

Blood and Daring: How Canada Fought the American Civil War and Forged a Nation

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Review

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Boyko, John *Blood and Daring: How Canada Fought the American Civil War and Forged a Nation*. Knopf Canada, \$35.00 ISBN 978-0-307-36144-8

Canada's Role and Reaction to the American Civil War

Blood and Daring is a well-organized and well-written account of the complicated relationship between the American Civil War and the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867 out of three British North American colonies: the United Canadas (Canada West and East), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Since its creation Canada has been closely affected by American economic, social and military power; many have argued that because of regionalism and other differences, Canadian nationalism consists of 'not being American.' Most Canadian historians have argued that the impetus for Confederation emanated from the problematic constitution of the Canadas, combined with economic forces, but that the American war affected the timing and some of the specific outcomes of the process. Canada was created by elites following narrow constitutional process such as colonial legislatures passing resolutions; there was no constitutional convention, referendum or even uniform elections. Yet elites were sensitive to the opinion of their constituents and that opinion was influenced by Civil War issues, such as soured relations between the Union and Great Britain. Boyko asks his readers to reconsider the links between the sundering and re-making of the United States and the making of Canada: "While saving itself by creating itself, Canada was intricately involved in the war's cause and course" (1). One of the few Western hemisphere nations not to be conceived in rebellion or civil war, Canada was an indirect creation of America's bloodiest conflict. The future of the British North America was complicated by not only the independent experience of the various colonies, but also the reluctance of Great Britain, which was ultimately responsible for the defence of the colonies, to not be viewed as forcing them into a new constitutional framework.

The author has examined twenty record groups in two Canadian archives, Canadian and American newspapers of the era and an extensive range of secondary sources. He employs an effective organizational device, combined with a lively writing style, which contributes to the book's narrative flow: the intersection of key issues and events with important or representative individuals. These include the fugitive Missouri slave John Anderson who reached Canada West in 1853, killing a white man en route. Boyko uses Anderson's story, which involved American demands for his extradition and British interference in Canada's legal process, to discuss Canadian reactions to slavery and the issues that led to the Civil War. Other individuals around which chapters are organized are William Seward, Republican Secretary of State and enemy of Britain; Sarah Emma Edmonds, the New Brunswick woman who served in a Michigan regiment disguised as a man; and Confederate Jacob Thompson, one of the agents behind the South's 'Canadian mission' that attempted to undermine Lincoln's popularity and disrupt the Union's war effort. The author is understandably attracted to Edmonds' evocative life story, chronicled in her best-selling 1865 autobiography, *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army*, and like most other writers may take too much of that story, which was influenced by folklore and sentimental fiction, literally. Chapters are also organized around George Brown, the Canada West publisher and Liberal politician who made possible the 1864 political coalition that sought Confederation, and John A. Macdonald, his Conservative rival-turned ally who finessed much of the Confederation process between 1864 and 1867. As previous writers have illustrated, although colonial public opinion seemed to support the Confederacy throughout much of the Civil War, large numbers of men from Canada and the Maritime colonies served in the Union forces. Although most historians have discounted contemporary Canadian fears of American annexationists, public opinion in the North was often critical of Britain and its colonies and the colonies often feared or resented Northern viewpoints and policies. During the Confederation debates, fears of a vengeful America were raised to argue the defence benefits of colonial union. Boyko provides useful discussion of some of the founding principles of Canadian Confederation: a rejection of republicanism and an elected senate; a preference for a federal system with a national government enjoying relatively greater powers than provincial governments; provision for minority educational rights and maintenance of ties to the mother country, as both a point of honor and a counterbalance to American power. Boyko shows how various echoes of the Civil War, such as the Lincoln assassination conspiracy, the Fenian movement,

Seward's purchase of Alaska in 1867 and the 1871 Washington Treaty, affected Confederation and the status of the new Dominion.

The author no doubt was under limitations in terms of manuscript length; the Civil War, Anglo-American relations and Canadian Confederation are all complicated topics with an intimidating literature. Condensation of historical evidence risks distorting the analysis; one example in *Blood and Daring* is an insufficient discussion of the causes of anti-Confederation feeling in Canada East and the four Atlantic colonies. Local political, economic and cultural factors were the key here, not the Civil War. Similarly, it is difficult in discussions of Canadian Confederation, much like the American Revolution, to avoid implying that federal union was the only logical outcome of the situation under study. As Ged Martin wrote in a book chapter published in 1990, the arguments against Confederation were equally logical as those advanced by Brown, MacDonald and their colleagues. Even to this day, an Ontario-based writer is likely to see Confederation differently than one based in the Maritime Provinces or especially Newfoundland (which only joined Canada in 1949). Although the book is extensively footnoted (with more than 20 pages of citations) there are many detailed paragraphs lacking any references. This is probably a result of the publisher's requirements but it does cloud the question of what is primary or new research and what is simply the repackaging of previously-published work.

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