Bourassa and the golden calf: the social program of the Nationalistes of Quebec 1900-1914* (Ottawa: Les Editions de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1972); Henri Bourassa, *Henri Bourassa on imperialism and biculturalism, 1900-1918* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970). Bourassa later sanctioned the creation of a Canadian Navy, though insisted that it should be under Canadian rather than British control.

⁷⁰ Macaulay to Laurier, 20 February 1911, fol. 182001, Series A, L.P., LAC.

⁷¹ A. de Léry Macdonald, Letter to the Editor, *Nassau Guardian*, 11 March 1911.

To Macdonald, Canada's annexation of the Bahamas – which he identified as the first of many acquisitions in the West Indies – was a thoroughly national project. This proposed expansion would be the “second epoch in the upbuilding of this new Nation.” Just as the Fathers of Confederation “worked and strove” tirelessly to finalize the federation of 1867 and were now venerated in posterity, so too would the men who strive to effect Canada's new epoch of nation-building in the West Indies.

There will be great strivings and great labour, and much opposition from various sources before it is consummated, but the patriots of Nassau who have taken the matter in hand must not lose heart, if the route proves arduous. They must keep in sight that venerable group of Patriots at Ottawa, remembering their labours and heartburns, and feel that it is their noble mission to bring to completion this nation-building task. Should these men have to sink their private interests or resist foreign coercion or menaces in the fulfillment of their glorious mission, their title to the gratitude of posterity will be the greater, and their names in turn, will find their legitimate places in the history of the Dominion, as having carried to its magnificent completion the work begun by those men of other days.

Possessing tropical territory “ought to appeal to Canadians,” he continued, because “it would make our country a complete territorial entity.” Union would not, however, serve only “the aggrandizement of Canada.” It would also consolidate and strengthen “the greatest Empire the world has ever known” and contribute immeasurably to the “comfort and happiness” of Bahamians.⁷²

In Macdonald's vision, a system of trade protectionism with imperial preferences was the best way to ensure the success of this new epoch in Canada's national history. While he addressed the implications of a Canada-United States reciprocity agreement for the Bahamas (free access to the American as well as the Canadian market), he thought a protectionist trade

⁷² Macdonald, Letter to the Editor, *Nassau Guardian*, 11 March 1911.

policy was the key to Canada's prosperity. This policy was responsible, after all, for making "the struggling Canadian Provinces of 1867 the nation of to-day." Moreover, Canada was "the most rapidly growing country on the face of the globe" and had an ever-expanding market to consume West Indian products. When the West Indies developed sufficiently under Canada's protective wing, it would then be possible to contemplate free trade within the Empire.⁷³

Macaulay shared Macdonald's Conservative politics and imperial sentiment, but he also supported Canadian trade reciprocity with the United States. He thought the trade agreement presented an opportunity for Canada to expand in the West Indies. The size of the Canadian market, though growing rapidly, did not compare to the enormous American market. From a strictly commercial perspective, then, annexation to the United States was perhaps more appealing to West Indians. But this would all change if Canada and the United States ratified trade reciprocity. Under the proposed agreement, the two countries would enjoy reciprocal free trade in natural products. In the event of a Bahamian-Canadian union, the Bahamas stood to benefit substantially from such an agreement, according to Macaulay, because the islands' produce could enter the United States market free of trade restrictions. One of the conditions of the proposed reciprocity agreement, he assured the audience at Nassau, "is that fruit, and agricultural products of almost every kind in their natural, unmanufactured forms, shall be exchanged with absolute freedom between the two countries." Of course the Bahamas would have to compete with agricultural products from Florida and California. But access to the United States' market, he pointed out, was nonetheless certain to reap considerable economic

⁷³ Macdonald, Letter to the Editor, *Nassau Guardian*, 11 March 1911.

returns for the islands.⁷⁴ The reciprocity agreement would thus place Canada “in a position to deal effectively and satisfactorily with West Indian problems” in a way not possible before.⁷⁵

Macaulay did not think the reciprocity agreement undermined Canada’s imperial connection. Canadian fears about reciprocity on this basis were groundless; they were a product of the “political game” orchestrated by the Conservative Opposition. The agreement dealt primarily with natural products and thus did not compromise Canada’s trade relationship with Britain. “Do we import fruits, or agricultural products or timber, from England? How then can this agreement seriously injure the mother country?” In fact, the agreement might demonstrate to Britain (a nation staunchly committed to free trade) that tariffs can be usefully employed to extract better terms from other countries. Until recently, the United States had shown little interest in reciprocity with Canada. Following the American lead, the Canadian government erected a protective tariff in 1879. “We were thrown on our own resources. We developed new markets. We prospered.” The United States soon came to realize, Macaulay averred, that Canada could not only survive but thrive without America. “Uncle Sam” has now “seen the error of his ways and has extended the hand of tariff friendship,” and Canada has accepted it at no detriment to Britain.⁷⁶

Macaulay’s promise of “absolutely free access” to the American market probably inspired many Bahamians to support, or at least consider seriously, the proposed union. From

⁷⁴ “The Great Public Meeting at Nassau,” 55-56, 52.

⁷⁵ Macaulay to Laurier, 20 February 1911, fol. 182008, Series A, L.P., LAC.

⁷⁶ “The Great Public Meeting at Nassau,” 55-56. *Toronto Star*, 15 March 1911.

the 1870s, the Bahamian people had endured varying degrees of depression and economic instability. Out of a total population of 55,944 in 1911, 55.89 per cent were unemployed. Unlike other British colonies in the West Indies, the soil and climate of the Bahamas were not suitable for farming or the cultivation of sugar cane. Cotton was produced on the islands in the latter two decades of the eighteenth century, but by 1800, soil exhaustion, insect infestations and plantation mismanagement led to the collapse of the industry. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a number of products were developed for commercial purposes, including pineapples, sisal, and sponges. But transportation problems, outmoded agricultural technology, hurricanes, a lack of capital, competition with other islands, and an insufficient labour supply caused many Bahamian exports to decline or become obsolete. Pineapples were exported to the United States in large quantities from 1842, but their declining value in the 1890s, combined with the McKinley Tariff of 1898 that imposed a 7-dollar duty per one thousand pineapples, critically hindered the industry. The prosperity of the sisal industry was similarly brief. Competition in the American market with more efficient producers and the overall poor quality of Bahamian sisal were the principal reasons for the industry's decline in the first decade of the twentieth century. Following the decline of the pineapple and sisal industries, the sponge became the most important product in the Bahamian economy until 1938, when a microscopic fungoid devastated the industry.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Population statistics can be found in Johnson, *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom*, 171. For statistics on employment and occupations in the Bahamas, see Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 188. For information on the Bahamian economy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Craton, *A History of the Bahamas*, 225-244; Rogozinski, *A Brief History of the Caribbean*, 343; and Johnson, *The Bahamas in Slavery and Freedom*, 168-169.

Following Macdonald and Macaulay's addresses at the 20 February meeting, Edward Nicholson of Winnipeg described the resources and industries of Canada's Northwest, and suggested that the Bahamian sisal industry might be developed to meet the "enormous demand" for binder twine in Western Canada.⁷⁸ Several Bahamians also spoke in favor of union. Nassau pharmacist George M. Cole tabled a resolution to place the proposal before the island's legislature, and newspaper editor Charles S. Rae seconded the resolution. Five members of the Legislative Assembly were subsequently appointed to a Ways and Means Committee for this purpose. The members selected included three white Bahamians, Dr. G.H. Johnson, W.C.B. Johnson and T.G. Brice, and two black Bahamians, G.R. Evans and Ernest L. Bowen.⁷⁹

A few weeks later on 9 March, the Legislative Assembly adopted by large majority a resolution to seek Colonial Office approval to initiate discussion of union with the Canadian government. Six days later the Legislative Council followed suit and unanimously endorsed the resolution. The proposition of union, according to Bahamian Governor William Grey-Wilson, had "raised the greatest enthusiasm" in the colony.⁸⁰ White Bahamian William Johnson supported the resolution for three reasons. First, it was "the wish of the people." Since the meeting on 20 February, Johnson had been "approached from all sides and by all classes" of

⁷⁸ *Nassau Guardian*, 22 February, 1911.

⁷⁹ *Nassau Guardian*, 22 February 1911. Occupation information on Cole and Rae were found in Saunders and Craton, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol. 2, 211, and Howard S. Pactor, *Colonial British Caribbean Newspapers: A Bibliography and Directory* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 27.

⁸⁰ William Grey-Wilson to Lewis Harcourt, 9 March 1911 and 15 March 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

Bahamians who were enthusiastic about union. Public meetings had been held on the Out Islands and resolutions adopted to urge Out Island representatives to support the resolution. Second, the resolution would, if nothing else, be a “cheap advertisement” for the Bahamas. The colonial government had spent one-thousand pounds in 1909 to advertise the commercial potential of the islands, with no results. But the resolution would surely “bring the Colony before the outside world as it had never been brought before.” Finally, and more generally, change was necessary to improve conditions in the colony.⁸¹

White merchant James P. Sands, black tailor Ernest Bowen, and “colored” businessman Charles C. Sweeting similarly endorsed the resolution on the basis that their constituents expressed interest in the union idea. Bowen was hopeful that union with Canada might reinvigorate “the life-blood of the colony.” Of the “100 men” with whom he had discussed the resolution, only one was opposed. Others who supported the resolution included Daniel Moseley, white printer (and brother of *Guardian* editor Mary Moseley), “colored” merchant Burton E. Williams, and white merchants Lorenzo Brice, Burton E. Williams and George Weech. Lawyer Kenneth Solomon, Dr. G. H. Johnson, and Bay Street clerk Eric V. Solomon, all white

⁸¹ William Christopher Barnett Johnson’s address to the House of Assembly, as cited in the *Nassau Guardian*, 15 March 1911. According to Saunders and Craton, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol. 2, 234, Johnson was a white Bahamian and the deputy speaker of the Assembly. He was also a onetime member of the Bank of Nassau’s Board of Directors. When the Bank folded in 1916 (leaving the Royal Bank of Canada with a monopoly on the island) Johnson and the other directors were accused of illegal activities and brought to trial.

Bahamians, voted for the resolution on the basis that it was non-committal and they wished to obtain more information about the feasibility and desirability of union.⁸²

Opponents of the resolution included white Bahamians Robert H. Sawyer, agent for the New York Steamship Company, barrister Harcourt Malcolm, Executive Council member James William Culmer, and Dr. James Culmer, resident surgeon at the Nassau hospital. While the Culmers did not address the house (simply voting “nay”), Malcolm and Sawyer dissented, in part, because they disagreed with the way in which the union proposal was introduced. Malcolm thought it “undignified” that the colonial Assembly would respond in this way to the overtures of a few Canadian visitors who were not acting in any official capacity. To Sawyer, it was unfortunate that William Johnson had tabled the resolution without obtaining “any facts or figures as to what the Colony was likely to lose or what would be contributed by Canada.”⁸³ White publican Charles E. Bethell and Chief Clerk of the Post Office Charles O. Anderson, a Bahamian of color, both opposed union on constitutional and racial grounds. As Anderson remarked at the 20 February meeting, while union might bring commercial and industrial prosperity to the islands, “we have a mixed population and, in my opinion, we are not ripe for the form of government which would be conferred on us as a province of the Dominion of

⁸² Minutes of the Legislative Assembly, copied in the *Nassau Guardian*, 15 March 1911. Occupation details were obtained in “Departmental Notices,” *Nassau Guardian*, which lists eligible jurors, how they qualified for jury duty (income, householder, or real property), address, and occupation; *Royal Colonial Institute Yearbook 1914* (London: Royal Colonial Institute, 1914); and Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol. 2, 269, 271, 509.

⁸³ Minutes of the Legislative Assembly, copied in the *Nassau Guardian*, 15 March 1915. Occupational details were found in William Grey-Wilson to Lewis Harcourt, 4 April 1911, CO 23/267, TNA; and Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, vol. 2, 209.

Canada. It would mean a larger measure of local self government to which I am opposed as our people are not alive to their interests.”⁸⁴ Bethell was “quite sure,” in any case, that “the coloured population would not vote for the resolution.”⁸⁵ To many “colored” and white Bahamians, the prospect of enfranchising black Bahamians was anathema.⁸⁶ When the vote was taken in the Assembly, however, the resolution passed 21 to 6.⁸⁷

This result encouraged advocates of union. When Macaulay and the other union advocates returned home from the Bahamas, they launched the annexation campaign in Canada and Britain. They discussed the proposal with friends and business associates at home and overseas, wrote letters to the press, the Canadian government, the Colonial Office, founded the Canada West Indies League and, shortly thereafter, the *Canada West Indies Magazine*. As stated in the League’s “aims and objects,” the “period of exclusiveness for Canada and the West Indies has passed. From both lands comes the demand for wider fields of labor, additional markets and a desire for expansion in every direction.” Canada’s immense growth in the first decade of the century was again cited as rationale for this expansion. “In Canada, villages are springing

⁸⁴ *Nassau Tribune*, 25 February 1911.

⁸⁵ Minutes of the Legislative Assembly, copied in the *Nassau Guardian*, 15 March 1915.

⁸⁶ See Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 89-100; and Gail Saunders, “The Role of the Coloured Middle Class in Nassau, Bahamas, 1890-1942,” in Saunders, *Bahamian society after emancipation: essays in nineteenth and early twentieth century Bahamian history* (Nassau: D. Gail Saunders, 1990), 77-112. The contours and implications of these racial hierarchies are elaborated in the next chapter.

⁸⁷ Minutes of the Legislative Assembly, copied in the *Nassau Guardian*, 15 March 1915. G.R. Evans, who was originally selected to sit on the Ways and Means Committee, was absent. According to Governor Grey-Wilson, Evans supported the resolution. William Grey-Wilson to Lewis Harcourt, 4 April 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

into existence with a rapidity that is simply astonishing the world. Towns are expanding into busy commercial centres." From Victoria to Halifax Canada's "great cities . . . are becoming known throughout the Empire for their progress and enterprise. . . The West Indies have received from their fellow British subjects in Canada an inspiration for commercial expansion, and they too are eager to develop their own wonderful fertile Islands."⁸⁸ By August the League boasted a rapidly growing membership that included proprietors and associates of Canadian banks, life insurance agencies, railroad companies, tourist associations, sugar refining companies, and steamship agencies. The League actively sought members outside Canada too; its members included merchants, bankers, lawyers, hotel proprietors and civil servants from the Bahamas, Barbados, British Guyana, Jamaica, Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Britain, and the United States.⁸⁹

Union advocates also sought the support of prominent Canadians, including Winnipeg millionaire Elisha Hutchings, railroad magnate Thomas Shaughnessy, and University of Toronto President Robert Falconer. Hutchings' chief enterprise was the Winnipeg-based Great West Saddlery Company, which had branches in Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon and Calgary. He was also President of Capital Loan and Savings, Athabasca Oil and Asphalt, the Birds Hill Sand and Gravel Building Supply, and served on the boards of the Great West Permanent Loan and Savings Company and the Canada National Fire Insurance Company. Like fellow-

⁸⁸ "Aims and Objects," enclosed in Elwyn P. Mousir, Assistant Secretary of the Canada West Indies League, to Wilfrid Laurier, 21 April 1911, fol. 185058-64, vol. 677, L.P., LAC.

⁸⁹ "The Canadian and West Indian League – Names of Some Members who have joined during July," *Canada West Indies Magazine*, August 1911.

Winnipeg businessman Edward Nicholson, he was a member of the Commercial Travelers Club and visited the West Indies in March 1911. He found a keen desire for annexation in the Bahamas, and consequently became a proponent of union.⁹⁰

Canadian Pacific Railway President Thomas Shaughnessy was equally enthusiastic about union. In addition to his presidency at Canadian Pacific and the Company's allied lines, he served on the boards of the Canada Northwest Land Company, the Reid Newfoundland Company, the Bank of Montreal, the Royal Trust Company, and the Commercial Cable Company. Shaughnessy hoped to develop Canadian Pacific's steamer service to the West Indies. Union might secure government subsidies for this service and encourage greater commodity and tourist traffic between the two regions. At Macaulay's invitation, Shaughnessy accepted the honorary presidency of the Canada West Indies League and pledged to do all he could "to help the [union] movement on."⁹¹

Robert Falconer had emphasized the importance of the West Indies to Canada as early as September 1907. "It would be an immense mistake," he argued, "if the growing prosperity of the West Indies were diverted to the United States."⁹² In many ways Falconer can serve as a model of imperial citizenship. Born in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island in 1867, Falconer

⁹⁰ T.C. Keenleyside to Laurier, 7 April 1911, fol. 187788-89, vol. 675, L.P., LAC. On Hutchings see Don Nerbas, "Wealth and Privilege: An Analysis of Winnipeg's Early Business Elite," *Manitoba History* 47 (Spring/Summer 2004), 42-64.

⁹¹ Macaulay to Laurier, 11 May 1911, fol. 186113, vol. 681, L.P., LAC. J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* (Toronto: Annual Review Publishing Co., 1911), 599; the *Toronto Globe*, 11 December 1923.

⁹² *Toronto Daily Star*, 6 September 1907.

spent much of his youth in Trinidad because his father, a Presbyterian Minister, had been posted there in the 1870s. After completing secondary school at Trinidad's Queen's Royal College, he pursued university studies in London, Edinburgh and Germany. In 1892, he was ordained a Presbyterian Minister and took up a position at Halifax's Pine Hill College shortly thereafter. He was appointed president of the University of Toronto in 1907, a position he held until 1932.⁹³ Falconer's interest in union was no doubt inspired by the proposed Canada-United States reciprocal trade agreement, and his unease with American influence in the hemisphere more generally. "[Y]ou cannot estimate the value of the West Indies to Canada and the Empire by what they are today," he told the Canadian Club of Toronto in his February address. "They stand at the gateway of the greatest undeveloped country in the world, South America. . . When you think of what the Americans are doing in cutting the Panama Canal, and of what it will mean when [it] is opened, the Islands assume great potential importance." Falconer urged Canadians to "wake up" from their fixation on the Northwest and appreciate the potential of the Caribbean and South American frontier.⁹⁴

Toronto manufacturer R.L. Patterson was more explicit about the potential of union to offset American influence. Patterson had visited the West Indies in the spring of 1911 and was

⁹³ Damien-Claude Bélanger, "Robert Alexander Falconer," *The Quebec History Encyclopedia* <http://faculty.marianopolis.edu/c.belanger/quebechistory/bios/robertfalconer.htm>, viewed 9 May 2010.

⁹⁴ Robert A. Falconer, "Canada and the West Indies," 1 February 1911, *Addresses delivered before the Canadian Club of Toronto* vol. 9 (Toronto: Warwick Bro's & Rutter, Ltd., 1912), 165-168, 170 (quotations can be found on pp. 168 & 170). Duncan MacIntyre – the Whitby judge who campaigned for union in the Bahamas with Macaulay, Macdonald and Nicholson in February 1911 – sat on the board of the University of Toronto's Presbyterian college (Knox) and may have found a union ally in Falconer.

quickly converted to the union cause. "From my observations on the spot, and from what I have learned after many conversations with merchants and residents, I would strongly urge the Canadian Government to take immediate steps to acquire the West India Islands." Doing so would lessen Canada's reliance on American trade. "With the West Indies in the Federation, and better steamship facilities, we could build up a trade with the islands that would make us practically independent of the United States." Jamaica, Barbados, and the other British West Indian islands could "send us everything we want except tea."⁹⁵

This self-sufficiency argument was intimately connected to a particular, albeit variable, national project. But advocates were often quick to make a distinction between the commercial and "sentimental" or "national" dimension of the union question. As Manitoba businessman T.C. Keenleyside contended, union "should appeal to the National aspirations of all Canadians apart altogether from the commercial aspect of the matter." He thought nothing would "tend to develop the Canadian national sentiment more than absorbing into confederation adjacent British territories." Keenleyside's list included territories that were neither British nor adjacent: Greenland, Newfoundland and Labrador, St. Pierre and Miquelon in the St. Lawrence, and, "last but not least," the West Indies.⁹⁶

The national implications of union also featured prominently in Thomas Macaulay's campaign. "Not only would [union] broaden our manufacturing field, not only would it make our people more prosperous, but it would increase the importance of the Dominion among the

⁹⁵ R.L. Patterson, *Toronto Globe*, as cited in *Canada West Indies Magazine* (June 1911).

⁹⁶ T.C. Keenleyside to Laurier, 7 April 1911, fol. 184488-89, vol. 675, L.P., LAC.

nations of the world. It would develop a greater and grander Canada. In fact, I almost believe that it would make us Canadians hold our heads an inch higher when talking with people of other lands." This vision was in Macaulay's assessment not in the least incompatible with wider imperial interests. Canada-West Indies union would consolidate and thus strengthen the Empire. Significantly, union was a means to achieving a new role for Canada in the Empire, a role in which Canada was an equal partner. "We have passed the old colonial days, and have now attained young manhood." It was time to stop thinking "provincially" and start thinking "imperially." Canada's "destiny," Macaulay averred, was "great and glorious," and having "interests outside of our own boundaries" was a crucial step in fulfilling this destiny.⁹⁷

A constellation of events, ideas, and circumstances at the turn of the twentieth century foregrounded both the possibility and the urgency of Canada's "destiny" in the West Indies. The increased ideological and commercial purchase of "the tropics" underlined Canada's climatic limitations and the consequent need to "round off" the Canadian federation with tropical territory. Canada's tremendous economic and demographic growth buttressed these tropical visions and underscored Canada's fitness, relative to Britain, to administer and develop the West Indies. Britain's retreat from the region and the United States' concurrent expansion in the West Indies highlighted the possibility of a larger role for Canada in the hemisphere. This role assumed greater urgency in 1911 when a Canada-United States reciprocal trade agreement

⁹⁷ T.B. Macaulay, "The Bahamas and Canada," Address before the Canadian Club, Montreal, 3 April 1911, as copied in *Sunshine* (May 1911), 47-48.

loomed. The proposed agreement mobilized union proponents to map out a contrasting Canadian national future that included the West Indies.

As the next chapter demonstrates, however, this vision was hampered by official opposition in London. With the opening of the Panama Canal fast approaching, the imperial government reassessed the value of the West Indies to Britain and the Empire. The Canal promised to reorient the world's trade routes and the West Indies might very well assume a level of strategic importance unknown since the eighteenth century. To some contemporaries, this reorientation might even shift the Empire's seat of power from London to Ottawa. Canada's natural resources and geographical position, as the *London Mail* had predicted, might "carry her to a pinnacle of power" unrealized by even Britain.⁹⁸ But in the years leading up to the outbreak of war in 1914 (the same year the Panama Canal would open) the imperial government was unwilling to entertain the possibility of this shift, nor anything that might precipitate it – such as, most notably, Canada's absorption of Britain's West Indian colonies.

⁹⁸ *London Mail*, as cited in the *Halifax Chronicle*, 19 August 1905.

5. A Betrayal of Trust

Commercial Interests and Humanitarian Obligations in Britain

Mr. Algernon E. Aspinall, the genial secretary of the West India Committee, London, . . . gave us the idea of being perhaps a little apprehensive lest some dark night the Canadian Navy, manned by the more enterprising and aggressive members of our Canadian-West Indian League, might swoop stealthily down on the British West Indies and forthwith annex them – willy-nilly – to these regions of the north; but after his chat with Mr. Macaulay, we think he left us feeling that the work of our League was being carried along in the true Imperialistic spirit, and that the unity of the Empire was the keynote of our work, and indeed, the ‘raison d’être’ of our League’s existence.

– *Canada-West Indies Magazine*, September 1911¹

Canada will become not only the strategic centre of the Empire’s development, but also to a very large extent of the development of the North American continent.

– Rev. J. Clifford, Westbourne Park Baptist Church, London, 1911²

The Nassau meetings of February 1911 and the Bahamian government’s consequent decision to initiate a formal inquiry on Canada-Bahamas union generated a mixed response in Britain. As it had in 1905, the prospect of union stimulated apprehension as well as sentimental predictions about Canada’s “grand destiny” in the Empire. To retired imperial engineer, civil servant and journalist Archibald Colquhoun, union would likely “usher in a new era in British inter-Imperial relations.”³ Britain’s enduring neglect of the West Indies, and Canada’s rapid

¹ “Mr. Algernon E. Aspinall’s Visit to Canada,” *Canada-West Indies Magazine*, September 1911.

² *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2 August 1911. Clifford was interviewed by the Canadian press while visiting North America in 1911. In May he delivered a lecture on “the equality of men” to a Baptist audience in New York. *New York Times*, 29 May 1911.

³ *Morning Post* (London), 3 April 1911. Born in South Africa in 1848, Colquhoun was educated in Scotland and was employed by British India’s Public Works department as a civil engineer. He was later a *London Times* correspondent, in which capacity he wrote about his travels throughout the British Empire. When Britain occupied Mashonaland (now part of Zimbabwe) in 1890, Colquhoun became the first administrator. He retired in 1894 but continued to publish books based on his travels, including *The key of the Pacific: The Nicaragua canal* (Westminster: A. Constable, 1895); *China in transformation* (New York:

economic development and geographical position, he maintained, pointed firmly in this direction. Union with the Bahamas would, moreover, do much to develop Canada's "national character." The "assumption of outside responsibilities would broaden the national outlook of Canada and do more than anything else to rescue her from provincialism." Colquhoun was less sure about the implications of union for "imperial unity." "One would gladly welcome the gravitation into the orbits of the self-governing Dominions of those tropical Colonies which are geographically and economically their natural appendages; but one cannot help feeling that such movements should be preceded by a settled policy of Imperial trade organization, so that the problem of Imperial unity may not be further complicated by too sectional a grouping of the component parts of the Empire."⁴ Britain should have some assurance, in other words, that in the event of union Canada would not extend its protective tariff over the Bahamas (and eventually the other West Indian colonies) to the detriment of British manufacturers and consumers.

Colquhoun's assessment reflected the general trend of imperial policy in the decade before the First World War. When the Liberal Party took power in December 1905, as Bernard Porter has argued, they recognized, as did many Unionists, that the "time for expansion was

Harpers, 1898); *The mastery of the Pacific*. (London: W. Heinemann, 1902); and *From Dan to Beersheba: Work and travel in four continents* (London: W. Heinemann, 1908). Colquhoun died in 1914. See Otness, Harold M., *One thousand westerners in Taiwan, to 1945: A biographical and bibliographical dictionary* (Taipei: Institute of Taiwan History, 1999), 33; and *Who was who*, vol 1, 1897-1916 (London: A & C Black, 1920), 150.

⁴ *Morning Post* (London), 3 April 1911.

past; now was the time for consolidation, for making the best of the empire as it stood.”⁵ To some extent, Canada’s absorption of Britain’s West Indian colonies promised to accomplish this consolidation. As union proponent Thomas Macaulay argued ad nauseam, the Empire suffered from a lack of cohesion. The West Indian islands were akin to “little detached sticks lying loosely around.” Any one stick could be broken easily. “Join one of these little sticks to the larger Canadian one,” however, and “the little one not only shares in the strength of the large one, but even adds something to the combined strength.” A stronger, “more important” Canada, in short, meant a stronger Empire.⁶ But Colquhoun’s comments suggest an underlying tension between union to serve imperial purposes and union as part of Canada’s evolving national project.

This chapter explores this tension by zeroing in on the key sites of resistance to the union campaign in 1911-12. It centers primarily on the “official mind” in London because it was the Colonial Office that resisted Canada-West Indies union most vigorously. The Colonial Office responded, to use clerk E. R. Darnley’s phrase, with “covert opposition.”⁷ Members expressed three central concerns: How would union affect imperial trade and especially Britain’s commercial interests? Would it precipitate a shift in the center of imperial power from

⁵ Bernard Porter, *The Lion’s Share: A Short history of British Imperialism 1850-1983* (London: Longman, 1975), 196.

⁶ Thomas Macaulay to Wilfrid Laurier, 20 February 1911, fol. 182011, vol. 668, Laurier Papers (hereafter L.P.), LAC.

⁷ “Union with Canada,” Minutes, 23 April 1911, CO, 23/267, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA).

London to Ottawa? How would Canada, a self-governing Dominion within the British Empire, govern Bahamians of color? These questions, explored in sequence, structure the chapter. The first section unpacks Colonial Office concerns about the commercial consequences of union. The second queries the implications of union for the existing structure of imperial relations. The depressed state of the Bahamian economy in the early twentieth century led colonial officials once again to reassess – as they often had since the end of the apprenticeship system in 1838 – the character of Britain’s relationship with the colony. But the construction of the Panama Canal inspired renewed confidence in the economic value of the islands. As James Patterson Smith has observed in his study of the British sugar colonies in the years following the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, though the dire economic conditions in the West Indies make it “difficult to understand why Britain would hang on” to these colonies, “the strategic value of blocking American expansion and securing access to any future isthmian canal” provided ample justification.⁸

The final section assesses the impulses underlying Colonial Office concerns about what some officials called the “colour question.” Under Canadian control, they argued, the non-white population of the Bahamas could expect an oppressive experience similar to that of African Americans in the United States. Drawing heavily upon the rhetoric of imperial benevolence and protection, colonial authorities suggested that Britain’s endorsement of the

⁸ James Patterson Smith, "The Liberals, Race and Political Reform in the British West Indies, 1866 -1874," *The Journal of Negro History* 79 (Spring 1994), 132.

proposed union would be a “betrayal of trust” to Bahamians of color.⁹ Canadian opposition to black immigration and the treatment of blacks in Canada were often cited as compelling evidence that only Britain’s continued control over the Bahamas could safeguard the interests of the islands’ non-white inhabitants. Yet the suggestion that Britain was singularly apt to protect these interests was not unrelated to questions of trade and imperial relations.¹⁰ The discourse that emphasized Britain’s unique ability to protect the black population of the Bahamas provided justification for retaining control of the islands and consequently enabled Britain to preserve its economic interests.

In a way similar to the operation of imperial trusteeship in Crown Colonies, the claim that Britain was “specially bound” to protect black Bahamians provided authorities in the Colonial Office with the tools to frame “Britain’s objectives overwhelmingly in humanitarian and moral terms.” As Susan Pederson has argued in her study of the interwar period, the “doctrine of trusteeship,” provided “a humanitarian justification” for Britain’s imperial designs and shielded “its adherents from that quintessentially modern understanding . . . of the inevitably interested and ‘impure’ nature of relations of power.”¹¹ This is not to suggest, of course, that Britain was motivated solely by commercial interests or that the apparent commitment to “protect” non-white Bahamians was entirely disingenuous. But appreciating

⁹ Minutes, 4 April 1911, CO, 23/267, TNA.

¹⁰ Minutes, 4 April 1911, CO, 23/267, TNA.

¹¹ Susan Pederson, “Modernity and Trusteeship: Tensions of Empire in Britain Between the Wars,” in Martin J. Daunton and Bernard Rieger, *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the late-Victorian era to World War II* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2001), 204, 217.

how the rhetoric of imperial benevolence and trust accommodated Britain's economic aspirations provides a sounder interpretive basis on which to assess how the Colonial Office negotiated and reproduced imperial power relations.

5.1 Markets and Misconceptions

When the Canadian union proponents launched their campaign in Nassau in February 1911, they found a strong ally in William Grey-Wilson, the Bahamian Governor. In this post since 1904, Grey-Wilson had previously served as Governor of the Falkland Islands (1897-1904) and of St. Helena (1887-1897). His interest in fostering a closer relationship between Canada and the Bahamas was encouraged by the parallel aspirations of his cousin Earl Albert Grey, Governor General of Canada from 1904 to 1911.¹² During his tenure the latter Grey pressed the Canadian government with limited success to adopt policies aimed to consolidate the Empire. But if his dreams of imperial federation fell on deaf ears, he did play an important role in persuading the government to establish a Canadian navy in 1910 and thus contribute to imperial defense.¹³ Grey had grand ambitions for Canada. "No other country awaits a greater destiny than Canada," he told a Calgary audience in 1909. "Nothing prevents Canada from

¹² Earl Grey, "Notes on Canada," c. 1911, GREY 171/4; William Grey-Wilson to Grey, 31 March 1905, and Grey to Grey-Wilson, 24 August 1905, GREY 174/4; J. Wodehouse to Grey, 10 April 1908, GREY 179/7; Wodehouse to Grey, 3 July 1908 GREY 179/13; Grey to Argyll, 13 February 1911, GREY 178/16, Grey Papers, Special Collections, Durham University.

¹³ See Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1974), 162-173.

acquiring, in the course of time, the controlling interests in the government of the empire.”

Canada’s absorption of the West Indies would set this process in motion.¹⁴

Grey-Wilson shared his cousin’s affinity for imperial consolidation schemes. But he was more immediately concerned with improving economic conditions in the islands. “[H]ard times,” he wrote to the Colonial Office, made the prospect of union particularly attractive to Bahamians. “Since the hurricanes of 1908 the Colony has experienced phenomenal droughts which have involved great hardships and driven large numbers of the labouring population to respond to the attractions in Florida, where wages more than double those obtainable here.” Out-migration and endemic poverty throughout the islands, he continued, “have reacted disastrously upon trade,” and “it is doubtful whether the [m]erchants and traders of the Colony” have experienced “so depressing a year as 1910” for quite some time.¹⁵

Despite Grey-Wilson’s impassioned plea, the Colonial Office was generally unwilling to entertain the possibility of union. The Colonial Secretary, Lewis Harcourt, sent a secret dispatch to the Canadian Government in April 1911 to inform them of the Bahamian resolution, but he did not anticipate an enthusiastic response. He requested, however, that the issue remain confidential. “Bahamas Legislature have passed [a] resolution asking permission to discuss incorporation with Canada . . . it would be useful if without formal communication to your Ministers you would ascertain their probable attitude and telegraph result to me. I presume it

¹⁴ Grey, as cited in the *Christian Science Monitor* (Boston), 11 October 1909.

¹⁵ Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 4 April 1911, CO, 23/267, TNA.

is highly improbable that they would support the idea.”¹⁶ Although the Colonial Office had not yet received a copy of the resolution, and wished to do so before expressing their position on the matter, they had already adopted an oppositional stance. As Gilbert Grindle, Principal Clerk in the West Indian Department remarked in an internal correspondence, “His Majesty’s Government propose to await the arrival of the text of the resolution,” but “when it does come we shall endeavour to find an excuse for not complying.”¹⁷

When the Colonial Office received and reviewed the resolution, they concluded correctly that much of the agitation for union was based on the “vital misapprehension” that Bahamian produce – in the event of the reciprocity agreement proposed between Canada and the United States – could enter the United States free of duty. Citing the text of the proposed reciprocity agreement, Assistant Under-Secretary Hugh Bertram Cox pointed out that many of the products important to the Bahamian economy were excluded from the agreement. The “arrangement says distinctly” that “fresh fruits to be admitted free of duty into the U.S. from Canada do not include lemons, oranges, limes, grape fruit, shaddocks, pomelos & pineapples.” It is likely, he continued, that the “demand for incorporation might fizzle out when the facts are known.”¹⁸ The Colonial Office subsequently sent a copy of the resolution to the Canadian Government, and an article from the Bahamian newspaper, the *Guardian*, which reported the proceedings of the House of Assembly on the day that the resolution had been passed.

¹⁶ Harcourt to Earl Grey, 3 April 1911, CO, 23/267, TNA.

¹⁷ Minutes, 15 March 1911, CO, 23/268, TNA.

¹⁸ Minutes, 4 April 1911, CO, 23/267, TNA.

Drawing attention to the various comments of Assembly members, the Colonial Office encouraged the Canadian Prime Minister and his ministers to observe that “several members appear to have supported the Resolution on the subject either on the ground that it was non-committal in terms, or with a view to attracting public attention to the Colony.” The Colonial Office correspondence with Canada belabored the point that, although the majority of Assembly members had voted in favor of the resolution, most of them did “not pretend to any very strong convictions” on the matter.¹⁹

Members of the Colonial Office expected the agitation for union to dissipate once Bahamians were informed of the restrictive terms of the reciprocity agreement. But upon receiving this information, according to Grey-Wilson, interest in union did not subside. Access to the United States’ market, he asserted, was only one of the many advantages of union. “It would no doubt be of great benefit to this Colony if its tropical fruits could enter the United States free of duty, and this is without a doubt more possible if this Colony forms part of the Dominion than if, isolated and defenceless, it has to face the powerful influences that are working on behalf of Florida, California, Cuba, and Samoa.” Britain’s resolute commitment to free trade since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 left Bahamian products largely unprotected in the world economy.²⁰ In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Bahamas had

¹⁹ Minutes, 20 April 1911, CO, 23/267, TNA. The *Guardian* article was dated 15 March 1911, and can be found in 4 April 1911, CO 23/267. The article is consistent with the Colonial Office assessment that many members of the House of Assembly were either “non-committal” or did not hold strong convictions. Many appear to have supported the resolution as a means to keep the issue open to further consideration.

²⁰ Of course with the onset of Britain’s agricultural depression in 1874 (and the international depression of 1873-1896), free trade came under increasing attack in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The

periodically enjoyed a United States market for their products, but the McKinley Tariff of 1898 slammed the door shut. United States' protectionism produced serious instability in the Bahamian economy and "practically dealt a death blow" to one of the islands' most important commodities – the pineapple. The solution for the Bahamas, Grey-Wilson argued, was to take shelter within the walls of the Canadian protective tariff. The pineapple industry – "almost our last remaining hope as regards fruit, would receive protection within the Dominion if this Colony becomes a Canadian province." The Governor also challenged the Colonial Office argument that the Bahamas had little to gain from access to the much smaller Canadian market. The "rapid expansion" of Canada's population, he contended, would ensure "an ever-increasing demand" for Bahamian products.²¹

fair trade movement gained some ground in the 1880s and was reinforced by other organisations advocating imperial protectionism, including the Imperial Federation League (1881-1891) and the United Empire Trade League (1891-1903). But following the end of depression in the latter half of the 1890s, free trade regained popularity in Britain. This was evidenced in the rejection of Joseph Chamberlain's tariff reform campaign in 1903, and the significant Liberal victory in the election of 1906, which was largely a campaign for free trade. In response to growing imperial sentiment in the Dominions in the 1890s, the Liberal Government of 1892-1895 had responded "with a new flexibility" to the empire, which culminated in the adoption of imperial preference for British goods in Dominion markets from the late 1890s. But the Dominions were cool to Chamberlain's movement for a free trade empire or any other schemes for imperial federation. They remained committed to protective tariffs, combined with a measure of imperial preference. See Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England, 1846-1946* (New York: Oxford University Press), 213-251; Semmel, *The Rise of Free Trade Imperialism: Classical Political Economy, the Empire of Free Trade and Imperialism 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 226; Gomes, *The Economics and Ideology of Free Trade: An Historical Review* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2001), 217-226; and D.K. Fieldhouse, "The Metropolitan Economics of Empire," in Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Lewis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. iv, *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 90.

²¹ Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267, TNA. The argument that the Bahamas had little to gain from the Canadian market can be found in Minutes, 4 April 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

The electoral defeat of Laurier's Liberal government in September 1911 doomed the Canada-United States reciprocity agreement. But Grey-Wilson assured the Colonial Office that this turn of events had "in no way diminished the ardour of a large section of the community" who supported union. Officials in the Colonial Office nonetheless renewed their resolve to continue their strategy of covert opposition. "Our policy at present," Assistant Under-Secretary George Fiddes wrote in an internal correspondence, "is lying low [and] saying nothing in the hope that the question will not be pressed." The Canadians who had initiated the scheme, they observed, had acted in an unofficial capacity, and it appeared that no "responsible Canadian had moved in the matter."²² With Grey-Wilson as the principal source of information for the Colonial Office, and given what appeared to be a lack of enthusiasm from the Canadian

²² Minutes, 23 April 1912, CO 23/269, TNA. A closer commercial relationship, which the Colonial Office recommended, was apparently not sufficient. When Grey-Wilson discussed the possibility of a Bahamian representative attending the upcoming Canada-West India Reciprocity Conference with members of the Legislative Assembly in April 1912, he failed to stimulate any interest. The "attitude of the House," he noted, was that the issue of commercial reciprocity could be discussed "at some future date and that in the mean time the larger question of federation should be examined." See Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 23 April 1912, CO/23/269, TNA. Grey-Wilson conceded, however, that Bahamian opinion about the financial benefits of federation was mixed, and that Canada would have to offer "fairly liberal" financial terms in order to secure the Bahamas in the Dominion federation. Canada's willingness to take on the islands' debt to the New York commission houses was, perhaps, the greatest financial obstacle. "Unless Canada is prepared to be more generous than equity demands, and unless satisfactory measures for the transfer of some of the commercial indebtedness of Nassau from New York to Canada can be devised, the movement will lose supporters." This indebtedness may explain why members of the Bahamian Assembly favored the prospect of political federation over stronger commercial relations with Canada. When the proposal to grant Britain and Canada trade preferences came up in the islands' Assembly in 1907, it was opposed, in large part, for fear of retaliation by the New York commission houses. Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 27 April 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

Government, it is perhaps not surprising that the Colonial Office opposed the proposal for union.²³

Yet this opposition is also curious, given the general deterioration of economic conditions in the West Indies following the end of slavery in the 1830s, and the dire state of the Bahamian economy in particular. In the early twentieth century, sugar remained the most important West Indian commodity in the world market, and those colonies that did not produce sugar, like the Bahamas, were at a marked disadvantage. As H. A. Will has shown, capitalists were reluctant to invest in the West Indies outside the sugar industry, and the Colonial Office often failed to address this problem. After becoming Colonial Secretary in 1895, Joseph Chamberlain launched a vigorous program to “develop” the imperial periphery that depended on a generous supply of British capital. He gained some favor with London capitalists for his “reputation as a businessman” and his personal investment in the Bahamian sisal industry, though his efforts were largely unsuccessful. By the early twentieth century, “in financial circles generally,” the “West Indies connoted failure.”²⁴

²³ The Colonial Office wished to obtain information about public opinion in the colony, but Grey-Wilson was consistently vague on the question, often citing, unhelpfully, that “a large section of the population” supported the proposal. On Colonial Office interest in obtaining information about public opinion, see for example Minutes, 23 April 1912, CO 23/269, TNA. And for an example of Grey-Wilson’s ambiguity in citing Bahamian support, see Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 23 April 1912, CO 23/269, TNA. Regarding the response of the Canadian Government, Earl Grey informed the Colonial Office that ‘Prime Minister [Wilfrid Laurier] privately informs me he is getting information as to the revenue[,], trade resources[, etc] . . . of the Bahamas and adds that though in many ways the project would appeal to him[,], a great deal of investigation and thinking is required.’ See Grey to Harcourt, 10 April 1911, CO 42/947, TNA.

²⁴ H.A. Will, “Colonial Policy and Economic Development in the British West Indies, 1895-1903,” *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 23, 1 (April 1970), 130-135.

One of the main reasons the Bahamas failed to attract private capital was, perhaps, the absence of a publicly-funded infrastructure of transportation and communications. Historians have suggested that in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, the British imperial economy functioned within a “liberal international system” whose central feature was free trade. Within this system, Britain’s commercial objectives could often be accomplished “informally” through an economic policy of laissez-faire, low-tariffs, and government expenditure to support the development of public works. The “development philosophy” of the Colonial Office, as Michael Havinden and David Meredith have suggested, “depended on the belief that once the state had provided a framework of ordered government and a basic infrastructure, private entrepreneurs and private capital could be relied upon to initiate and carry out a steady programme of economic advance.” Thus, to attract private capital and ensure long-term economic development, colonies required public roads, harbors, railroads, steamship services, telecommunications, and banks.²⁵

²⁵ Michael Ashley Havinden and David Meredith, *Colonialism and Development: Britain and its tropical colonies, 1850-1960* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), 91. The authors point out that this was a simplification of the problem of developing these regions. Because “so many of the tropical colonies were so deficient” in terms of their infrastructure, it “encouraged the illusion that the problems of economic development were relatively simple, and concealed the fact that further investments in infrastructural growth were unlikely to yield dramatic returns.” See also B.R. Tomlinson, “The Economy of the Empire on the Periphery,” in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. iv, *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 358, and Patrick Karl O’Brien, “Intercontinental Trade and the Development of the Third World since the Industrial Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 8, 1 (1997), 96. On the concept of an “informal empire” see C.R. Fay, *Cambridge History of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 399, and John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *Economic History Review* 8, 1 (1953), 1-15.

The Bahamas lacked most of these “prerequisites to development” in the early twentieth century. A regular steamship service between Britain, Canada and the Bahamas was not established until 1921, and the Nassau harbor was unable to accommodate deep-draft vessels until 1923. A road network and the creation of a modern water system were similarly slow to develop. The most significant developments before the First World War included the introduction of the telephone in 1906, electricity the following year, and wireless telegraphy in 1913. But these latter amenities were largely confined to a small, elite segment of the population that resided on New Providence Island, and especially in the capital city, Nassau.²⁶

Yet despite this absence of infrastructure, Britain’s place in the liberal international economy and the popularity of “free trade imperialism” among Prime Minister Asquith and many of his fellow Liberals after 1903, help to explain the opposition to union in the Colonial Office. Although many Liberals who supported free trade imperialism appreciated that Britain’s economic policies were incompatible with those of the Dominions, and subsequently accepted the autonomy of the Dominions to maintain protectionist economic policies,²⁷ British policy makers did extend this privilege to its other colonies. Indeed, the success of free trade imperialism and “informal empire” hinged on Britain’s ability to “enforce free trade (or something approaching it) on tropical regions.”²⁸ When officials in the Colonial Office

²⁶ Michael Craton and Gail Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream: A History of the Bahamian People, Vol. 2. From the Ending of Slavery to the Twenty-First Century* (Athens & London: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 213-214, 242-243, and Michael Craton, *A History of the Bahamas* (London: Collins, 1962), 246.

²⁷ Anthony Howe, *Free Trade and Liberal England*, 248.

²⁸ See Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism and Development*, 45.

discussed the Bahamas joining the Canadian confederation, they often expressed the concern that such a scheme was “not in the interest of British trade.” In the event of union, remarked one official, “it would become necessary for them to adopt the whole of the Canadian customs tariff in detail against the world in general. This adoption would involve a disturbance of the existing channels of trade, the results of which it is impossible to foresee.”²⁹ Moreover, some officials in the Colonial Office may have overestimated the Bahamas’ potential for agricultural development.³⁰ This type of estimation was, as Havinden and Meredith have shown, a common misconception in imperial economic policy.³¹

5.2 A Shifting Center of Imperial Power?

The Colonial Office also feared that union might upset the existing structure of imperial relations and spur a shift of the axis of imperial power from London to Ottawa. As one official remarked in April 1911, “the center of gravity of the Empire will leave England for Canada in less than a quarter of a century; but we do not wish to accelerate the process at our expense.”³² The imminent completion of the Panama Canal had much to do with these concerns. The isthmus promised to revolutionize the trade routes of the world, create new trade possibilities,

²⁹ See for example, Minutes, 4 April 1911 and 15 April 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

³⁰ See for example, Minutes, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

³¹ Havinden and Meredith, *Colonialism and Development*, 20-21.

³² Minutes, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

and consequently bolster the value of the Bahamas and the other West Indian colonies.³³ As R.A. Wiseman of the Colonial Office remarked in March 1912, “it is considered doubtful,” in light of “the great strategic possibilities of the Bahamas . . . whether the Imperial Government would ever consent to relax their control of so valuable a colony.”³⁴ Some officials feared that Britain’s loss of the Bahamas to Canada might be “the thin end of the wedge as regards the [West Indies],” and thus would precipitate the loss of more West Indian colonies. If the Bahamas joined the Canadian federation, as Gilbert Grindle remarked, “it is impossible to see where it would stop.”³⁵ Although many of these colonies owed substantial debts to the Imperial Exchequer, they were, nevertheless, “very valuable to [Britain] from the point of view of commerce and investment.” And that “value would undoubtedly be diminished by a transfer of the administration to Canada, while if we keep [the Bahamas] we shall benefit by the great development which is going on and by the opening of the Panama Canal.” These observations inspired a somewhat competitive, and occasionally disdainful, attitude toward Canada. As one official asserted, “Canada has an abundance of resources already; why should we let her have any of ours?”³⁶

³³ See Minutes, 5 March 1912, CO 23/268, TNA. On British interest and enthusiasm about the opening of the Panama Canal see *West India Committee Circular*, 14 February, 1 August, 15 August, 10 October, 24 October 1911; *Pall Mall Gazette*, as cited in the *West India Committee Circular*, 12 September 1911; and Robert Porter, *London Magazine*, as cited in the *West India Committee Circular*, 28 May 1911.

³⁴ Minutes, 5 March 1912, CO 23/268, TNA.

³⁵ Minutes, 4 April 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

³⁶ Minutes, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

Officials in the Colonial Office nonetheless anticipated some form of Canada-West Indies union in the future. "It appears almost certain," Harcourt predicted, "that in a future not very remote the Dominions in temperate zones will desire to acquire for themselves 'hothouses' for consumable luxuries and other purposes. It is not unreasonable to contemplate the ultimate absorption of the West Indies by Canada; of the Pacific Islands by Australia and New Zealand; of Rhodesia and the native Protectorates (even of Nyassaland [sic]) by South Africa."³⁷ The Colonial Office's object, then, was to elude and delay the union question, rather than repudiate it outright. Opposition remained covert. As Grindle averred, "there are arguments which, strong as they are, can hardly be used publicly." Wiseman reiterated this point in a subsequent memo. "Overt opposition on our part would possibly only confirm the local impression of the value of the Bahamas."³⁸ This significant desire for secrecy suggests that the Colonial Office cared more about how union would affect Britain than the Bahamas.

By the early twentieth century many metropolitan Britons had reason to believe the Empire would not survive another century. Pessimism, Ronald Hyam observes, was "an all-pervasive and quintessential characteristic of Edwardian thinking about the Empire." There were several reasons for this gloom. Chief among them was the South African War (1899-1902), which proved a surprisingly protracted and embarrassing conflict for Britain. It had taken the Imperial army three years and £270m to quell a "backwoods army" that employed "barbaric" methods of warfare. The war challenged the optimistic notion that "the Englishman was the

³⁷ Lewis Harcourt, "Suggested Reconstruction of the Colonial Office," April 1911, vol. 503, Lewis Harcourt Papers, Modern Political Manuscripts, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

³⁸ Minutes, 4 April 1911, CO 23/267, and Minutes, 5 March 1912, CO 23/268, TNA.

born ruler of the world” and heightened concerns in the metropole about the Empire’s vigor and capabilities.³⁹ Britain’s relative decline in industrial and naval power from the late nineteenth century and the subsequent “naval scare” of 1910-11 similarly inspired anxieties about imperial security and compelled Britain to re-evaluate its strategic assets throughout the empire.⁴⁰ To many imperialists, the solution to Britain’s waning power was the consolidation of the Empire. From the early years of decline in the 1870s, as Geoffrey Searle has observed, imperialists often expounded the merits of closer imperial relations. In many ways, Britain’s imperial expansion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was “a defensive response to contemporary events: a novel method of underpinning traditional and well-established national interests in a changing international world where they were increasingly threatened.”⁴¹ In this context, the Colonial Office ascribed the Bahamas greater value.

The early twentieth century was also a period of domestic turmoil in Britain. Industrial unrest and the rise of trade unionism, suffragette fanaticism, Irish nationalism and the resurgent “Irish question” exposed deep fissures within British society.⁴² When Governor Grey-Wilson first presented the Canada-Bahamas union proposal to the Colonial Office in March 1911, Irish

³⁹ Ronald Hyam, “The British Empire in the Edwardian Era,” in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, The Twentieth Century*, vol. iv (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 49-51. A.P. Thornton, *The Imperial Idea & Its Enemies: A Study in British Power* (London: MacMillan, 1985 2nd ed. [1st ed. 1959]), 108-152.

⁴⁰ G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 8-10, 173.

⁴¹ Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency*, 10.

⁴² Bernard Porter, *Britannia’s Burden: The Political Evolution of Modern Britain 1851-1990* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 158-162.

Home Rule had resumed a central position in both government thinking and parliamentary discussion. The two general elections of 1910 left the Liberals dependent on the support of Irish Nationalist Members of Parliament. Although Prime Minister Herbert Asquith had practiced, like his predecessors, a cautious and gradualist approach to the Irish question, his support for Home Rule left the Liberal Party vulnerable to the vitriol of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists. To these latter groups, Home Rule had grave implications for the future of British imperialism; it signaled the devolution of imperial power, and, more seriously, the end of Britain's Empire.⁴³ Asquith's administrators in the Colonial Office were likely influenced by this tumultuous political climate. Their unwillingness to relinquish control of the Bahamas furnished Conservatives and Liberal Unionists with evidence that Liberal support for Home Rule did not imply imperial disintegration. The desire to retain control over the Bahamas highlighted the enduring vitality of the Empire within the Liberal Party.

In this context of imperial insecurity and domestic tumult, it is not surprising that the Colonial Office opposed the union proposal. Officials simply did not share Thomas Macaulay's conviction that Canada should annex "a few outlying provinces" in order to realize "the extent of her duty as a great and prosperous part of the Empire."⁴⁴ Canada might fulfill this duty at a later date, but that date lay far in an undefined future. When Macaulay requested a meeting in with Harcourt in September 1912 to discuss how Canada might "take up her

⁴³ On Unionist concerns about the implications of Irish Home Rule for the Empire, see for example H.C.G. Matthew, "The Liberal Age," in Kenneth O. Morgan, *The Oxford History of Britain* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 559.

⁴⁴ *Sunshine*, 56-57. Macaulay to Harcourt, 4 September 1912, CO 23/270, TNA.

proper share of Imperial burdens," the Colonial Office declined; Harcourt would be out of town. Refusing an interview, officials concluded, would not likely "give rise to any feelings of annoyance among Canadians," certainly not among men in positions of political authority. Granting an interview, on the other hand, would bolster the union movement by providing Macaulay with a means to exploit his cause in the press. Macaulay was, according to Grindle, a "gas bag with infinite possibilities of explosive mischief" whose efforts should not be encouraged.⁴⁵

5.3 The 'Colour Question'

Notions of racial superiority, imperial benevolence, and the rhetoric of trusteeship provided a convenient discourse for the Colonial Office to discourage efforts toward Canada-Bahamas union and to maintain Britain's continued interests in the region. Canadian control of the Bahamas, they argued, would threaten the well being of the islands' non-white populations. It was thus the responsibility of the Colonial Office to safeguard these interests by maintaining the status quo. Soon after Grey-Wilson introduced the prospect of union, the Colonial Office expressed concerns about the implications of such a scheme for the "coloured" population. As Gilbert Grindle wrote in April 1911, "[His Majesty's Government has] always looked on themselves as specially bound to look after the coloured population. No doubt for the moment the Dominion . . . would safeguard their interests, but there are signs of the rise of a colour

⁴⁵ Minutes, 12 September 1912, CO 23/270, TNA.

question in Canada . . . With this possibility before us, it seems to me . . . it would be a betrayal of trust for H.M.G. to hand over" the islands to Canada.⁴⁶

These concerns, of course, were not without merit. The "racial hierarchy" in Canadian society was very different from that in the Bahamas. African-descended people in Canada, like the United States, occupied one of the lowest positions in the racial hierarchy, and little distinction was made between "coloured" and "black."⁴⁷ In contrast, though whites similarly occupied the highest stratum in Bahamian society, there was a significant socio-economic division between the islands' "coloured" (usually connoting someone of mixed African and European descent) and black (usually connoting someone of African descent) inhabitants. Although the historically contingent and constructed nature of race meant that these differences were always contested, ambiguous and mutable, the former generally straddled an "intermediate" position in society and many were identified with the colony's rising middle class. Members of the "coloured" middle class often worked as craftsmen, merchants, or teachers, and by the early twentieth century, many owned land. Black Bahamians, on the other hand, were largely confined to positions in manual labor.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Minutes, 4 April 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

⁴⁷ Asians occupied a similarly low position in the hierarchy. On Canada's racial hierarchy in the early twentieth century, see Howard Palmer, "Reluctant Hosts: Anglo-Canadian Views of Multiculturalism in the Twentieth Century," in R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith, eds., *Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Toronto: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2002), 117-118.

⁴⁸ See Craton and Saunders, *Islanders in the Stream*, 89-100, and Saunders, "The Role of the Coloured Middle Class in Nassau, Bahamas, 1890-1942, 77-112. Of course as Saunders and Craton points out, the "coloured" population occupied a somewhat ambiguous position. While some gained a measure of

More alarming – and thus more detrimental to the union campaign – was the fact that the Canadian government (supported by the prejudices of almost all of the white electorate) actively discouraged black migration to Canada in the early twentieth century. While census returns from this period are imprecise (inconsistent terminology and the tendency to under-enumerate non-white residents were common), the decennial census indicates Canada's black population declined slightly between 1901 and 1911 (from 17,437 to 16,994, according to federal census returns).⁴⁹ Newspapers and especially the records of Canada's Department of Immigration nonetheless confirm that hundreds of West Indian migrants entered (or attempted to enter) Canada in the years leading up to and including 1911. The growth of the Canadian economy created employment opportunities for West Indian migrants – despite white resistance – as industrial laborers in Toronto, Montreal and Sydney, Nova Scotia, farmers/agricultural laborers in Alberta and Saskatchewan, and domestic servants across the country.

White Canadians' racist attitudes received particular attention in the British and West Indian Press from 1909 to 1911, when an increasing number of African Americans (mostly from

respectability among upper-class whites, others worked as labourers. Yet they also suggest that the Bahamian social system was not as flexible as those in the West Indies.

⁴⁹ Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997 [1971]), 484-496.

Oklahoma) moved north to settle in the Canadian West.⁵⁰ By May 1911, Canada's unfriendly response to blacks was reported in West Indian newspapers, and Canada was subsequently identified as an undesirable place to live.⁵¹ As black Bahamian tailor Robert Bailey wrote in a letter to the *Nassau Guardian*:

We were told that Canada would receive us, 'with open arms'. That there was no colour prejudice in Canada. That coloured American citizens were taking up large tracts of land in the 'North-West'. Within a week, these utterances were decidedly check-mated, as one of our cable items informed us that a party of American negroes were refused admission into Canada, as the negroes were considered to be undesirable citizens. . . As the great majority of the people of this Colony are negroes, we would certainly expect that those to whom we had confided the preservation and protection of our interests would use every means to find out the truth or otherwise, of this statement, before trying to pitch us, baseball like, at Canada.⁵²

Bailey referred to the union proposal as "freakish legislation." He was highly critical of those members of the legislature who supported the resolution. Did they not realize the extent of Canada's "colour prejudice"? They would certainly experience a rude awakening on their first visit to Ottawa. "Picture our House journeying to Ottawa . . . Canada [ready] with smiling countenance, and open arms, waiting to receive them, when suddenly she espies Messrs. Anderson, Evans, Bowen and Roxborough. The smile vanishes, her arms are slowly folded: 'No, no they are undesirable get rid of them, and [don't] come again'."⁵³ Even Grey-Wilson

⁵⁰ R. Bruce Shepard, *Deemed Unsuited* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997); H.M. Troper, *Only farmers need apply: official Canadian government encouragement of immigration from the United States, 1896-1911* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972).

⁵¹ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 298-313.

⁵² Robert M. Bailey, Letter to the Editor, *Nassau Guardian*, 28 March 1911.

⁵³ Bailey, Letter to the Editor, *Nassau Guardian*, 28 March 1911.

conceded that the colony's non-white populations were concerned that their well-being might be compromised under Canadian control. While British-appointed Governors, he pointed out, "have hitherto been credited with sympathy, with consideration for, and impartiality towards the coloured race . . . doubts are felt in regard to the Governors who might be sent from Ottawa." Bahamians feared, in other words, that their treatment under the Canadian administration would "prove more American than British."⁵⁴

The Colonial Office cited as evidence of the "rise of colour question" particular instances in which blacks had been mistreated in Canada. Newspaper articles including those titled "Negro Immigrants in Canada – Protest by White Settlers" and "Canada and Negro Immigration. A Growing Problem" were attached in the Colonial Office minutes to provide officials with "an indication of Canadian feeling towards coloured people."⁵⁵ White Canadian hostility toward black migrants provided compelling evidence that Canada could not be trusted to safeguard the interests of black Bahamians.

Governor Grey-Wilson countered these concerns by drawing attention to the support for union among non-white Bahamians in the House of Assembly. According to the Governor, there were "three black members [in] the House[,] all of whom support the Resolution."⁵⁶ He also emphasized the minimal concessions that would be required to appease Bahamians and

⁵⁴ Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

⁵⁵ *The Times* (London), 10 April, 13 April, 1911, enclosed in Minutes, 15 April 1911, CO 23/267, TNA. See also *Toronto Star*, 3 March, 15 March 1911; *New York Times*, 2 April 1911; *The Calgary Daily Herald*, 6 March, 8 March, 1911; Britton B. Cooke, "The Black Canadian," *Maclean's Magazine*, (November 1911), 5-11.

⁵⁶ Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

gain popular support for union in the islands. All they wanted, after all, was “British justice and a high franchise irrespective of colour.”⁵⁷ This was not a tall request, given that the Canadian franchise was more inclusive than the Bahamian.⁵⁸ In fact, it was white rather than “coloured” or black Bahamians who were particularly concerned about the prospect of a widened franchise. “There is a well-defined fear among the whites,” the Governor warned, “that unscrupulous Canadian professional politicians might, for political purposes, seek to disturb the existing harmony as regards representation, and by playing upon the impressionable minds of the Negroes, overthrow the white domination.”⁵⁹ This concern was likely inspired by the ongoing debate in Canadian and provincial politics regarding the country’s new immigration law, passed by the Liberal government in 1910, which was “restricted, exclusive, and selective.” Although both Liberals and Conservatives generally discouraged black immigration, with a general election upcoming in September 1911, Ontario Conservatives “seized the occasion to declare their affection” for their black voters.⁶⁰

If Macaulay’s vision provides any indication of what governance would like under union, white Bahamians had nothing to fear. He seems to have favored a system similar to Crown colony rule. The “present happy relations between the two races” in the Bahamas, he assured Prime Minister Laurier, “are in no small degree due to the fact that the Islands are to a

⁵⁷ Minutes, 5 March 1912, CO 23/267, TNA.

⁵⁸ See Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

⁵⁹ Grey-Wilson to Harcourt, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

⁶⁰ See Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 306-307.

certain extent a Crown colony.” The Bahamas possessed an elected Assembly, which technically negated Crown colony status. But with a Governor appointed from London and an Upper House appointed by the Governor, there were sufficient “safeguards against unwise legislation.” The point of comparison, here – the example to be avoided – was the United States. “It is the fear of the colored vote that makes the whites of the Southern States use such measures to keep the negro under; and it is the knowledge of their power as voters, and resentment of the oppressive attitude of the whites, that cause the colored population to become discontented and aggressive.” The United States lacked safeguards, he continued, to protect both races. Under union, “[w]e must devise some plan, under which it will be impossible for a condition of affairs to develop similar to that existing in the Southern States.” Macaulay recommended a “rather severe” franchise qualification at the federal level. To avoid offending Bahamians, however, the qualification should refer to “tropical conditions” rather than color. “Allusion could be made to the case with which a bare living can be obtained in the tropics, people of all colours, even including Coolies from India, being able to live there on an income which in the North would be quite inadequate.” People who “live hand to mouth” and who have “little financial stake in the country” could hardly expect to be granted the vote.⁶¹

If Canada annexed the Bahamas, administrators in the Colonial Office concluded, it would be disastrous for all parties concerned. As Hartman Just asserted in April 1911, “I cannot imagine anything more unwise from the Canadian point of view than to take on a province with a coloured population [and] truly destroy the homogeneity of her citizens. And I am

⁶¹ Macaulay to Laurier, 20 June 1911, fol. 187107-115, vol. 684, L.P., LAC.

afraid that it would [become worse over time] . . .What if the Bahamas afterwards wanted to [leave] a Confederation with which they have no ties of history, geography or race? – [S]uppose they appeal to us against decisions made in Ottawa”? Not surprisingly, the Colonial Office emphasized this “colour question” in its correspondence with the Canadian government. When Harcourt drew Laurier’s attention to the Bahamas’ large non-white population in May 1911, he was assured that the Prime Minister had “no intention of dallying with the proposal.” The “proportion of coloured to white when I mentioned it was sufficient to “put him off.”⁶²

Although the Canadian government had changed hands a few months later, by the summer of 1912 discussion of union in the Colonial Office correspondence had diminished. Despite Grey-Wilson’s continued assurances about the viability of union, the Colonial Office remained unwilling to seriously entertain the possibility. When George Haddon-Smith replaced Grey-Wilson as Bahamian governor in October 1912, the Colonial Office briefed him on the history of the movement and instructed him to discourage any activity that might stimulate the agitation for union. Grey-Wilson, he was told, had “unfortunately constituted himself into an advocate of union with Canada,” which had “got [him] in hot-water” with the Colonial Secretary. Haddon-Smith assured the Colonial Office in April 1913 that the issue had not been raised recently in the House of Assembly, no meetings on the subject had been held, and no “accredited representatives” of the Canadian government had expressed any interest in discussing the matter with him. When DeLéry MacDonald, one of Macaulay’s associates in the

⁶² Minutes, 5 March 1912, CO 23/268; Minutes, 4 April 1911, CO 23/267; and Minutes, 6 May 1911, CO 23/267, TNA.

union movement, travelled to Nassau in March 1913 to revive interest in the proposal, Haddon-Smith informed him he was not at liberty to discuss the matter. MacDonald had intended to stay in Nassau for one month, but left the island within ten days.⁶³

The political inclinations and experiences of particular officials in the Colonial Office may help explain why the Office adopted a fairly conservative attitude to union. Many of these officials had been assigned to the Office during Chamberlain's tenure as Colonial Secretary (1895-1902), and some worked closely with him outside the Colonial Office. Gilbert Grindle served as Chamberlain's private secretary in 1898, and Hartman Just accompanied Chamberlain on his African tour in 1902. George Fiddes, who joined the Colonial Office in 1907 as an Assistant Under Secretary, previously served as imperial secretary to Alfred Milner, Governor of Cape Colony. According to Fiddes' biographer, during his career in Africa he was "an unyielding imperialist" who was "firmly opposed to the Afrikaner's aspirations."⁶⁴ Finally, Charles Prestwood Lucas authored several books on the British Empire and was "much in sympathy with the imperial ideologies of Chamberlain."⁶⁵ He supported Chamberlain's financial conservatism and pushed for greater restrictions on public borrowing in the West Indies. And, most interestingly, when Lucas and Chamberlain discussed how they might

⁶³ George Haddon-Smith to Harcourt, 12 April 1913, CO 23/271, TNA.

⁶⁴ C.J. Beyers, *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Vol. III (Cape Town: Tafelberg-Uitgewers Ltd., 1977), 294-295.

⁶⁵ Walter Stoneman, "Charles Prestwood Lucas (1853-1931)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/articles/34/34621-article.html>. Viewed 10 March 2006.

secure private investment in British Guiana in 1902, Lucas suggested that it might be advisable to establish crown control over the colony's finances.⁶⁶

It is difficult, of course, to establish with any certainty the extent to which these civil servants may have influenced Lewis Harcourt's response to the situation. And although Harcourt's comments appear periodically in the Colonial Office minutes, and he appears to have opposed the proposed union, his contributions may have been inconsequential. As Ronald Hyam has suggested, the experience and personal qualities of Colonial Office staff were instrumental in shaping policy, and "it would have to be a powerful Secretary of State who could impose his own policy on all but a highly selected number of individual issues."⁶⁷ There were, moreover, varying levels of support for imperialism in Britain's major political parties, and differing opinions about the purpose and character of imperialism. For example, although Harcourt, Fiddes and Grindle came from different professional backgrounds and may have varied in their understandings of imperialism, it would not have been unusual for them to unite in their opposition to a Canada-Bahamas union.

It is nonetheless clear that administrators in the Colonial Office did not wish to assert publicly that their resistance to the union proposal was motivated largely by commercial and strategic interests. Not wishing to attract attention to the value of the islands in a way that

⁶⁶ Will, "Colonial Policy and Economic Development in the British West Indies," 140, 142, 134. The elected majority in British Guiana's Combined Court maintained partial control over the colony's finances. As such, British Guiana was not a "pure crown colony."

⁶⁷ Ronald Hyam, "Bureaucracy and 'Trusteeship' in the Colonial Empire," in Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. IV, The Twentieth Century* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 258-259.

might stimulate increased interest in the region in Canada – or perhaps worse, in the United States – the Colonial Office adopted an approach of clandestine opposition.⁶⁸ Their claims that black Bahamians' well-being was in "trust" to the British government, and the reports of white Canadian hostility toward black immigrants that they sought out and distributed provided a convenient justification for this opposition and allowed them to mask Britain's continued commercial and strategic interests in the colony.

Of course the argument that British imperial control (with its attendant and profoundly racialized economic, political and social structures) was in the best interests of subject populations, and the use of this argument as a means to disguise, justify or bolster colonial aspirations, was hardly new. Cloaked in various terminology over a period of several centuries (e.g. the "redemption of the human race," the "civilization," "enlightenment," or "uplift of dark races," the "white man's burden," and the doctrine of "trusteeship"), the contention that Britain had a special responsibility (and a racial aptitude) to either improve and/or protect "subject races" is an enduring theme in the colonial project.⁶⁹

Yet the use of this argument by the Colonial Office to justify Britain's continued presence in the Bahamas was also somewhat unique. Officials in the Colonial Office did not

⁶⁸ On United States involvement in the Caribbean from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century, see Stephen J. Randall and Graeme S. Mount, *The Caribbean Basin: An International History* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998); Lester D. Langley, *The Banana Wars: United States Intervention in the Caribbean 1898-1934* (Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1988 [first pub. by the University of Kentucky Press, 1983]).

⁶⁹ For an early example of this phenomenon, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966): 23-24, and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1975): 299-306.

suggest that the Bahamas' black population required Britain's protection from the powerful white elite in the Bahamas, or from the imperialist designs of nations outside the British Empire. Rather, black Bahamians required protection from the unscrupulous practices of another British colony – Canada. However disingenuous, the claim that Canada was unsuited to administer the Bahamas destabilizes the common assumption that the “white settlement colonies” were reflections of Britain. These colonies were, as Catherine Hall has pointed out, often “thought of as offshoots of the mother country, new places where the English (or Irish or Scots) settled . . . [they] were children, with all the meanings of connection and separation carried by that familial trope.”⁷⁰ British subjects may have “settled” in Canada, and the political and constitutional infrastructure of the Dominion may have been based on the British model, but according to the Colonial Office, Canada could not be trusted to exercise British principles of justice and liberty in the Bahamas.

Members of the imperial government, though largely outside the Colonial Office, would take a very different stance in only a few years time. The war destabilized the existing world order and compelled the Allied powers to redraw the global map. In this new order the imperial government called on Canada and the other Dominions to take up their proper share of the “imperial burden.” To imperial authorities in London, retaining the West Indies became neither longer desirable nor practical.

⁷⁰ Catherine Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002): 10. This understanding of “colonies” generally contrasted with the concept “dependencies.” The latter referred to “conquered territories or wartime acquisitions, with majority non-white populations.” Yet as Hall makes clear, this division was not always clear and was often being negotiated.

6. 'Expansionists in the broadest sense of the word' Redrawing the Global Map

By 1916 dreams of a Greater Canada that included Britain's West Indian colonies were bolstered by official interest in Ottawa and London. The Allied occupation of German colonies in Africa and the Pacific during the early part of the war inspired a flurry of discussion about territorial changes after the war. The Committee of Imperial Defence subsequently appointed an interdepartmental Committee on Territorial Changes in August 1916, chaired by Louis Mallet of the Foreign Office. Concerned primarily with the future administration of former German territories, the Committee did not report on the West Indies.¹ But its work nonetheless aroused Canadian interest in the prospect of territorial gains. It was, as Prime Minister Robert Borden observed in June 1916, an opportune time to consider bringing the British West Indies into the Canadian confederation.² Australia, New Zealand and South Africa had either laid claim to or anticipated the acquisition of new territories, so it was appropriate that Canada – the oldest and largest Dominion – should also obtain new colonial possessions. Absorbing the West Indies, argued a memo from the Canadian Department of State, would be due compensation for Canada's considerable war contribution.³

¹ Reports of the Mallet Committee were released on 25 January, 22 March, 28 March and 17 July, 1917. See Reports, Proceedings & Memoranda, Committee on Territorial Changes, Committee of Imperial Defence, 1916-1917, CAB 16/36, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA).

² Robert L. Borden to George H. Perley, 2 June 1918, *Documents on Canadian External Relations, vol. 1, 1909-1918* (Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1967), 70-71.

³ Joseph Pope, "Confidential Memorandum upon the subject of the annexation of the West India Islands to the Dominion of Canada" (Ottawa: Dominion of Canada, 1917), 4.

This chapter queries how the war transformed the discourse about Canada-West Indies union, focusing on the three years from the summer of 1916 to the summer of 1919. Official discussion of territorial readjustments emerged forcefully in 1916, as noted above, and continued until the conclusion of the Paris Peace Conference in June 1919. The spring and summer of 1919 was a pivotal moment in the union discussion not only for the Peace negotiations, but also because it marked a turning point in imperial relations. Before these negotiations concluded and the bulk of Allied soldiers demobilized and returned home, colonial subjects of color world-wide still held out hope for a new world order based on racial equality and self-determination. These expectations, increasingly dashed by the fall of 1919, are elaborated in the next chapter.

This chapter centers instead on the impulses that shaped the union discourse in official and commercial circles. Historians have long identified the First World War as “one of the great turning points in the evolution of the Empire.”⁴ For India and the Dominions, the war prompted increased participation in imperial affairs and incited, in many cases, a heightened national consciousness. Canadian, New Zealander and Australian soldiers “blooded” a new nationality at the Front, while Dominion statesmen fought for a greater voice in the conduct of war and the constitutional reorganization of the Empire.⁵ To those who popularly anthropomorphized the constituent parts of the Empire, Canada and the other Dominions

⁴ W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact 1869-1971* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 181.

⁵ Robert Holland, “The British Empire and the Great War, 1914-1918,” *Oxford History of the British Empire* vol. iv, *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 119.

matured from “children” to “sisters” of Britain. Prime Minister Borden urged Dominion representation in the Imperial War Cabinet, at the Imperial War Conferences, and in the British Empire delegation at the Peace Conference. Most significantly, he drafted resolution IX (introduced at the Imperial Ministers’ Conference in 1917), which identified the Dominions as “autonomous nations of an Imperial Commonwealth.”⁶ The resolution called for the extension of Dominion autonomy in domestic affairs to external relations, and a voice in imperial foreign policy.⁷

While the prospect of an imperial foreign policy had become moribund by the Imperial Conference of 1921 and Canada’s autonomy in external relations was not officially recognized until the Statute of Westminster in 1931,⁸ these developments should not be projected backwards to diminish the significance of the war on the national trajectory that Canadians imagined in 1916-1919. Canadian policy makers were reluctant, Canadian historians suggest, to exercise an independent foreign policy well into the interwar period.⁹ But as the war-time campaign for Canada’s annexation of the British West Indies reveals, its advocates identified

⁶ John Herd Thompson, “Canada and the ‘Third British Empire’,” in Phillip Buckner, ed., *Canada and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97-98. Norman Hillmer and J.L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 2000 [1st ed. Copp Clark Longman, 1994]), 58-64.

⁷ L.W. White and W.D. Hussey, *Government in Great Britain, the Empire, and the Commonwealth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 264.

⁸ See Thompson, “Canada and the ‘Third British Empire’,” 98. Hillmer and Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire*, 115.

⁹ Hillmer and Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire*, 115, argue that Canadian politicians were reluctant to take advantage of the new constitutional autonomy granted by the Statute of Westminster. With the Statute “full independence was there to be grasped if Canadians wanted it, but it is clear that they did not. Certainly very few politicians did. Thus the British Foreign Office continued to act for Canada in most of the countries of the world; Canada had diplomatic representatives in only three foreign capitals throughout almost all of the 1930s.”

annexation as a means to greater national autonomy in both the Empire and in a broader global context. Administering external territories was an indicator of advanced national status; Canada's absorption of the West Indies would thus provide a route to a more independent nationhood. Union was less about consolidating the British Empire, as it had been in earlier years, and more about the evolution of Canadian sovereignty.

The first section of the chapter introduces the chief advocates of union in Canada and Britain. Unlike previous union campaigns, the war-time campaign was driven largely (though by no means exclusively) by high-ranking government officials in Ottawa and London. The analytic centerpiece of this section is a nine page confidential memorandum on Canada's annexation of the West Indies, drafted by the Department of External Affairs in 1917. The memo, which makes scant reference to Britain, highlights the nationalist orientation of the war-time annexation campaign.

The future of Britain's West Indian colonies was increasingly uncertain during the war. While the imperial government had resisted earlier union campaigns, the shift in global power from Europe to the United States, Japan, and Russia, in process before 1914 but increasingly apparent in the years during and after the war, underscored the expediency of Canada-West Indies union. As the second section of this chapter demonstrates, annexationists identified formal Canadian control of the British West Indies as a means to check American influence in the hemisphere (which increased significantly in the years leading up to and during the war) and to secure commercial relationships in an increasingly unstable global context. But Canada's status in the British Empire, which facilitated Canadian commercial ventures in the West Indies

to some extent, simultaneously discouraged these ventures. Canada lacked the constitutional authority to intervene directly on behalf of Canadian investors and other commercial interests in the British West Indies (or anywhere else for that matter). Protocol required that the Canadian government submit a request to the imperial government to act on behalf of Canadian investors, a process which could prove both ineffective and infantilizing.¹⁰ Formal Canadian control thus promised commercial stability and a crucial step forward in Canada's constitutional evolution.

The final section of this chapter explores war-time visions of governance under union. It returns to the "Confidential Memorandum" of 1917, and traces the discussion of governance in commercial circles and in the halls of government. While Canadian proponents might articulate slightly different ideas about political representation and the franchise, they agreed on one central point: "annexation" rather than "confederation" was the appropriate term to describe any future political arrangement with the West Indies. This distinction was rooted in a mistaken understanding of the diverse political circumstances and social relations in the British West Indies, and in the assumption that governing "darker races" – in a paternalistic system marked by profoundly unequal power relations – was a compelling indicator of national status.

6.1 Negotiating Territorial Desiderata in Ottawa and London

Harry J. Crowe was the most vocal and influential advocate of annexation in the commercial world during the war. Born in Halifax in 1868, he worked in his father's wholesale

¹⁰ R.L. Borden to D. Lloyd George, 5 March 1919, and enclosures, Lloyd George Papers, LG F/35/3/58, Parliamentary Archives, London.

grocery firm before entering Nova Scotia's lumber trade. He established sawmills in different parts of the province in the late 1890s, but soon sold these operations to exploit the much vaster timber resources of Newfoundland. In 1903 he co-founded the Newfoundland Timber Estates Company with William Duff Reid of Newfoundland, Benjamin Franklin Pearse of Halifax, and Henry Melville Whitney of Boston. Recognizing that Newfoundland wood was more appropriate for papermaking than lumbering, Crowe purchased several timber operations in central Newfoundland and established pulp and paper mills at Grand Falls and Bishop's Falls.¹¹

Following his first trip to the West Indies in 1915, Crowe became an ardent promoter of some form of Canada-West Indies federation. A staunch supporter of Newfoundland's union with Canada, he believed Canada's annexation of the West Indies would compel Newfoundland to enter the federation. Newfoundland conducted considerable trade with the West Indies, and the prospect of gaining free access to the region's markets and resources under confederation would be, Crowe argued, too enticing to refuse. Newfoundland "could not afford, either politically or commercially," he warned, "to remain outside of such a consolidation of all her sister colonies in North America."¹² The completion of the Panama Canal in 1914 made annexation all the more appealing. "What is of paramount importance in

¹¹ *Halifax Herald*, 13 July 1895; *The Globe*, 26 May 1928; J.K. Hiller, "The origins of the pulp and paper industry in Newfoundland," *Acadiensis* 11, 2 (1981-82), 42-68, and "The politics of newsprint: the Newfoundland pulp and paper industry, 1915-1939," *Acadiensis* 19, 2 (1989-1990), 3-39; and *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* vol. 15, 1921-1930 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, CHECK YR), [CHECK PGS]

¹² Harry J. Crowe, "Commercial Union with the West Indies or Confederation?" *Canada-West Indies Magazine*, 5, 25 (Dec 1916-Jan 1917), 629. Crowe's interest in bringing Newfoundland into the Canadian Confederation was long-standing. In the years before the war, he corresponded with former Canadian Governor General Earl Grey, who similarly supported Newfoundland's entry into Confederation as well as stronger ties between Canada and the West Indies. Grey Papers, 174/4, Harry J. Crowe to Grey, 4 February 1911, Durham University Special Collections, Durham, United Kingdom.

this Confederation," Crowe maintained, "is the strategical position of these British West Indies, lying as they do in the pathway of trade routes between North and South America, with Jamaica at the entrance to the Panama Canal, upon which the future development of British Columbia will, to a considerable extent, depend." As earlier unionists argued, annexing the West Indies would give Canada free access to tropical agriculture, a crucial impetus to national development (as the United States had amply demonstrated domestically with California and Florida, and in the Caribbean with Cuba and Puerto Rico). Canada should not, Crowe averred, lose the opportunity of "rounding off the Dominion into a Great Canada" by acquiring tropical territory.¹³

War-time circumstances bolstered this argument. Canada's war contribution, Crowe pointed out, exceeded that of the other Dominions, and so it was only fair that Canadians be rewarded accordingly. "Our Dominion, while paying the largest price in this war of any child of the Mother Country, has not, as a result of her great sacrifices, willingly made for the Empire and humanity, added to her territory." South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand had acquired former German possessions in Southwest Africa and the South Pacific, but the absence of German territory in the Americas left Canada empty handed. Canada's annexation of the British West Indies would rectify this imbalance.¹⁴

A regular correspondent with Borden in the years between 1916 and 1919, Crowe's vigorous pursuit of federation no doubt influenced the Prime Minister. Not long after Crowe's

¹³ Harry J. Crowe, "Canada and the West Indies," *United Empire*, October 1918. *Daily Gleaner*, 25 April 1919; *The Times* (London), 14 March 1917.

¹⁴ Harry J. Crowe, "Canada and the West Indies," *United Empire*, October 1918.

initial letter to Borden in April 1916, which cited broad support for annexation within Jamaica's business community, Borden wired Canada's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Sir George Perley and asked him to assess the British government's opinion on the question. "Prominent Canadian business man just returned from Jamaica reports very strong feeling in favour [of] political union with Canada," he wrote. "It is believed that similar feeling exists in other West India Islands and that during present war opportunity of bringing these Islands into Confederation is more favourable than it ever will be in future." Borden asked Perley to first confer with Canada's Minister of Trade and Commerce George Foster, in London at the time, and then discuss the matter with Colonial Secretary Andrew Bonar Law. Law informed Perley that he did not think the British Government would "object or interfere" with the scheme. In the midst of war, however, he thought the timing inopportune. Yet Law offered no discuss the subject with British Prime Minister H.H. Asquith and raised no objection when Foster inquired at the Colonial Office about the annual cost of administering the West Indian colonies. Like Law, Asquith did not think the timing was apt to pursue the question.¹⁵

Undeterred by this lukewarm response, Prime Minister Borden enlisted Under Secretary of State for External Affairs Joseph Pope to draft a report on the viability of Canada-West Indies union. Released to the Cabinet in February 1917, the nine page report was titled "Confidential Memorandum upon the Subject of the Annexation of the West India Islands to the Dominion of

¹⁵ Crowe to Borden, 29 April 1916, MG26-H (R6113-2-3-E), Borden Papers, Correspondence, OC Series, vol. 70, reel C-4314, Library and Archives Canada (LAC). Borden to Perley, Telegram, 2 June 1916, Borden to Perley, 3 June 1916, and Perley to Borden, 27 June 1916, in *Documents on Canadian External Relations*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967), 714-715, 716-717. George Foster to Andrew Bonar Law, 19 June 1916, CO 318/345, TNA.

Canada.” It included a brief history of the question, the advantages and disadvantages of annexation for Canada, and an appendix of British West Indian trade statistics, furnished by the Department of Trade and Commerce.

Consistent with the paternalistic, sanctimonious pronouncements of earlier Canadian annexationists, the report erroneously located the origins of the annexation question in nineteenth-century Jamaica rather than in Canadian commercial circles. Moved by the depressed state of the sugar industry, as the story was often told, Jamaicans clamored for salvation under Canada’s “protective wing.”¹⁶ While union had not been previously propitious and was roundly “mooted” in Ottawa and London, much had changed since then. The Dominion’s extensive contribution to the Allied war effort bolstered this outlook. These experiences foregrounded Canada’s maturity, underlined Ottawa’s readiness for extra-territorial governance, and seemed to bolster Canada’s case in London.

The report emphasized the urgency and timeliness of the annexation question. As the Allied powers discussed the ground rules of peace, it was important that the Canadian government forcefully articulate its own interest in territorial gains. The absence of German colonies in the Americas - which no doubt relieved Canadians at the outbreak of war – placed Canada at a distinct disadvantage in the scramble for post-war accessions. German territory in southern Africa and the South Pacific made Australia, New Zealand and South Africa likely benefactors of territorial spoils. “It was fitting that this should be so,” but Pope’s memo asked

¹⁶ Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 2. While the provenance of this document was likely the Department of External Affairs (RG 25), it is catalogued separately in the library collections of Library and Archives Canada.

by “what means then is Canada to be territorially recompensed in the day of triumph for the blood and treasure she has poured out to preserve and augment the integrity and greatness of the British Empire?” As territorial readjustments were being discussed in London, Paris and Washington, it “behooves Canada to consider,” without delay, “in what measure she can best secure an equivalent to those territorial advantages which she will be glad to see her sister Dominions acquire.” The annexation of the British West India Islands to Canada, Pope concluded, “would seem to supply the answer.”¹⁷

Pope’s memo outlined several advantages to a Canada-West Indies federation. Most of them were familiar arguments, reiterated since the 1880s by successive generations of Canadian expansionists. Free access to tropical products would allow Canada to be more economically self-sufficient, much like the United States. “One of the few disadvantages under which this Dominion labours is to be found in the fact that all its provinces are situated roughly on the same parallel and possess similar climatic conditions – their products are nearly identical – whence it follows that our interprovincial trade can never be very large.” For commerce to thrive, it must “follow lines of longitude rather than of latitude.” The West Indies would provide a ready market for Canadian flour, fish, lumber, and manufactured goods, while Canada would take in much of the sugar and tropical fruit produced in the West Indies. The free admission of West Indian products would mean a loss of revenue for Canada in the short

¹⁷ Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 2-3.

term, but “this “diminution would eventually be more than made up by the great development of trade” that would follow union.¹⁸

Pope’s report also suggested that political federation would spur the development of Canadian sea power. Administering, trading with, and protecting geographically isolated islands, particularly in a region whose value increased considerably in 1914 with the opening of the Panama Canal, required a much-expanded Canadian navy.¹⁹ To many English-speaking Conservatives, including Prime Minister Borden, this was likely an advantage of – or at the very least a perk to be gained from union. Sensitive to the distinct lack of Empire zeal in Quebec, Borden was never too quick to commit Canadian resources to the Royal Navy. But he did identify a national navy, of modest size and strength, as a long-term goal.²⁰ The addition to Canada of several territories in the West Indies would solidify and accelerate these plans. Yet at the same time, the defence required to protect new West Indian acquisitions was identified as a disadvantage in the report. Annexing the islands “might excite the jealousy” of other countries and “multiply sources of friction” between Canada and those other countries. The “isolated and exposed” position of the islands “would render the Dominion vulnerable to attack, and

¹⁸ Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 4, 5.

¹⁹ Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 4.

²⁰ Norman Hillmer and J. L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World to the 1990s* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing Ltd., 2000), 45-49.

would thus necessitate a permanent expenditure for both naval and military defense on a considerably larger scale than hitherto contemplated” by the Canadian government.²¹

The distance between the West Indies and Canada, as well as the distances between the islands themselves, was also identified in the report as a factor as requiring consideration. “Many leagues of ocean” lay between the islands and the seat of government in Ottawa. Yet with advances in travel and communications technologies, distance was becoming less of an obstacle. Steamship freight rates were cheaper than those required for railroad transport. And relative to the vast distances separating Eastern and Western Canada, the West Indies were not particularly remote. “A swift line of steamers would bring Jamaica nearer to Halifax in point of time than is Winnipeg to-day, with much cheaper freight rates. At present it costs less to ship from Montreal or Toronto to Trinidad, than to points west of Winnipeg.” All the British West Indian islands, he continued, were nearer to Saskatchewan, Alberta and Manitoba than they were to the United Kingdom or to any other destination in continental Europe.²²

In London during the spring of 1917 to attend the Imperial War Cabinet meetings, the memo provided Borden and the other Canadian delegates with a basis to discuss the question with the imperial government. The year before, Borden had expressed frustration over the imperial government’s failure to consult – or even update – Canada or the other Dominions about the war’s progress. He was thus pleased when David Lloyd George replaced Asquith in December 1916 and created the Imperial War Cabinet shortly thereafter. Well aware of the

²¹ Borden to Perley, 3 June 1916, MG26-H (R6113-2-3-E), Borden Papers, Correspondence, OC Series, vol. 70, reel C-4314, LAC; Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 5.

²² Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 5.

Dominions' remarkable contributions to the Allied cause (and the need to ensure continued contributions), the new Prime Minister was more sympathetic to Dominion concerns.

The Imperial War Cabinet meetings provided an opportunity to brief the Dominions on the war and to discuss, if only in a preliminary sense, the terms of peace. Under the leadership of Lord Curzon, a sub-committee assembled to consider territorial readjustments in April 1917.

With no German colonies in the Americas, the Canadian delegates expressed interest in the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon,²³ a portion of the Alaska panhandle,²⁴ Greenland,²⁵ as well as

²³ "Committee of the Imperial War Cabinet on territorial desiderata in the terms of peace," CAB 21/77, TNA. While under the sovereignty of four different states (France, the United States, Denmark, and Britain, respectively), and offering different strategic and material advantages (e.g. fishing rights, access to crucial waterways, tropical territory, and northern sovereignty), the Canadian government was interested in these territories for at least one common reason: the United States' growing influence in the hemisphere. St. Pierre and Miquelon's reduced importance to the French fishing industry inspired Canadian and Newfoundlander interest in the islands' future. Not wanting them to fall into American hands, each Dominion encouraged the imperial government to negotiate a transfer on its behalf. While officials in the Colonial Office were sympathetic to their claims, and even contemplated exchanging territory in British Africa for the islands, they did not wish to choose sides. The Colonial Office subsequently informed the dominions that the matter would only be taken up if France initiated negotiations (which it never did). In 1907 the Canadian Government had expressed similar concerns to the Colonial Office about the future of St. Pierre and Miquelon. See Committee of Imperial Defence, Committee on Territorial Changes, Reports, Proceedings & Memoranda 1916-1917, CAB 16/36, TNA.

²⁴ "Committee of the Imperial War Cabinet on territorial desiderata in the terms of peace," CAB 21/77, TNA. A strip of the Alaskan pan-handle, which had been lost to Canada in the boundary settlement of 1903, remained a sore point for many Canadians. Discussions of territorial shuffling during and immediately following the war provided Canadian delegates – and the Prime Minister himself – with opportunities to request an amendment to the 1903 settlement. J.A. Munro (ed), *The Alaska Boundary Dispute* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1970); N. Penlington, *The Alaska Boundary Dispute: A Critical Reappraisal* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1972). John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies* (Athens, The University of Georgia Press, 3rd ed., 2002 [1st ed. 1994]), 66-69. Norman Hillmer and J. L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing [1st ed. Copp Clark Longman Ltd., 1994]), 61.

²⁵ "Committee of the Imperial War Cabinet on territorial desiderata in the terms of peace," CAB 21/77, TNA. Canadian interest in Greenland arose in large part from the United States' acquisition of the Danish West Indies on 31 March 1917. Heightened concerns in Washington that Germany might annex Denmark and secure the Danish West Indies as a naval base hastened the United States government to

the British West Indies. Curzon sympathized with the first three claims, but dismissed the last claim on the grounds that it did not involve foreign territory and was thus outside the purview of the Cabinet's agenda.²⁶

purchase the islands. Anxious that Denmark might also sell Greenland, the Canadian government urged the British government to secure a first right of purchase in the event that Denmark decided to sell. These concerns were not unfounded. American Admiral Robert Peary's claim to have reached the North Pole only a few years earlier raised questions about United States' sovereignty in the region. See *New York Times*, 21 August 1916. Peary and other American explorers had also claimed rights of discovery along Greenland's northern coast, which revived Canadian anxieties about the possibility of a northern Monroe Doctrine. The Canadian delegates at the Imperial War Conference subsequently urged Curzon to initiate an inquiry with the Foreign Office. See "Report of the Sub-Committee of the Imperial War Cabinet," April 1917, as cited in a paraphrase telegram from the Governor General of Canada to the Colonial Secretary, 28 September 1919, FO 608/120, file 419/1/4, TNA. The Danish government assured the British Foreign Office it had no plans to place Greenland on the market. This response relieved the Canadian government, but only temporarily. The Canadian delegates raised the question again in 1919 during the Peace Conference. Denmark reiterated its earlier position, and went one step further; the Danish Minister in Paris submitted a request to the Peace Congress to have the Great Powers acknowledge Danish sovereignty over the whole of Greenland. To the satisfaction of the Canadian government, the American, French and British representatives acquiesced. When United States Secretary of State Robert Lansing signed the Convention Respecting the Cession of the Danish West Indian Islands to the United States of America on 4 August 1916, he issued a declaration on behalf of his government that the United States would "not object to the Danish Government extending their political and economic interests to the whole of Greenland." In light of this declaration, it was somewhat curious to the British Foreign Office that the Canadian government raised concerns about Greenland 3 years later in Paris. See Lansing, as cited in *Délégation de Danemark*, 9 July 1919, FO 608/120, file 419/1/4; Minutes, Peace Congress, Danish Claims to Sovereignty over Greenland, 18 August 1919; Charles Tufton [for Balfour] to M. Berhoff [Danish Minister at Paris], 26 August 1919; Curzon to Tufton [for Balfour], 26 August 1919; Eyre Crowe to Gerald Spicer [for Curzon], 15 November 1919, FO 608/120, file 419/1/4, TNA.

²⁶ The British Foreign Office entertained the possibility of exchanging British Honduras for a strip of the pan-handle – an idea Borden later took up with Lloyd George in April 1918 – but the Colonial Office objected strenuously. As P.G. Wigley, "Canada and Imperialism: West Indian Aspirations and the First World War," in ed., Brian Douglas Tennyson, *Canada and the Commonwealth Caribbean* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 220-221, observes, relinquishing British Honduras to a country with deplorable race relations would violate the Colonial Office's frequently avowed commitment to protect people of color throughout the Empire. On Borden's interest in the proposal to trade British Honduras for a strip of the Alaska pan-handle see Borden to Lloyd George, 29 April 1919, and John J. O'Gorman to Borden, 26 April 1919, David Lloyd George Papers, LG F/35/3, folios 44-46, Parliamentary Archives, London.

Borden's claim to the British West Indies nonetheless garnered considerable support in the imperial government. Assistant secretary in the War Cabinet Leo Amery; Alfred Milner, member of the British Cabinet; and Lloyd George's private secretary, Philip Kerr, expressed particular interest. All were members of the Round Table group, an organization whose central object was imperial union.²⁷ They identified Canada's annexation of the West Indies as one step towards this larger goal. While Borden appreciated that this annexation might serve imperial interests, he eschewed larger schemes to federate or centralize the Empire on a constitutional basis. Like his predecessors, he favored an increasingly autonomous role for Canada in the Empire. Consistent with this vision, the "Confidential Memorandum," included not a single reference to Britain. The advantages outlined in the memo pertained exclusively to Canada.

Amery, Milner and Kerr nonetheless provided Borden with influential allies in the imperial government. By the summer of 1918 the British Prime Minister himself actively supported the union cause. As Borden observed in August, "[Lloyd George] suggested that we should take over the West Indies, and I acquiesced."²⁸ Amery was Borden's strongest ally. He wrote to the Prime Minister regularly on the subject of union in the summer and fall of 1918. Referring to Lloyd George's recent observation that Britain was unable to "develop all the vast territories of the Empire" on its own, Amery highlighted the potential of the Dominions to take up such work. "The United Kingdom obviously cannot do it all, and the Dominions would

²⁷ See John Kendle, *The Round Table Movement and Imperial Union* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975).

²⁸ W.A. Riddell, *Documents on Canadian Foreign Policy 1917-1919* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1962), 56.

naturally throw themselves into the work with greater zest if the connection were a direct one, at any rate as regards certain parts of the dependent Empire." Canada would have more reason, in other words, to invest capital and energy in the development of the West Indies (as Australia and New Zealand would be in the South Pacific), under a federal arrangement. "My project," he continued, "would be the expansion of Canada into what would in fact be a Greater Dominion of British America" that included Newfoundland, Bermuda, the West Indies and, "if you liked to have them thrown in," the Falkland Islands.²⁹

Ever mindful of the necessity of good Anglo-American relations, Amery was nonetheless confident that such an arrangement would not offend the United States. In fact, Amery thought the United States' government should respond favorably to his scheme for a "Greater Dominion of British America" because it furthered the tenets of the Monroe Doctrine: Europe's retreat from the Western Hemisphere. If Britain relinquished control of the West Indies to Canada, moreover, it would "make Americans realize that we are not simply out at the United Kingdom end to grab all the territory in the world we can from mere lust of domination."³⁰ Canada's annexation of the West Indies did not constitute an expansion of the British Empire's territory, but a transfer in the administration of existing territory from London

²⁹ Amery to Borden, 19 August 1918, Amery Papers, AMEL 2/1/1, Churchill Archives Center, Cambridge University. This correspondence is reproduced in Documents on Canadian External Relations, Volume I, 1909-1918 (Ottawa: Roger Duhamel, 1967), 717-718. See also Borden to Amery, 22 August 1918; Amery to Lloyd George, 8 June 1918; Borden to Amery, 4 September 1918; Amery to Borden, 25 September 1918, AMEL 2/1/1, Churchill Archives Center, Cambridge University.

³⁰ Amery to Borden, 19 August 1918; see also Amery to Barnes, 19 August 1918; Amery to Balfour, 22 August 1918; Amery to Lord Reading, 1 October 1918; Amery to Curzon, 22 October 1918; Amery Papers, AMEL 2/1/1, Churchill Archives Center, Cambridge University.

to Ottawa. This transfer was important for two reasons. First, in demonstrating that Britain was not power-hungry, it might temper the United States' response to British claims in East Africa and the Middle East. Second, it would allow the Canadian government to circumvent the charge of having imperial ambitions. Borden, like U.S. President Woodrow Wilson, was eager to avoid the appearance of wanton expansion. Taking up a share of the "imperial burden" – or, in what became the preferred language in the months following the cession of war, holding the West Indies "in trust" – allowed the Canadian government to take the moral high ground and effectively disguise its expansionist aspirations.³¹

Outside the halls of government, annexation proponents cared less about the appearance of unrestrained, self-aggrandizing expansion. In language almost indistinguishable from Benjamin's Kidd's unabashed pronouncements twenty years earlier in *The Control of the Tropics*, Crowe predicted that the "great rivalry of the future will be for control of the tropics."³² There was no more compelling indicator of this trend, he maintained, than in the United States' recent expansion in the Caribbean and Latin America.

³¹ See Susan Pederson, "Modernity and Trusteeship: Tensions of Empire in Britain Between the Wars," in Martin Daunton and Bernhard Rieger, eds., *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War II* (Oxford & New York: Berg, 2001), 203-220. As Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001), 93, 47, Borden's "real dream was always a partnership between the United States and the British empire." The "main Canadian concern . . . was to keep on good terms with the United States and to bring it together with Britain."

³² Harry J. Crowe, "Canada and the West Indies," *United Empire*, October 1918. *Daily Gleaner*, 25 April 1919; *The Times* (London), 14 March 1917. Benjamin Kidd, *The Control of the Tropics* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1898).

6.2 The United States and the Necessity of Formal Canadian Imperialism

In the years and months leading up to the first round of Imperial War Cabinet meetings in 1917, the United States purchased the Danish West Indies and intervened in Nicaragua, Mexico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. War-time circumstances coupled with the completion of the Panama Canal in 1914 to intensify American interest in the region. As U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing observed in January 1917, the “Caribbean is within the peculiar sphere of influence of the United States, especially since the completion of the Panama Canal and the possibility of a change of sovereignty of any of the islands now under foreign jurisdiction, is of grave concern to the United States.” The Dutch West Indies, comprising Surinam on the South American continent and a few islands off the northwest coast of Venezuela (principally Curacao, Aruba, and Bonaire), fell within this purview of concern. Dutch neutrality in the war was increasingly uncertain in 1917. Britain’s blockade had cut off crucial imports to the Netherlands, and the situation worsened after April 1917 when the United States’ entered the war and enacted its own embargo. As New York’s *Independent* warned in July 1917, Holland “lies between the belligerents, and has been steering a difficult course of neutrality for the last three years. It is doubtful if this neutrality can be preserved much longer.” Of negligible worth to Holland, the article continued, the Dutch West Indies would be of great strategic and commercial value to the United States. Curacao, according to the United States Naval Department, was home to “one of the finest and most commodious harbors” in the West Indies, while Surinam possessed tremendous commercial potential. The French (Berbice) and British (Demerara) Guianas, like Surinam, “could not expect to prosper so long as they remain under

European control. But if transferred to the United States their prospects would be bright." American capital and enterprise would flow into the region and, before too long, a railroad would connect the rich Amazon interior to the coast.³³

United States' interest in Demerara and Britain's other West Indian colonies provoked concern among many West Indians, as well as among Canadians with commercial interests (or aspirations) in the region. Four days before the United States declared war on Germany, an article appeared in the New York *Evening Mail* titled "We Need the Bahamas Islands." Forming a semi-circle from the north coast of Cuba to the south coast of Florida, the Bahamas were thought crucial to the defense of both the United States and the route to the Panama Canal. Possession of these islands by any foreign power was a threat to American security. Britain "ought to be willing to sell [the islands] to America" because their strategic and commercial value to Britain was apparently negligible. Trade between the Bahamas and the United States exceeded that between the Bahamas and Britain, and the islands had long experienced economic stagnation under British rule. It was only natural that the United States should absorb the Bahamas. "The manifest destiny of the people of the Bahamas, geographically and commercially, tends toward a union with the United States." Union would ensure Bahamian prosperity while protecting America's strategic and commercial interests.³⁴

³³ *Independent*, 21 July 1917. See also *The Port-of-Spain Gazette*, 31 August 1917.

³⁴ *Evening Mail*, 2 April 1917. Bahamas' Governor William Allardyce assured the Colonial Office that while such "editorial effusion" was "doubtless significant as reflecting the thoughts and wishes of a certain class of people in the United States . . . no real importance need to be attached [to it]." With few exceptions, Allardyce stated, "all sections" of the Bahamian population opposed annexation to the United States. William Allardyce to Walter H. Long, 11 April 1917, CO 23/279, TNA.

The idea that the United States might annex the Bahamas met harsh criticism in the Bahamian press. In June 1917 the *Nassau Tribune*, a newspaper representing Bahamians of color, responded to rumors that Britain might relinquish the Bahamas to the United States in partial payment of the latter country's war loans. According to the *Tribune*, many white Bahamians supported annexation to the United States, while Bahamians of color wished to remain under the British flag. Episodes of racial discrimination and conflict in the United States were frequently reported in the *Tribune*, which no doubt generated anti-American sentiment among Bahamians of color.³⁵ The *Nassau Guardian* was more hostile to the suggestion of American annexation. Responding to an October 1917 declaration in New York's *Evening Mail* that America "[w]ould like to get the Bahamas," several Bahamians (all writing under pseudonyms) wrote letters of protest to Daniel Moseley, *Guardian* editor during the war. A writer using the pseudonym "Bahamian" leveled the sharpest and most controversial criticism. Citing the United States' poor record of race relations and its recent imperial exploits in the Caribbean basin, the author concluded that "the United States (on the whole) cannot be considered a civilized country."³⁶

³⁵ *Nassau Tribune*, 5 June, 7 June 1917.

³⁶ *Evening Mail*, cited in the *Nassau Tribune*, 25 October 1917; *Nassau Guardian*, 27 October 1917, 3 November 1917, 7 November 1917; Allardyce to Long, CO 23/279, 29 October 1917, 8 November 1917, TNA. The letter prompted the United States Consul in Nassau, William F. Doty, to register a formal complaint with Governor Allardyce and to send the articles in question to Washington. Such "libelous and un-called for" statements were all the more offensive given that the United States had recently entered the war and was making enormous contributions to the Allied cause. At Allardyce's request, Moseley visited Doty and expressed his regrets. The Governor then urged Moseley and the colony's other newspaper editors to refrain from publishing anything on the subject of American annexation of the Bahamas until after the war. The Colonial Office and the British Ambassador to Washington expressed little concern about the statements in the *Guardian*. One official in the Colonial Office deemed Consul Doty "childish" for taking issue with such trivial statements in the press. Another official, equally

U.S. aspirations in the Bahamas (or any other West Indian colony) were also of ongoing interest to many Canadians. Not surprisingly, the proprietors and readers of the *Canada-West Indies Magazine* were particularly interested. The magazine frequently covered American commercial and military initiatives in the Caribbean and reproduced articles from the American press – like those printed in the *Evening Mail* – that urged U.S. expansion in the region. Many of the magazine’s long-term subscribers enjoyed strong commercial ties to the West Indies and were thus keenly interested in any developments that might affect these ties. The Royal Bank of Canada, for example, which had established branches throughout the Caribbean in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and continued this expansion during the war, maintained an institutional membership in the Canada-West Indies League from its inception in 1911 to its demise in 1934. The *Canada-West Indies Magazine*, originally founded as the League’s official organ, continued publication for two more decades, and Royal Bank executives remained on its subscription roll for the duration.³⁷

dismissive of the idea that the United States might annex the Bahamas, found comfort in such anti-American sentiment. “I hope that ‘A Bahamian’s’ views on the superiority of British rule to U.S. rule for Negroes are widely held in the Colony, & I have little doubt that they are.” British Ambassador Cecil Spring-Rice was similarly unalarmed with the libelous statements in the *Guardian*. Blame lay not with *Guardian* editor Daniel Moseley, but with the proprietors of New York’s *Evening Mail*. Owned by William Randolph Hearst – a vocal critic of Britain and a staunch opponent of the United States’ entry into war in April 1917 – the *Evening Mail* often published content designed to fuel Anglo-American animosities. Minutes, Colonial Office, 8 November 1917; Cecil Spring-Rice to Allardyce, 16 November 1917, enclosed in Allardyce to Long, 27 November 1917, CO 23/279, TNA. On Hearst see Ben H. Procter, *William Randolph Hearst: The Later Years, 1911-1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30-76. The Hearst papers were also known to publish content aimed to stir up ill-feelings between Canada and the United States. In November 1916 Canada’s Post Office Department denied the Hearst papers access to the Canadian mails for this reason. See the *Financial Post of Canada*, 11 November 1916, 18 November 1916, and 25 November 1916.

³⁷ On the Royal Bank’s expansion in the Caribbean see Duncan McDowall, *Quick to the Frontier: Canada’s Royal Bank* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), ch. 3.

War-time speculation about American designs on the Bahamas was of particular import to the Royal Bank, whose executives had expansionist aspirations of their own. In the midst of this speculation in June 1917, the Royal Bank purchased the Bank of Nassau, which effectively produced a banking monopoly in the islands. The Royal Bank established its first Bahamian branch in 1908 and, following the Bank of Nassau purchase in 1917, was the only bank operating in the islands until 1947. Officials of the Royal Bank were acutely aware of the United States' growing presence in the region. This presence fueled a lively spirit of competition that was often chronicled in (and no doubt fueled by) the popular press. When six Royal Bank executives toured the West Indies in the winter of 1916, the trip was reported with much interest in the United States. On 3 March the *New York Times* announced that the United States government was recently advised that officials of the Royal Bank were touring the West Indies to develop a plan for expansion "to every important commercial center in the Indies." Eager to establish branches before the American banks had the opportunity to do so, the officials endeavored "to keep their mission secret."³⁸ This expansionist agenda was reason enough for Royal Bank executives to tour the West Indies as surreptitiously as possible. But to Inspector of Foreign Branches Solomon Randolph Noble, who negotiated the Bank of Nassau purchase, and Managing Director Edson Loy Pease, the driving force behind Royal Bank's original foray and subsequent expansion in the Caribbean, there was additional cause for secrecy. The bank's past and continuing success in the region, coupled with amenable economic and financial

³⁸ *New York Times*, 3 March 1916. See also *The Washington Post*, 3 March 1916. This coverage of Canadian banking in the West Indies was typical in the American press. See *New York Times*, 12 September 1903, August 10 1907, 11 November 1910, 11 May 1915; *The Washington Post*, 18 April 1912; *Los Angeles Times*, 7 March 1917, *Wall Street Journal*, 12 March 1906, 1 September 1910, 19 March 1914.

conditions, was compelling evidence that more branches translated to increased prosperity. Yet to Pease and Noble, the economic potential of the British West Indies and, correspondingly, Royal Bank's prosperity, might be more fully realized under a Canada-West Indies federation.

Political union was certainly not a prerequisite to the introduction, growth, or prosperity of Canadian banking overseas. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Canadian banks – particularly the Bank of Nova Scotia and the Royal Bank – thrived in Newfoundland and St. Pierre, Bermuda and the Caribbean, Europe, Central and South America, as well as in Canada and the United States. When and where convenient, Canadian banks benefited from the resources and reputation of countries with political, economic, or sentimental influence in these regions. Canada's place in the British Empire, for example, allowed Canadian banks to enter British imperial and foreign contexts with greater ease, while the Canada's French fact facilitated the same in France, Guadeloupe, and Martinique. U.S. intervention in Cuba and Puerto Rico during the Spanish-American War and later, in the Dominican Republic, provided further opportunities for the expansion of Canadian banking. The Royal Bank's first Caribbean branch (then named the Halifax Merchants' Bank) was in fact established in Cuba. In financial ruin after the war, Cuba needed reliable banks to furnish, above all else, capital and a stable currency. Pease seized the opportunity, successfully convincing the bank's board of directors to open a Havana branch (the first of what would amount to 65 branches by the early 1920s) in March 1899. The bank's early success was in large part the result of American legislation that effectively minimized Royal Bank's competition. Not until the Federal Reserve Act of 1913 could American banks (with federal charters) set up foreign branches and finance foreign trade.

Even more advantageous was the Platt Amendment of 1901, which granted the United States government authority to intervene in Cuba's political and commercial affairs to protect life, property and individual liberty. In prohibiting Cubans from entering new commercial agreements that would increase Cuba's debt to foreign parties, and threatening military intervention in times of political instability, the Amendment safeguarded Royal Bank's operations in Cuba. Canadian banks in Puerto Rico and later, the Dominican Republic, were similarly protected.³⁹

Other Canadian enterprises in the Caribbean benefited from similar circumstances and relationships. Often riding the coattails of British or American imperialism in the region, the success of these enterprises did not require formal political or military support from Ottawa. Nor did success depend upon a system of informal Canadian imperialism, whereby Canadian entrepreneurs forged contracts with local Caribbean governments that placed these governments in a state of long-term debt and thus vulnerable to continued exploitation.⁴⁰ As H.V. Nelles and Christopher Armstrong conclude in their pioneering study of Canadian-

³⁹ McDowall, *Quick to the Frontier*, 163-202. "Given Canada's fledgling presence on the world stage," McDowall argues, the Royal Bank "habitually donned the *de facto* identity of other nationalities. Hence, the Platt Amendment had allowed it to assume American protection in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. In the British West Indies, it was a 'British' bank. In Guadeloupe, it was a 'French' bank. Only in South America did it develop a more autonomous identity." (p. 188). See also Joseph Schull and J. Douglas Gibson, *The Scotia Bank Story: A History of the Bank of Nova Scotia 1832-1982* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), 67-78. A concise summary of the Platt Amendment can be found in Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 55-57.

⁴⁰ See John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," in Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire: The Ford Lectures and other essays*, ed. Anil Seal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 7, who argued that argued that it is "only when the politics of these new regions fail to provide satisfactory conditions for commercial or strategic integration and when their relative weakness allows, that power is used imperialistically to adjust those conditions."

initiated public utilities companies in Latin America and the Caribbean from 1896 to 1930, relations between these utilities companies and Caribbean authorities were complex and ever-changing.⁴¹ They were “characterized by continuous negotiations, in which alterations in the flow of information and capital, not to mention upheavals in international affairs, dramatically changed the bargaining power of negotiators over time.” To suggest that capitalists who invested in these utilities companies “bought their way into positions of power and dictated terms to local authorities thereafter, creating conditions of permanent dependency,” would be misleading.⁴²

To be sure, myriad impulses directed Canadian enterprise and investment in the Caribbean and Latin America. While Canadian businessmen (and their investors in Britain, Canada and elsewhere) were no doubt driven, first and foremost, by the promise of personal and professional gain, their means to this end, generally speaking, should be differentiated from the methods of commercial intervention that drove – and secured – much American enterprise in the region. Canadian commercial ventures were often characterized by uneven and exploitative relationships between entrepreneurs and local authorities, capital and labor. But these relationships were a far cry from those produced under the United States’ practice of “dollar diplomacy,” wherein American investors – with support from the State Department – established control over a particular region’s public finances, thus creating conditions

⁴¹ H.V. Nelles and Christopher Armstrong, *Southern Exposure: Canadian Promoters in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1896-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 287-292. See also Duncan McDowall, *The Light: Brazilian Traction, Light and Power Company Limited, 1899-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

⁴² Nelles and Armstrong, *Southern Exposure*, 290.

conducive to political control. As Yale Professor Edwin M. Borchard described it in 1917, “[i]t is only a short step from private investment in a railroad or in a large concession for the exploitation of a weak country’s important resources to the exercise of a sphere of influence by the home government of the investor; and the sphere of influence easily merges into political control. Hence the adoption by the United States of its Caribbean and particularly its Central American diplomacy of encouraging American enterprises, which would promote our political interests.”⁴³ While the Canadian government encouraged Canadian enterprise in the Caribbean and Latin America, especially endeavors aimed to strengthen north-south trade, it was neither in a position nor of the inclination to support these interests with military or even diplomatic intervention. Autonomous in all matters save foreign policy and defense, the Canadian government did not possess the constitutional authority to conduct diplomatic negotiations directly with foreign or British colonial governments. This status placed Canadian investments and other commercial interests at a disadvantage, and subsequently underlined the benefits of formal Canadian imperialism in the region. Economic expansion, as John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson argued, “will tend to flow into the regions of maximum opportunity, but maximum opportunity depends as much upon political considerations of security as upon questions of

⁴³ Edwin M. Borchard, “Commercial and Financial Interests of the United States in the Caribbean,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York*, 7, 2, *The Foreign Relations of the United States: Part I* (July 1917), 193. Borchard was Professor of Law at Yale. The historiography dealing with dollar diplomacy and United States’ economic imperialism in the Caribbean and Latin America more generally is voluminous. Instructive studies include Emily S. Rosenberg, *Financial Missionaries to the World: the Politics and Culture of Dollar Diplomacy, 1900-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003 [orig. pub. by Harvard University Press, 1999]); Cyrus Veaser, *A World Safe for Capitalism: Dollar Diplomacy and America’s Rise to Global Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); and Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

profit. Consequently, in any particular region, if economic opportunity seems large but political security small, then full absorption into the extending economy tends to be frustrated until power is exerted upon the state in question.”⁴⁴

Canada’s membership (and status) in the British Empire hampered the ability of Canadian entrepreneurs and investors to take full advantage of economic opportunities in other ways as well. Commercial endeavors in the British West Indies, in particular, were impeded by Britain’s long disengagement with the region. The dwindled flow of British capital into the West Indies, combined with Britain’s staunch commitment to free trade, had devastated the colonies’ economies. As Pease observed in 1916, the “trade of the West Indies has been almost criminally neglected in the past. The sugar industry, which at one time was the main industry, nearly suffered extinction.” These colonies possessed “the elements that would tend to cheap production – namely, a rich soil and cheap labor,” but lacked the modern machinery and infrastructure to maximize this production. Trade agreements with the United States and Canada helped revive select sectors of West Indian economies to some extent, such as the United States’ preference for Jamaican bananas and Canada’s preference for West Indian sugar. But the absence of modern equipment – particularly in the sugar industry – limited output and kept prices uncompetitive. Britain’s West Indian colonies produced about 200,000 tons of sugar in 1915, the bulk of which Canada absorbed, but they were capable, according to Pease, of producing 3,000,000 tons per year.

⁴⁴ Gallagher and Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” 7.

Under formal Canadian control, the British West Indies would realize this potential. “A union confined to commerce,” the *Canada-West Indies Magazine* reported in January 1917, “would be subject to change by the future governments of all countries concerned.” It would consequently lack the “permanence necessary to inspire confidence in Canadian capital and enterprise for the development of these islands.” Under a strictly commercial agreement with Canada, the West Indies would also be vulnerable to demands for trade concessions and possibly retaliation from the United States. Jamaica and the Bahamas declined to enter the Canada-West Indies trade agreement of 1913, for example, partly because they feared United States retaliation.⁴⁵ Political union would shield the West Indies from these deleterious possibilities and strengthen the trade output of both regions. The West Indies would diversify Canada’s industries and exports, and Canada would secure political recognition and commercial preference for the West Indies in the markets of the world.⁴⁶ The permanence of political union would inspire confidence in the future stability of the region, and Canadian-directed capital would flow readily into the development of modern infrastructures and agricultural technologies.

Annexation rather than trade reciprocity was also attractive to Canadians because it promised to secure trade relationships made volatile by the war. The war cut off European trade with central and South America, which presented opportunities for the expansion of trade

⁴⁵ British Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons, Cd. 6092, *Agreement between Canada and certain West Indian Colonies*, dated 9th April 1912; and correspondence relating thereto, June 1912.

⁴⁶ *Canada West Indies Magazine* (Dec 1916-Jan 1917), 630-631; Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 3; *Daily Gleaner*, 7 May 1917.

between North and South America. "The after-war struggle for foreign trade will be the sharpest and keenest the world has yet seen," remarked an American contemporary in 1917. "With a thoroughly awakened England made efficient as never before, a Germany hungry for the trade she has lost, and a France sharpened by her recent great trials, we shall need all that we have of money, ships and brains."⁴⁷ With such stiff competition on the horizon, Canadian control of the British West Indies offered some degree of commercial certainty in a very uncertain global environment.

6.3 Annexation not Confederation

This heightened interest in union inspired a more comprehensive discussion of what governance after union took place would look like. As in the past, the "Confidential Memorandum" identified the "negro question" as the greatest obstacle to union. West Indian history, characterized by "insurrection and disorder," foretold a Canadian future under union in which West Indians might not acquiesce quietly to the paternalistic assumptions and policies of the Canadian government. West Indians might expect – and perhaps even demand – greater political concessions. "[I]t is not unlikely," Pope wrote, "that under confederation the negroes would clamour for larger political privileges than they at present possess, under the direct control of Great Britain." Admitting the West Indies in the federation under the same terms as Canada's provinces and, in particular, granting them self-government, was simply "out of the

⁴⁷ James Carson, "Commercial and Financial Agencies of Pan-American Union," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science in the City of New York*, 7, 2, *The Foreign Relations of the United States*, Part. 2 (July 1917), 270.

question.”⁴⁸ For this reason, “confederation” was not appropriate. “There can be no confederation of the British West Indies with Canada at the start in the sense in which that word was used in the case of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick half a century ago. There can be no equality of status at the outset. . . . ‘Annexation’ or ‘incorporation’ would more closely describe the initial process of admission into the union, under which they would become, as it were, ‘Territories’ of the Dominion.” Consistent with the paternalistic and, for the most part, mistaken assumption of other annexationists, Pope suggested that equality at the outset was neither expected nor desired by the West Indians themselves.⁴⁹

Guided by notions of white racial superiority and the principle of trusteeship, these recommendations outlined a form of Crown colony government similar to that already practiced in many of the islands. The central change, of course, was rule from Ottawa rather than London. The report neither took account of, nor even recognized the diversity of governance in the region, ranging from austere Crown colony rule to varying degrees of legislative autonomy and representative government. Barbados and the Bahamas, for example, had long operated under the old representative system, which included a legislative assembly as well as a council. For the most part Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and British Guiana remained Crown colonies until the interwar period, with varying concessions in the intervening

⁴⁸ Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 4.

⁴⁹ Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 4, 5.

years. While West Indian federation was not a prerequisite to union with Canada,⁵⁰ annexationists identified federation as the ultimate consequence of a Canada-West Indies union. Because federation schemes entailed some measure of uniformity in governance, the more prosperous islands (particularly the prosperous islanders therein) and those with greater legislative autonomy (particularly the islanders therein who dominated the legislature), were no doubt apprehensive about such schemes.⁵¹

Largely ignorant of West Indian opinion, Pope concluded that Canada's absorption of the islands was feasible and desirable. "It is, I think, a legitimate inference from this brief presentation of the question that the advantages of union of the British West Indies to Canada outweigh the disadvantages." While all the issues outlined in the report presented challenges, none, "with the possible exception of the negro problem," were insurmountable. Pope's way of

⁵⁰ Gideon Murray, "Canada and the British West Indies," *United Empire* 10 (February 1919), 58, who argued that West Indian federation should be a prerequisite to Canada-West Indian union, was an exception.

⁵¹ In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Colonial Office intermittently entertained the idea of West Indian federation. The subject was often raised in Britain's House of Commons and subsequently considered in several Royal Commissions on the West Indies. Amalgamating the island governments under one administration was thought not only financially expedient, but an important stage toward regional development and, ultimately, independence. But these plans were hampered by a lack of adequate support in the islands. Ever sensitive to the appearance of despotism, the British Government did not force the issue. Yet as Thomas Holt has argued, some members of the Colonial Office were reluctant to endorse West Indian Federation on the grounds that it might inspire agitation for more popular (specifically non-white) control over the administration of the region. See Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 361-362. Though somewhat dated, Samuel J. Hurwitz, "The Federation of the West Indies: A Study in Nationalisms," *The Journal of British Studies* 6, 1 (Nov. 1966), 139-168, Colin A. Hughes, "Experiments Towards Closer Union in the British West Indies," *The Journal of Negro History* 43, 2 (April 1958), 85-104, and Jesse H. Proctor Jr., "The Development of the Idea of Federation of the British Caribbean Territories," *Revista de Historia de América* 39 (June 1955), 61-105, continue to offer useful summaries of the federation debate in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

addressing this “problem” – territorial rather than provincial status and a restrictive franchise – was consistent with Borden’s vision of federation. Other Canadian politicians differed in their recommendations. Minister of Trade and Commerce George Foster, for example, proposed few changes beyond a transfer of administration from Ottawa to London. Foster thought it appropriate to govern the West Indians under the same terms in force under British rule. Intent to avoid the appearance of exploitation, however, he maintained that West Indians should initiate the discussion. While “[t]he Dominion Government would look favourably on the proposal,” as Foster stated in the House of Commons in the winter of 1917, “any movement in this direction must emanate from the West India Islands themselves.”⁵² Former Minister of Finance W.S. Fielding was similarly reluctant to endorse annexation. Not yet ready for self-government, the current system of “petty kingdoms” remained appropriate. “The whole mass of the inhabitants, it must be remembered, are not of the white race. A handful of white men from the Old Country have been remarkably successful in guiding and directing West Indian affairs and in enlisting the sympathy and co-operation of the native races, who are given as large a share in the business of government as circumstances permit.” So successful, in fact, that Fielding doubted whether Canada could do a better job. While he was willing to entertain the idea of political federation, he generally favored a commercial union of the two regions.⁵³

⁵² Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 5. George Perley to Robert Borden, 27 June 1916, MG26-H (R6113-2-3-E), Borden Papers, Correspondence, OC Series, vol. 70, reel C-4314, LAC. Harry J. Crowe, “Canada and the West Indies,” *United Empire* 9, 10 (October 1918), 427.

⁵³ *The Journal of Commerce*, as cited in the *Daily Gleaner*, 29 July 1918.

Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom George Perley, on the other hand, expressed more serious reservations. Responding to a letter from Borden on the subject in June 1916, Perley wrote, "I have given the matter some consideration, and, while I see many things in favour of it, as set forth in your letter of the 3rd instant, I see serious difficulties in connection with the franchise. . . . I feel that [West Indians] would probably expect a good many more concessions from Canada in the way of political rights than they get from the Mother Country."⁵⁴ These anxieties were echoed in Sackville's *Maritime Merchant* in April 1917. Confederation with Canada, the editor warned, might extend the franchise to "a population not yet ready for it." Because only a small minority of West Indians were white, Confederation might "involve the danger of the administration of the Government falling into the hands of a class which might shortly repeat the same performances that we have had reported from Haiti and San Domingo." Educated people of color in the West Indies, the editor continued, were equally alive to this possibility as the whites.⁵⁵

These concerns were not unfounded. The idea that West Indians could expect greater political rights in the Canadian federation was liberally propagated throughout the West Indies by Harry Judson Crowe. In a series of speeches, meetings, and letters to the press in Canada, the West Indies and Britain, Crowe outlined the benefits of federation. During his many visits to the Caribbean, he assured West Indians that federation would bring about a provincial government of the West Indian islands, with elected representatives in Ottawa. While his assurances were

⁵⁴ George Perley to Robert Borden, 27 June 1916 and 15 September 1916, MG26-H (R6113-2-3-E), Borden Papers, Correspondence, OC Series, vol. 70, reel C-4314, LAC.

⁵⁵ *Maritime Merchant* (Sackville, NB), 5 April 1917.

usually ambiguous, carefully excluding specific details that might alienate any particular segment of the region's diverse populations, they went some way in convincing West Indians that federation with Canada meant increased political rights. This was particularly the case in Jamaica where Crowe, for strategic and commercial reasons, focused his efforts. "We would take a big step in advance politically [if] annexed to Canada," argued one Jamaican under the pseudonym "Patriot" in a letter to the island's *Daily Gleaner*. "[N]o longer a little quasi Crown colony, out voted whenever occasion may arise by the official and nominated element, [we would take up] rank as an integral part of the Dominion with full representation and local powers to settle our matters locally, under the lead of young virile Canadian leadership, shaping our destiny on more progressive lines than is possible from ultra-conservative Downing Street." These sentiments echoed an earlier letter to the editor, written under the pseudonym "Tranquil." For both commercial and political reasons, he argued, federation with Canada "is a great and brilliant idea." Commercially "it appeals to me, as a comparatively weak and poor man being taken into partnership by a rich, progressive and influential member of his family who sees in him an asset to his business and at the same time, is prepared to give him a square deal. . . . [yet] the strength of the proposal lies in the political aspect, by which we would be part and parcel of Canada, enjoying equal rights and privileges with her." Responding to one of Crowe's editorials in May 1919, an anonymous writer from Clonmel, Saint Mary, reiterated this enthusiasm for federation. "By all means let there be commercial and political federation with Canada. The British West Indies, on a whole, and Jamaica, in particular, would stand nothing to lose, but a lot to gain by it." Confident that "99 per cent of the people would

be in favour of it," the writer entreated the colonial government to conduct a plebiscite on the question.⁵⁶

In an address to the Manchester branch of the Jamaica League, W.E. Harrison similarly extolled the political benefits of federation. Headmaster of the Munroe and Dickenson's School in St. Elizabeth's parish, Harrison spoke in place of Crowe, who was unable to attend and deliver an address as scheduled. In stark contrast to Pope's insistence that the term "annexation" was more appropriate than "confederation" because the latter implied an equality of status, Harrison argued the reverse. "There are others who talk about confederation as annexation. The essential principle of confederation is union of Sovereign States with independent rights, and it is as a colony of independent position under the Crown that we approach this question, and it is in that light that Canada also views it." Pope and Harrison emphasized a distinction, but for entirely different reasons.⁵⁷

Others were less concerned with the distinction. Inspired by Crowe's vision of a revitalized and prosperous Jamaica under Canadian rule, Reverend J. W. Graham of the Church of England in Guy's Hill, St. Ann parish, urged the formation of a "Canada Annexation Association." The idea was to gather the support of prominent men in Jamaica's major towns and cities, and enlist them to form branch associations in each parish. A few delegates from each branch would then attend a central meeting to formalize the aims and objects of the association. While it is unclear whether the Annexation Association ever materialized, it did

⁵⁶ *The Times* (London), 14 March 1917, see "The 'Big Brother'" and "Canada's British Neighbours"; *Mail and Empire* (Toronto), 12 September 1919; *Daily Gleaner*, 29 August 1919, 16 May 1919, 3 May, 1919.

⁵⁷ *Daily Gleaner*, 10 June 1919.

gain the support of at least one other clergyman. J. Kissock Braham, a Wesleyan pastor in Port Antonio, Saint Mary, enthusiastically endorsed Graham's proposal. "I am quite sure," he asserted, "that every man in the island who has the welfare of the island at heart, views with favour the proposal, and I hope that the matter will not be delayed until the opportunity passes." In an increasingly desperate tone, he concluded, "Oh let us wake up out of our lethargic state, and do something for the benefit of our much beloved island."⁵⁸

Crowe's speeches to Canadian audiences, his articles in British and Canadian newspapers, and his correspondence with members of the Canadian government reveal a very different vision of union than the one he advanced in the West Indies. According to Crowe, white Canadians need not fear a common citizenship with West Indians, nor the increased migration of West Indians to Canada. Like Foster, he proposed a simple transfer of administration from London to Ottawa. Existing structures of local governance in the West Indies would remain unchanged. Canada would assume control over foreign affairs, tariffs, the post-office, the marine and fisheries departments, and public works, allowing "limited but adequate" West Indian representation in these areas. More importantly, the restrictive West Indian franchises would not be synchronized with Canada's more liberal franchise. "There is no demand for extending the vote there, and there is no reason why there should be in the future, unless the development of the people justified it." West Indians would be similarly disinclined, Crowe argued, to migrate to Canada. "Because of climatic conditions prevailing in Canada, the coloured population of the B.W.I. would never invade our Dominion." Many persons of color

⁵⁸ *Daily Gleaner*, 3 May 1919.

who migrated to Canada during the American Civil War had, after all, returned to the southern United States when peace was restored. This was, in Crowe's logic, compelling evidence that "darker races" were unsuited to "temperate and frigid zones." West Indians would be less likely to leave the region, moreover, because union would stimulate the agricultural and industrial development of the region and consequently increase the demand for labor.⁵⁹

Crowe's contention that there was no demand for an expanded franchise in the West Indies was misleading and self-serving. It was based on the misguided yet common assumption that West Indians of color were content with white-dominated colonial governance. In the midst of war, it was perhaps difficult for Crowe and others to recognize (or even predict) how profoundly the war had (or would) accentuate inequalities in the region and give rise to mass protest and political organization.⁶⁰ Even after the war, some Canadians continued to identify the paternal model as both necessary and desired by West Indians. As John R. Reid, past president of the Ottawa Board of Trade argued in January 1919, a paternal (white) administration in the West Indies was not only appropriate, but desired by West Indians themselves. While visiting Barbados and Bermuda, Reid discussed the racially disproportionate composition of the legislative bodies with several islanders. In Bermuda, where approximately

⁵⁹ Harry J. Crowe to Robert Borden, 13 September 1916; Crowe to Loring Christie, 26 November 1919, MG26-H (R6113-2-3-E), Borden Papers, Correspondence, OC Series, vol. 70, reel C-4314, LAC. Harry J. Crowe, "Canada and the West Indies," *United Empire* 9, 10 (October 1918), 428. "Harry J. Crowe, "Commercial Union with the West Indies or Confederation?" *Canada-West Indies Magazine* 5, 25 (December-January 1916-1917), 632.

⁶⁰ On the First World War as a watershed in political protest and organization in the West Indies see Glenford Howe, *Race War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War* (Kingston, JA: Ian Randle, 2002). See also Richard Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, Masculinity and the Development of National Consciousness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

two-thirds of the population was of color, all but two of the twenty-nine members of the island's Assembly were white. Yet according to Reid, this imbalance did not concern Bermudans of color. "They were contented with the political condition, and informed me that while they were proud of the representatives of their race in the Chamber, they would be quite satisfied if the entire body was white." Britain's paternal administration had been "so wise and beneficent" for so long that West Indians of color apparently did not desire greater political rights. It was for this reason that Reid objected to any change of administration that might upset this arrangement, including annexation to Canada.⁶¹

In the Jamaican context, Crowe's conclusions about public sentiment were based on the interests and inclinations of the island's "leading men," many of whom were enfranchised and did not wish to disrupt the status quo. Not surprisingly, during his visits to Jamaica Crowe concentrated his efforts on winning the support of the island's middle and upper classes. He forged connections with members of the Jamaica League, an organization representing the island's middle classes, and the Jamaica Imperial Association, an elite group comprising the island's business and ruling classes. Crowe gave scant consideration to the island's majority population, the black laboring classes. This was because black West Indians were thought unfit to vote, in contrast to white West Indians and those of mixed European and African descent who were increasingly obtaining educational qualifications and filling the ranks of the region's growing middle classes). Yet black West Indians did assume an important role in Crowe's

⁶¹ John R. Reid, "Canada's Future Relations with the West Indies," *Canada-West Indies Magazine* 7, 3 (January 1919), 66. See also the *Montreal Herald*, as cited in the *Canada-West Indies Magazine* 7, 1 (November 1918), 10.

vision of a "Greater Canada." It was their very "unfitness" that demanded paternal guidance from white Canadians. This guidance, in turn, was thought crucial to the development of Canada's national outlook and hemispheric prominence. "Do not let us be 'Little Canadians'," he argued, "but rather Expansionists in the broadest sense of the word. Let us do what lies in our power to bring about the confederation of Canada and the B.W.I. Let us assist in the developments of our brothers of a darker race, and add to our borders what is an almost tropical dominion." Doing so would place Canada "on an equal footing" with the United States and "[raise] up on this Continent a magnificent nation." To dispel white Canadian fears of a "race problem" akin to that in the United States, Crowe subsequently differentiated black West Indians from blacks in the United States. Unlike blacks on the continent (including those in Canada), West Indians were "receptive to enlightenment" and "would eagerly grasp the hand of their more highly favoured brothers of the same Imperial family." The implications of annexation thus went far beyond commercial questions. Broadening Canada's national outlook and prestige, according to Crowe, required the Dominion to take responsibility for both the economic development of the West Indies and the cultural development or "enlightenment" of its diverse populations.⁶²

The Department of External Affairs' "Confidential Memorandum" similarly outlined this connection between national prestige and governing "darker races." Assuming responsibility for the development of the hundreds of thousands of dark-skinned and thus (by

⁶² Harry J. Crowe, "Commercial Union with the West Indies or Confederation?" *Canada-West Indies Magazine* 5, 25 (Dec 1916 – Jan 1917), 632; Harry J. Crowe to Colonel de Satgé, 14 July 1919, folio 278, CO 318/352, TNA.

the logic of early twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon racial pretention) socially and intellectually challenged West Indians, would add “considerably to the importance and influence of the Dominion.”⁶³ As the histories of the European powers were alleged to demonstrate, acquiring and administering colonial territories were more than prerequisites to domestic economic growth. “The responsibilities of governing subject races,” as Robert Borden remarked in June 1916, “would probably exercise a broadening influence upon our people as the Dominion thus constituted would closely resemble in its problems and its duties the Empire as a whole.” Governing “subject races” would thus be an indicator of national status akin to sending 500,000 Canadian soldiers to fight in Flanders.⁶⁴

Yet as the next chapter reveals, Canadian annexationists’ desire to take “responsibility” for “subject races” became, in the years between 1916 and 1919, increasingly incompatible with social and economic circumstances in Canada and the West Indies. Borden and other Canadian annexationists did not anticipate the war’s profound impact on peoples of color. The war intensified racial inequalities on both foreign and domestic fronts. The brutality of the war undermined the moral and progressive tenets of the civilizing mission ideology, while racial animosities flared between white and “colored” soldiers at home and abroad.⁶⁵ Hundreds of West Indians migrated to Canada to enlist, study, or to take advantage of war-time labor

⁶³ Pope, “Confidential Memorandum,” 4.

⁶⁴ Robert Borden to George Perley, 3 June 1916, MG26-H, Borden Papers, Correspondence, OC Series, vol. 70, LAC.

⁶⁵ See Michael Adas, “Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology,” *Journal of World History* 15, 1 (2004), 31-63.

shortages. This increased migration met with a concomitant rise in white Canadian racism towards peoples of color. As was the case world-wide, race relations in Canada became more volatile in the months leading up to and following the cessation of war, when "coloured" labor posed a more immediate threat to demobilized white soldiers. This heightened animosity consequently furnished contemporaries in Canada and the West Indies with powerful grounds to suppress the union campaign.

7. Black Subjects in Canada

Alliance, Organization, and the Struggle for British Justice

At the same time the First World War heightened interest in Ottawa and London for a Canada-West Indies union, the war increased the migration of West Indians to Canada. West Indians journeyed north to join the Canadian Expeditionary Forces and to meet the labor shortage created by wartime economic expansion. A smaller group studied at Canadian universities. Companies such as Sydney's Dominion Steel and Coal Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway ignored the informal strictures against recruiting workers of color and actively sought black labor from the West Indies and the United States, while Canadian universities expanded their recruitment efforts in the West Indies to offset the loss of enlisted students.¹ Resistance to the formation of a black West Indies regiment for overseas service in the British War Office and the Colonial Office prompted eager West Indians to make their own way to England or Canada to enlist. By the time a British West Indies regiment was approved

¹ Marie Sarah-Jane Mathieu, "Jim Crow Rides This Train: The Social and Political Impact of African American Sleeping Car Porters in Canada, 1880-1939." PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 2001, 124, 129-130. See Meeting Minutes, 4 September 1917, Dalhousie University Senate, Dalhousie University Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Jamaica *Daily Gleaner*, 2 May 1914, 24 April, 1915, 12 April, 1916, 12 April 1917. Canada's immigration policy did not explicitly exclude blacks, but the Superintendent of Immigration at Ottawa instructed immigration inspectors to restrict black migration as much as possible. Inspectors could thus deny entry to black immigrants who, in the inspector's assessment, had poor health, questionable "moral character," or were thought unsuited to Canada's climate. Inspectors also used the "continuous passage" regulation liberally when they encountered non-white migrants. If West Indians docked in New York or Newfoundland before proceeding to Canada, for example, they were refused entry because they did not arrive by continuous passage. See for example W.D. Scott to J. Russell Smith, 26 January 1917; Scott to L.F. St. Bernard, 8 February 1917; Scott to J.W. Gallway, 3 February 1917; Scott to C.E. Donald Horton, 2 April 1917; Scott to D. Vallancey, 30 April 1917, with enclosure, file 810666, pt. 2, vol. 566, RG 76, LAC.

in May 1915, many West Indians had already enlisted elsewhere.² Several joined fighting battalions with white Canadian soldiers, while discrimination forced others to wait, once again, for the formation of an all-black labor battalion in the summer of 1916.

As a “sister colony” in the British Empire, Jamaicans, Barbadians, and other West Indians identified Canada as the ideal place to launch their military careers. As Herbert DeLisser, editor of Jamaica’s *Daily Gleaner*, reported in April 1916, “[t]here is now at Halifax some one hundred and six of our men, and it is known that they could not be kindlier treated if they were here at home. Kindness and sympathy are extended to them; and this indeed was to be expected from the Canadian people, one of the most homely, kindly and courteous peoples we have ever had the pleasure of travelling amongst.” A Jamaican of African and Jewish descent, DeLisser was actively involved in the island’s cultural life and commercial development until his death in 1944. In addition to his work as *Gleaner* editor for 40 years, DeLisser wrote novels, founded the annual journal, *Planter’s Punch*, and served as Chairman of the Institute of Jamaica, an organization dedicated to the promotion of Jamaican culture. He also served as the general secretary of the Jamaica Imperial Association, which, in affiliation with London’s West India Committee, aimed to develop the island’s commercial and agricultural potential.³ To Delisser, the increased migration of West Indians to Canada during the war was a testament to Canada’s connection to Jamaica – a connection that, in his

² Glenford Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War* (Kingston, JA: Ian Randle, 2002), 29-40.

³ Herbert George DeLisser, Biographical Notes Collection, National Library of Jamaica, Kingston. See also W. Adolphe Roberts, *Biographical Sketches of Six Great Jamaicans* (Kingston, JA: Pioneer Press, 1952), 104-122.

assessment, might very well transform into some form of political and commercial federation after the war. After the war, he continued,

Canada will make a bid for tropical provinces on lines that will do no violence to the feelings of West Indians and no injury to their material interests. The British Empire has changed wonderfully in less than two years; the loosely connected heterogenous colonies and dependencies which we called the Empire have swiftly developed a homogenous feeling, a solidarity of Imperial sentiment, a oneness of outlook, which suggest a reorganization and readjustment of Imperial relationships. . . . during the next generations that portion of the King's self-governing dominions will devote itself to exploiting the resources of what amounts to a tropical empire. . . the Canadians, believing that they have a great future in the world, have for some time past been wishing for some portion of the tropics that should be a complement to their magnificent country. Canada is vast, Canada is fertile, Canada possesses abundant mineral resources. But Canada is all temperate and frigid region; she has no Florida or Louisiana like the United States; no Hawaiian Islands, Phillipines, no Cuba or Porto Rico like her great neighbor to the south.⁴

But in the next few years, DeLisser would have a very different impression of Canada and come to expect that union would indeed “do violence” to the feelings of West Indians. Like millions of other colonial peoples (white settlers as well as subjects of color), West Indians contributed to the Allied cause with the expectation of greater political representation and autonomy after the war. These expectations were assumed – and often articulated – in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as well as in India, Ethiopia, and the West Indies.⁵ Peoples of color in self-governing

⁴ *Daily Gleaner*, 12 April 1916.

⁵ See for example Michael Adas, “Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology,” *Journal of World History* 15, 1 (2004), 31-63; Judith M. Brown, *War and the Colonial Relationship: Britain, India, and World War I* (New Delhi: South Asia Books, 1978); John Gallagher, “Nationalisms and the Crisis of Empire, 1919-1922,” *Modern Asian Studies* 15, 3 (1981), 355-368; Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), chap. 4; and Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (California: University of California Press), 175-176. On the relationship between war contributions and claim making in the British dominions, see Robert Holland, “The British Empire and

societies were similarly eager to do their part in the war and were equally invested in post-war change. “[T]he present war is another epoch period in history,” reported one of Canada’s black newspapers in April 1917. “The war cry is Justice and Freedom. May it be obtained and be maintained after the war, by all the combatant nations in its fullest sense, and thus the darker races will have their reward for the blood that is, and will be, spilled, and lives sacrificed upon the battlefields.”⁶ Yet their contributions were often made in the face of considerable adversity and racial animosity. Black immigrants, soldiers and seamen, as well as laborers and students at home, encountered ongoing and sometimes violent bigotry during the war.

This chapter maps the increasingly assertive demands of Canada’s black subjects for British justice during and immediately following the war. It then assesses how their demands and more general West Indian experiences in Canada shaped West Indian and black Canadian responses to Canada-West Indies union. While the war provided an opportune space for Canadian expansionists to advance their aspirations in the West Indies, it simultaneously produced a domestic context that constrained and, by the fall of 1919, ultimately quashed these aspirations. The first three sections of the chapter explore different sites in which West Indian servicemen, laborers, and students resident in Canada contested white discrimination. These sections cover the period from 1915, when West Indians and black Canadians initiated organized protests against racial discrimination in military recruitment, to the spring/summer

the Great War, 1914-1918,” in eds., Judith M. Brown and William Roger Louis, *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 4, *The Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 119-133; and Norman Hillmer and J. L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 2000), 58-64, 67-81.

⁶ *The Canadian Observer*, 14 April 1917.

of 1919, which marked the beginning of mass demobilization and the return home of servicemen. As the chapter's final section reveals, these struggles for British justice, characterized more often by disappointment than by triumph, hampered proposals for Canada-West Indies union. But it was not until after the spring of 1919 that West Indians identified these struggles as wholly incompatible with union. The defeat of the racial equality clause in the League of Nations covenant, demobilization riots in England, and heightened labor unrest in Canada and the West Indies undermined black subjects' faith in the possibility of post-war change. These post-war disappointments generated a new social and ideological milieu in the British Caribbean, wherein West Indians of color were increasingly sceptical of white colonial rule. Their scepticism, in turn, scuttled the possibility of Canada-West Indies union.

The West Indian and black Canadian experiences sketched in this chapter differ from those Sarah-Jane Mathieu outlines in her study of black sleeping car porters in war-time Canada. Mathieu argues that the "Great War gave birth to a new radicalized race consciousness and an infrastructure to make that radicalism manifest at home and abroad." She suggests this race consciousness was transnational and fashioned sleeping car porters' concept of international trade unionism. Shut out of white trade unions, Canada's black porters (comprised of black Canadians, African Americans, and West Indians) established the Order of Sleeping Car Porters in 1917. The connection Mathieu draws between war-time labor radicalism and race consciousness is persuasive. It is clear, moreover, that the "infrastructure" of organized resistance Canada's black subjects established during the war – the newspapers and race-based friendly societies, commercial associations, and "racial uplift" groups – laid a

critical foundation for racial justice struggles after the war. Yet the “race consciousness” Mathieu explores is more continental than transnational. Canada’s black porters modeled their associations on, and formed alliances with, black organizations in the United States. And it was these cross-border alliances that buttressed Canadian porters’ fight for racial justice.⁷

The struggles of servicemen, laborers, and students explored in this chapter paint a different picture. Across class and regional lines, black subjects in Canada continued to identify British subjecthood as the best means to obtain “fair play” and to win political concessions. These subjects consistently employed the rhetoric of British justice and appealed to their colonial, national and imperial governments for redress. Not until the spring/summer of 1919 – when the promise of greater respect and autonomy for West Indians of color proved increasingly hollow – did “British justice” begin to lose its cultural and political currency.

7.1 Recruits, Conscripts, and the No. 2 Construction Battalion

In the months following the outbreak of war in August 1914, tens of thousands of men flocked to Canadian recruiting stations to enlist. Hundreds of black Canadians and West Indians were among them. While there were no racial restrictions set by the Department of Militia and Defence, the large majority of Canadian regiments rejected black volunteers.⁸ Some recruiting officers sent black volunteers away with the explanation that the conflict was “a white man’s war.”⁹ Military officials across Canada advised against placing black and white

⁷ Mathieu, “Jim Crow Rides this Train.”

⁸ See Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997 [1st ed. Yale University Press, 1971]), 314-315.

men in the same regiment.¹⁰ As Colonel Ogilvie, the Officer Commanding District Eleven in Victoria, BC, cautioned, “the universal opinion is that if this were allowed, it would do much harm, as white men here will not serve in the same ranks with Negroes or Coloured Men.”

Asked about the possibility of forming a black regiment in September 1915, Chief of the General Staff Willoughby Gwatkin responded that black men should be recruited only as a last resort.

“In the last extremity we might organize a company or two. But would Canadian Negroes make good fighting men? I don’t think so.”¹¹

A group of representatives from Canada’s black communities travelled to Ottawa in October 1915 to urge Minister of Militia and Defence Sam Hughes to authorize the formation of a black regiment. They presented him with census material documenting the number of black citizens across Canada, and evidence of keen interest among them to join the war effort. The federal census of 1911, they observed, “showed a colored population of 16, 877,” with

⁹ Interview with Mr. George Fells, Yarmouth, N.S., 9 September, 1982, as cited in Calvin W. Ruck, *Canada’s black battalion: No. 2 Construction 1916-1920* (Halifax, The Society for the Protection and Preservation of Black Culture in Nova Scotia, 1986), 12. See also Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 314.

¹⁰ James W. St. G. Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70, 1 (March 1989), 1; Barbara Wilson, ed., *Ontario and the First World War, 1914-1918: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), cviii. On British concerns about employing black soldiers in combat see Glenford Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 46-47. In the French context see Sally Marks, “Black Watch on the Rhine: A Study in Propaganda, Prejudice, and Prurience,” *European Studies Review* 13 (1983), 297-334, and Rob Reinders, “Racialism on the Left: E. D. Morel and the ‘Black Horror on the Rhine’,” *International Review of Social History* 13 (1968), 1-28. On concerns about the use of black South African troops see B. P. Willan, “The South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916-1918,” *Journal of African History* 19, 1 (1978), 61-86. Discrimination against black soldiers in the First World War has received greater attention in the American context. See Richard Slotkin, *Lost Battalions: the Great War and the crisis of American nationality* (New York: H. Holt, 2005); and Adriane Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Major General Willoughby Gwatkin to Loring G. Christie, 30 September 1915, file HQ297-1-21, vol. 1206, RG 24, LAC, as cited in Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 14, 18-19.

approximately 2,000 of military age. Deducting those medically unfit or unwilling to serve, and accounting for the need to reinforce the battalion every 3 months or so, left about 1,000 men ready to enlist.

Hughes was apparently pleased to hear of the many black Canadians eager to serve and was “surprised” to learn there were “so many colored people in Canada.” But he could not endorse the formation of a black regiment, which he deemed a mere “fad.” As Hughes later informed his recruiting officers, he had no intention of supporting the creation of an all black regiment any more than he intended “to have a regiment of one-eyed men or men with yellow moustaches or red hair.”¹² He assured the representatives that there was nothing preventing black soldiers from joining the Canadian forces in the regular way.¹³ But when seventeen black volunteers from Saint John complained of discrimination two weeks later, Hughes was compelled to act. Not only had the volunteers passed the required medical examination, some had families and had left their jobs after enlisting. “These volunteers have been told,” black Saint John resident John T. Richards informed Hughes, “that they are not on the payroll, not entitled to sub-sistence money, and that in fact they are only Militia men. These men are all poor men, some with families. On an average each was making at least \$12.00 per week when they threw up their jobs to enlist and fight for their Empire and King. . . it is a downright shame and an insult to the Race, the way our people have been [treated] in regards to wanting to enlist.” Richards thought this shameful treatment was particularly glaring given that Britain

¹² *The Canadian Observer*, 30 October, 1915; *Saint John Globe*, 20 November 1915, as cited in Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 314.

¹³ *The Canadian Observer*, 30 October 1915.

– architect of Canada and beacon of justice and fair play – was “using many Coloured troops.”¹⁴

Upon receiving Richards’ letter, Hughes issued a general order to recruiting officers that medically fit black volunteers be permitted to enlist.¹⁵

Discrimination nonetheless persisted, as did black protest. Rejected recruits and their supporters appealed directly to their members of parliament, the Department of Militia and Defence, and Britain’s representative in Canada, the Governor General.¹⁶ The black press also launched a vigorous protest campaign. In underlining the repugnance of racial discrimination in Canada, the *Canadian Observer* referenced British justice and the specter of race relations in the United States. “Can it be that British fair-play is asleep, or is it here in Canada being over-ruled by American sentiment?” The British Army “heartily welcome[d]” Indians and Africans in their ranks, so why were Canadian military officers so “narrow-minded”?¹⁷ Undeterred, editor J. R. B. Whitney wrote to Hughes in December 1915 asking for permission to recruit volunteers for a black unit. Perhaps recognizing that no white officer would agree to command a black unit, Hughes replied to Whitney that there was nothing preventing him from doing so.

On 8 January 1916, Whitney announced that Hughes approved the formation of a black platoon,

¹⁴ Sean Flynn Foyn, “The Underside of Glory: AfriCanadian enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1917” (M.A. Thesis, University of Ottawa, 1999); John T. Richards to Sam Hughes, 21 November 1915, file HQ297-1-21, vol. 1206, RG 24, LAC.

¹⁵ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 315; Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 15-16.

¹⁶ Canada, House of Commons Debates, vol. 124, 1916, 2114-2115; LAC, RG 13, Series A-2, vol. 199, file 148, C. J. Doherty to Colonel E. A. Stanton, 7 January 1916; “Memorandum for the Minister of Justice,” 25 January 1916; W. Stuart Edwards to E. A. Stanton, 31 January 1916; and E. A. Stanton to W. Stuart Edwards, 2 February 1916.

¹⁷ *The Canadian Observer*, 23 October 1915, 4 September 1915, 13 November 1915. See also the *Canadian Observer*, 30 October 1915, and 20 November 1915.

and published the first of several "Call for Recruits" in the *Observer*. The plan was to start with 60 volunteers and then send the names on to Ottawa. "We trust that many names will be submitted before our next issue and that the support received will warrant the confidence of the militia department." The *Observer* recruited for the next three months, receiving enlistment coupons from hundreds of black volunteers from all over central and Maritime Canada, though primarily from Ontario.¹⁸

When military officials in Ottawa received information that Whitney had raised enough volunteers to form a platoon, they informed him in March 1916 that permission for recruitment could not be granted because no commanding officer would accept them. Continued protest by Whitney and other black leaders in the following weeks, coupled with mounting Allied losses in Europe and declining enlistment rates in Canada, led military officials to reconsider the possibility of a black battalion. In April 1916, Major-General Gwatkin released a memorandum on the enlistment of blacks in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (C. E. F.). He recommended that black Canadians continue to join battalions at the discretion of commanding officers, and that one or more black labor battalions be formed. Guided by the assumption that black soldiers would not make good fighters, should not be armed, and would not work well with white soldiers, Gwatkin envisioned a battalion with duties that were limited to construction work and other labor-intensive projects in Europe. Gwatkin's concerns echoed those of Britain's Army Council and War Office. The Council strenuously opposed placing black soldiers in white combat units, while the War Office preferred to employ blacks in non-

¹⁸ *The Canadian Observer*, 8 January 1916, 15 January 1916, 22 January 1916, 29 January 1916, 12 February 1916, 19 February 1916, 4 March 1916, 15 April 1916. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 315-317.

combatant, labor units.¹⁹ In the British Dominions, this opposition was rooted in the fear that combatant service would entitle peoples of color to political and/or constitutional concessions and thus destabilize white hegemony. “[I]f black and white were acknowledged to be fighting with and against each other on equal terms,” B.P. Willan has argued in the South African context, “this was likely to seriously undermine the future maintenance of the existing state of black/white relationships by devaluing the concept of race as an effective means of forestalling the emergence of class as an alternative, overt, basis for the organization of social and political relations.”²⁰ James Walker has identified a similar phenomenon regarding Japanese would-be recruits in Canada. While the Japanese were considered “desirable soldiers,” he observes, “their enlistment was feared as a step towards enfranchisement.”²¹

Gwatkin’s memorandum became the basis for the formation of a segregated black battalion. The British War Office informed Canada’s Governor General on 11 May 1916 that it would accept the battalion, and on 5 July 1916 the No. 2 Construction Battalion received authorization in Ottawa. Lieutenant Colonel Daniel H. Sutherland, a white railroad contractor from River John, Nova Scotia, became the Battalion’s commanding officer.²²

¹⁹ Howe, “Race, War, and Nationalism,” 46-47. In June 1918 the Army Council was compelled to enlist black soldiers in combat units due to major manpower shortages.

²⁰ Willan, “The South African Labour Contingent, 1916-1918,” 63.

²¹ Walker, “Race and Recruitment,” 7.

²² Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 316-318. Foyn, *The Underside of Glory*, 74. Memorandum by Major-General Willoughby Gwatkin, 13 April 1916, file HQ297-1-21, vol. 1206, RG 24, LAC. Gwatkin also listed a third option, which he did not recommend: to ask the imperial government if there might be a need for a black fighting battalion for special duties overseas, such as in Egypt. See also Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 18-20. See also Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I,” 8.

In the following months, Halifax's *Atlantic Advocate* joined the *Observer* in recruiting men for the No. 2 Construction Battalion. While the *Observer* was run by Canadian-born J.R.B. Whitney, the *Advocate* was managed primarily by West Indians in Nova Scotia. Yet like the *Observer*, the *Advocate* did not generally differentiate among West Indians, black Canadians, and African Americans. Founded in Halifax in April 1915 by Wilfred Alleyne DeCosta, a Jamaican-born gardener and collection agent who immigrated to Nova Scotia around 1908, the *Advocate* was "devoted to the interests of colored people in the Dominion generally," but especially to those in the Maritimes.²³ DeCosta was the *Advocate's* president and associate editor, and his wife Miriam served as secretary. Other staff included vice-president George Roache, a Halifax-born restaurant owner, Mowbray Fitzgerald Jemmott, a teacher from Bridgetown, Barbados and the *Advocate's* first editor, and William Thomas, circulation manager and treasurer. Editorial responsibilities were taken on by Ethelbert L. Cross, originally of San Fernando, Trinidad in 1916, and the following year by Dr. Clement C. Ligoure, a recent graduate of Queen's medical school, also from San Fernando.²⁴

Ligoure spent seven months recruiting for the No. 2 Construction Battalion and early in 1917, DeCosta and Cross enlisted. Of the 605 men who ultimately joined the Battalion, 71 were born in the British West Indies. While the majority (344) was Canadian born, 171 were born in the United States, four in England, two in Mexico, and one each in Arabia, Cuba, Holland,

²³ *The Atlantic Advocate*, April 1915; Wilfred DaCosta's birthplace is listed as Kingston, Jamaica, on his son's birth certificate. See NSARM, Vital Statistics of Nova Scotia, Birth Registry, Wilfred Alleyne DaCosta, b. 1908, Halifax, Halifax County, registered in 1908, p. 56300313. Additional bibliographical material on DaCosta can be found in Philip Hartling, "The *Atlantic Advocate*, Nova Scotia's First Black Magazine," unpublished history with biographical notes of *Advocate* staff, NSARM, 1992.

²⁴ Hartling, "The *Atlantic Advocate*."

Malta, and South Africa.²⁵ Enlistment shortages in late 1916 and early 1917 led Lieutenant Colonel Sutherland to seek authorization from Ottawa to expand recruitment to the United States. These shortages were likely a consequence of several factors, including opposition to a segregated unit and lingering discontent with earlier episodes of discrimination at recruiting stations. The Canadian government approved Sutherland's request and contacted the United States government for authorization. Although the United States would not enter the war until April 1917, Washington granted permission and 165 black Americans reported for training at Battalion Headquarters in Truro, Nova Scotia.²⁶

Equally controversial was the Battalion's unceremonious departure for Europe in March 1917. Unlike other Battalions bound for Europe, the No. 2 Construction Battalion was denied a proper farewell. Confined to the camp at Truro until called for service, the Battalion was

²⁵ *The Atlantic Advocate*, April 1917; Foyn, *The Underside of Glory*, 110-111. The provincial totals by place of enlistment were 359 (NS), 158 (ON), 27 (NB), 19 (AB), 11 (MB), 9 (PQ), 9 (BC), and 5 (SK). Place of birth was not disclosed for eight of the 605 recruits.

²⁶ Foyn, *The Underside of Glory*, 111; Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 22, 24-25; Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 318. When the No. 2 Construction Battalion received authorization in July 1916, attention soon shifted to the question of whether black officers would serve in the Battalion. J. R. B. Whitney sent inquiries on the subject to Sutherland as well as Adjutant-General W. E. Hodgins in Ottawa. While Hodgins evaded Whitney's request for a definitive reply, Sutherland informed the editor that blacks would receive commissions as chaplain and medical officer. Whitney made clear in the *Canadian Observer* that this concession was insufficient. Blacks should also be permitted to receive the other two commissions, those of quartermaster and paymaster. "Let us all pull together in making our demands for further commissions for our men, and as they are given such commissions let us each work to make this battalion a pride of the Race." *The Canadian Observer*, 22 July 1916 and 23 September 1916. Despite continued demands that the No. 2 Construction Battalion be "officered by men of our own Race," the Battalion left Halifax for Liverpool in March 1917 with only one black commissioned officer, Chaplain William Andrew White, a Baptist minister from Truro, Nova Scotia. Not only were the quartermaster and paymaster commissions filled by white officers, Sutherland reneged on his earlier promise that a black medical officer – Queen's educated Trinidadian, Dr. Clement Ligoure – would accompany the Battalion overseas. White was originally from Williamsburg, Virginia. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 22. *The Canadian Observer*, 3 February 1917.

transported to the ship at Halifax without the courtesy of a patriotic goodbye from friends and family. "Why," Ligoure asked in April 1917, "should our Race be huddled together in one mass, like cattle, marched from Barracks to the train at Truro, then on arriving at Halifax, driven, yes, even under severe military discipline on board the outgoing transport without the last long good-bye to those near and dear to them?" Mothers and sisters, wives and daughters, many of whom travelled hundreds of miles to bid farewell to their loved ones, were denied the same privilege extended to white families. As the *Atlantic Advocate* contended, this treatment was hardly consistent with British principles of justice and freedom. An unceremonious farewell, coupled with ongoing episodes of discrimination since the outbreak of war, fueled dissatisfaction among black Canadians and other residents of African descent. "[T]here is without doubt," Ligoure warned, "a whirlwind of discontentment sweeping over the Dominion among the Colored population which would have been averted had they been given justice."²⁷

Discontent spread in the late summer and early fall of 1917 when conscription came into force under the Military Service Act. Following Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden's trip to Europe in the spring of 1917, during which he visited the front and witnessed the devastation of war firsthand, he returned home determined to enact conscription for overseas service. He introduced the proposition to parliament on 18 May 1917, and the Military Service Act became law on 29 August.²⁸ Many black Canadians were outraged to learn that they would be drafted

²⁷ *The Atlantic Advocate*, April 1917.

²⁸ On the history of conscription in Canada see J. L. Granatstein and J. Mackay Hitsman, *Broken Promises: a history of conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977). See also Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007 [5th ed., 1st ed. pub. by Hurtig, 1985]), 151-157.

into military service after being turned away – sometimes multiple times – from recruiting stations in the preceding months. The issue was not conscription itself, as Reverend A. W. Hackley of Winnipeg’s African Methodist Episcopal Church argued, but the humiliating and highly offensive discrimination that had predated conscription. We “emphatically object to the branding of our men as conscripts, when they have already willingly offered themselves to defend the country, and have been refused for no other reason than their color, over which they have had no control. Now in the face of justice and British fair play, is it RIGHT to force men to help defend the Empire as CONSCRIPTS, when they have been denied the right to do so in an honorable manner?” Voluntary enlistment was widely understood as a patriotic and honourable duty. Denying black Canadians the opportunity to fulfill their service on this basis and then forcing them to enlist was considered a shameful betrayal of British justice and fair play.²⁹

West Indians in Canada also protested the conscription of black Canadians (and other residents of African descent) who had been refused enlistment as volunteers. This protest was articulated primarily through the West Indian Trading Association of Canada (WITA) in November and December, 1917. Founded in Toronto in 1916 as an auxiliary organization of Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), WITA was a co-operative grocery and trading association with shareholders in Quebec, Ontario and Nova Scotia.³⁰ Although affiliated with UNIA headquarters in Harlem, WITA’s founders likely declined to call their organization by the same name for fear of offending Canadians of mixed African and

²⁹ *The Canadian Observer*, 8 September 1917, 17 November 1917, and 1 December 1917.

³⁰ *The Canadian Observer*, 24 November 1917. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 414.

European descent. This was the case in the British West Indies, including in Garvey's native Jamaica, where a rigid yet mutable "colour line" guided social relations. As Colin Grant has observed in the Jamaican context, many refused to embrace the "Negro" descriptor in the UNIA. The "descendants of white planters and raped slave women," these "light-skinned Jamaicans . . . were outraged by one word: Negro. No one, least of all the aspiring brown artisans, bank clerks, and civil servants, would have willingly ticked such a box connoting their racial classification. And light-skinned blacks recoiled at Garvey's presumption to herd them together with their unfortunate darker brethren."³¹ To some extent, these racial boundaries were reproduced in Canada. Canadians of color filled the ranks of both laboring and professional classes, but unlike West Indian societies, all classes were denied access to positions of political power. Somewhat ironically, while the Canadian franchise was more inclusive than those in the British West Indies (the legislatures of the latter still imposing a restrictive property requirement), the idea that a person of color might occupy a seat in government – no matter their lightness of skin – was unthinkable. While it was not uncommon for white Canadians to interpret social acceptability according to gradations of skin color (where lighter skin connoted a greater degree of social privilege and a more advanced state of civilization), political power was the preserve of white Canadians. In the context of these racialized assumptions and practices, combined with Canada's much smaller African-descended population relative to the West Indies, struggles for racial justice were necessarily more socially inclusive in Canada.

Colin Grant, *Negro with a Hat: The Rise and Fall of Marcus Garvey* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 54-55, 265-282. The literature on race relations in the British West Indies is vast. Useful surveys on the Trinidadian and Jamaican contexts are Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870-1900* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); and Patrick E. Bryan. *The Jamaican People 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control* (London: Macmillan Education, 1991).

Despite its name, WITA's membership was not confined to West Indians. Like the UNIA, its overarching objective was the "advancement of colored people." As Trinidad-born WITA President Arthur E. King described it, the key to this advancement was organization. WITA solicited shareholders, established a produce trade with the West Indies, opened at least one grocery store in Toronto near Spadina and Queen, and purchased residential properties for rental to men and women of color. Access to proper housing was thought crucial to social advancement and economic well-being. Canadians of color, King argued, faced "social ostracism and economic starvation, with the resultant evils of poor housing conditions, which [led to] impaired physique and mentality." WITA was particularly committed to assisting recent West Indian and African American immigrants find suitable housing.³²

WITA members proceeded with the conviction that the "organization and commercialization of the race" would ultimately provide the necessary leverage to effect social and political change. "[B]y becoming commercialized," E. Millington argued during a WITA meeting in December 1916, "we can make larger demands, can fight the immigration question, and all other questions along Race lines." In the fall of 1917, WITA centered its protest against the conscription of black Canadians. Toronto members discussed alternatives to conscription at monthly meetings, sent delegates to confer with, and gather support from, WITA shareholders in Montreal, and presented their grievances to the federal government. They emphasized the injustice of drafting men who were earlier "refused the privilege of volunteering." Justice could

³² *The Canadian Observer*, 9 December 1916, 23 December 1916, 13 January 1917.

only be restored, WITA argued, by providing black Canadians another chance to enlist voluntarily.³³

Protests against compulsory enlistment were largely ignored by the Department of Militia and Defence. The Canadian Expeditionary Force suffered enormous losses in 1917, at Vimy Ridge in the spring and then at Passchendaele in the fall.³⁴ In Ottawa, concerns about the limited – or worse, dangerous – fighting capabilities of blacks, and the “mingling” of black and white soldiers, were blunted by an acute need for reinforcements. Like others who evaded the draft, Canadians of color who ignored conscription notices and failed to present exemption documents when questioned by military officials were apprehended and forced into service.³⁵

7.2 Conflict at Fort William and Glace Bay

Incidents of racial conflict in Canada during the late summer and early fall of 1918 incited white Canadians’ fears about the unfortunate – and dangerous – consequences of inter-racial interaction. Danger lay not only in the potential for violence, but also in the possibility that racial conflict might destabilize the status quo of white dominance. War contributions were expected to reap post-war dividends for subject peoples in the form of increased political representation and self-determination. Blacks’ protest against the discrimination they endured in military enlistment and later, as servicemen, was only a prelude of the protest to come. As the war progressed, black Canadians and other residents of color increasingly protested white

³³ *The Canadian Observer*, 23 December 1916, 24 November 1917.

³⁴ See J. L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 117-123-124.

³⁵ Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 37-38.

discrimination, demanded racial justice, and articulated a post-war vision that challenged white hegemony.

In August 1918, the British Admiralty sent 13 seamen – 11 black and two white – from Cardiff, Wales to Fort William, Ontario to man the recently built S.S. *War Sioux* on its voyage to Europe. Prior to the crew's arrival, ship Captain Thomas R. Pritchard, already in Fort William, arranged accommodations for them at the local Y.M.C.A. When they arrived on 10 August, they checked into their rooms at the Y.M.C.A. at 11 o'clock in the morning. Three hours later, all 11 black men were "told to get out." According to Y.M.C.A. Secretary Allan Thomson, none of the men had misbehaved. The color of their skin, the *Daily-News Chronicle* reported, "was sufficient offense." The seamen left peacefully and found accommodations elsewhere. Not long after, they were reportedly refused service at a local restaurant, the Main Café.³⁶

The Liberal-leaning *Daily-News Chronicle* fiercely criticized the Y.M.C.A. and the Main Café. The issue was not that persons of color were treated unfairly, but rather that British subjects in the service of the Empire had been discriminated against. "Under ordinary conditions," the editor wrote, "we would not have a great deal to say about this matter, but the case is different today. Had it not been for the black men and the red men and the brown men of the British Empire, the white men would have had a might sight harder job on their hands than they have had. . . . They served in every capacity and laid down their lives, nor counted it as a sacrifice. The black man, of all the races, knows what liberty means and gives himself

³⁶ *Daily News-Chronicle*, 19 August 1918. The *Daily News-Chronicle* was published in nearby Port Arthur. Fort William and Port Arthur amalgamated in 1970 to become Thunder Bay.

freely for its maintenance.”³⁷ The story soon spread beyond Fort William and met with disapprobation in Toronto’s and Montreal’s black communities. In a series of articles and letters to the editor, the *Canadian Observer* and its readers admonished the “un-Christian” and “un-British” actions of the Y.M.C.A. As C. J. Catheline pointed out in a letter to the editor, not only was it hypocritical for a Christian organization to turn away men of color, it was unpatriotic and dangerously anti-British. Refusing British servicemen adequate food and accommodations would discourage them and consequently hinder their ability to do “faithful service” to themselves and the Empire. Catheline went so far as to suggest that the Y.M.C.A.’s discriminatory practices were “pro-German.”³⁸

The Colored Political and Protective Association of Montreal (CPPAM) conducted a more vigorous protest, bringing the Fort William incident directly to Prime Minister Borden’s attention. “This Association,” Secretary Arthur J. Thomas proclaimed, “standing as it [does] for the protection of our colored citizens, considers this glaring and defiant discrimination an insult to every one of us.” Thomas similarly emphasized how detrimental this discrimination was to the war effort. It was particularly offensive that men in the service of the Empire encountered such bigotry. If “colored men are good enough to die bravely on the battlefields in “No Man’s Land” for the Empire’s Cause,” it certainly was not much to ask that they “be given ordinary

³⁷ *Daily News-Chronicle*, 19 August 1918.

³⁸ See for example “Colored British Seamen Refused” and “Color Line Drawn by Y.M.C.A.” in the *Canadian Observer*, 14 September 1918, and “Fair play under British Rule,” 21 September 1918.

fair-play” under the British flag. Borden assured Thomas that an investigation would be made, and he asked his Minister of Justice, C. J. Doherty, to look into the matter.³⁹

Doherty sent an inquiry to the Chief Commissioner of Dominion Police at Ottawa, Percy Sherwood. The Commissioner obtained reports from Y.M.C.A. Secretary Allan Thomson and the Chief Constable of police at Fort William, W. J. Dodds, which he forwarded to Doherty for review. In his report, Thomson recounted how Captain Pritchard had visited his office in July 1918 to arrange accommodations for his crew. Pritchard said nothing about “whether the men were white or colored” at that time, and Thomson reserved the accommodations. The dormitories were nearly filled when Pritchard made the request, but Thomson, not wanting to disappoint the Captain, doubled up the men in each room to accommodate the crew. When the men arrived on 10 August, Thomson was “greatly surprised” to find that 11 of the 13 men were not white. Trying to make the best of an “unfortunate predicament,” he assigned the men to their rooms as planned. An hour later, he “was faced with a very serious problem, namely – that our men in the dormitories and our matrons who look after same, expressed to me their keen disapproval and intimated that they would leave the building at once.” Because the Y.M.C.A. had suffered financial problems earlier in the war due to the scarcity of patrons, sending the majority of current (white) patrons away was out of the question. In concluding his report, perhaps in an effort to offset any criticism of his decision to expel the seamen, Thomson drew attention to the men’s moral conduct. “Some two weeks” after their arrival, he stated, “as the Police Department should be able to inform you, Captain Pritchard had to appear in Police

³⁹ Arthur J. Thomas to Robert Borden, 12 September 1918, enclosed in Robert Borden to C. J. Doherty, 16 September 1918, file 2464, vol. 229, Series A-2, RG 13, LAC.

Court, owing to some trouble on the part of some of these colored men." While *one* member of the crew was arrested for reportedly assaulting a boat swain, Thomson spared no liberty in exaggerating the incident.⁴⁰

Constable Dodds informed Sherwood that he had no knowledge of the Y.M.C.A. incident, but he had met the seamen in question. To allay concerns about any wrongdoing on the part of the Y.M.C.A., he similarly drew attention to the men's conduct. Soon after they arrived, Pritchard brought them to the police station so that the Constable "might caution them regarding their behavior while in Fort William." In addition to concerns about their conduct, the Captain was apparently worried that the high wages offered in southwestern Ontario might tempt some of his men to desert. According to Dodds, Pritchard's concern proved valid. The Constable referenced the assault incident involving the boatswain, and highlighted the men's apparent reluctance to return to the ship. When the S. S. *War Sioux* was ready to depart, Pritchard placed a notice in the local newspaper summoning the crew to the ship at a certain time. Most of the men failed to appear, so the police department sent out an officer to threaten them with arrest if they did not report immediately to Pritchard. The men claimed no knowledge of the Captain's previous summons, and agreed to report at once.⁴¹

Dodds' and Thomson's reports appear to have reassured the Minister of Justice and Prime Minister Borden that no further action was necessary. The Chief Commissioner of Dominion Police forwarded Minister Doherty the reports of Dodds and Thomson, as well as a

⁴⁰ Allan Thomson to the Minister of Justice, Ottawa, 22 October 1918, file 2464, vol. 229, RG 13, Series A-2, LAC.

⁴¹ W. J. Dodds to the Chief Commissioner of Dominion Police, Ottawa, 23 October 1918, file 2464, vol. 229, RG 13, Series A-2, LAC.

letter Captain Pritchard had written to the *Daily News-Chronicle* defending the actions of the Main Café owner. Pritchard stated that “the proprietor treated the men in a fair manner by all accounts.” The men were refused service not on account of their skin color, but because the Café was understaffed. Doherty sent all the reports to the Prime Minister’s Office, and the subject received no further attention.⁴² CPPAM’s protest and, to a lesser extent, the articles published in the *Canadian Observer* and the *Daily News-Chronicle*, were nonetheless significant. They exposed racial discrimination in Fort William and made it known to authorities in Ottawa – including the Prime Minister himself – that such discrimination would not go unnoticed by Canada’s black communities.

Only a few weeks after the Fort William incident, at the request of West Indian laborers at Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, the federal government was called on once again to investigate a race riot. On 2 September 1918, the Glace Bay Athletic Sports Club, organized and managed by Barbadians, was having its annual games. During one of the bicycle races, two contestants collided and a riot ensued. According to the *Sydney Record*, athletic rivalry and poor sportsmanship inspired the disturbance. Sinclair Callendar, a Barbadian contestant who was apparently “made jealous” by the repeated success of L. Linello, an Italian contestant, “fouled him in one race by running his bicycle in front of him and knocking him down.” Regaining his feet, Linello struck Yard, and the fight escalated into “a free for all fight” between black and white residents. The Dominion Coal Company police arrived but were ill-equipped to suppress the fight, which soon spread beyond the athletic grounds to other parts of the city. While some

⁴² Percy Sherwood to the Minister of Justice, Ottawa, 26 October, 1918, and enclosure, Thomas R. Pritchard, letter to the editor, *Daily-News Chronicle*, 20 August 1918, file 2464, vol. 229, RG 13, LAC.

“whites tore up the refreshment booths and destroyed everything on the field,” the *Record* reported, “[o]thers set upon every black man. The negroes sought safety in wild flight. They were overtaken and dragged from their hiding places and beaten and knocked into insensibility. Persons who gave them shelter had the windows of their houses smashed to bits, the house doors driven in, and the refugees were dragged out in the street and battered and hammered in wild anger.” A mob of whites descended on Sterling, a community where many blacks were known to reside. Soon after, a “volley of revolver shots rang out,” as the mob fired bullets through the windows of several homes and many occupants fired back.⁴³

A fifteen- year-old Barbadian, Urban Yard, was shot and killed inside a Sterling shack where he and other blacks had sought refuge.⁴⁴ Many others, black and white, were seriously wounded. The mayor called in a company of fifty soldiers from the local militia and read the riot act, but it took several hours to quell the disturbance. The police, with the help of militia forces, eventually made thirty-three arrests. According to the *Sydney Daily Post* and the *Halifax Chronicle*, the authorities had “arrested every person who acted in any way disorderly.”⁴⁵ All those arrested were black men.

An inquest was held into Yard’s death, but no one was found responsible. With very little deliberation, a jury concluded on 5 September – only three days after Yard was killed – that he “had come to his death by being shot with a revolver in the hands of some person

⁴³ *The Sydney Record*, 3 September 1918; *The Halifax Herald*, 3 September 1918.

⁴⁴ Reports referencing Yard are widely inconsistent in citing his given name. In addition to Urban, he is referred to as Hernan, Herman, Irvin and Irwin. My use of the name Urban reflects the greater frequency of this name in the sources consulted.

⁴⁵ *The Sydney Daily Post*, 3 September 1918; *The Halifax Chronicle*, 3 September 1918.

unknown.” All but three of the thirty-three black men arrested were released.⁴⁶ The destruction of Sterling homes during the riot, coupled with lingering racial tension in the days following, led many blacks to leave Sterling and seek domicile in communities nearby. “The feeling against the blacks,” the *Record* reported, “is running at a very high pitch and it would not take very much to start things all over again. . . The immigration [of blacks] commenced yesterday and it is expected that by Saturday there will not be a colored man living at the Sterling.” The *Record* concluded that the riot, and several earlier disturbances, could have been avoided if blacks had never taken up residence in the area. Sterling was apparently “too near” Sydney’s residential and business sectors for a black settlement.⁴⁷

Outraged by the conduct of the police and the local government, Barbadian residents in Glace Bay and Sydney enlisted the counsel of Joseph Eaglan Griffith, a young black Halifax lawyer. Originally from the West Indian island of Nevis, Griffith earned degrees at New York and McGill Universities and was admitted to the Nova Scotia Bar in May 1917.⁴⁸ In consultation with several Barbadians who witnessed the events of 2 September, Griffith sent a petition to the Barbados government. The petition, which included sixty-four names, beseeched the Barbados government to demand redress from either the Canadian or Nova Scotian government. The

⁴⁶ *The Sydney Daily Post*, 4 September 1918; *The Sydney Record*, 4 September 1918; *The Sydney Record*, 5 September 1918.

⁴⁷ *The Sydney Record*, 6 September 1918.

⁴⁸ *The Canadian Observer*, 26 May and 9 June 1917. See also Barry Cahill, “The ‘Colored Barrister’: The Short Life and Tragic Death of James Robinson Johnston, 1876-1915,” *Dalhousie Law Journal* 15, 2 (Fall 1992), 372-374, and Philip Girard and Jeffrey Haylock, “Stratification, Economic Adversity, and Diversity in an Urban Bar: Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1900-1950,” in eds. Constance Backhouse and W. Wesley Pue, *The Promise and Perils of Law: Canadian Lawyers in History* (Toronto: Irwin Law, 2009), 20-21.

signatories requested that a proper investigation be made into Urban Yard's death, that the "assailants of the colored people be ascertained and dealt with according to law," that the conduct of the police and soldiers who quelled the riot be investigated, and that the Barbadians be compensated for loss of property and goods during the riot.⁴⁹

Upon receiving the petition, Barbados Governor Charles O'Brien forwarded it to the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia and the British Colonial Secretary. He did so, as stated in an accompanying letter to the Lieutenant Governor, "in full confidence that the Petitioners will be afforded a sympathetic hearing on any matters that they may wish to put forward in connection with the riot."⁵⁰ British Colonial Secretary Alfred Milner also contacted Canada's Governor General, the Duke of Devonshire, to request a report from the Canadian government.⁵¹ The Attorney General of Nova Scotia subsequently conducted an inquiry and a report was relayed to Ottawa and London.⁵² While the contents of the report are unknown, it appears that very little was done to address the petitioners' claims.⁵³ Griffith provided the

⁴⁹ Enclosed in Viscount Milner to the Duke of Devonshire, 15 January 1919, file 35018, vol. 642, G21, RG 7, LAC.

⁵⁰ C.R.M. O'Brien to Walter H. Long, 30 October 1918, Barbados no. 178, and C.R.M. O'Brien to the Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, 30 October 1918, Barbados no. 123, enclosed in Viscount Milner to the Duke of Devonshire, 15 January 1919, file 35018, vol. 642, G21, RG 7, LAC.

⁵¹ Viscount Milner to the Duke of Devonshire, 15 January 1919, file 35018, vol. 642, G21, RG 7, LAC. Colonial Office Memorandum, 31 October 1918, CO 28/294, TNA.

⁵² Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia to the Under-Secretary of State, Ottawa, 3 March 1919, and Administrator (for the Lieutenant Governor) to the Secretary of State, Ottawa, 12 September 1919, vol. 17, RG 2, NSARM; Joseph Pope (Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa) to the Governor General's Secretary, Ottawa, 26 September 1919, and L.H. Davies (Deputy Governor General, Ottawa) to Viscount Milner, 30 September 1919, file 35018, vol. 642, G21, RG 7, LAC.

Attorney General with a list of persons who had taken part in the assaults of 2 September, but no one was brought to trial, nor was anyone held accountable for Urban Yard's death.⁵⁴

The failure of authorities to address the petitioners' grievances was a consequence, in part, of the idea that inter-racial mingling would ultimately produce racial conflict and perhaps even violence. Blacks were assumed responsible for such conflict because their very presence trespassed on whites' sense of entitlement to occupy and dominate Canadian spaces. Yet responses to the riot – and the riot itself – were also the product of a particular historical moment. War-time labor demands led to a reduction of immigration barriers and hundreds of West Indians migrated to Canada. Sydney's Dominion Steel and Coal Company actively sought black labor from the West Indies and the United States to replace enlisted white laborers. Despite war-time demands, black laborers were profoundly resented by white laborers at home and overseas. As Tyler Stovall has argued in the context of war-time France, people of color came to signify, for different reasons in different contexts, the war's detrimental impact on the working classes.⁵⁵ West Indians in Glace Bay came to symbolize the regrettable consequences of war.

⁵³ A search was conducted for the report in the records of the Department of External Affairs and the Governor General's papers at Library and Archives Canada, the Colonial Office correspondence at the National Archives of the United Kingdom, and in the records of Nova Scotia's Attorney General and Lieutenant Governor at Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management in Halifax.

⁵⁴ A search was conducted in the *Sydney Record*, the *Sydney Daily Post*, and the Minutes of the Cape Breton County Supreme Court for Barbadians who were in court as either defendants or victims from 1918 through 1923. It appears that no one was brought to trial in connection with the riot.

⁵⁵ Tyler Stovall, "The Color Line Behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War," *The American Historical Review* 103, 3 (June 1998), 737-769.

7.3 Confronting 'Controlled Democracy' at Canadian Universities

West Indian students encountered fewer obstacles at the Canadian border than other migrants of color. The Department of Immigration required incoming students to be in possession of a confirmation of enrollment from a recognized collegiate institute, or from a Canadian university or college authorized by statute to confer degrees. In cases where students were required to complete a matriculation exam in Canada prior to enrollment, they were asked to provide documentation of their educational qualifications to date.⁵⁶ Following the outbreak of war in 1914, however, immigration officials often demanded additional evidence documenting the character or reputation of West Indian students. Heightened concerns about the spread of seditious ideas – whether anti-colonial, anti-British, or worse, anti-war – prompted immigration officials to examine new migrants with greater scrutiny.⁵⁷

Once in Canada, West Indian students faced considerable discrimination. While the federal government did not impose (with a few exceptions) discriminatory legislation on black Canadians, it nonetheless “upheld the right of Canadian individuals, organizations and institutions to discriminate on grounds of ‘race’.”⁵⁸ Blacks subsequently encountered segregation and exclusionary practices in a wide range of social and institutional contexts that included schools, restaurants and social clubs. West Indian students, in alliance with other

⁵⁶ Meeting Minutes, 4 September 1917, Dalhousie University Senate, Dalhousie University Archives, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

⁵⁷ D. Vallancey to W.D. Scott, 14 June 1916; Fortier to Scott, 14 June 1916; Scott to Vallancey, 21 June 1916; Scott to Rev. A.E. Armstrong, 15 January 1918, file 810666, vol. 566, RG 76, pt. 2, LAC.

⁵⁸ James W. St. G. Walker, *“Race,” Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada: Historical Case Studies* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997), 122.

West Indians in Canada and the Caribbean – and often supported by black Canadians long resident in Canada – contested these racist practices.

In 1918, the Student Council at Dalhousie University concluded that it was in the best interests of the student body if black students refrained from attending any of the university's social functions. Soon after, representatives from the Council approached members of Dalhousie's black community and requested that they no longer attend any social gatherings at the university. The decision appears to have been partly the result of a complaint made by a white female student. As reported in the *Dalhousie Gazette* on 18 February, the young lady demanded that the "members of the African race" who are currently studying at Dalhousie be barred from all college functions "on the ground that her parents would never allow her to remain at an institution that permitted such a state of affairs." The *Gazette* editor was wholly critical of the Council's decision, insisting that "any right-minded Dalhousian must resent the bigotry of such a stand." Barring black students was undemocratic and thus against the principles of the university.⁵⁹ Not all the *Gazette* readers agreed with this viewpoint. In a letter to the editor on 4 March, signed with the pseudonym "Controlled Democracy," the writer argued that the decision to exclude black students from the university's social functions was crucial to the maintenance of sexual and moral order. "[T]hose who have observed too many instances of the lamentable results of too free association of the Ethiopian male with the white female, explain it as you may, have the right in their turn to protest against your classification of them as narrow-minded bigots because, knowing the danger, they desire to protect their

⁵⁹ *Dalhousie Gazette*, 18 February 1918.

daughters against it.”⁶⁰ This incident suggests that black men’s alleged threat to white female virtue, a common construct with often tragic results in the United States’ South, was also a concern in early twentieth century Canadian society.⁶¹ The notion of protecting white female purity provided a pretense to control black Canadians. “The threat of real or imagined violence,” as Sarah Carter has observed in the context of white-indigenous relations in the Canadian West, “was a rationale for securing white control, for clarifying boundaries between peoples.”⁶² Maintaining the status quo of white power and control, this pretense similarly regulated social relations between black and white Canadians.

Unwilling to abide the slanderous remarks of “Controlled Democracy,” five West Indian students, “on behalf of colored Dalhousians,” sent a note of protest to the university’s president, A. Stanley Mackenzie. The note was brief, consisting of not much more than a request that Mackenzie come to their defense. For the president’s reference, the students enclosed a longer letter they had recently sent to the *Gazette*, which the editor declined to publish. The students emphasized their class and educational pedigrees as well as their British subjecthood. They introduced themselves as Theodore Nichols and William Smith, formerly schoolmasters in British Guyana, Frederick Hamilton, the “son of a landed gentleman” from Tobago, and George Morrison, “son of a prominent schoolmaster” in Barbados. The letter was also signed by R. S. Hall, a McGill University student who had formerly been a druggist at Kingston General

⁶⁰ *Dalhousie Gazette*, 4 March 1918.

⁶¹ See for example Glenda E. Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁶² Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 15.

Hospital in Jamaica. All these “gentlemen,” according to the letter, “enjoyed the best society in their respective homes” before moving to Halifax.⁶³

To refute the Student Council’s and “Controlled Democracy’s” implied assaults on their morality, Nichols and the other letter writers also emphasized the accomplishments of West Indians as evidence of great moral character. The leading lawyers, doctors, and members of government in the West Indies, as well as many teachers, editors, and ministers of religion, were of African descent. This was all the more commendable given that the islands were also inhabited by “thousands of white men.” Britain was “proud of her colored West Indians” and assured of their “moral worth.” West Indians were consequently placed in positions of trust and respect. “Did ‘Controlled Democracy’ ever read of that Ethiopian in Barbados, who was so immoral that Queen Victoria made him a Knight, and that this man Sir Conrad Reeves served as Chief Justice until his death? There are many K.C.’s [Knight Commanders of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire] among Colored West Indians.” Moreover, there were hundreds of black students studying at British universities who were “not discriminated against socially.”⁶⁴ Just as middle- and upper-class white Canadians (and black Canadians of Loyalist descent) revered Britain, so too did middle-class West Indians in the English-speaking

⁶³ Enclosure in Theodore T. Nichols et al. to A. Stanley Mackenzie, 12 March 1918, UA 3, File 310.10, President’s Office fonds, Dalhousie University Archives. Nichols and the other West Indian students sent the letter to the *Gazette* on 7 March. Nichols, Smith and Morrison were students in the Faculty of Medicine and Hamilton was registered in the Faculty of Arts and Science. See *Calendar of Dalhousie University 1919-20* (Halifax: William McNab & Son, 1919), 152, 157, and *Calendar of Dalhousie University 1918-1919* (Halifax: William McNab & Son, 1918), 160, 162, 163. Of course discrimination against black students was in fact rampant at British universities. See Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain, 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998).

⁶⁴ Enclosure in Nichols et al. to Mackenzie, 12 March 1918, UA 3, File 310.10, President’s Office fonds, Dalhousie University Archives.

Caribbean. Educated in West Indian schools that were based on the British model, many of them aspired to a British way of life.⁶⁵ Recognition and honors from Britain thus provided the highest indicator of good character.

It is unclear whether President Mackenzie replied to the letter, but it is likely that he communicated with the *Gazette's* editor. Six days after the West Indian students sent their letter to Mackenzie, the *Gazette* apologized for publishing "Controlled Democracy's" letter and announced that any future discussion of the controversy would not be published in its columns. "The coloured students at Dalhousie, past and present" the editor wrote, "have always conducted themselves as gentlemen, and have merited consideration and respect." "Controlled Democracy" was a graduate of Dalhousie rather than a current student, and as such was not qualified to comment on social conditions at the university.⁶⁶

In the spring of 1918, Mackenzie was more concerned about the larger question of admitting black students to Dalhousie's Faculty of Medicine.⁶⁷ Clinical instruction, usually conducted at nearby hospitals, presented a problem because white patients refused treatment from physicians and medical students of color. In the United States, African Americans addressed this issue by founding several black medical colleges, many of which established (or

⁶⁵ See Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870-1900* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and Patrick E. Bryan. *The Jamaican People 1880-1902: Race, Class and Social Control* (London: Macmillan Education, 1991).

⁶⁶ *Dalhousie Gazette*, 18 March 1918.

⁶⁷ Mackenzie to J.C. Connell, 3 May 1918, UA 3, File 310.10, President's Office fonds, Dalhousie University Archives.

at least had access to) nearby hospitals to meet clinical education requirements.⁶⁸ Canada's much smaller black population made access to clinical facilities with black patients – let alone the establishment of black colleges – an unlikely prospect. Faculties of medicine at Canadian universities were consequently faced with two options: prohibit students of color from enrolling in medical programs, or make arrangements for these students to undergo clinical training at a hospital in the United States during their final years of study.

Concerned that the “colour question” might soon become an issue for Dalhousie's Faculty of Medicine, Mackenzie wrote to medical faculty at Queen's, McGill and the University of Toronto for advice. He was particularly interested in hearing from Queen's Faculty of Medicine, which had recently closed its doors to students of color. Returned soldiers receiving medical care in Kingston were vitriolic and sometimes hostile in refusing treatment from anyone other than white doctors and white medical students. With the support of Queen's Senate, Dean of Medicine J.C. Connell prohibited the admission of prospective black students and expelled all 15 black students in residence, most of whom were West Indian. In a community where “a great deal of prejudice against the colored race survives,” Connell informed Mackenzie, “the Faculty decided some months ago that it would not be possible to

⁶⁸ The literature on the history of African-American medical schools is voluminous. Useful surveys include Todd L. Savitt, “Four African-American Proprietary Medical Colleges: 1888-1923,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 55, 3 (2000), 203-255; Darlene Clark Hine, “The Anatomy of Failure: Medical Education Reform and the Leonard Medical School of Shaw University, 1882-1920,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 54, 4 (Autumn 1985), 512-525; James Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors: A History of Meharry Medical College* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1983); and Louis W. Sullivan, “The Education of Black Health Professionals,” *Phylon* 38, 2 (2nd Qtr. 1977), 181-193.

continue the education of these men.” Those expelled included students in their early years of study who were not yet in the clinical phase of the program.⁶⁹

Black students had not been an issue in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto, according to Dean C.K. Clarke. Very few black students had applied, and in the cases of those who had, admission was refused on the basis of merit rather than race. “We find as a rule their preliminary training is defective,” he contended, and “consequently they have gone to such institutions as Queen’s.”⁷⁰ J.W. Scane, the registrar of McGill’s Faculty of Medicine, was more forthcoming in his reply. McGill admitted black medical students, but they were required to undergo their obstetrical training elsewhere, preferably at a medical training facility in New York or Boston. The Montreal Maternity Hospital had closed its doors to black students a few years earlier, and McGill was thereafter unable to offer incoming black students the clinical course in obstetrics. McGill’s Faculty of Medicine was represented on the Medical Board of the Maternity Hospital, but “had no voice at all in the management of the institution.” According to Scane, the “problem was taken out of [McGill’s] hands” by the Hospital’s restriction.⁷¹ This

⁶⁹ Mackenzie to J.C. Connell, 3 May 1918, and Connell to Mackenzie, 8 May, 1918, UA 3, File 310.10, President’s Office fonds, Dalhousie University Archives. Connell indicated that efforts were being made to transfer these students to other universities. See also “Black students, expulsion from medical school,” *Queen’s Encyclopedia*, Queen’s University Department of Marketing and Communications, <<http://qnc.queensu.ca/Encyclopedia/b.html#Blackstudents>>, viewed 2 February 2009.

⁷⁰ Mackenzie to C.K. Clarke, 3 May 1918, and C.K. Clarke to Mackenzie, 16 May 1918, UA 3, File 310.10, President’s Office fonds, Dalhousie University Archives.

⁷¹ Mackenzie to J.W. Scane, 3 May 1918, and Scane to Mackenzie, 6 May 1918, UA 3, File 310.10, President’s Office fonds, Dalhousie University Archives. *The Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica) 13 July 1918, 22 May 1917.

restriction presented an additional obstacle for West Indian students, but it was not insurmountable. In April 1918, four West Indians graduated with M.D. degrees from McGill.⁷²

Not long after McGill barred its first students of color from obstetrical training courses in September 1916, a group of West Indian medical students formed the Gamma Medical League. Aimed at “bringing together the men from various parts of the Empire for their professional, social and mutual benefit,” the League persistently contested McGill’s discriminatory policies. Following the unsatisfactory results of their discussions with medical faculty and the registrar, the League sent a petition to McGill’s Board of Governors on 21 October, “setting forth [their] position and praying for redress.” University Principal William Peterson acknowledged receipt of their petition at the end of October, but informed them that it would be “quite some time” before the body that considered student petitions, the university Corporation, reconvened. When the petitioners received no response in the following weeks, they confronted Peterson in person to “enquire as to the fate of their attempt to get justice.” Peterson informed them the petition had been referred to the medical faculty. The students then met with Registrar Scane in January 1917, who assured them that arrangements would be made to facilitate obstetrics and gynecology courses for black students.⁷³

⁷² See *The Canadian Observer*, 20 April 1918. The students were A. R. Newsam and H. E. Skeete, both of Barbados, O.M. Francis of Grenada, and F.T. Reid of Jamaica.

⁷³ *The Canadian Observer*, 11 December 1916; *The Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica), 22 May 1917 and 2 March 1918. The elected officers of the Gamma League were R. S. Hall (President, Med. '17), R. B. Taylor (Vice-President, Med. '18), P. M. Savory (Secretary, Med. '19), C. Chandler Jones (Assistant Secretary, Med. '20), H. L. Ellis (Treasurer, Med. '20), and Julius Jordan (Chaplain, Arts '16, Med. '20). The University Corporation, according to the 1821 Charter of McGill College, consisted of college faculty, governors, and prominent members of the Montreal community. See Stanley Brice Frost, *McGill University for the*

When the League had not yet received confirmation in June 1917 that such arrangements would be made, they broadened their forum of protest to the West Indies. They sent letters to several prominent newspapers, including Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner*, the *Jamaica Times*, Demerara's *Daily Argosy*, and the *Barbados Advocate*.⁷⁴ The League asked the editors to publicize McGill's discriminatory practices so that the university "may realize the injustice and error of the decision referred to, and rescind this un-British order." Education was a crucial prerequisite to increased representation in government. Denying (or obstructing access to) education to peoples of color was thus a profound obstacle along the path to racial equality and self-determination. Emphasizing the importance of protest and perseverance in effecting change, the League called West Indians to action. Change "will depend upon the interest you display in the matter to decide whether your children and your children's children will be debarred from the education so indispensable to civilization. . . [We] earnestly ask whether [you] can afford to remain indifferent and see the shrines of knowledge gradually closing their doors on the faces of [your] children." West Indians resident in Canada were "on the spot" and could see more readily than those at home that the discrimination at McGill was merely "the thin edge of the wedge."⁷⁵

The *Jamaica Times* was particularly vitriolic in its condemnation of McGill. Dr. Scane's statement that the Montreal Maternity Hospital had tied McGill's hands was a poor excuse.

Advancement of Learning: 1801-1895 vol. 1 (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), 79.

⁷⁴ A detailed description of the League's activities from September 1916 through July 1917 can be found in *The Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica), 2 March 1918.

⁷⁵ *The Daily Gleaner* (Jamaica), 14 June 1918.

“Could not a great University beneath the British flag, assume and be true to the simple position of primitive loyalty to humanity, namely, that a certain group of men should not be penalized because they were of a certain race or color?” Rather than “tamely yielding” to the Maternity Hospital’s restriction, McGill should have sought – “at all costs” – vindication for its students of color, even if this required the university to build and run its own hospital. The *Times* entreated West Indian governments to register their disapproval with the proper authorities at McGill. They should highlight, in particular, how antithetical the university’s practices were to British principles of justice and “fair play.” Doing so would make McGill and “all the other Canadian centers that are inclined to follow the broad and easy road of prejudice” realize that “their native island and their fellow countrymen have no intention of looking on apathetically.” United action on the part of the colonial governments would, moreover, demonstrate West Indian solidarity against racial prejudice.⁷⁶

J. A. G. Smith, a black lawyer and member of the Jamaican Legislative Council, brought the issue before Council as early as April 1918. The Council subsequently sent an inquiry, by way of the island’s colonial secretary, to Registrar Scane. In Scane’s reply, he assured the Council that arrangements had been made with an institution in New York City, where black students could undergo obstetrical training in the summer between their fourth and fifth years. Scane also emphasized the small minority of black students in the Faculty of Medicine, which, at present, met their “quota” of eight to ten. The implication was, of course, that it was unrealistic to expect McGill to go to great lengths to accommodate so few students. He pointed

⁷⁶ *Jamaica Times*, 16 March, as cited in *The Canadian Observer*, 16 March 1918.

out, nevertheless, that the medical faculty had “endeavoured to meet the situation in all fairness, and in many instances it has been found that when the situation is really understood the students themselves do not object to this arrangement.” McGill’s arrangement, he added, was much more accommodating than Queen’s policy, which barred black students entirely from the medical school. While Scane missed (or chose to ignore) the larger issues at stake for students of color, his letter appears to have placated Jamaica’s Legislative Council.⁷⁷

Queen’s discriminatory policy was met with similar disapprobation by West Indians in Canada and the Caribbean, as well as by black Canadians. *The Canadian Observer* once again took a lead role in the protest. “Those of our Government that stand for freedom, justice and fair play, should not overlook vital instances in the life of a struggling race of people seeking to obtain higher education, [so] that they may be of greater service to that people.” It was disappointing that an influential, distinguished university had submitted so easily to prejudice. That an institution of higher learning – comprised and supported by individuals who claim to be highly cultured – practiced racial discrimination was nothing short of hypocrisy. As Toronto resident W. E. Benfield wrote in his letter to the editor on 4 February 1918, are students of color “not human beings just the same?” Was Canada’s government not conscripting black students as well as white to squash militarism and autocracy in Europe? Canada was fighting for freedom and justice throughout the world while betraying these same principles at home.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Joseph W. Scane to the Acting Assistant Colonial Secretary, Jamaica, 10 June 1918; G. M. Wortley to J. A. G. Smith, 6 July 1918; and J. A. G. Smith, letter to *The Daily Gleaner*, 10 July 1918, all cited in *The Daily Gleaner*, 13 July 1918. On J. A. G. Smith, see Abigail B. Bakan, *Ideology and Class Conflict in Jamaica: the politics of rebellion* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1990), 99.

Just as McGill's Gamma Medical League had sent a petition to all the British West Indian governments, so too did the West Indian Club at Queen's. Club President E. W. Reece similarly emphasized the importance of education to the "advancement of the colored race," and the hypocrisy of enlisting black soldiers to fight the cause of freedom overseas while simultaneously discriminating against them at home. That several West Indian colonies had recently contributed funds "rather liberally" to alleviate the suffering caused by the Halifax explosion in December 1917 made such discrimination all the more offensive. Reece and the other petitioners also underlined the incongruity of this discrimination and Canada's interest in strengthening ties with the West Indies. After the war, Canada "is contemplating not only extensive trade relations with the West Indian islands, but [a] Governmental relationship as well, and it would appear inconsistent in policy that a Government which desires such intimate commercial and political relationships with another people should[,] through its institutions of learning[,] set up barriers against those living in their midst." The Club urged the West Indian governments to intervene on their behalf by sending an appeal to either the Canadian government or the appropriate governing body at Queen's.⁷⁹

The colonial governors of Bermuda and Barbados went one step further and forwarded the petition directly to the Colonial Office in London. Bermuda Governor James Willcocks indicated that there were not, to his knowledge, any Bermudian students at Queen's Medical

⁷⁸ *The Canadian Observer*, 2 February 1918, 9 Feb 1918. In the federal census of 1911, there is only one W. Benfield listed in Ontario. A white farm laborer in the York North district, William Benfield was born in England in 1869 and migrated to Canada in 1876. *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911*, Library and Archives Canada, R233-28-5-E, District no. 137, Sub-district no. 5, p. 3, Household no. 25, Reel T-20410.

⁷⁹ The West Indian Club of Queen's University to the Officer Administering the Government of the Colony of Barbados, 15 April 1918, enclosure in T.E. Fell to Walter H. Long, 4 June 1918, CO 28/293, TNA.

School. He nevertheless thought it advisable to forward the letter to the Colonial Office for their information. The Acting Governor of Barbados, T. E. Fell, did more than forward the petition; he outlined the implications of Queen's discriminatory policy in a supplementary letter. Because there were no universities in the West Indies, he averred, it was crucial that West Indian students continue to have access to universities overseas. The education boards in several West Indian colonies granted their students scholarships to pursue university degrees in Britain, Canada, and the United States. If Canadian universities continued to bar West Indian students from particular courses of study, the Education Acts of the various West Indian colonies would require amendment. Section 57 of Barbados' Education Act of 1890, for example, stipulated that the Barbados scholarship was tenable, with the approval of the Education Board, "at any university in Europe or Canada." Amending the Act to exclude Canada would draw attention to Canada's discriminatory practices and surely engender bitter feelings. If Canadian universities continued to bar (or place restrictions on) West Indian students, it was, Fell argued, "liable to provoke keen resentment amongst the coloured people of Barbados" and ultimately "induce a feeling of estrangement" towards Canada.⁸⁰

The Colonial Office agreed that discrimination against West Indian students at Canadian universities was sure to provoke resentment. It was, as one colonial official remarked, a particularly "unfortunate time for embittering the colour feeling," given that thousands of West Indians were fighting (or had fought) the Allied cause in France, northern Africa and the

⁸⁰ T.E. Fell to Walter H. Long, 4 June 1918, CO 28/293, TNA, and enclosure: The West Indian Club of Queen's University to the Officer Administering the Government of the Colony of Barbados, 15 April 1918.

Middle East.⁸¹ Yet at the same time, the Colonial Office recognized there was little it could do to check racial discrimination in Canada. As a self-governing Dominion, Canada controlled its domestic affairs, which included the discretion to exclude imperial (non-white) subjects from other parts of the Empire. Debates over imperial migration and citizenship only a few years earlier, centered on Indian mobility in the Empire, had (re)confirmed this autonomy. At the Imperial Conference of 1911, Dominion resistance to imperial citizenship schemes compelled the British government to “accept the principle that each of the Dominions must be allowed to decide for itself which elements it desires to accept in its population. . . . [The contention] that membership of the British Empire shall entitle any British subject to reside wherever he chooses is disposed of by acknowledged political facts.”⁸² If the imperial government conceded autonomy in immigration, it was certainly not in a position to influence – at least formally – Canadian universities’ admission policies.

The imperial and West Indian governments were unable to intervene on behalf of the student petitioners to eliminate the “colour bar” at McGill and Queen’s. Yet West Indians in Canada and the Caribbean nonetheless generated significant protest. The petitioners’ pattern of protest, wherein they emphasized their British subjecthood and their right to justice and fair play, was particularly instrumental. During the height of West Indian protest in 1917 and 1918,

⁸¹ Internal correspondence, 14 May 1918, CO 37/262; 4 June 1918, CO 28/293, TNA. On West Indian soldiers in the war, see Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*.

⁸² As cited in Hugh Tinker, *Separate but Unequal: India and the Indians in the British Commonwealth-1950* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1976), 28. See also Radhika Vyas Mongia, “Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport,” in ed. Antoinette Burton, *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 196-214, and Daniel Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 158-171.

Dalhousie's medical school formulated a new admissions policy. The only students of color eligible for admission were British subjects. While quotas were established to limit matriculates of color, those registered obtained their clinical training in Halifax area hospitals with white students.⁸³

7.4 Union Revisited

The events at Queen's and McGill prompted West Indians in the Caribbean and Canada to explicitly question the feasibility of a Canada-West Indies union. Jamaica's *Daily Gleaner* bluntly reported in June 1917 "that the McGill incident has dealt a terrible blow to the idea of closer union between these two different parts of the British world." If Canadian universities continued to close the doors of their medical colleges to people of color, it "would put an end once [and] for all to any possibility of closer political unity between the Dominion and the British West Indies." McGill had "beyond doubt" wounded "the susceptibilities of millions of people" and would, in the future, "inflict hardships on scores of intelligent, well-mannered and entirely respectable men." Until Canadian universities repudiated their narrow-minded policies and practices, West Indians would regard federation proposals with "strong aversion."⁸⁴ A writer under the pseudonym "ITALEAN" shared these sentiments in a letter to the editor. "It appears very strange to me that Canada should be wanting political union with the British West Indies, and at the same time raise the colour bar against the majority of the inhabitants of these

⁸³ See Mackenzie to Andrew T. Drummond, 26 November 1920, UA 3, File 310.10, President's Office fonds, Dalhousie University Archives.

⁸⁴ *The Daily Gleaner*, 14, 15 June 1917,

islands." Such a step was "sufficient to damn the scheme" for political federation with Canada.⁸⁵

The protests of West Indians in Canada were also taken under consideration at meetings of the Associated West Indian Chamber of Commerce, the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce in British Guyana, London's West India Committee (WIC), and Canada's Department of Trade and Commerce. Once again the tension between race and commerce was explicit. Demerara's *Daily Chronicle* reported as early as August 1916:

If Canada can petition the Imperial Government to appoint a Commission for the purpose of securing the lion's share of our trade, it would seem that in Canadian eyes we possess a certain commercial value, but if after having compelled the Imperial Government to devise means whereby she shall occupy a favoured position in our markets to the exclusion of all other parties she turns round and seeks to exclude from her land a great majority of the people of these colonies, she has been guilty of chicanery which these colonies will not easily forget and which will make the creation of that Imperial brotherhood which we expect to arise as one of the outcomes of the great War, very much more difficult to attain.⁸⁶

In response to increased reports of discrimination against West Indians at the Canadian border, the executive committee of the Georgetown Chamber released a statement in its annual report of 1917. "The restrictions which have been placed on the emigration to Canada of coloured persons have been referred to in this chamber. . . . The restriction is not to this colony alone, as protests have also been made in Barbados. The feeling of the Associated Chamber was that this

⁸⁵ *The Daily Gleaner*, 16 April 1917.

⁸⁶ *Demerara Daily Chronicle*, Mail Edition, 4 August 1916.

is not an opportune time to press the [union] question but it is one we will not lose sight of.”⁸⁷ Canada’s trade commissioner in Barbados expressed similar concerns to the Department of Trade and Commerce in Ottawa. On 26 June 1917, the *Barbados Advocate* admonished the Canadian government’s racist immigration practices. “The illegal discrimination now being practiced by the Canadian Authorities against coloured passengers from the West Indies to Canada is sowing the seeds of discontent which will be certain to ultimately develop into strong protest against closer connexion with Canada whether in the form of Trade or otherwise.”⁸⁸ The trade commissioner at Barbados forwarded the article to Canada’s Superintendent of Immigration W.D. Scott and requested an explanation. “It is true,” Scott replied in a form letter sent to countless trade agents and boards, steamship company proprietors, and prospective West Indian migrants, “that our Immigration Act contains a provision that the Governor in Council may prohibit the entry of immigrants of any race, etc., deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada.”⁸⁹ Immigration inspectors possessed the discretionary power to prohibit the entry of blacks, in other words, without explicitly restricting immigration on racial grounds.

The WIC was similarly concerned that Canadian attitudes towards people of color were detrimental to closer commercial and political relations between the two regions. WIC

⁸⁷ Annual Report of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, 1917, as cited in the *West India Committee Circular*, 4 October 1917.

⁸⁸ *Barbados Advocate*, 26 June 1917, enclosed in O’Hara to Scott, 17 July 1917, file 810666, pt. 2, vol. 566, RG 76, LAC.

⁸⁹ Scott to O’Hara, 30 July 1917, file 810666, pt. 2, vol. 566, RG 76, LAC. This file includes numerous letters from prospective West Indian immigrants, trade agents, and other commercial interests on the subject of Canada’s restrictive immigration regulations.

members had expressed interest in the possibility of a Canada-West Indies federation during the war. But like the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, the committee supported the deferral of negotiations until Canada resolved its race question.⁹⁰ Members of the Royal Colonial Institute, another London-based organization with a wider, more diverse membership and broader purview of imperial interest concurred. In October 1917, the Institute's organ, *United Empire*, argued that while the scheme for a Canada-West Indies federation was sound commercially, it was "on less sure ground" from a political standpoint. The West Indies possessed the tropical produce necessary to fuel both Canada's population and its growing industries, while Canada could offer the West Indies the much needed capital that Britain consistently failed to provide. Yet Canada's "racial difficulties" were "not likely to be helped towards a solution by the addition of two millions of the West Indian population." Not only did Canada's attitude toward people of color pose a serious barrier to federation, the idea that West Indians should be given a decisive voice in Canada's future, and vice versa, was questionable.⁹¹

West Indians resident in Canada were understandably more interested, and to varying degrees uneasy, about federation. While Canadian annexationists assured West Indians that

⁹⁰ *West India Committee Circular*, 4 October 1917.

⁹¹ *United Empire*, as cited in *The Daily Gleaner*, 8 November 1917. Union was a recurring subject in *United Empire*. See Evans Lewin, "Canada and the West Indies," *United Empire* 7, 11 (November 1916), 704-706; T. H. MacDermot, "The British West Indies and their Future," *United Empire* 8, 9 (September 1917), 550-551, and W. R. Hunt, "The British West Indies," *United Empire* 8, 12 (December 1917) 707-708; and Harry J. Crowe, "Canada and the West Indies," *United Empire* 9, 10 (October 1918), 426-431. The Royal Colonial Institute was founded in 1868 (named the Colonial Society) to provide a forum for discussion of Empire related topics. Focused on intellectual exchange of a non-partisan nature, the Institute's central endeavour was the establishment and expansion of a colonial library. See T. R. Rees, *The History of the Royal Commonwealth Society 1868-1968* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).

Canada would welcome them with open arms and give them a voice in Ottawa, they simultaneously reassured white Canadians that restrictions would be placed on West Indian representation and northward migration. When Judge S. Rowan-Hamilton of the Supreme Court of the Leeward Islands advocated federation during his visit to Halifax in March 1918, the *Canadian Observer* highlighted the “stir among the natives of the West Indies who are in Canada as to the advisability of this move.”⁹² As residents of Canada, they were all too familiar with white Canadians’ attitudes toward peoples of color. Many of them likely planned to return to the West Indies, had family and friends there, and were thus vested or, at the very least, interested in the region’s future. The promise of Canadian capital – leading to agricultural and industrial development, higher wages, and the ultimate prosperity and improved well-being of West Indians – was no doubt appealing. But West Indian experiences in Canada foretold a different future.

In the twelve months following the Armistice, West Indians of color interpreted and responded to these experiences – and white Canadians’ racism more generally, with much less tolerance. November 1918 marked the cession of war, but it did not witness an immediate ideological, constitutional or political break with the past. History is much messier than such a break implies; there was change as well as continuity in the immediate post-war period. Colonial peoples and other subaltern groups remained hopeful (as they had during the war) that change would still come in the form of increased representation, autonomy, and self-determination. In March 1919 Black Torontonians and WITA president Arthur King still

⁹² *The Canadian Observer*, 8 March 1918.

identified Canada-West Indies union as the best means for West Indians to obtain these concessions. He placed some faith in Harry Crowe's promise that the West Indies would have proportional representation under union. Black Canadians had equal access to the franchise as white Canadians, so it was natural to assume that West Indians would too. "[W]e may expect for them a higher political status than they enjoy at present, which must reflect on Colored Canadians, owing to their direct connection."⁹³ *Observer* editor J.R.B. Whitney agreed. "[T]here is a feeling predominating that the British West Indies should be connected with Canada, giving them a popular representation in our parliament. We trust to see the day, and that it may be soon, when this popular representation may be afforded every island . . . We assure them that they have our sympathy in this matter and that those of us here in Canada will pledge our loyal support in forwarding this great movement." While it would be an oversimplification to assume race unity across class, color, and regional differences, the prospect of two million newly enfranchised Canadians of African descent probably appealed to some black Canadian advocates of race equality. Canada's black population comprised less than two per cent of the population in 1919,⁹⁴ and the federal legislature was not, consequently, an efficacious forum to pursue race reform.

The Pan-African Congress, which convened in Paris – not coincidentally – at the same time as the Paris Peace Conference, provided a crucial forum for black peoples worldwide to discuss racism, colonialism, and proposals for reform. As an international delegation representing black populations in Africa, the Caribbean and the United States, the Congress

⁹³ *The Canadian Observer*, 8 March 1919.

⁹⁴ See Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 486-487.

hoped to influence discussions about racial equality and colonial self-government at the peace talks. The Congress was “an opportunity that we should grasp,” black Canadian George F. Bon asserted in March 1919, “so that we may be able to press our demands with greater energy and influence.” To Bon, the social and political conditions prevailing in the West Indies exemplified the contradictions and injustices of colonial rule. They were “a group of islands, rich in resources, and possessing men with educational qualifications equal to the best that Europe or America can produce, yet they are . . . undeveloped and divided, and with few exceptions the inhabitants suffer the burdens of taxation without representation.” With “representatives of the race” assembled in Paris, Bon concluded, now was the time for change. “How can we be denied the right to rule ourselves in our own lands when the ‘slogan’ of the Allies . . . is ‘democracy’ and ‘self-determination’ . It is inconceivable that the Allies will ignore their own avowed pronunciamiento.”⁹⁵

But Bon soon learned that the white Allied powers convened in Paris would do just that. The Pan-African Congress was ignored and in some cases obstructed. The United States’ government refused passports to Paris-bound black activists and the Congress’s manifesto, which entreated the League of Nations to acknowledge the right of all “civilized citizens” to take part in the political and cultural life of their respective states, fell on deaf ears.⁹⁶ The outcome of the Peace Conference, especially the defeat of the racial equality clause in the

⁹⁵ *The Canadian Observer*, 1 March, 11 March 1919.

⁹⁶ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 306-308.

League of Nations covenant, incited worldwide disillusionment.⁹⁷ Tabled by the Japanese delegates, the clause stated that because the “equality of nations” was a basic principle of the League of Nations, League members should “agree that concerning the treatment and rights to be accorded to aliens in their territories, they will not discriminate, either in law or in fact, against any person or persons on account of his or their race or nationality.”⁹⁸ Japanese delegate Baron Makino echoed the aspirations of non-white peoples worldwide when he stated that “different races have fought together on the battlefield, in the trenches, on the high seas, and they have helped each other and brought succour to the disabled, and have saved the lives of their fellow men irrespective of racial differences.” These unprecedented experiences, he concluded, had set the tone for a new world order based on racial equality.⁹⁹ But the clause was defeated on 13 April. As Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds point out, the Dominions – Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and especially Australia – played a significant role in this defeat. Granted separate representation at Versailles (as part of the British delegation), the

⁹⁷ *The Canadian Observer*, 22 February 1919, and 1 March 1919. Thoughtful summaries of the peace negotiations include Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, and Susan Pederson, “Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations,” in eds. Caroline Elkins and Susan Pederson, eds., *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 113-136.

⁹⁸ As cited in Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 289. See also Thomas W. Burkman, *Japan and the League of Nations: Empire and World Order, 1914-1938* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 80-86.

⁹⁹ As cited in Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 291.

Dominions staunchly opposed the clause for fear it might encourage Asian immigration to their respective countries.¹⁰⁰

The riots, strikes and general unrest that characterized demobilization and the return home of hundreds of thousands of servicemen compounded the disillusionment generated by the Paris disappointments. White skilled workers were in most cases granted priority in the demobilization timeline. The Black West Indies Regiment, Canada's No. 2 Construction Battalion, and working class white servicemen waited in overcrowded European camps for several months before they returned home. As Sarah-Jane Mathieu observes in describing Canada's military compounds around Liverpool, "[s]enseless bureaucracy, cramped housing in makeshift tents, poor nutrition, irregular disbursement of wages, outbreak of influenza, fuel shortages, biting cold, unyielding rain – and worse still – boredom – created an explosive climate." Race riots broke out throughout the winter, spring and early summer, exposing Canada's "preoccupation with race and class to the Empire and the world." These riots made clear that the war "had done little to equalize Canadian society."¹⁰¹

This mass unrest and general lawlessness continued when servicemen returned home. White Canadian veterans were livid to find their jobs had been (or might be) filled by "colored" labor, while black West Indians, still smarting from their experiences in Europe, returned home

¹⁰⁰ Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 297-298. See also Margaret MacMillan, "Canada and the Peace Settlements," in David Mackenzie, ed., *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 400.

¹⁰¹ Mathieu, "Jim Crow Rides this Train," 160-178. Quotations can be found on p. 170.

to mass unemployment and dire living conditions.¹⁰² The war had produced uneven degrees of economic prosperity and devastation within and across different colonial (and metropolitan) contexts. In the British West Indies, the price of food stuffs and clothing rose dramatically between 1914 and 1919, while wages remained largely the same. White planters and large-scale merchants, on the other hand, earned substantial profits from increased production and prices. Representatives of the laboring and professional classes had certainly condemned planters and merchants in the pre-war decades, but this condemnation became more vigorous and vitriolic after the war. As Glenford Howe argues, the significance of the war “lay not so much in the novelty of its impact as in the unprecedented way it exacerbated underlying tensions and contradictions implicit” in West Indian societies.¹⁰³ Manifest in the strikes, lootings, riots and other violent disturbances throughout the spring, summer and fall, these tensions undermined existing structures of colonial rule and, by extension, the prospect of Canada-West Indies union.

Dr. Robert M. Stimpson, a black Jamaican who graduated from Quebec’s Bishop’s University in 1898 with a medical degree, had a very different opinion of Canada in May 1919 than he did two years earlier. In May 1917, Stimpson had dismissed West Indian concerns about racial discrimination at McGill on the basis that Montreal’s population was, relative to other Canadian cities, un-British. “Coloured West Indian students visiting Montreal have always felt that the time would come when there would be a cleavage. With a French-Canadian element, and an Irish-Canadian population, as Montreal possesses, the progressive coloured

¹⁰² Mathieu, “Jim Crow Rides this Train,” 185-213; Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 172-199.

¹⁰³ Glenford Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War* (Kingston, JA: Ian Randle, 2002), 200.

man could scarce hope to have fairplay." Apparently unaware of the challenges facing students of color at other Canadian universities, Stimpson urged West Indians to attend medical school at the University of Toronto, Queen's, or Dalhousie. With all these alternatives, "why worry over McGill?"¹⁰⁴ By May 1919, however, Stimpson was more alive to the broad scope of Canada's "colour bar." This scope was particularly alarming in the context of Canada's Loyalist history. Anyone with knowledge of the Underground Railway or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would hardly imagine that Canada had "become such a degenerate as to close the doors of its seats of learning" to peoples of African descent. Highlighting the contradictions inherent in Enlightenment notions of progress (more acute in the post-war climate), he continued, "But such it is in this twentieth century of our boasted civilization!"¹⁰⁵ A closer relationship between Canada and the West Indies could only be forged if the Dominion reformed its racist outlook. "Canada must be prepared to come with clean hands, and ample and sufficient guarantees that it has mended its ways." Jamaicans, he elaborated, were sensitive to any sign of racial discrimination. As a people of integrity and honor, they expected the same courtesies that any civilized community would expect from another. Having "failed to comply with these simple observances," Canadians should not be surprised if they "are taken at a discount" by West Indians.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *The Daily Gleaner*, 28 May 1917.

¹⁰⁵ *The Daily Gleaner*, 12 May 1919. On these contradictions see Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ *The Daily Gleaner*, 12 May 1919.

The principle of self-determination, liberally propagated by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson in the spring and summer of 1919, left a lasting impression on colonial subjects worldwide. Erez Manela argues persuasively that colonial peoples in Egypt, India, China and Korea shrewdly appropriated Wilson's rhetoric in ways that "would help them gain the right to self-determination." Middle-class West Indians similarly deployed this rhetoric. When a minister in Lloyd George's government suggested that Britain relinquish several West Indian colonies to the United States to help settle Britain's war debt, Trinidadian Kathleen I. Liddelow was livid. "Whatever the reason may be, one may well express astonishment that the ink of the Peace Treaty has hardly dried before the principle of self-determination of which we have heard so much lately is apparently forgotten."¹⁰⁷ In the wake of what Manela calls the "Wilsonian moment," Liddelow was understandably outraged at the suggestion that Britain might cavalierly barter its West Indian colonies without even consulting West Indians.

Rothermere's suggestion was thoroughly out of touch with the emerging political and social milieu in the West Indies. So too was the idea of Canada-West Indies union. Many commentators who were previously skeptical of union for commercial reasons, were, by the latter half of 1919, opposed on racial grounds. These opponents included the West India Committee, the Jamaica Imperial Association, President of the Associated West Indian Chambers of Commerce Edward Davson, and Gideon Murray, British Member of Parliament

¹⁰⁷ *The Financier*, as quoted in the *Port of Spain Gazette*, 22 September 1919; Liddelow, Letter to the Editor, *West India Committee Circular*, 11 December 1919. Liddelow wrote the letter on 17 October.

and former administrator of St. Vincent and St. Lucia.¹⁰⁸ Even those who were keenly interested in union during the war, most notably Leo Amery and Robert Borden, were now dubious. Amery's earlier contention that the West Indies were Canada's "birthright" was no longer politically or constitutionally appropriate. By June 1919 his enthusiasm was considerably subdued. When Harry Crowe urged Amery, now Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Colonies, to press the Jamaican government to send a delegation to Ottawa to discuss the union proposal, he politely refused. "I told Mr Crowe," he informed his colleagues in the Colonial Office, "that while we were all in favour of Canadians taking the very greatest interest in the development of the West Indies and were in no sense opposing the idea of a closer union with Canada if the West Indies wished for it, we must be guided by their wishes and were not prepared to push them into it."¹⁰⁹ Borden had supported the union proposal as late as March 1919, and he had encouraged his Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Francis Keefer, to advance the proposal in Canada and the West Indies while he was in Paris.¹¹⁰ By May, however, Borden was no longer interested in pursuing union. Earlier that year, Borden had expressed the concern that West Indians might "desire and perhaps insist upon representation in Parliament." Because Canadian blacks were enfranchised, he feared West Indians of color

¹⁰⁸ *West India Committee Circular*, 26 June 1919; Edward Davson, Letter to the Editor, *The Times* (London), 2 August 1919; Gideon Murray, Letter to the Editor, *The Times* (London), 11 August 1911; Jamaica Imperial Association to the Colonial Office, December 1919, CO 318/352, TNA. P.G. Wigley, "Canada and Imperialism: West Indian Aspirations and the First World War," in Brian Douglas Tennyson, ed., *Canada and the Commonwealth Caribbean* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 244.

¹⁰⁹ Rough notes of a speech by Amery, c. August 1918, AMEL 1/3/67, Churchill Archives Center, Cambridge University. Minutes, 19 June 1919, CO 318/352, TNA.

¹¹⁰ Crowe to Borden, 1 March 1919, fol. 49674-75, vol. 94; Keefer to Borden, 14 March 1919, fol. 36011-12, vol. 70; Borden to Keefer, 14 March 1919, fol. 36015, vol. 70, BP, LAC.

might “consider themselves equally entitled.”¹¹¹ Following the events in Paris during the spring, Borden was no doubt assured that West Indians would indeed consider themselves “entitled.” He had been in Paris at the same time as the Pan-African Congress, had witnessed the controversy over (and actively opposed) the racial equality clause, and had returned home in May to heightened labor unrest, anti-immigrant campaigns, and racial violence.¹¹² Moreover, Keefer’s tour of the West Indies had been disappointing. When he returned to Ottawa in the summer of 1919, he regretfully informed Borden that he had “found practically no sentiment in favour” of Canada-West Indies union.¹¹³

The most remarkable about-face in 1919 was that of Jamaica *Gleaner* editor Herbert George DeLisser. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, in 1916 DeLisser looked openly and encouragingly toward a post-war union of Canada and the West Indies. But his opinion had changed dramatically by the fall of 1919. “The West Indies would be for Canada,” he remarked in October, “but Canada would not be for the West Indies.”¹¹⁴ When British Colonial Secretary Alfred Milner encouraged the Dominions to take on a greater political and commercial role with the colonial dependencies nearest them that same month, DeLisser

¹¹¹ Borden to Keefer, 1 January 1919, OC Series, BP, LAC.

¹¹² Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-1990* (Toronto: Dundurn Press Ltd., 1992), 98-107; Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers in Canadian History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), 289-328; Craig Heron, *The Worker’s Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); David J. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: labour, industrial relations, and the general strike* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974); David J. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: labour, industrial relations, and the general strike* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974); 217-231; Mathieu, “Jim Crow Rides this Train,” 189-213.

¹¹³ See Roger A. Boutilier, “Ten Years of Non-Existence” (B.A. Thesis, Mount Allison University, 1971), 65.

¹¹⁴ *Daily Gleaner*, 24 October 1919.

published a vitriolic response. That the Dominions were interested in forming closer relationships with nearby dependencies was clear enough.

But why? Not because they want to benefit the people of those colonies. What has Australia done with her natives? Slaughtered them off the face of the earth. What is South Africa doing with hers? Making them slaves – for the position of these unfortunate people is not far removed from that of slaves. As for Canada, she has a law forbidding any British East Indian to set foot on Canadian soil, and yet it is suggested that she is interested in the quarter million of East Indians who are now to be found in Trinidad, British Guiana and other parts of the British West Indies.¹¹⁵

DeLisser admonished Milner and Prime Minister Borden for assuming West Indian willingness to be an appendage of Canada. “The falsehood is being steadily propagated that the British West Indies would view such a transference with favour, and the next move will probably be a tentative suggestion by Sir Robert Borden that Canada is willing to assume her share of Imperial ‘burdens’ – at the expense of the West Indian section of the Empire.” Citing articles in the Canadian Press, such as “Jamaica Asks to be Joined to Canada” and “Prominent Speakers Claim Island on Verge of Ruin,” Delisser deduced that “the Canadian looks upon us as shivering orphans, neglected and despised, asking for food and shelter.” If one were to believe the “busy scribes” in Canada, it would appear that Jamaica is “a very fair representation of Darkest Africa.” This myth could be promptly expelled, Delisser continued, if Canadians read the speeches delivered in Jamaica’s Legislative Council, which were certainly up to the standards of oratory in Canada’s legislature. Milner’s misunderstanding of West Indian conditions and sentiment, on the other hand, was somewhat excusable given his busy schedule. The Colonial Secretary would, Delisser was assured, “drop the Canadian federation idea as

¹¹⁵ *The Daily Gleaner*, 24 October 1919.

though it were blazing hot” when he realized that the West Indies were not far off from claiming the right to self-determination.¹¹⁶

By the time 1919 drew to a close, the union momentum had dissipated. The form of union Canadian annexationists had envisioned during the war – territorial rather than provincial status, a limited franchise, and restricted mobility to continental Canada, was incompatible with the emerging post-war consciousness in the West Indies. While the imperial government would not grant West Indians significant constitutional concessions until after the mass labor disturbances of the 1930s, their struggles during and immediately following the First World War birthed a “collective consciousness”¹¹⁷ that was increasingly difficult to reconcile with existing structures of colonial rule in the region. In 1919 the ideal of self-determination did not mobilize West Indians to seek immediate independence, but it did mobilize expectations for an autonomous future. West Indians consequently dismissed Canada-West Indies union and other schemes that threatened to derail this trajectory.

¹¹⁶ *The Daily Gleaner*, 24 October 1919, 19 June 1919.

¹¹⁷ Howe, *Race War, and Nationalism*, 200-201.

8. Conclusion

Ambiguity, Race, and the Legacy of Canada as Non-Empire

Proposals for Canada-West Indies union sprang up periodically in the middle decades of the twentieth century, but they never regained the momentum of union campaigns between 1880 and 1920. In the interwar period Canada actively pursued a foreign policy independent of Britain and resisted being pulled into Britain's imperial entanglements.¹ During the war advocates of Canada-West Indies union had identified union as a means to an independent foreign policy for Canada. But this was no longer tenable in the 1920s. The war had dealt a serious blow to the civilizing mission ideology and the protracted process by which colonialism eventually became a dirty word was underway.² The post-war rhetoric of equality and greater autonomy for all the constituent parts of the British Empire – however conflicted this rhetoric may have been – was incompatible with new colonial acquisitions.

At the Imperial Conference of 1926, the Balfour Declaration recognized Britain and the Dominions as "equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations."³ While the Commonwealth

¹ John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Ambivalent Allies: Canada and the United States* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 99-126; J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, *Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World to the 1990s* (Toronto: Irwin Publishing, 2000), 83-109.

² See Michael Adas, "Contested Hegemony: The Great War and the Afro-Asian Assault on the Civilizing Mission Ideology," *Journal of World History* 15, 1 (2004): 31-63.

³ See W. David McIntyre, *The Commonwealth of Nations, Origins and Impact, 1869-1971* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

was limited to “self-governing nations,” it nonetheless reflected the emergence of a broader, egalitarian ethos. Mackenzie King, one of the most influential personalities in Canadian political life during the interwar period (he served as Prime Minister in the years 1921-26, 1926-30, and 1935-48), exuded this ethos in 1931 when he remarked “We in Canada who cherish constitutional self-government . . . wish to see it developed to the full in all parts of the British Empire.”⁴

To be sure, West Indians had much to do with the unfeasibility of Canada-West Indies union in the 1920s and 30s. The strikes, riots, and general unrest of the immediate post-war period were critical to the development of reform politics and labor organization in the inter-war years. The black and “colored” middle classes in the British West Indies fought hard for economic, social, and constitutional reforms, though with limited results. By the mid 1930s, increased material pressures on workers, social and racial discrimination, and the agro-commercial elite’s unwillingness to cede even marginal reforms incited labor rebellions throughout the region.⁵ Yet despite limited success, black and “colored” West Indians’ commitment to reform nevertheless reflected an agenda that was thoroughly incompatible with Canada-West Indies union. The war-time struggles of West Indians in Nova Scotia and Ontario had exposed white Canadian sentiments toward peoples of color and had offered West Indians

⁴ Canada, House of Commons Debates, 2nd session, 17th parliament, 16 March 1931 (Ottawa: F.A. Acland, 1931), 14.

⁵ See Abigail B. Bakan, *Ideology & Class Conflict in Jamaica: The Politics of Rebellion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s, 1990), 94-133; O. Nigel Bolland, *On the March: Labour Rebellions in the British Caribbean, 1934-39* (Kingston, JA: Ian Randle, 1995); Hilary Beckles, *A History of Barbados: from Amerindian settlement to nation-state* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 154-169; Bridget Brereton, *A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962* (Oxford: Heinemann International, 1981), 157-176.

a rude glimpse of life under union. These struggles contributed to an emerging collective consciousness among West Indians of color that was increasingly anathema to white colonial rule – whether from Nassau, Ottawa or London – during the interwar years.

Aspirations in Canada and elsewhere to acquire colonial satellites underline the messiness of Empire. They foreground the need for an interpretive framework that makes sense of lateral expansion initiatives within a wider frame of Empire without discounting the import of imperial power in London. As this project has demonstrated, the imperial government arbitrated and most often obstructed schemes for Canada-West Indies union, reminding us of the enduring weight of imperial power at the Empire's "center." Yet these lateral expansion schemes also suggest that power relations within the Empire were much more diffuse and multi-directional than traditional metropole-colony frameworks allow. They call into question, for example, the empire-to-nation trajectory that continues to dominate our understanding of both decolonization (in the case of colonial dependencies) and de-Dominionization (in the case of self-governing settler societies).⁶ While the processes culminating in decolonization and de-Dominionization varied widely both between and within "dependencies" and "settler societies," historians generally assume a linear progression from

⁶ While de-dominionization and decolonization are generally identified with the 1960s and 1970s, as historical processes their roots can be traced back much earlier in the century. On the problems arising from the unquestioning use of the empire-to-nation trajectory, see Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: UCP, 2005), 153-154. On the idea of de-dominionization, see Tsokhas, Kosmas, "Dedominionization: The Anglo-Australian Experience, 1939s-1945." *The Historical Journal* 37/4 (1994), 861-883 and Jim Davidson, "De-Domionization Revisited," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51 (2005), 108-13. See also Granatstein and Hillmer, *Empire to Umpire*.

colony to nation state.⁷ In Dominion histories, traditional accounts emphasize the gradual process by which Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa extracted themselves from the British imperial frame during the twentieth century. Aspirations (or success, in the case of Australia and New Zealand) in these societies to create their own empires is never reconciled sufficiently with this process. Yet a successful transition from colonial state to nation state was measured in part by the new nation's acquisition of its own colonial territories. Taking these aspirations into account, an alternative trajectory comes into view that locates empire as both the foundation and consequence of nationhood.

This project has argued that Canada-West Indies union was, to its Canadian advocates, crucial to Canada's national trajectory in the twentieth century. Yet the union discourse was always marked by ambiguity and inconsistency. Unionists never agreed on the terms under which Canada would absorb the West Indies. Was the proposed arrangement to be an act of annexation or federation, and what, if any, was the difference? It was not until the middle years of the First World War that union advocates explicitly differentiated one from the other. This was because the main thrust of union advocacy during the war was centered in Ottawa and London. Earlier proponents, largely outside the halls of government, adopted language they deemed expedient given the context. While they employed the terms "confederation" and "federation" liberally when visiting the West Indies or writing to West Indian newspapers, they favored "annexation" and "absorption" when speaking to Canadian audiences. Their

⁷ See for example Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation, 1918-1968* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006); Roy Douglas, *Liquidation of Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); and David Boyce, *Decolonisation and the British Empire*, (New York: St. Martin's, 1999).

ambiguity and duplicity allowed them to gain a broader base of support. But when the Canadian government jumped on the union bandwagon in 1916-17, it was pressed to articulate the terms of union.

Equality of status for the West Indies in the Canadian federation was out of the question, according to the Department of External Affairs' confidential report of 1917. The report identified "annexation" or "incorporation" as a more appropriate term to describe the act of union than "confederation." More importantly, in the event of union the Canadian government planned to grant the West Indies "territorial" rather than "provincial" status. This latter distinction was crucial because it implied that the West Indies would have limited autonomy within the Canadian federation. While the *British North America Act* recognized provincial rights to self-government and other powers independent of the federal government, Canada's territories (which included the Northwest Territories and the Yukon in the early twentieth century) were/are not similarly protected by the constitution. Subordinate to the federal government, their powers were/are largely granted at the discretion of Ottawa.⁸

While there was often slippage in the language of union, Canadian proponents also favored the designation "territory" over that of "colony" in mapping relations of power between the West Indies and the Canadian state. Of course union advocates in Canada and Britain romanticized the Dominion's "grand destiny" in the Empire and they highlighted Canada's obligation to take up the "white man's burden." This was particularly the case at the

⁸ See Kenneth Coates, *Canada's Colonies: a history of the Yukon and Northwest Territories* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1985).

turn of the twentieth century when the “tropics” took on greater significance in white national imaginaries. But union advocates did not explicitly identify their role as that of colonizer. This was because they differentiated continental from extra-continental expansion. The former process was characterized by white settler colonization; the latter was not. The Canadian state’s push westward in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was an unabashed exercise in Empire-building and white settler colonization. As U.S. scholars have pointed out, expansionists argued that there was something “natural” and celebratory about continental expansion.⁹ White Canadians triumphantly settled the West, in the process pushing Aboriginal peoples to the margins of society or exterminating them through dispossession and disease. Advocates of Canada-West Indies union envisioned the Dominion’s absorption of the West Indies as a logical continuation of this expansionist project, but the West Indies presented unique problems and possibilities.

Under union Canada would appropriate tropical resources and, problematically for unionists, tropical non-white subjects. The West Indies thus constituted a very different colonial project for white Canadians. In the context of westward expansion, Aboriginal peoples were dispossessed and expected to eventually die out as white Canadians claimed and “settled”

⁹ See for example Amy Kaplan, “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 3-21; Michael Adas, “From Settler Colony to Global Hegemon: Integrating the Exceptionalist Narrative of the American Experience into World History,” *American Historical Review* 106 (Dec. 2001), 1692-1720; Paul A. Kramer, “Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880-1910,” *The Journal of American History* 88, 4 (March 2002), 1315-1353; George Steinmetz, “Return to Empire: The New U.S. Imperialism in Comparative Historical Perspective,” *Sociological Theory* 23,4 (December 2005), 339-367.

the West. White Canadians did not propose a similar process of appropriation and dispossession in the West Indian context. Canadians' successful "development" of Jamaica, Barbados or British Guyana depended on West Indian labor. Unionists were consequently compelled to construct a very different "rule of difference"¹⁰ to regulate relations between white Canadians and West Indians of color. Concerned that union might enfranchise West Indians and precipitate their mass migration to Canada, unionists deployed a variety of racial constructs to avert these possibilities. These constructs ranged from the unsuitability of Canada's frigid climate for "tropical races," to the "uncivilized" character of black West Indians, which conveniently made them unqualified to contribute to either Canadian or West Indian political life.

That unionists favored the term "territory" over "colony" does not negate the fact that they were "thinking like an empire."¹¹ Nor should Canada's historical location within the British Empire obscure or absolve Canadians' imperial ambitions in the West Indies. There was always a tension between union in the name of the British Empire and union in the name of the Canadian "nation." While these advocates couched their expansionist ambitions in terms that would appeal to the imperial government and British imperialists elsewhere (and indeed believed union would serve British imperial interests by consolidating British territory in the

¹⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). See also Patrick Wolfe, "Land Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race," Forum Essay, *American Historical Review* 106, 3 (June 2001), 866-905.

¹¹ Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 154.

Americas), they were concerned, first and foremost, with how union would enhance Canada's national future.

In this way, the imperial impulses of Canadian unionists cannot be reconciled with our conventional understanding of Canadian imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This understanding continues to be based on Carl Berger's seminal thesis, articulated forty years ago in *The Sense of Power*. Defining Canadian imperialism as "that movement for the closer union of the British Empire through economic and military co-operation and through political changes which would give the dominions influence over imperial policy," Berger argued that "Canadian imperialism was one variety of Canadian nationalism." But as this project has revealed, Canadians with expansionist aspirations in the West Indies articulated a very different "variety" of imperialism, one directed "laterally" toward the Caribbean rather than across the Atlantic to Britain.

The erasure of these imperial aspirations in Canada's historiography obscures the history of Canada's racist past, and thus has crucial implications for Canada's future. In his address to the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh in September 2010, Prime Minister Stephen Harper remarked unselfconsciously that Canada, unlike the great powers, has "no history of colonialism."¹² Most Euro-Canadians no doubt agreed. Harper was promptly corrected and roundly criticized by First Nations activists and scholars. But such statements nevertheless speak to a powerful and persistent historical amnesia that persists today.

¹² *Calgary Herald*, 25 September 2009; Jorge Barrera, "Prime Minister needs to apologize for colonialism denial: Native groups," *Canada.com*, 30 September 2009, viewed 17 October 2009, <http://www.canada.com/life/Prime+minister+needs+apologize+colonialism+denial+Native+groups/2051980/story.html>.

In the past decade, Canadian politicians and members of the general public have revived proposals for Canadian expansion in the Caribbean. As CBC News On-line reported in April 2004, "Quebec City too cold in February? Fredericton frosty in December? Nunavut November not for you? Fear not, there may be help: at least one member of Parliament and a handful of interest groups are asking the Canadian government to annex a little slice of sun-splashed heaven: the Turks and Caicos, a Caribbean gem with an average wintertime temperature hovering between 28 and 29 C[elsius]." Private and public interest groups from Vancouver to Halifax have lobbied the federal government, Nova Scotia's provincial parliament passed a resolution in favor of annexation, Canadian members of parliament visited the Turks and Caicos to stir up support and the federal House of Commons has tabled the proposal on several occasions.¹³

This growing interest is informed by a troubling neo-colonial outlook that has profound implications for West Indians. Not surprisingly, annexationists do not generally identify their pursuits as neo-colonial. The acquisition of external territories is regarded as a benevolent overture that will be mutually beneficial to both parties.¹⁴ In justifying expansion in this way, Canadians do not seem to recognize that annexation campaigns have a long history in Canada. Justified with similar claims of benevolent intervention, these histories were marked by racism and self-interest.

¹³ See "Canada's Caribbean Ambition," *CBC News Online*, 16 April 2004, and Ryan Remiorz, "Canada could ditch winter blues by annexing Caribbean paradise," *USA Today*, 26 March 2004.

¹⁴ "Canada's Caribbean Ambition."

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Biography

Paula Hastings was born in Barrie, Ontario. She earned a B.A. Honors degree in Sociology from the University of Western Ontario (1999), and B.A. and M.A. degrees in History from Carleton University (2002, 2004). She has published three peer-reviewed articles: "Fellow British Subjects or Colonial 'Others'? Race, Empire, and Ambivalence in Canadian Representations of India in the Early Twentieth Century," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 38, 1 (Spring 2008), 3-24; "Branding Canada: Consumer Culture and the Development of Popular Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century," in eds. Adam Chapnick and Norman Hillmer, *Canadas of the Mind: The Making and Unmaking of Twentieth-Century Canadian Nationalisms* (Montreal: MQUP, 2007), 134-158; and "'Our Glorious Anglo-Saxon Race Shall Ever Fill Earth's Highest Place': *The Anglo-Saxon* and the Construction of Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada," in eds. Phillip Buckner and Doug Francis, *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity* (Vancouver: UBCP, November 2006), 92-110. She has received the following awards: Andrew W. Mellon Foundation/American Council of Learned Societies Dissertation Completion Fellowship (2009-2010); Anne Firor Scott Research Award (2009); Duke Center for Canadian Studies Summer Research Grant (2005-2010); Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Doctoral Fellowship (2004-2008); Duke Graduate School Fellowship (2004-2009); International Council for Canadian Studies Scholarship (2008-2009); London Goodenough Association of Canada Alan J. Hartley Memorial Scholarship (2007-2008); Andrew W. Mellon Grant from the Duke Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies (2007); and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Master's Fellowship (2003-2004).