

**LIBERTY AND BRITISH IDENTITY:  
PRINTED REACTIONS TO THE QUEBEC ACT 1774-1775**

A Thesis

by

AARON LUKEFAHR WILLIS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2007

Major Subject: History

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Troy Bickham
Committee Members,	James Rosenheim
	Margaret Ezell
Head of Department,	Walter Buenger

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**ABSTRACT**

Liberty and British Identity: Printed

Reactions to the Quebec Act 1774-1775. (August 2007)

Aaron Lukefahr Willis, B.S., Santa Clara University

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Troy Bickham

This thesis explores reactions to the Quebec Act of 1774 in pamphlets and newspapers within Britain and the American colonies. The Quebec Act was signed by George III in June of 1774, the bill instituted French Civil Law, put in place a military governor and an executive council, all of whom served at the will of the Crown, and effectively established Roman Catholicism in Canada under the Crown's control. The rhetoric analyzed for this thesis came from a number of contemporary pamphlets and newspaper commentaries on the Quebec Act specifically, or on colonial policy, which included the Quebec Act, more generally. The pamphlets were written by ministers, politicians, public figures and anonymous individuals. The concepts, ideals, and words used by these various commentators suggest underlying concerns and ideals which they all share and which their audience would understand and identify with. In using the rhetoric employed in these sources this study hopes to show that in their reactions to the incorporation of French Catholics, under their own laws and religious traditions, British contemporaries revealed their conception of what it meant to be British. There is a strong sense that British Protestantism was not so unified that it would serve as an effective foundation to build an identity. Therefore, rather than simply being formed as a reaction against the French and Catholic Other, this identity seems to be rooted in a positive sense of the

nature of English liberty, which was then extended to the British people. The rhetoric in the American colonies is used to show how an identity centered on the ideal of liberty functions on the periphery. This thesis hopes to also address the fact that the Quebec Act has been overlooked by many who address the issue of British identity. Such an event, even if overshadowed in popular history by the other Coercive Acts, is a valuable episode in the creation and expression of a British Identity.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The rhetoric used by those debating the Quebec Act suggests that as the eighteenth century came to a close, liberty stood as the foundation for a British identity that was less than a century old. Contemporary reactions in the press and pamphlets to the passage of the Quebec Act linked the two concepts. The Quebec Act was highly divisive, and its incorporation of French Catholics into the British Empire brought to the surface numerous issues. Religion, government and law were all central to the debate between supporters and opponents of the bill. During the course of the debate the Quebec Act moved beyond the two houses of Parliament and into the public sphere in pamphlets and the press. English liberty was a central concern in the public debate and was offered as the fundamental representation of all British people. While the ideal of liberty is expressed as English by many of the commentators, it is seemingly understood as a tradition that all of Britain inherited after the Act of Union (1707). The nature of the Quebec Act provides a powerful lens to understand British conceptions of themselves as they incorporated a vastly different people into the empire under their own laws and religion.

Several important provisions of the Quebec Act would prove to be the central concerns of contemporary reaction to the bill. The first extended control of the government of Quebec to include the Labrador Coast in the north to the lands bordering the Ohio and Mississippi rivers in the south. Quebec was extended to take up the

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This Thesis follows the style of *The Journal of American History*.

territory encompassing the St. Lawrence River, the Great Lakes region and the Ohio River Valley. The colony effectively became a blockade surrounding the seaboard colonies and took control of the North American interior. Beyond extending the control of the colonial government into the Ohio River Valley, the bill also aimed to dramatically modify the religious, political and legal structures of colonial Quebec. First, the bill allowed for the free and open practice of the Roman Catholic faith, and guaranteed the right of priests to collect tithes from those associated with the Catholic Church. Beyond the toleration of Catholicism, the bill also re-implemented aspects of French law within the colony which removed key aspects of the English legal structure. While keeping English criminal law, the bill made French civil law the official legal code of the colony; which included removing jury trials and the right of *habeas corpus* in civil cases. Colonial governance would be dependent on a military governor and a legislative council, all of whom served by appointment of the king. The governor and the council would have the right to create legislation for the colony though it could be rejected by the king at his will. The bill was introduced into the Lords on 1 May 1774 and passed the house on 13 June, after which the amended bill was quickly passed by the Lords and received royal assent.<sup>1</sup>

The problems of governing Quebec were a direct result of the settlement of the Seven Years War in the Treaty of Paris (1763). The war started in North America as a result of tensions along the North American frontier between the French, who were sending military expeditions into the Ohio River Valley to lay claim to the region, and the

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<sup>1</sup> To get a full understanding of the Quebec Bill and its development see Jack Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy 1760-1775* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961) or P.D.G Thomas, *Tea Party to Independence: The Third Phase of the American Revolution 1773-1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).



North American seaboard colonies, the source of Indian traders and land speculators looking to control and profit from the region's vast resources. The push of British settlers further to the west and perceived incursions by French military units created tension on both the French and British side, thus providing the initial impetus for war between two imperial rivals.<sup>2</sup> However, the conflict fit with the "Blue Water Policy," a Tory conception embraced and acted upon by William Pitt the Elder, which sought to remove Britain from costly continental engagements and to focus on controlling the Atlantic and especially the North American colonies. Those who initially developed the strategy felt that wars in the colonies would be much cheaper and would provide significantly greater economic and territorial benefit than those in continental Europe. The Seven Years War provided a perfect opportunity to secure many of the goals of the "Blue Water Policy" by removing the French from North America. William Pitt the elder used the war for exactly this purpose and sought to shift Britain's military and diplomatic focus away from Continental engagements.<sup>3</sup>

The British were successful in defeating the French and gained all French and Spanish territory east of the Mississippi River by the Treaty of Paris (1763).<sup>4</sup> Such a quick and large expansion created numerous problems for colonial management. First, the Americans proved incapable of managing the war and frontier territory as effectively as the British expected. Secondly, the costs of the war and the continuing expenses of defending and administering North America were much greater than Pitt and others

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<sup>2</sup> P.J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empire: Britain, India and America c.1750-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 82-84, 86 and 116.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed explanation of the "Blue Water Policy" and how it affected the Seven Years War see Eliga H. Gould, *Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 35-71.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

expected.<sup>5</sup> The realizations of the 1760s and 1770s pushed London to seek greater control and influence in North America.

Expansion of the North American seaboard colonies created numerous fears at home in Britain. While ways to gain revenue to support the colonial administration were important and would prove divisive, other concerns were especially significant in the formulation of the Quebec Act. As P.J. Marshall has argued,

contemporaries were well aware of what seemed to be the dangers of unregulated expansion: colonial trade might outgrow the framework of the Navigation Acts, colonial manufacturing might become a rival to British manufacturing, emigration might depopulate Britain, drawing off valuable artisans in particular, mass movements of people onto new land in the west would almost certainly plunge Britain into Indian wars, and sooner or later might create settlements beyond effective imperial control.<sup>6</sup>

Such fears were serious and with regard to conflict with Indian populations had already proved a reality. Conflicts with Indian populations prior to and after the Seven Years War, most importantly Pontiac's War and the Cherokee War, were blamed on the lack of decisive control from the metropolis.<sup>7</sup> As the 1760s wore on, and efforts at control from the metropolis over Indian affairs was effectively abandoned, it became obvious that American colonists' disregard for Indian populations and their inability to effectively manage relations with Indians made American colonial governments unqualified to administer the frontier territory.<sup>8</sup> The Quebec Act was seen as a way to better manage the frontier territory, Indian relations and the other fears raised by American colonial expansion. The Canadians proved themselves more than capable of interacting

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<sup>5</sup> Gould, *The Persistence of Empire*, 68-71.

<sup>6</sup> Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empire*, 322.

<sup>7</sup> Troy O. Bickham, *Savages within the Empire: Representations of American Indians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), 134, and Sosin, *Whitehall in the Wilderness*.

<sup>8</sup> Bickham, *Savages within the Empire*, 159-160.

successfully with Indian populations, and the power given to the crown and Parliament to indirectly govern Quebec made regulation easier than dealing with seaboard colonial legislatures and councils. Such a policy, contemporaries thought, would be cheaper and more effective than entrusting the backcountry frontier to the seaboard colonies.<sup>9</sup>

The bill was also intended to ensure a loyal and stable population in what would be the expanded colony of Quebec and to provide a counterweight to the American colonies along the eastern seaboard which looked to be edging closer to rebellion by the day.<sup>10</sup> The bill did so by granting the French Canadians many of the changes to the legal code in their colony they requested and by allowing for the full toleration of the Roman Catholic faith. Although P.D.G. Thomas argues that the bill only satisfied the old French elite and enacted policy decisions that were determined long before the crisis with the American colonies, the timing and structure of the bill in total should be considered an important piece of Parliamentary reaction to the crisis in the North American colonies.<sup>11</sup> The bill's passage on the heels of the Coercive Acts and its concessions to French Canadians during a time of colonial instability, even if aspects of these concessions were discussed long prior to the passage, suggests the bill was part of a broader colonial policy than simply addressing concerns which had been obvious since the 1760s. That Parliament finally acted on the policy suggestions of the past ten years is an important aspect of the bill's role in colonial policy.

In exploring reactions to the Quebec Act this paper hopes to illustrate that liberty is at the core of a British identity. Throughout the debate over the Quebec Act there was

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<sup>9</sup> Bickham, *Savages Within the Empire*, 167.

<sup>10</sup> Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empire*, 189.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas, *From Tea Party to Revolution*, 113-117.

no more important concern than the protection and understanding of liberty. That the issue of liberty dominates a debate which could include so many other religious and cultural concerns points to it as the foundation of a British identity. This work does not claim to understand the true thoughts and feelings of the contemporaries responding to the Quebec Act. Rather, it simply makes the assumption that by analyzing the discourse surrounding the bill, the terms used and ideas expressed by contemporaries will point to some larger and more general ideal. The purpose then is not to find the true motivations for the bill, but to understand the ways in which the discourse reflects a contemporary understanding of British identity. The collective expression of contemporaries suggests an outline of their shared ideals, even if they disagree on particular aspects of the Quebec Act, and their reactions suggest a shared identity centered on the ideal of liberty.

In the contemporary sources there is strong evidence that the ideal of liberty and the institutions of the British state and empire, which were rooted in their creation based on English common law, served as the basis for a British identity.<sup>12</sup> Such a definition of British identity is plausible because the Act of Union served to create an identity out of a political unity. When the term “British” is used by contemporaries it is largely in relation to the political liberty which they share and which commentators see as uniting the British people. The Act of Union of 1707 was a political union, it did not create a unified cultural and historical nation or identity, and it in fact solidified the Protestant division between Scotland and England. The political realities which led to the creation of a British state did not destroy Scottish or English cultural identities, though greater cultural

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<sup>12</sup> For an understanding of how Walpole ensured that the governmental and political institutions of Britain were controlled from London and based on English forms see J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725* (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 179-182.

and economic change undoubtedly occurred, nor did Union remove or ease the Protestant divide.<sup>13</sup> The British identity is one that represents the political union of Britain. The idea of British liberty stands as the idealized representation of the British state which therefore becomes the foundation of this identity. Liberty is a strong ideal which can act in any number of broad formulations, providing a strong foundation for a newly formed nation and identity. Therefore the institutions of the state and the governing body are meant to uphold and protect this ideal of British liberty while extending it to all British citizens. That British political and governmental structures are based on an English model explains the use of terms like “English liberty” and references to English Common Law by contemporaries embroiled in a debate, which necessitated thinking about what it meant to be British. The use of such terms does not require that the British identity be viewed as simply an expanded English identity. Regardless of the underpinning of the British state, contemporary reactions to the Quebec Act suggest that the British identity went beyond any foundations inherited from England.

While identity is a difficult idea to express and quantify, it is a crucial aspect of understanding history. For the British, the idea of identity is especially difficult to understand since it incorporates peoples who do not always share the cultural and religious connections that would help to unify a more homogeneous nation. However, scholars have argued for an identity centered on Protestantism and a reaction against the French Other. The most influential of these works, *Britons: Forging the Nation* by Linda Colley, makes especially strong use of these two factors in uniting the various peoples

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<sup>13</sup> Though I disagree with his quick conclusions on British identity, for a basic understanding of the Act of Union see Frank O’Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832* (London: Arnold, 1997), 54-62.

contained in a British identity.<sup>14</sup> While Colley's work is important and a strong analysis of the subject, it does not ultimately provide a strong enough argument that Protestantism and the Other were enough to create a growing ideal of Britishness.

Colley takes the idea of identity and Other found in the work of Edward Said and applies it to her work in *Britons*, forming the foundation of her argument in a manner that seems much more black and white than Said intended. In the introduction to *Orientalism* Said, states that

the Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.<sup>15</sup>

Later he continues, saying, "The two geographic entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other."<sup>16</sup> For Said, the Other has helped to define the identity of the West and has shaped its culture and ideas. Colley takes this theory of the Other and applies it to the British of the eighteenth century in relation to the French. For her, the development of the British identity is tied directly to this dichotomy. Colley writes, "They defined themselves as Protestants struggling for survival against the world's foremost Catholic power. They defined themselves against the French as they imagined them to be, superstitious, militarist, decadent and unfree."<sup>17</sup> Within this statement Colley seems to complicate the idea that the Other was the defining factor of the developing British identity. The French are "imagined" to be opposite of everything that is British;

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<sup>14</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Colley, *Britons*, 5.

the idea of what it is to be French was shaped by the idea of what it was to be British. The French were certainly Catholic and ruled by a powerful aristocracy, but these aspects of French culture were picked because they went against a British identity formed outside the France-Britain dichotomy.

The way the British viewed the French was based on their own goals and ideals. The British did not create their identity simply in contrast with the French; rather they emphasized various aspects of their culture and identity depending on the Other they came into contact with. As Said points out, “The imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections.”<sup>18</sup> His argument can also apply to the French-British relationship; the British were shaping the world around them to fit their own “desires, repressions, investments, and projections.” In this sense identity is simply the act of emphasizing differences and ignoring similarities based on contemporary motives.

It is not that the Other has no role in terms of forming identities. On the contrary, it must do so, since nations and people do not exist in vacuums, and there is a need for contrast to determine what makes an identity different and unique. Ultimately, though, identity is significantly more about a positive definition than a negative one. In exploring the British identity contemporary rhetoric suggests that the British were more proud of what they were than what they were not. The British, whether English, Scottish or

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<sup>18</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 8.

Welsh, shared a unique ideal of liberty which was protected and extended by the political and governmental structures that they all shared.

While the Other is important in forming and expressing an identity it often brings forth expressions of identities that already exist on their own. Rather than focusing on a negative definition of identity, that is explaining who we are by who we are not, it is important to see how people define themselves in the positive form, which is by who they are absent outside comparisons. In exploring the Quebec Act, the French and Catholic traits are often used as a counter point to liberty. Liberty is understood as the true expression of who the British people were, and the French system is neither good nor bad, but rather simply an expression of who they were. There is not a threat from the Other which unites these people; rather they are united by traits that exist independent of outside threats.

Within the contemporary debate over the Quebec Act, Protestantism appears as an especially weak foundation for unity, as the tensions between Dissenters and the Church of England erupts in a great deal of the literature. Far from showing uniform disapproval of the Catholic faith, the debate explored in this thesis often focused not on whether Catholics should be given toleration, but rather if they were being given rights denied to Dissenters. Again the Other is not so much a means to unite the people but rather a basis for comparison and a way of claiming rights based on a British identity. Religion is an important focus for contemporaries responding to the Quebec Act, but it is not the primary concern of those engaged with the bill.

In what stands somewhere between my own position and that of those who base their views on a religious opposition to the Other, Richard Armitage approaches the



British Empire, which includes the unification of the British Isles, within a contemporary ideology which centered on a people who were Protestant, commercial, maritime and free. His approach focuses not so much on a shared ideal of identity, but rather a shared ideology which united the British Empire and those living and working within it, though Armitage agrees that at some point this ideology may have become an identity. While this differentiation between ideology and identity is interesting, it is difficult to understand how such a distinction can be made and when an ideology becomes an identity.<sup>19</sup>

For Kathleen Wilson, what seems most important in the formation of a British identity is the public sphere and political and cultural engagement. In two of her important works it is apparent that, whether in the realm of oppositional politics or in understanding the South Pacific and the voyages of Captain Cook, identity is a function of public discourse.<sup>20</sup> Rather than being self-informed or culturally inherent, the ‘sense of the people’ is created by the engagement of differing groups of people who react off one another to form a unified self-image. The terminology and ideals used in this engagement are crucial to forming that identity, but far from being tools for unity, religion and empire could be used to create divisions and form identities which did not fit into the larger framework. On the other hand, in engaging with different cultures outside of the British Isles, cultural terminologies and practices could be used to better understand the British people and to imagine their own growth. Such an idea is mirrored

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<sup>19</sup> David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>20</sup> Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire, and Gender in the Eighteenth-Century* (New York: Routledge Press, 2003) and *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

in the debate over the Quebec Act, where the Roman Catholic and culturally French citizens of Quebec were not so much feared for their difference, but rather were viewed as what would become of the British if their king were to gain arbitrary power.

Another understanding of the development of identity in the British Isles focuses on the claims of early modern Britons to a shared ancestry based on Biblical tradition. In Colin Kidd's work, *British Identities Before Nationalism*, much of the contemporary elite's discussion of identity centered on religious and political histories.<sup>21</sup> These histories, which either united the British Isles or justified their differing political and religious institutions, created identities that were more complex and rooted in a much older tradition than many other scholars address. However, Kidd's work fails to address the vast majority of the populace and only explores conceptions of identities of the intellectual elites. His thesis does not incorporate the larger British public in its scope, a flaw that makes it an interesting but ultimately unconvincing argument.

In looking at the impact of the American war for independence on the formation of identity, Stephen Conway argues that the war had a significant impact on the way the British viewed themselves and the Empire.<sup>22</sup> The local interests of various parts of the British Isles and the 'melting pot' effect of the British Army created a more unified idea of Britishness. With local communities raising troops to fight in the war effort, many doing so based on domestic concerns, there was a growth in the perceived unity of the British Empire and a growing ideal of Britishness. At the same time, the rebellion of the Americans created a doubt as to the ability of the Empire to spread liberty to all of those

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<sup>21</sup> Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

living under its influence. Such questioning brought the focus back to the British Isles and a more unified definition of the unique liberty of the core of the British Empire.

While dealing primarily with England, Robert Colls argues that the initial and key foundation for an English identity was English common law and perceptions of the benefits it afforded. In his chapter, “The Law Becomes You,” Colls argues that such a foundation was crucial in uniting the English people in the eighteenth century. Contemporaries could trace the linkage between the law, the political system, their state and the English people back to the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>23</sup> Colls’ work suggests that the formation of the English people’s identity up to and into the eighteenth century undoubtedly influenced the formation of a British identity. It is for this reason that his work is often unable to separate British and English identities successfully. The importance of the political and governmental structures based in London are crucial in Colls’ work to both English and British identities.

David Hempton explicitly agrees with Colley and argues that an anti-Catholic Protestantism was the foundation which united the British people. As he has argued, “Insofar as eighteenth-century Britons regarded themselves as peculiarly free and peculiarly prosperous, it was because of the blessings of Protestantism.”<sup>24</sup> Hempton largely paraphrased Colley’s argument, quoting her at length, and arguing that such a connection lasted well into the nineteenth century. Although he does provide strong support for Colley in quoting her, his dependence on her as the source for proving her own argument provides no outside evidence to support her argument.

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>24</sup> David Hempton, *Religious and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the decline of empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 146.

Rather than a negative definition of identity, a more compelling argument can be made for a positive identity based around liberty and the English legal tradition. Jack P. Greene is an important figure in the development of a liberty-focused identity. Greene states that

while, between the Elizabethan era and the American Revolution, the acquisition of colonies and other outposts would become increasingly significant in defining what it meant to be English or (after the union with Scotland in 1707) British, liberty was also the single most important element in defining a larger Imperial identity for Britain and the British Empire.<sup>25</sup>

The connection between liberty and a British identity is strongly supported in the reactions to the Quebec Act. These responses emphasize the focus of the British psyche on the idea of liberty more than issues of religion or culture, as would be expected when debating the governing of French Canadians within the Empire. The subject of liberty is the core concern for those debating the Quebec Act. The implications for liberty in the face of what is portrayed as an internal attempt by the Crown and Parliament for power is present in almost every attack or defense of the bill; Frenchness, Catholicism, Protestantism and other points of contention merely serve as points from which to debate liberty and its importance to the British people. Liberty is an abstract idea and it is the varied nature of the idea which makes the debate so intense.

It is impossible to understand fully what the British meant by the term ‘liberty’. The expressions of liberty found in the contemporary responses to the bill show patterns of ideas and points of difference within Britain. Yet there is a great deal of variation within the different sources. Trying to first argue that one truly understands what the

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<sup>25</sup> Jack P. Greene, “Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. 2, ed. P.J. Marshall, 208-230 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 208.

contemporary sources meant in their expressions of liberty is difficult enough. It would be impossible to also understand the full ideal of liberty which lies unexpressed behind the text. Even individuals who agreed on many political issues and spoke the same way about liberty could have vastly different conceptions of liberty. However, the very fact that the idea is so broad and can be molded into so many different forms makes it the perfect foundation for an identity that needed to incorporate varied religious and cultural groups. While religion must be expressed in practice and dogmatic positions, liberty can within a fairly broad range be taken to mean any number of things without creating division. While taken to extremes, as is the case with the American colonies, it can lead to a splintering of identity, though in a surprisingly varied definition it can encompass any number of people and definitions. The fact that it has no precise definition is what makes it so powerful in uniting the British people. It is the goal of this paper to show that liberty provided the foundation for a British identity, one that could incorporate an ever-growing empire.

Press and pamphlet literature is the primary means by which this thesis hopes to understand contemporary attitudes of identity. Press culture is especially important in understanding national identities. As Benedict Anderson has argued, nations are often an “imagined community” forged through press experiences shared by a large and diverse readership that was able to imagine itself as a connected and unique people. In looking at the debate in the press and in pamphlets over the Quebec Act, it is possible to see how the British people, despite a variety of differences, imagined themselves in a religiously, politically and culturally charged situation. As Anderson argues, “[National identity] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know of their

fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communities.”<sup>26</sup> By understanding the terms and forms of rhetoric used by contemporaries it is possible to gain some insight into how they understood their own community. Press and pamphlet coverage of the debate would have reached a much larger audience than other forms of printed materials. In addition, press and pamphlet sources provide access to rhetoric and ideals which were commonly understood within contemporary society.

Although each printing was numerically small, pamphlets served as a crucial means of influencing public opinion and should be considered an important tool in understanding contemporary attitudes. Although the average pamphlet printing was 500 per impression, several of the pamphlets that will be examined in this work received more than one printing.<sup>27</sup> In addition, pamphlets could receive a larger audience if they were reprinted in periodical sources, such as newspapers and magazines. According to John Brewer, a periodical like the *Monthly Review* sold more than 3000 copies per issue.<sup>28</sup> While these numbers might suggest a limited influence on the whole of society, pamphlets were widely available to readers in coffeehouses and taverns, exponentially expanding the readership of each printing; additionally, the low price of these publications made them available to a wide range of individuals.<sup>29</sup> Even so, the size of

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<sup>26</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

<sup>27</sup> John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 146.

<sup>28</sup> Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 146-147. Samuel Johnson, *The patriot. Addressed to the electors of Great Britain. The third edition.* (London, 1775) was reprinted in *The Monthly Review* in October 1774 and Sir William Meredith. *A letter to the Earl of Chatham, on the Quebec Bill. The third edition, corrected.* (London, 1774) was reprinted in the publication in August 1774. Twelve of the other pamphlets were given short summaries and/or mentioned in *The Monthly Review* but did not receive reprintings.

<sup>29</sup> Gould, *Persistence of Empire*, xx-xxi.

pamphlet printings does not on the surface suggest the importance of such a medium to spreading conceptions of identity; however the aim of this work is not to identify how a British identity spread through the press. The reactions themselves represent a previously formed system of ideals expressed in the press and in pamphlets. That John Wilkes, the outspoken London radical leader, used the pamphlet as a tool of propaganda points to its ability to reach and influence a wide range of people and its connection with newspapers, which together could be an important means of influencing and judging the various positions taken by the British people.<sup>30</sup> Understanding the size and importance of newspaper readership is equally important to conceptualizing the ability these publications had in expressing public sentiment and ideals.

Newspapers reached a larger audience than the average pamphlet and helped to spread the debate over the bill beyond a limited sphere of influence. However determining the total numbers of papers printed, the literacy rate and the number of readers per printed paper are all difficult. Such difficulty leaves doubt as to the actual readership of newspapers in London and the provinces. Hannah Barker has worked to understand the press during the late eighteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Her estimates put the number of newspaper readers somewhere around a third of the adult population of London and somewhere around one tenth in the provinces.<sup>32</sup> In general, the average reader could be described as an urban male who was either a tradesman, a member of the clergy or among the elite, though by no means were they the only groups exposed to such

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<sup>30</sup> Brewer, *Party Ideology*, 170-174.

<sup>31</sup> Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and English Society, 1695-1855* (New York: Longman Press, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society*, 47.

materials.<sup>33</sup> Even though readership was still concentrated at the higher levels of economic and social status, Barker estimates that contact with printed materials, especially newspapers, reached fairly far down the social ladder to almost all levels of society.<sup>34</sup> As she argues,

Neither the inability to read nor the high cost of newspapers necessarily prevented the bulk of the population from discovering their contents. Reading aloud – either in private homes or at public meetings – was a common activity, and the shared purchase and hire of newspapers, coupled with their presence in coffee-houses, pubs and shops, as well as in increasing numbers of subscription reading rooms (both genteel and lowly) and circulating libraries, made them accessible to many.<sup>35</sup>

The broad impact within society made newspapers an important tool for not only influencing but also judging public opinion. As Barker states, “Newspapers could not have operated successfully if unaware of the tastes, preoccupations and concerns of the readers they hoped to appeal to.”<sup>36</sup> The connection between public sentiment and the press is important in using the press coverage of the Quebec Act as a means to judge British conceptions of themselves and in looking at the debate as more than simply political rhetoric which represented only limited interests.

In his work on the foundations of the American Revolution, Bernard Bailyn uses pamphlets as an important means of understanding the ideology of the rebellious Americans and their opponents. As he states of pamphlets during the build up to the Revolution, “Explanatory as well as declarative, and expressive of the beliefs, attitudes, and motivations as well as of the professed goals of those who led and supported the Revolution, the pamphlets are the distinctive literature of the Revolution. They reveal,

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<sup>33</sup> John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 12.

<sup>34</sup> Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society*, 47-49.

<sup>35</sup> Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 109.



more clearly than any other single group of documents, the contemporary meaning of that transforming event.”<sup>37</sup> While this work is not looking at the larger Revolutionary movement, the Coercive Acts, including the Quebec Act, were a major development in the progress towards the American Revolution; thus, Bailyn’s characterization of pamphlets’ value as tools to find meaning proves useful.

In researching this thesis 25 pamphlets from Britain and 14 from the colonies were used to understand reactions to the Quebec Act. Since the bill was the primary focus of this thesis, all of the pamphlets read for this work dealt directly with the bill in some substantive way. The pamphlets were also the vast majority of the pamphlets available to the author, with only those that made a passing reference to the bill not being fully utilized within this thesis. The press coverage of the bill is viewed through the coverage of four London papers. These papers were selected for their contemporary importance in the capital press and their known political positions. In selecting papers which have implicit ideological positions it is easier to understand how each side of the debate framed its position.

The first chapter of this work examines the contemporary reactions to the Quebec Act in pamphlets written during 1774 and 1775. The pamphlet debate engages many of the issues that will be explored throughout the thesis. Reactions in the pamphlet literature suggest that the ideal of liberty was central to the British identity. Within the pamphlet debate there is also not a simple division between pro- and anti-ministry forces, making reactions to the bill more than traditional political rhetoric. While it is not

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<sup>37</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 8.

possible to make such a claim about reactions in the newspapers, since the commentators' identities are unknown, a break from traditional divisions in the pamphlet literature suggests the disruption of the status quo is possible in both media of expression.

Religious rhetoric did not mask divides between the various Protestant groups within the country, and the fear of Catholicism was often connected to domestic political concerns. Many critics of the bill were not concerned with the threat from Catholics or the formerly French subjects but rather from Parliament and the Crown. Many saw both as threats to liberty, and such threats were attacks on the very core of the British people.

The second chapter of this work examines the coverage of the bill and the debate surrounding it in the newspapers, focusing on the most vigorous months of debate, June and July of 1774. The reactions in newspapers are equally important to those in pamphlets but they also serve to reach a much larger portion of society and the debates in which a wider audience participated. What is important to understand in looking at the two forms of media, is that despite their difference in the scope and the characteristics of their readers they contain a surprising amount of uniformity.

While John Wilkes and his followers might have used the power of the press for their own ends, they undoubtedly had to have captured popular sentiment and thought in their attacks on the bill; similarly defenders of the bill addressed an audience they believed would be sympathetic to their own views on British liberty and the Quebec Act. The debate which took place in Britain was also taking place in the colonies on the other side of the Atlantic. In their common identity as British citizens, the colonists expressed similar ideals to those in Britain but with a somewhat different bent. The colonists took

the expression of the British ideal of liberty to its extreme and began to form a separate and conflicting identity at the edge of the Empire.

The third and final chapter explores the debate in pamphlets in the American colonies along the eastern seaboard. These colonies, which would soon declare independence from Britain and set out on their own, included the Quebec Act in their debate over Coercive Acts. Much as Bailyn argues in his work, there is strong evidence suggesting that the Americans, like the pamphleteers and newspaper correspondents in Britain, see liberty as the key to their identity and a right based on their ancestry.<sup>38</sup> In their extension of liberty to something far more expansive than in the home islands the colonists took the core of the British identity and turned it into their own. If this identity is one centered on liberty, then the actions and conceptions of the core of the state, that is London, set the broad parameters of how the new British identity and relationship played out. By looking at how the Quebec Act was understood in the colonies, and unfortunately it was strongly wrapped up in the debate over the Coercive Acts, one is able not only to continue looking at the religious and cultural issues the bill raised, but also to explore how the ideal of liberty and a shared British identity worked on the periphery. Understanding an expanded ideal of liberty in the colonies and how it was expressed in reactions to the Quebec Act is important in exploring the foundations of a British identity.

The formulation of a British identity is a highly contentious issue; however this thesis hopes to show, through a debate which incorporated many of the factors scholars have previously used to create such a formulation, that responses to the Quebec Act

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<sup>38</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 19.

suggest an ideal that united the British people. In analyzing reactions to the Quebec Act liberty can be posited as the central organizing ideology which the British people used to conceive of themselves. In addition, the ability of the Protestant faith to unite the British people seems weak at best. Fears were focused not on external threats which could unite the British people, but rather on domestic threats to liberty. Such concerns were important to understanding how the various commentators understood their own identity and the ideals which united the British people. Religious, economic, ancestral and military considerations were all raised in the debate, but each was ultimately put forth in terms of its relation to and impact on British liberty. Liberty subsumed all these concerns and placed them in a British context making them unique and part of a national consciousness.

## CHAPTER II

### THE QUEBEC ACT IN PAMPHLETS

While British reaction to the Quebec Act was characterized by a few common points of contention, what is most striking about contemporaries' printed reactions to the bill is that they were more concerned with internal politics than with a fear of incorporating an Other and former imperial rival into the empire. The primary disagreement between those on both sides of the debate centered on the impact of the Quebec Act on English liberty and the implications for the legal traditions of Britain. For those who opposed the bill the threat came not from the French citizens who were incorporated as British subjects, but rather from the Crown and Parliament. On the surface it might appear that dissatisfaction with the Quebec Act was a response by British citizens angered that French Catholics regained their cultural and legal traditions; however a close reading of the pamphlet literature disproves such a claim. There was no overriding concern that incorporation of Quebec's citizens opposed or threatened the English liberties which British citizens held so central to their identity. Contemporaries often characterized the threat to English civil liberties as coming from within, making the Quebec Act a sign of a much more pernicious danger.

In the debate contained in the pamphlets produced during 1774 and 1775, reaction to the Quebec Act centered on several key themes. The first was an attempt to identify and define the key aspects of English liberty. In general terms liberty was always presented in the pamphlets as uniquely English, part of the tradition handed down from the Saxons, expressive of the Enlightenment ideal of natural rights and protected by the

structure of the British political system. Regardless of whether the author was for or against the Quebec Act, the debate was primarily engaged with the idea of English liberty. Because contemporaries felt the ideal of liberty was both attacked and exemplified in the Quebec Act, depending on whether they opposed or supported the bill, the formulation of English liberty was important and varied across the various positions. While making it difficult to say that a narrowly defined idea of English liberty served as the foundation for a British identity, contemporary responses suggest that a general idea of liberty, unique only to England prior to 1707, and the political institutions that protected the ideal, were central to the formulation of a British identity. While divided on its true definition, the authors united in the idea that it was a development unique to their political and legal tradition.

A second key characteristic was the treatment of religion within these pamphlets. Rather than presenting a unified ideal of Protestant versus Catholic, divisions within the Protestant community were readily apparent. Where one would expect a repudiation of the Catholic faith as a whole such repudiations were somewhat lacking. While Catholicism, referred to in derogatory terms and generally accepted as a deviant religious approach, served as a powerful point for debate, even the harshest critics of Catholicism approve of its toleration in Canada. The threat from Catholicism was often presented within the pamphlets in terms of its proclivity to obey arbitrary rule, for example Papal control, and the fact that the Quebec Act put George III in control of the Church in Canada. The common association of Catholics with Jacobitism and a large anti-Catholic

sentiment during conflicts with Catholic powers were still widespread.<sup>1</sup> Contemporaries' fear stemmed from the possibility that George III and his ministers would use the Catholics to consolidate control at home and abroad. Opposition to the bill saw Catholicism not as a threat from France or Rome, but as one emanating from the King and his ministers and their attempt to assume arbitrary power. Those in support of the bill were often quick to point out not only that tolerating Catholicism was part of the ideal of English liberty, but that Protestants could just as easily act as an enemy of liberty and the English system of rule. Allusions to the Puritans' role in the English Civil War and the brutality of Cromwell, coupled with references to contemporary Dissenters, points to an underlying division and tension between Protestants. While some scholars have argued for a British identity founded on a strong and unified Protestantism, in the reaction to the Quebec Act neither a strong abhorrence of Catholicism nor a strongly united perception that all Protestants share equally in their reputation of liberty appeared.<sup>2</sup> It would be foolish to say that Britain was not strongly or primarily Protestant, but Protestantism was not necessarily the firm foundation on which the British people built their identity.

The third characteristic apparent in the responses to the Quebec Act was the domestic nature of the discussion. The reactions to the bill show a focus on issues of control in the metropolis rather than a concern with imperial policy as it applied to the periphery. The Other, Catholicism, support of the American colonies' rejection of Parliamentary control and the articles of the Quebec Act merely acted as a framework

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 22. and Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832* (London: Arnold, 1997), 152-155.

<sup>2</sup> For such an argument see especially Colley, *Britons*.

within which to discuss domestic issues of liberty. For those who sought to attack the Quebec Act, especially the London radical leader John Wilkes and his supporters, the threat to liberty in the colonies represented the current ministry's attempt to gain arbitrary power for itself and the Crown. The Quebec Act was the first step towards the despotic regime that those in power hoped to establish. Therefore, the greatest threat to British liberty was not the Other waiting to ruin British success and freedom, but rather British ministers and the monarchy. Most discussion of the bill's impact on colonial populations only acted as a means of expressing dissatisfaction with the state of liberty at home. Those in support of the bill again argued that the crown was simply reacting to the petitions from the Canadian people in enacting a system for their benefit. Therefore, the bill stood as a representation of English liberty and a fulfillment of a political natural law. All three of these characteristics point to an underlying agreement that liberty, and the institutions meant to protect it, were the foundation of the British identity. The fact that defining and defending liberty for all British subjects, including former French subjects, was the overriding concern exemplifies the importance of such an ideal. In addition, the threat to liberty was not the incorporation of the Other, but rather the power given to the crown. These two points make a better understanding of contemporary responses to the Quebec Act crucial in exploring the formation of a British identity in the eighteenth century.

The supposition that the English people were united around an ancient ideal of liberty passed down from their Anglo-Saxon ancestors pervaded the pamphlets, regardless of their perspective on the Quebec Act. In responding to the Continental Congress and their complaints of British control the author of *An Englishman's Answer*, a



pro-Quebec Act pamphlet, argued that, “Our ancestors in almost every age...have indeed, during both foreign and civil wars, maintained their independence...and I am happy in agreeing with you, that they transmitted their rights and liberties to us their posterity”.<sup>3</sup>

The author went on to explain that the nature of the British political system with a national government divided into three segments: the crown, the Lords and the Commons extended liberty to all British subjects. The system of government was portrayed as uniquely English, though it now encompassed what the author called “British Society,” and the political and legal institutions were presented as the sacred rights of the British people. Contemporary reactions imply that British liberty did not come from Protestantism, since it was handed down from a time long before the Protestant Revolution, but instead the liberties that united the British people were part of a natural law expressed and protected by the institutions of the British government.

In responding to the criticisms of the Quebec Act from Lord Chatham, formerly William Pitt the elder, who led the nation during the Seven Years War and gained Quebec for the Empire, Sir William Meredith, who served as a member of George III’s Privy Council in 1774, consistently made the point that the first principle of natural law was that the people should chose their own form of government and that liberty was best served by legal and political structures based on the will of the people. The laws of a people must be made “to correspond with their genius and temper,” so that those who live under the specific legal codes would be willing to follow and accept them.<sup>4</sup> While those on both sides of the issue may understand the form and extent of English liberty to be

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<sup>3</sup> *An Englishman’s answer, to the address, from the delegates, to the people of Great-Britain* (New York, 1775), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Sir William Meredith. *A letter to the Earl of Chatham, on the Quebec Bill. The third edition, corrected.* (London, 1774), 19.

different, there was little disagreement that it represented of the nucleus of the British people.

As an extension of the laws and structures of the British political/legal system, English liberty was the fulfillment of the British nature.<sup>5</sup> The fact that liberty was the ultimate expression of Britishness means that it was an extension of the core disposition of all British people. They were united as a nation because their nature as individuals, and as a society, was best protected and fulfilled under their unique system of government. In understanding the nature of the British identity such an idea is crucial because liberty then subsumes all other characteristics. Even if English Protestantism represents liberty and Catholicism despotism, the fact that the British are a free people did not spring from their religion, because not all Protestants were seen as seeking liberty, and so liberty is not a consequence of Protestantism.<sup>6</sup> Rather, the Reformation sprang from the nature of the British people to seek out their own form of religion, thus fully expressing their desire for liberty. Liberty could be extended to any number of other posited characteristics of British identity during the eighteenth century. The extension of trade and the growth of the maritime empire were an offshoot of liberty: what ultimately propelled the British people out into the world and to success was their ideal of liberty.<sup>7</sup>

As Jack Greene has argued, “contemporaries also associated other characteristics with the

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<sup>5</sup> David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 194-195; Eliga H. Gould, *Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 14-17; and Jack P. Greene, “Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Vol. 2*, ed. P.J. Marshall, 208-230 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 209-213.

<sup>6</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, Linda Colley would argue the opposite of this, see especially her first chapter: Colley, *Britons*, 11-54.

<sup>7</sup> Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, 141-145; Gould, *The Persistence of Empire*, 1-34 and Greene, “Empire and Identity”, 215-220.

emerging national identity: social openness, a penchant for scientific and intellectual achievement, and, most significantly, prosperity and trade.”<sup>8</sup> As Greene points out, contemporaries linked these characteristics to liberty. Aspects of British identity, such as consumer culture, Protestantism, maritime expansion and trade, were a result of a system of government and laws which expressed the nature of the British people and allowed them to define who they were.

It was such a perspective which allowed those who defended the Quebec Act to argue for its justice and effectiveness. In the pro-Act pamphlet, *Thoughts on the Quebec Act*, the author states that “the end of all government being to promote the happiness of the people, tho’ through different means – the laws the Canadians were under, perfectly answered the end of the institution”.<sup>9</sup> The author argued that since the Canadians were happy and prosperous under their own laws it was just to allow them to remain under a system that fit their disposition. The argument was made in several pamphlets that the Canadians were not disposed to the British legal system, and therefore any law the Canadians were held to should be of their own choosing. Such an argument fit within the conception that the natural aim of government was to represent the nature of a people. The author of the pamphlet argued that extending British ideals and liberty, in the form of British law and institutions, rather than “the blessing intended to be given, would prove an oppressive evil”.<sup>10</sup> Because the Canadians did not understand or desire trial by jury and British legal codes, it “shews that it [trial by jury] is but ill adapted to a people whose ideas of law and civil government are so confined” and that “a principle of subordination

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<sup>8</sup> Greene, “Empire and Identity”, 215.

<sup>9</sup>*Thoughts on the act for making more effectual provision for the government of the province of Quebec* (London, 1774), 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

is natural in the people”.<sup>11</sup> The purpose and success of the bill was that it fulfilled the natural law, and granting the Canadians a legal system which best fit their needs was the just, Christian thing to do.<sup>12</sup> The support for this perspective was best summed up by the author of *An Appeal to the Public* who in paraphrasing Solon states, “We have not given them the best constitution possible, but we have given them the best that they are capable of receiving”.<sup>13</sup> The existence of a philosophy, which saw the fulfillment of natural law in a government which represented the nature of the people it protected, is crucial to understanding how the British understood their own identity.

The Quebec Act provides a lens to understand the influence of such a philosophy on contemporary Britons. Those opposed to the Quebec Act had their own ideas of the relationship between the bill and liberty, yet their reactions pointed to the fact that British government was representative of the people. Those who attacked the bill argued that it subverted British liberty and that since laws were the extension of the people it was important for them to be the same throughout the empire, lest the system be destroyed. While many of these complaints will be important in understanding the domestic, rather than the imperial, nature of the dissatisfaction opponents had with the Quebec Act, their reactions suggest that liberty served as the central uniting factor for these authors.

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<sup>11</sup> *Thoughts on the act for making more effectual provision for the government of the province of Quebec* (London, 1774), 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> See especially, William Knox, *The justice and policy of the late act of Parliament, for making more effectual provision for the government of the province of Quebec* (London, 1774); Samuel Johnson, *The patriot. Addressed to the electors of Great Britain. The third edition.* (London, 1775); and Baron Thomas Lyttelton, *The speech of Lord Lyttelton, on a motion made in the House of Lords for a repeal of the Canada Bill, May 17, 1775* (London, 1775).

<sup>13</sup> *An appeal to the public; stating and considering the objections to the Quebec bill* (London, 1774), 58; this exact quote of Solon is brought up by Sir William Meredith in his pamphlet when describing the relationship between a people and their laws.

One of the strongest supporters of this ideal of English liberty was Catherine Macaulay. In her anti-Quebec Act pamphlet, *An Address to the People of England, Scotland and Ireland*, Macaulay argued that the threat to liberty was evident in the actions of the current ministry. In responding to the pro-Quebec Act pamphlet *The Patriot*, Macaulay implies that the ideal of liberty and the institutions set up to protect it go back to the earliest days of the English people. She argued that “There are others who whilst they have the words Freedom, Constitution, and Privilege, continually in their mouths, are using every means in their power to render those limitations useless, which from time to time have been erected by our ancestors, as mitigations of that barbarous system of despotism imposed by the Norman tyrant on the inhabitants of this island”.<sup>14</sup> The implications of the bill for the fate of British constitutional liberty were serious, and like many who were dissatisfied with the Quebec Act, Macaulay saw the current ministry as the true source of the threat.

An anti-Quebec Act pamphlet called on Lord Mansfield, the Lord Chief Justice, to serve as the protector of liberty. The author stated that, “[I] cannot help looking up to your Lordship, upon the *present* Principles of the Constitution, as the natural Guardian, if a civil Institution can be so termed, of British liberty”.<sup>15</sup> The author claimed the Chief Justice had not always held this role, but the forms of the British government allowed for the protection of liberty from within the system. The author later argued that just as the Reformation showed the Pope was not the true head of the Church, the Glorious

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<sup>14</sup> Catherine Macaulay, *An address to the people of England, Scotland, and Ireland, on the present important crisis of affairs*. By Catharine Macaulay (Bath, 1775), 9.

<sup>15</sup> *An address to the Right Honourable L-d M-sf-d; in which the measures of government, respecting America, are considered in a new light : ...* (London, 1775), 4-5.

Revolution showed that the King was not the true defender of liberty.<sup>16</sup> It became the duty of the other branches of the British system, Parliament and the Courts, to protect the rights of the people. The author strongly suggested that liberty was the fulfillment of the British people's desires, but that liberty must constantly be protected from threats, many of them internal. For contemporaries the British governmental institutions served an important role in extending and protecting the British ideal of liberty, and without this unique system of checks and balances liberty would fall to the designs of domestic despots.

Another common attack on the bill was a refutation of the idea, put forth by supporters of the bill, that the Quebec Act fulfilled the right of a people to choose a form of government which represented their nature. In responding to the pro-Quebec Act pamphlet written by Sir William Meredith, a critic of the bill best explained the opposing position:

The 19<sup>th</sup> page you begin with observing, that there can be no rule for the composing of laws, "but the sentiments and inclinations of those who are to be governed by them." With respect to independent states, you are right; because their sentiments and inclinations form the general will or good. But with respect to a dependent or conquered state you are wrong; because their sentiments and inclinations do not form the general will or good; but a partial one, which may be injurious to, if not subversive of the superior or conquering state.<sup>17</sup>

The commentator claimed that rather than fulfilling this ideal and forming a government which fit the people, meaning British citizens, the bill gave arbitrary power to George III and stood in contrast to the true ideal of liberty. These differing positions provide an

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<sup>16</sup> *An address to the Right Honourable L-d M-sf-d; in which the measures of government, respecting America, are considered in a new light : ...* (London, 1775), 20.

<sup>17</sup> *A letter to Sir William Meredith, Bart. in answer to his late letter to the Earl of Chatham* (London, 1774), 34.

example of how the same intellectual ideal of government and liberty led to two different conclusions. However, the shared ideal points to the underlying framework of liberty which most of those in the debate seemed to work within. As the author of *Remarks on the Patriot*, an anti-Quebec Act pamphlet, claimed, “Superiority of birth or fortune, of corporal, or even intellectual abilities, though it may give power, never can give the right to one to govern many without their own consent: consequently the people is the origin and the Prince only the residence of authority”.<sup>18</sup> The outcomes may be different but the ideal of British liberty and conceptions of its origin in the British people were common to both sides. The source of British liberty and government is the people, who consented to a government which best expressed their nature as a people. Such an ideal presented them with the ability to find success and expansion for their empire as they were free to live as best suited their character.

The anti-Quebec Act pamphlet, *An Address to Protestant Dissenters*, while primarily concerned with raising support for Parliamentary candidates who supported increased rights for Dissenters, made a key point about the nature and importance of British liberty. The author called people to oppose those members of Parliament who “concurred in the late atrocious attempts to establish arbitrary power over so great a part of the British empire [the Quebec Act and the Coercive Acts], to the imminent hazard of our most valuable commerce, and of that national strength, security and felicity, which depends on UNITY and LIBERTY”.<sup>19</sup> Rather than focusing on religion, in a pamphlet intended for Dissenters, the author argued that the keys to success were “UNITY and

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<sup>18</sup> John Scott, *Remarks on the Patriot. Including some hints respecting the Americans: with an address to the electors of Great Britain*. (London, 1775), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Priestley, *An address to Protestant Dissenters of all denominations, on the approaching election of members of Parliament, with respect to the state of...* (London, 1774), 23.

LIBERTY”. Unity was a result of liberty, leading to the supposition that liberty ultimately brought together the people of Britain into a single community or identity. The role of liberty in ensuring the success of the British people and in extending their commercial endeavors was mentioned prominently in several texts, suggesting that liberty was the foundational ideal of any commercial traits associated with the British.<sup>20</sup>

As would be expected when dealing with the formal incorporation of 100,000 Catholics into the overwhelmingly Protestant British Empire, religion was a major part of the discussion dealing with the Quebec Act. Within the pamphlets Catholicism was often attached to the fear of Jacobitism, as Catholics made up the bulk of dedicated supporters, and suggested as the possible source of a military uprising against the Hanoverians, as had occurred in 1745.<sup>21</sup> David Hempton argues that fears of Catholicism remained in the late eighteenth century: Catholicism was “foreign, violent, morally corrupt, doctrinally erroneous, magical, devious, and was led by a standing army of Popes, Jesuits and priests.”<sup>22</sup> Yet the reactions to the religious aspects of the bill, for example the open toleration of Catholicism, were often less about a fear of Catholicism, and more about an attempt by the crown to gain arbitrary power over the Catholic faithful in Canada, and what that signaled about its intentions for Britain as a whole. Those who defended the Quebec Act saw the toleration of the Catholic faith as upholding the Treaty of Paris and the rights guaranteed to formerly French citizens. As the author of the pro-Quebec Act

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<sup>20</sup> See especially, *An appeal to the public; stating and considering the objections to the Quebec bill. Inscribed and dedicated to the Patriotic Society of the Bill ...* (London, 1774); Sir William Meredith, *A letter to the Earl of Chatham, on the Quebec Bill. The third edition, corrected.* (London, 1774); Arthur Lee, *An appeal to the justice and interests of the people of Great Britain, in the present disputes with America. By an old Member of Parliament.* (London, 1774), and *A letter to Sir William Meredith, Bart. in answer to his late letter to the Earl of Chatham.* (London, 1774).

<sup>21</sup> O’Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century*, 153.

<sup>22</sup> David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the decline of empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 144.



pamphlet *An Appeal to the Public* wrote, “As to *Popery*, I shall observe that we only grant them that toleration which, as *Christians*, or as *Men* they are entitled to – as *Subjects* they may claim, under that very *Treaty*, by which they became our subjects”.<sup>23</sup> For those who supported this line of reasoning the toleration of Catholicism was essentially a non-issue, it was simply the only choice because of both the rights of man and the rights retained in the treaty. While the author claimed that Catholicism was “much dearer, through a mistaken *zeal*, which unhappily misleads them,” the author also argued that the British had no right to force them to change their religion or to stop them from practicing, for “let no man say that we have a right to compulsion, because *our* laws and religion is better than *theirs*. Such an assertion may be very true; but, if admitted as an argument is an argument, which the veriest tyrant upon earth, operating for the worst of purposes, might equally with us make use of”.<sup>24</sup> There was little problem for this author with incorporating the Other, which did not pose a threat to the British people and generated no strong reaction against itself.

All the authors implied that the Protestant faith and Catholic faith were not equal, for in their view Catholicism was obviously a misguided set of beliefs, but there was a willingness to accept Catholicism as a non-threatening part of the Canadian culture. As the author of the pro-Quebec Act pamphlet *The Patriot* argued, “in an age where every mouth is open for *liberty of conscience*, it is equitable to show some regard to the conscience of the Papist”.<sup>25</sup> It was only right that Catholics be given the liberty to

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<sup>23</sup>*An appeal to the public; stating and considering the objections to the Quebec bill. Inscribed and dedicated to the Patriotic Society of the Bill ...* (London, 1774), 57.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The patriot. Addressed to the electors of Great Britain*. The third edition. (London, 1775), 12.

practice their religion as they saw fit. Yet this freedom could also benefit the Church of England in Canada, and it did not ensure the continuation of the Catholic faith. The pro-Quebec Act pamphlet *Thoughts on the Quebec Act* argued that since the British took over Canada and opened the possibility to disassociate from the Catholic Church, “the errors of the church of Rome hourly lose ground, the craft of priests and designing men begin to be seen through by the people, and they glow with a warmth to exercise their own right of understanding”.<sup>26</sup> While the author agreed that the Catholic faith should be tolerated, the liberty of the British system and the superstitions of the Catholic faith would combine to bring an end to the church in Canada.

For those who doubted that Catholicism would simply crumble as time went on, other supporters argued that the bill allowed for greater support and growth than was previously possible for the Protestant faith. For the bill found that “the best means of encouraging Protestantism in *Quebec* [was] to exempt its professors from the payment of all tythes and ecclesiastical dues whatever, and a suitable provision be made out of the public revenue of the province for the support of the Protestant clergy”.<sup>27</sup> In opening the possibility to the Catholics of Quebec of becoming Protestant and therefore obtaining freedom from Catholic religious taxes, the author assumed that the bill provided an incentive for conversion and provided more money to support the Protestant clergy. Far from being a source of anxiety for those who supported the Quebec Act, incorporating the Catholic faithful was viewed as the only just action. In addition, these authors felt that as a misguided faith Catholicism would simply wither away and should not be seen

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<sup>26</sup>*Thoughts on the act for making more effectual provision for the government of the province of Quebec.* (London, 1774), 24.

<sup>27</sup> William Knox. *The justice and policy of the late act of Parliament, for making more effectual provision for the government of the province of Quebec, asserted ...* (London, 1774), 54.

as a threat now that it was under the King's control. An argument in several of the authors' works suggested that threats to liberty were not simply the realm of Catholics, and there was a supposition that the division within the Protestant faith was serious and not to be overlooked.

In the pro-Quebec Act pamphlet *An Englishman's Answer*, the author suggests that all religions have their own value and no one is a greater threat than another. The argument turned to the actions of Puritans to show that Protestants had just as much history in persecution and violence as the Catholic faith.

If the actions of the different sects in religion are enquired into, we shall find, by turning over the sad historic page, that it was the \_\_\_\_\_ sect (I forget what they call them, I mean the sect which is still most numerous in New-England, and not the sect which they so much despise) that in the last century deluged our island in blood! That even shed the blood of our sovereign, and dispersed impiety, bigotry, superstition, hypocrisy, persecution, murder, and rebellion throughout every part of the empire.<sup>28</sup>

The author went on to show how the Church of England was suppressed, and that even in contemporary North America the puritans in the colonies suppressed other religions, especially by attacking and violently punishing the peaceful Quakers. Such a statement and the others like it, show that the unity of the Protestant faith was shaky and serious divisions still existed amongst the various denominations. Beyond divisions over the Quebec Act there is evidence that strong distrust of Dissenters was common in numerous cases throughout the period.<sup>29</sup> It would seem difficult, given such attitudes, for Protestantism to serve as the primary unifying factor for the British people.

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<sup>28</sup> *An Englishman's answer, to the address, from the delegates, to the people of Great-Britain, in a letter to the several colonies, which were ...* (New-York, 1775), 22-23.

<sup>29</sup> James E. Bradley, "The British Public and the American Revolution", in *Britain and the American Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson, 124-154 (New York: Longman Press, 1998), 151.

For those who sought to discredit the bill, the toleration of the Catholic Church was not the primary problem. In fact, most accepted the idea that Catholicism was practiced within the British Empire and that it was not necessarily a serious threat to liberty. While they may not have liked the idea that Catholicism seemed to be established as the religion of Canada, they still felt this was a side issue to larger problems. Macaulay stated that rather than focus on the distinction between toleration and establishment “I will...wave a subject which must be an invidious one while there are so many of us in communion with the Roman church, and which is perhaps impertinent, because it carries with it the appearance of a remote danger, while so many nearer mischiefs demand our present attention”.<sup>30</sup> For Macaulay and others the “nearer mischief” was the threat to liberty from the ministry and the crown, not the toleration of Catholicism.

It is not the toleration of the Popish religion in Quebec, even to the exclusion of a toleration to the Protestants except by favor of the crown, and this at a time when the test, and other arbitrary acts restrain the rights of conscience, hang over the heads of our own Dissenters, that we know complain. ---- Our present objection is not that which the Canadian's enjoy, but to that which they are deprived. ---- It is not the preservation, but the violation of the Royal Word, which stands foremost in our list of grievances.

In the Act for the government of the province of Quebec, my friends and citizens, we read despotism in every line.<sup>31</sup>

There was no value in assuming that Catholicism was a direct threat to liberty and as she pointed out, focusing on the issue would only blind contemporaries to other more pressing and real problems.

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<sup>30</sup> Catharine Macaulay, *An address to the people of England, Scotland, and Ireland, on the present important crisis of affairs*. By Catharine Macaulay. (Bath, 1775), 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 15-16.

An example of this more pressing threat was portrayed in the anti-Quebec Act pamphlet *An Address to Lord Mansfield*, as the author explained how the government had grown increasingly corrupt and power hungry, and questioned the true aims of the Quebec Act. The commentator accepted regulations against Boston, and other rebellious and disloyal colonies, but did not understand the motives behind the Quebec Act. The author concluded that the bill was “an act, my lord, made by a *Protestant* Parliament, in a *Protestant* Country, where ‘*political Liberty is the very End of the Constitution,*’ to *establish the Roman Catholic Religion, and give absolute Power to the King, over Life, Liberty, and Property*”.<sup>32</sup> There was an implied threat from Catholicism in the author’s continued explanation of the bill. However, the real threat came not from the Catholics as independent actors or from Catholicism itself, but from the power that the King held over them and his ability to use the Canadians against the rest of the British population. A common theme in the pamphlets was the threat to liberty posed by the unchecked power the King gained over the Catholic Canadians, as they now depended on him for their religious freedom, and their proclivity to accept and follow arbitrary rulers. It is important though to focus on the fact that it was always the King and his ministers who used this power for their own good, rather than a threat from Catholics either directed from within Canada, or from Rome or Paris.

The Quebec Act also sparked a debate which focused on the plight of Protestant Dissenters within Britain, and their rights now that Catholics were being given freedom to openly practice their religion with no political consequences in Canada. The one

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<sup>32</sup>*An address to the Right Honourable L-d M-sf-d; in which the measures of government, respecting America, are considered in a new light : ...* (London, 1775), 28.

pamphlet where liberty was explained as a consequence of Protestantism was the pamphlet *An Address to Protestant Dissenters*. The pamphlet was a call to all denominations of Protestant Dissenters to vote in the upcoming elections only for candidates who would extend greater rights to Dissenters. The Priestly makes the explicit connection between religious and civil liberty,

*Religious liberty*, indeed is the immediate ground on which you stand, but this cannot be maintained except upon the basis of *civil liberty*; and therefore the old *Puritans* and *Nonconformists* were always equally distinguished for their noble and strenuous exertions in favor of them both. Their zeal in this cause, and the valuable effects of it, are so well known, that even Mr. Hume (an historian of the most unsuspected impartiality in this case) acknowledges that whatever civil liberty we know enjoy is to be ascribed to them.<sup>33</sup>

While this discussion of liberty was not within the part of the pamphlet discussing the Quebec Act, the threat to liberty from the bill is made explicit later. In discussing the threat to the American colonies Priestly stated that

At the same time, they see the boundaries of Canada extended, and made a perfect arbitrary government, as a model no doubt, for their own in due time, and a check upon them till that time...Lastly, Do you imagine, my fellow-citizens, that we can sit still and be idle spectators of the chains which are forging for our brethren in America, *with safety to ourselves?*<sup>34</sup>

For Priestly the Quebec Act was an omen of what was to come in Britain at the hands, not of the Catholics, but of the King and his ministers.

An appeal to greater liberty in response to the Quebec Act, by taking advantage of the issues it brought up, was the exact problem that some in the Anglican Church saw coming. A sermon given by the Anglican Archdeacon James Ibbetson to the House of Commons was printed at his request in 1775. Much of his speech was focused on the

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Priestley, *An address to Protestant Dissenters of all denominations, on the approaching election of members of Parliament, with respect to the state of...* (London, 1774), 6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

role and the history of the King as the Supreme head of the Church of England and his fear that the Quebec Act had given Parliament the right to diminish that supremacy. While he made claims that diminishing the power of the King gave the Pope in Rome more power, there were signals that the power of the Church of England to control Protestant dogma in the British Empire was of the utmost concern.

It is only from the King's Supremacy we can have licence to make such alterations in the rights and ceremonies of the church, as shall anytime hereafter seem either necessary or expedient; and till then we are bound by the same Supremacy to permit certain controverted points to rest under the approved moderation of the Church of England, and not to be over-busy in matters of speculative divinity, whence factions may arise dangerous to civil government itself.<sup>35</sup>

Without the supremacy given by the King to the Church of England, Ibbetson claimed, factions might arise that would threaten government itself, though he did not initially mention who these factions might be as he continued it was implicit that the Protestant community, and not Catholics were his chief concern. For he stated

It is not only the best profession that the clergy can make of their constant fidelity and obedience to His Majesty, but it is moreover the bond of Protestantism and of that great Community which goes under the denomination of the Reformed Church, and of which the Church of England has deservedly been honored with the title of chief and leading branch. Let the politician leave me to add, that it is essential to the unity of the British Empire.<sup>36</sup>

These expressions suggest that the division of Protestants within Britain was real and significant. Dissenters across Britain were some of the most vocal in opposing the treatment of the colonies along the North American seaboard and in seeking

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<sup>35</sup> James Ibbetson. *A speech in the Lower House of Convocation, on Monday 23 January 1775. By the Reverend James Ibbetson, ...* (London, 1775), 5.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid*, 5-6.

representation in Parliament for their own, often economic, policy stances.<sup>37</sup> The desire of Dissenters to have representation in Parliament and freedom to express their own points of religious dogma was not easily overlooked and was a threat to liberty and civil government. As the calls of Joseph Priestly in *An Address to Protestant Dissenters* suggested, Dissenters sought religious and political power within Britain. According to Priestly, as the source of British liberty Dissenters deserved broad and open liberties which were denied by current Parliamentary leaders. Only through political mobilization resulting in the election of sympathetic members of Parliament and public outcry would they be able to gain such liberties.<sup>38</sup>

The Quebec Act and the issue of religious toleration were strongly connected in the debate over the bill, yet where one would expect to find strong fears of Catholicism there was little. The role of religion was to bring attention to domestic threats and intra-Protestant divisions that authors felt were the primary implications of the bill. Religion was a powerful tool in framing a debate and it was used effectively by both sides. While neither position had any strong fears about the incorporation of Catholics into the empire, those who attacked the Quebec Act saw it as an extension of the Crown's drive to consolidate power. It is these domestic concerns of liberty and control that make up the third and final characteristic of this debate.

The din of voices which hoped to focus the Quebec Act to highlight domestic issues and internal threats to liberty were primarily those who attacked the bill. Those in support, if they address the charges that the bill attempted to lead Britain into despotism

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<sup>37</sup> Bradley, "The British Public and the American Revolution", 141-147.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Priestley, *An address to Protestant Dissenters of all denominations, on the approaching election of members of Parliament, with respect to the state of...* (London, 1774).



and arbitrary rule at all, usually did so by arguing many of the points already covered in this thesis, primarily, that the bill fulfilled ideals of British liberty and that religious issues were not as important as some portrayed them to be. If these authors did address the issue of domestic politics it was often formulated in one of two ways.

The most common reply to domestic concerns of arbitrary power was that the bill simply sought to find the most pragmatic approach to dealing with numerous issues in the North American colonies, relations with the Native populations and the spread of settlers into the Ohio River Valley to name just two. A pragmatic explanation was meant to show that there was no grand scheme to consolidate power but rather that the ministry created a bill that passed through both houses because it was the best policy, nothing more, nothing less. In stating an interpretation of the Quebec Act, the author of *An Appeal to the Public*, a pro-Quebec Act pamphlet, who dedicated the work to the Patriotic Society of the Bill of Rights, wrote that the opponents of the bill “make a question, whether the *Supreme Legislature* of the *British Empire* has a right to give, to its ceded province of *Canada*, such form of government, and such toleration of religious professions, as shall appear fitting for the *imperial* state to give, and the *dependent* state to receive”.<sup>39</sup> The author went into detail of how the bill did not harm the liberty of the British people, but rather was legislation made by the body who was supposed to create legislation using their expert knowledge, to give a strong government to the Canadians, create boundaries on the frontier that would allow for peaceful relations with native tribes and took advantage of the skills of the Canadians in dealing with problems on the

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<sup>39</sup> *An appeal to the public; stating and considering the objections to the Quebec bill. Inscribed and dedicated to the Patriotic Society of the Bill ...* (London, 1774), 10.

colonies' western frontiers. This was the common response given by those who supported the bill and wanted to show that it not only upheld ideals of British liberty, but that it was also a strong piece of legislation that fulfilled the needs of the imperial government.

The second line of defense for supporters of the bill was to point out that those who were attacking the bill were concerned with their own domestic issues and that the bill itself was not the real issue. Therefore, contemporaries should not have confused these attacks with any real failures of ministry policy. The real motivation for attacking the bill, according to supporters, lay elsewhere and therefore opponents of the bill were being dishonest. The strongest attack of this sort came from Samuel Johnson, the author of *The Patriot*. The main thrust of his pamphlet was to attack those who spoke out against the ministry in general, and the Quebec Act specifically, as self-serving rabble rousers. In essence, the patriots in the pamphlet were those who did not attack the government, and Johnson portrayed opponents of the bill as unpatriotic and selfishly hoping to gain power in Parliament. As Johnson stated of those he was criticizing, "As his political melancholy increases, he tells, and perhaps dreams of the advances of the prerogative, and the dangers of arbitrary power; yet his design in all his declamation is not to benefit his country, but to gratify his malice".<sup>40</sup> In many of the attacks there was at least a hint, and at times an outright statement, that the authors understood the bill's critics to be not only unpatriotic but dangerous to the political system. Criticism of the

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<sup>40</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The patriot. Addressed to the electors of Great Britain. The third edition* (London, 1775), 5.

government became linked with subversive behavior.<sup>41</sup> Even so, many of those in support of the Quebec Act spent limited time attacking the character of their opposition and most of their efforts proving the merits of the bill. For, “these harsh expressions, it is to be hoped, arise more from heat of passion than from serious reflection, and are too fallaciously founded to attempt to be seriously refuted”.<sup>42</sup> As is suggested in the preceding sections, many of these authors explained the bill as an extension and fulfillment of liberty and religious toleration, while also being the soundest policy approach to regulating the North American colonies.

Not all criticism of the bill could be simply dismissed as anti-ministry rhetoric as the author of *The Patriot* suggested. While there were certainly attacks from supporters of Wilkes, the divide between support and disapproval of the bill was not simply a matter of pro- versus anti-ministry forces. Several of the authors writing in support of the bill, namely Sir William Meredith and Lord Lyttelton, were Rockingham Whigs who were not strong supporters of the North ministry. The Rockingham Whigs often opposed the actions of the North ministry in order to gain political advantages. However, on this bill, and on a few of the bills which made up the Coercive Acts, they shelved their dissent.<sup>43</sup> Radicals in the capital and Rockingham Whigs were divergent groups, especially after 1770; yet both were the main voices of opposition to the North ministry during this

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<sup>41</sup> See especially Baron Thomas Lyttelton, *The speech of Lord Lyttelton, on a motion made in the House of Lords for a repeal of the Canada Bill, May 17, 1775* (London, 1775) and Samuel Johnson, *The patriot. Addressed to the electors of Great Britain*. The third edition. (London, 1775).

<sup>42</sup> *Thoughts on the act for making more effectual provision for the government of the province of Quebec*. (London, 1774), 35.

<sup>43</sup> Frank O’Gorman, “The Parliamentary Opposition to the Government’s American Policy”, in *Britain and the American Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson, 97-123 (New York: Longman Press, 1998), 104.

period.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, Chatham and the London radicals were divided over numerous issues, the least of which was Chatham's acceptance of a peerage.<sup>45</sup> While London radicals and Chatham might have fought the bill, the main body of opposition, the Rockingham Whigs, stood behind the bill. Not all of those attacking the bill had any obvious connection with Wilkes and even those who do their motivations are not important, but their language and assertions of an internal threat to liberty were. What is important about the crux of the fears of domestic and internal threats is that to be so common they must have at least been plausible to those who read them. While there is no way to say how many people actually felt the ministry and the crown represented a threat to liberty, the fact that in attacking the actions of the ministry the focus was on internal threats, rather than taking advantage of the lurking Other is significant. If the French Other was the source of a unified identity then it would be reasonable for opponents of the bill to focus on the threat from the French Canadians. Yet they instead focused on a different and seemingly more pernicious threat, a power hungry crown and ministry working together to consolidate arbitrary power to form a despotic regime.

While this threat was over stated, it is crucial nonetheless to understand the debate surrounding the Quebec Act as concerned in many cases primarily with the threat to liberty from London, and not from Paris or Rome. For Macaulay, the Quebec Act is an action of despotism in the colonies, and towards Quebec specifically. The significance to the people in the metropolis was implicit, for "in limited monarchies, when on the conquered are imposed laws, opposite and hostile to the limitations of power in these

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<sup>44</sup> John Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots: London Supporters of Revolutionary America 1769-1782* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 43-44.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 44-45.

governments, it never fails of subjecting the conquerors to the same measures of slavery which they have imposed on the conquered".<sup>46</sup> The threat posed to liberty by the Quebec Act was not to be seen as an action against just the North American colonies, it signaled a loss of liberty for all those living in the British Empire and at home, a point made time and time again by the other authors who responded negatively to the Quebec Act. In discussing the religious aspects of the debate earlier, attention was brought to the pamphlet *An Address to Lord Mansfield* and the perception that the crown and ministry had used the bill to gain influence and control over Quebec. As the author continued to discuss the implications of the Quebec Act for liberty in the colonies, the spread of this arbitrary power was extended to all possessions of the British Empire until the home islands were surrounded by colonies under control of the crown. The last stand of liberty at the hands of the British crown was expressed by the author, "Thus surrounded my Lord, Bribery and Corruption will at length do, what all the civil and foreign Wars against this country could never accomplish: *Make Slaves of Britons*".<sup>47</sup> While the scenes painted by the author are melodramatic, there were strong arguments that the focus of the Quebec Act should be on its implications for liberty at home, rather than abroad.

There was also a prevalent undercurrent of distrust throughout opposition pamphlets, a suspicion that those who supported the bill were hiding the real designs of the Crown. Arthur Lee, a supporter of Wilkes and a Virginian living in London, had one of the more interesting ways of expressing this suspicion. He wrote of the King and his interests:

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<sup>46</sup> Catharine Macaulay, *An address to the people of England, Scotland, and Ireland, on the present important crisis of affairs*. By Catharine Macaulay. (Bath, 1775), 16-17.

<sup>47</sup> *An address to the Right Honourable L-d M-s-f-d; in which the measures of government, respecting America, are considered in a new light : ...* (London, 1775), 29.

A system of slavery can never be the interest of his people: but a little Popery, a little arbitrary power, French law, French religion, French government, and in America only – there can be no harm in that. There is no wind can blow them over to England. And if such an accident should happen, there will be honest men enough found to persuade us that there is no harm in that either. *A false alarm, or an answer to queries*, will do the business.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the authors against the Quebec Act tried to show that the threat to liberty was not obvious but was there. The danger in the bill and the political maneuvers of the crown and ministry were that they were subtle and not easily distinguished. Such a threat was much more pernicious, it was not the obvious threat from the outside but rather an internal and domestic attempt at overthrowing liberty.

In trying to show that the provisions of the bill signaled the Crown's plans for removing protections of British liberty the author of *Remarks on the Patriot* states, "That trial by jury is not established in Canada is certainly no proof of a design to abolish it in England; but those who shew dislike to an object in one place, may be reasonably suspected of an inclination to shew dislike to it in another".<sup>49</sup> The connection between the Quebec Act and what can be read of the king's plan for England was made in similar ways with varying provisions of the bill in many of the pamphlets attacking the Quebec Act. The bill becomes the framework through which issues of concern in the metropolis are discussed; it represents what the king might try and do to the institutions of British liberty on the home island; that is the real threat of the Quebec Act. The threat did not come from the Other, nor from Catholicism, rather it came from internal sources and divisions which were brought to the surface through discussion of the bill. The author of

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<sup>48</sup> Arthur Lee. *An appeal to the justice and interests of the people of Great Britain, in the present disputes with America. By an old Member of Parliament.* (London, 1774), 23.

<sup>49</sup> John Scott, *Remarks on the Patriot. Including some hints respecting the Americans: with an address to the electors of Great Britain.* (London, 1775), 14.

*A Letter to Sir William Meredith* expressed the sentiment of many of the authors by closing his pamphlet with an admonition that liberty is lost when those who should do not speak up to defend it.<sup>50</sup> It was the fear that liberty was under attack from within that motivated these responses and any reference to the stereotype of the French Other, represented by the Canadians, was a means to express various elements of that fear.

The debates contained within the pamphlet literature from 1774 and 1775 provide important insight into the understanding of British liberty, the role of religion in the British identity and the fears of threats to liberty for contemporaries. It is suggested that British liberty and the supporting governmental and legal institutions were seen as unique and representative of the British people. They were an illustration of the true nature of the British people passed down from their ancestors who controlled the island prior to the Norman invasion. The issue of religion was not simply Catholic versus Protestant; it was much more fractured and complicated. There was no assumption that all Protestants had the same legacy of liberty as others, and a division within the Protestant faiths was a threat to liberty. Finally, responses to the Quebec Act were concerned not with imperial policy or liberty in the colonies, but rather liberty at home. In this debate the idea that liberty was at the heart of the British identity rose to the surface and while Protestantism was important, it was too broad and fractured an umbrella to unite the British people.

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<sup>50</sup>*A letter to Sir William Meredith, Bart. in answer to his late letter to the Earl of Chatham.* (London, 1774), 49-52.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE QUEBEC ACT IN THE PRESS

Throughout the months of June and July 1774, the nation—both in and out of Parliament—fiercely debated the Quebec Act, with hardly an issue of a newspaper failing to offer some type of coverage. While coverage of the parliamentary debate was largely verbatim, there were a few areas of editorial control that helped to put the debate in a light which best fit the papers' positions on the issue. The debate that played out in newspapers in many ways mirrored the points of contention in the pamphlet literature. Yet for the modern reader, coverage of the bill in contemporary newspapers enhances the ideas expressed in pamphlets and adds new dimensions to the positions of those who supported or opposed the Quebec Act.

This thesis' analysis of this debate is based on four contemporary papers and the coverage they gave to the bill. Two of these papers, *The Middlesex Journal* and *The London Evening Post*, provided little to no voice to those who supported the bill, and their opposition to the government was readily obvious. *The London Chronicle*, an obviously pro-North paper, on the other hand, gave little voice to the opposition. While characterized as being sympathetic to the ideas of the radical opposition and anti-North administration, *The Public Advertiser* provided lengthy coverage of the bill, including a vigorous debate from both sides of the issue among various commentators writing letters to the publisher.<sup>51</sup> Understanding the debate in the press is an important addition to

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<sup>51</sup> Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and English Society, 1695-1855* (New York: Longman Press, 2000), 151. The papers themselves point to their political leanings based on editing of debates and comments in coverage of the act.



looking at pamphlet debates. Newspapers provided a wider exposure for the debate over the Quebec Act. While covering the debate newspapers also exposed readers to pamphlet literature.

There are a few important links between the debates in the pamphlets and those in the newspapers. All of the newspapers printed lengthy accounts of speeches by Lords Chatham and Lyttelton, which, in one way or another, appeared in the pamphlet literature. All four papers printed some part of the speeches by the two members and generally gave them lengthy coverage above and beyond what was normally given to debates in the houses of Parliament. As each was in some way responding to the other, and the larger house debate, this most likely proved an important way for papers to sum up each side of the debate. The fact that both speeches appeared in such large and detailed printings might be attributed to both men's sending copies of their speeches to the papers – a growing practice in the late eighteenth century.<sup>52</sup> The connection between pamphlet and newspaper literature was limited in this area, but there were points of greater overlap.

For those who supported the Quebec Act there was an even greater connection to the issues being raised in pamphlets. *The London Chronicle* printed large sections of three separate pamphlets, all supporting the bill, over several days from late June through the end of July. The three pamphlets, *Thoughts on the Quebec Act*, *The Justice and Policy of the Late Act of Parliament* and *A Letter to the Earl of Chatham* (which was attributed in the paper to Lyttelton) were all quoted verbatim and at length. The first two are stretched over two separate issues and each was given a brief introduction which

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<sup>52</sup> Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and English Society*, 90.

provided a summary of the work and the points to be explained; the third pamphlet was presented in a letter to the printer and then is similarly quoted verbatim and at length.<sup>53</sup> The direct exposure for the pamphlets greatly extended the reach of the ideas contained within them. While none of the pamphlets opposing the bill were similarly treated in any of the papers there are strong indications that many of the same ideas permeated the debate none the less.

The primary issue on both sides of the newspaper debate was liberty; those opposed to the bill are not primarily averse to the idea of French laws, their chief concern was the threat posed to domestic liberty, they argue, by the arbitrary power the bill created. Supporters on the other hand saw the ideal of liberty fulfilled in the Quebec Act since it gave the people the form of government they most desired. Liberty in this context refers to the broad ideal of English liberty discussed in the previous chapter. Religion was obviously an issue, however the focus was again put on the rights of Protestants and especially Dissenters in the face of such a law. Such a claim does not mean that stereotypes were not played upon or that rhetoric was not used which demeaned Catholics and French custom. However, as in the debate within the pamphlets, the underlying issue was again the foundation of the British identity, liberty, and what it meant for rule at home and abroad.

The early coverage of the bill in the newspapers was dominated by reports of the debate in Parliament or the response to the bill of the London Common Council; many of the letters and much of the debate among readers and publishers did not begin until the middle of June. As Hannah Barker points out, coverage of Parliamentary debate during

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<sup>53</sup> *London Chronicle*, 25-28 June, 28-30 June, 14-16 July, 16-19 July, and 28-30 July.

this period was a contentious issue and note taking was not allowed until 1783, which led to a dependence on figures in the contemporary press like William Woodfall, who likely supplied many of the papers with the same coverage of the day's debates.<sup>54</sup> Such limitations on reporting limited the ability of the press to give full accounts of debates, or even substantially different accounts.<sup>55</sup> It would certainly account for the almost uniform press coverage given to the debates within Parliament. However 1774 provided a watershed in the breadth and detail of Parliamentary reporting, giving more reliability and depth to the coverage of the Quebec Act than previously possible.<sup>56</sup> Even with these largely similar accounts, editing, which expressed biases and loyalties, was evident in several of the papers.

The most effective way to understand these editorial choices can be found in comparing *The London Chronicle* with *The Middlesex Journal*. There was one glaring difference in the printed transcript of an examination of several individuals over the Quebec Act before the House: Francis Maseree, the former Attorney General of Quebec, William Hay, Chief Justice of Quebec, Doctor James Marriott, the King's Advocate General and a Mr. Loubillere, only identified as of French Nobility from Quebec. Where *The Middlesex Journal* printed testimony of all four men, *The London Chronicle* only printed that of Maseree and Hay, in a word for word match of that found in *The Middlesex Journal*.<sup>57</sup> While neither man necessarily supported the bill, they were far less detrimental to it than the second two witnesses. Marriot refused to give a straight answer

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<sup>54</sup> Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society*, 76-79.

<sup>55</sup> P. D. G. Thomas, "The Beginning of Parliamentary Reporting in Newspapers, 1768-1774," *English Historical Review* 74 (1959): 623-36.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas, "The Beginning of Parliamentary Reporting", 631-632.

<sup>57</sup> *The London Chronicle* June 7-8 1774 and *The Middlesex Journal*, June 7-8 1774.

to any of the questions posed to him, a report he had written previously contradicted several key provisions of the bill, which proved embarrassing to supporters of the bill. As a Canadian Loubillere did not express a strong and unwavering desire for all of the bills provisions, a key claim of those who defended the bill, allowing a reasonable amount of doubt to enter into the debate over the wishes of the formerly French subjects. The editorial license taken by the paper saved supporters from undercutting two important points of their argument, first that they were having a fair and open hearing of a bill based on sound policy and second, that the bill was simply meeting the demands of the Canadians and therefore fulfilling the ideal of liberty. Such editing does not prove that neither was true, but rather that in framing the debate in Parliament each side was willing to delete positions that did not fit their perspective. For the modern reader such actions suggest the paper's ideological positions and emphasize the important ideals within the discourse.

Although coverage of the Parliamentary debate from June 6 and 7 in *The London Chronicle* and *The Middlesex Journal* was not verbatim, the difference in content between the two papers was telling. The debate centered on the issue of the boundary lines of Quebec and how they would affect the established American colonies, and on the removal of British legal structures to accommodate French legal traditions. In *The Middlesex Journal*, Lord North was only given one small paragraph reporting his basic agreement with Edmund Burke and Governor George Johnston, both opponents of the bill. The quote insinuated that North agreed with his opponents that the bill should not negatively affect the land rights of other colonies, concluding, "if the honorable gentleman [Burke] will furnish limits to which no great objections are open. I shall very

readily accept of them as an amendment of any motion.”<sup>58</sup> Burke followed this statement by reciting a well-defined line of boundary for the old colonies, which he argued best suited to the natural layout of the land. The remainder of the debate consists only of accounts of the positions taken by Burke and Johnston. The paper ends the report of the parliamentary debate with a challenge from Burke for those on the other side to answer his attacks on the bill and according the paper, “To the astonishment of all good men, no answer given; those who ought to have replied, had probably nothing good to say.”<sup>59</sup> The paper’s coverage of the debate stands in sharp contrast to the portions of the debate covered by *The London Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* covered the days by listing the objection of the opposition in one sentence and then explaining the reply of Lord North in the next. One of the more entertaining examples illustrates this practice,

The next objection was to a part of the preamble of a clause which says, “it will be highly expedient to grant them the same laws by which their lives and property have been heretofore governed, protected, and ordered.” – Mr. Dempster and Mr. E. Burke objected to the word “protected,” as it was, in their opinion, not true, and was at the same time paying the French too much a compliment. – Lord North, Lord Beauchamp, and Mr. Grey Cooper, insisted the word was proper, and that the law that governed protected.<sup>60</sup>

Such an adaptation of the debate gave a greater illustration of a back and forth, and also reported on the passage of the amendments put forth by supporters. The difference between the two papers shows how tailored each was to a specific audience and a specific point of view. Editorial power had a major impact on the way in which the debate played out.

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<sup>58</sup> *Middlesex Journal*, June 8-10 1774.

<sup>59</sup> *Middlesex Journal*, June 8-10 1774.

<sup>60</sup> *The London Chronicle*, June 8-10 1774.

In all four papers the coverage of the actual debate within Parliament was limited, much of the most informative material comes from letters written to the editors which will be explored later in the chapter. It is nevertheless important to summarize the debates on each side and to get an idea of the tone and issues involved, though the most detailed coverage of these points came from the speeches of Lyttelton and Chatham which appeared in the pamphlet literature. In pamphlet form Chatham's speech was only printed in the colonies, yet a response to his speech was printed in the form of a letter from Sir William Meredith in both England and the colonies.<sup>61</sup> Although the response to Chatham is now credited to Meredith, it was originally often attributed to Lyttelton, as it fits well with the line of argument he took based on the newspaper accounts of his speech. The themes discussed by each man have been thoroughly discussed in the previous chapter; however, this connection is important in linking the themes and ideas of the pamphlet debate to the more far-reaching medium of newspapers.<sup>62</sup> The existence of widespread overlap between newspapers and pamphlets suggests a common understanding of the ideals and principles utilized in the debate. The intention is not to argue that the two audiences were exactly alike, but that they significantly overlapped and for all their differences shared some common ground in thinking about this issue more specifically, and British identity more generally.

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<sup>61</sup> See *The speech of the Right Honourable the Earl of Chatham*, Boston, 1774 and Sir William Meredith, *A letter to the Earl of Chatham, on the Quebec Bill*. The fifth edition. London, 1774 and *A letter from Thomas Lord Lyttelton, to William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, on the Quebec Bill*, New York, 1774. Notice that in the colonies that the letter was expressly attributed to Lyttelton, as was the first printing of the pamphlet in London.

<sup>62</sup> John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976). and Barker, *Newspapers, Politics and English Society*.

The opposition's position can be summed up in two statements by Governor Johnston. The first from *The Middlesex Journal* where he argued that, "the great point in question here, and will be the question in almost every clause of the bill, is this, cannot you consistently with the happiness of the Canadians, and the policy of this country, give them a system consistent with liberty, instead of this horrid system of despotic authority."<sup>63</sup> Much of the printed opposition focused on this point of implementing a system that went against the nature of British liberty for no discernible reason. The testimony of the speakers from the 2 and 3 of June argued that there was no strong desire for and no reason for the bill, at least as in its final form. Johnston also summed up the value judgments implicit in the bill from the opposition's point of view, "that the state of slavery is better than the state of freedom, that the Popish religion is better than the protestant, that juries are unnecessary and to be disused, that monopolies are useful to trade, that it is easier to go up a river than down, that French laws and commercial regulations are preferable to English, and that the constitution, which our ancestors had framed with so much wisdom, and established at the expense of so much blood and treasure is to be destroyed by their wiser sons."<sup>64</sup> The majority of the complaints focused on the threat to British legal and political structures and the ideals of liberty, which the constitution and the British people stood for. The language may not be as forceful as that of the author's pamphlets or letters to the editor but the same ideals animate it. Burke, who often trumpeted similar claims as Johnston's on the legal and religious aspects of the

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<sup>63</sup> *Middlesex Journal*, June 8-10 1774.

<sup>64</sup> *London Evening Post*, June 9-11 1774.

bill, was also active in working to set the boundaries of the colony more favorably to the colonies along the eastern seaboard, as would be expected of an agent of New York.<sup>65</sup>

Despite a lack of coverage in the only pro-government paper, I would argue that the arguments offered on the floor of the Commons are best illustrated by the letter written in response to Lord Chatham and to the congruent ideas Lyttelton himself expressed in the speech printed in the papers. It is also equally difficult to judge the real nature of debate in the Lords much beyond Chatham's attack on the bill and Lyttelton's response. Although the debate was not mentioned in *The London Chronicle*, *The Middlesex Journal* and the *London Evening Post* printed identical reports of the one issue the Lords debated once the bill was returned by the house. The papers reported that the alterations made to the oath of supremacy, allowing the Canadians to take a more generalized oath which would not force them to reject Catholicism and recognize the King as the head of the Church, created the most debate. "This act of Elizabeth has generally been looked on, as one that the Legislature would no more think it was in their power to repeal, than the Great Charter or the Bill of Rights; but in this, people must have been widely mistaken," concluding that "it will be something curious for his Majesty to break his coronation oath, by the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal."<sup>66</sup> The lack of outrage from the Bishops would become an issue for those who would write against the bill during the coming weeks.

As with much of the religious rhetoric which emerged in the debate, the language used suggests that religion was a way to make points beyond those on the surface. Notice

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<sup>65</sup> Jack Sosin. *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy 1760-1775* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 246.

<sup>66</sup> *London Evening Post*, June 17-20 1774.



in the above quote that the other acts that could be repealed were secular rather than religious, the Bill of Rights and the Great Charter were the next to go if the Parliament has the power and consent of “Lords Spiritual and Temporal”. The fear came from an attack on liberty and the tenuous nature of British liberty in the face of the Quebec Act. The reaction to the bill was again not implicitly about colonial policy, but rather about what it meant for the home islands. Debates that took place outside of Parliament suggest that responses to the Quebec Act were motivated by domestic fears, rather than concern for the frontier of the American colonies or a fear of French Catholic culture.

Two important statements about the Quebec Act were made outside of Parliament through petitions to the Commons and the King by the Common Council of London. Contemporary petitions were documents signed by elected officials, electors and non-electors alike, to express a collective political sentiment to the king or Parliament.<sup>67</sup> Printing petitions in the press was important not only because they served as instigators of debate, but also because petitions were viewed by a number of contemporaries as, “valid indicators or informed public opinion; some even construed them as arbiters of which side was more popular.”<sup>68</sup> Alternatively some contemporaries, especially the petitions’ targets, dismissed petitions as meaningless because they were often signed by people who did not understand what they were stating with their signature.<sup>69</sup> Claims of ignorance were not a problem with the two petitions printed in the press, for the petitions emanated from the Common Council and not the people of London. The Common

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<sup>67</sup> For an explanation of the way petitions functioned in contemporary politics see, John A. Phillips, “Popular Politics in Unreformed England” *The Journal of Modern History* 52.4 (Dec. 1980), 599-625.

<sup>68</sup> James E. Bradley, “The British Public and the American Revolution”, in *Britain and the American Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson, 124-154 (New York: Longman Press, 1998), 139.

<sup>69</sup> Phillips, “Popular Politics in Unreformed England”, 617.

Council's close association with Wilkes in the period made it a strong voice for London radicals and opponents of the bill.<sup>70</sup> Their statements of opposition give a strong understanding of the issues involved for those radicals who opposed the bill in the papers.

The first petition as it appeared in *The London Chronicle's* 7 June printing was addressed to "the Hon. the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament assembled," and hoped to prod the Commons into rejecting the bill based on three key principles. The first was that the bill removed English law in civil cases, especially "that sacred part of it, the trial by jury" and replaced it with French Canadian laws, which they saw as threatening the stability of property ownership. Secondly, the bill established Catholicism without giving similar freedoms to the protestant faith, threatening those who already lived, or who in the future might live, in Quebec. Finally, the bill put all the legislative power in the hands of the king, which was "totally inconsistent with the liberty and principles of the English constitution." These three concerns fit well within the opposition's dissatisfaction with the bill, whether radical Wilkites or more moderate Chathamites. Although this petition came from the more vocal and radical wing of the opposition, there is little evidence that the fear came from French law or religion itself, but rather that the dissatisfaction was with the subversion of British values and identity. Their rejection of the religious aspect of the bill was not based on anti-Catholic sentiment, though the rhetoric would change in the later petition, but rather protection for Protestants in Canada. Such a sentiment could easily express a desire for protection of

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<sup>70</sup> John Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots: London Supporters of Revolutionary America 1769-1782* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 60-62.

Dissenters from the Church of England, more than a concern for the establishment of the Church.

The second petition, given to the king prior to his assent to the Quebec Act and the other bills passed during the Parliamentary session, was much longer and more forceful than the previous petition. *The London Evening Post* gave more insight into the debate over the bill, as it was the only paper to print an account of the Common Council's debate in forming the petition to the King.<sup>71</sup> Although no one person was given credit for statements in the debate, the paper gave a short summary. Unlike the petition to Parliament, anti-Catholic rhetoric dominated the debate and dissatisfaction with the King and Parliament were more readily apparent. The debate continued with the three points of the previous petition, but went further by implicitly suggesting the possible threat of persecution from Catholics and the power of the governor to act as a despot in controlling the colony. The reporter argued that "our excellent constitution and the inherent rights of Britons were never so little attended to as they have been in the progress and consideration of this odious bill." The report also concluded that the bill could not have been written better by "our natural enemies the French," and while this account hinted at a French plot on British liberties, such a claim did not make it into the mainstream of the debate. Their line of rhetoric shows that there was at least an attempt to use the Anglo-French rivalry to paint the ministry and the crown in a negative light. However, as it remained on the fringes in both the pamphlets and the newspapers, the implication was that Britons were more willing to suspect their own Parliament and George III of aiming for arbitrary power, than they were French Catholics.

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<sup>71</sup> *Evening Post*, 15-17 June 1774.

The anti-Catholic rhetoric was woven throughout the petition to the king. Expounding on the issues that the Common Council brought up in the previous petition, a few wrinkles were added to the debate. Besides labeling the Catholic religion, “idolatrous and bloody” the petition reminded the King that he was brought in as a protector of the Protestant faith. As they declared:

According to the oath established by the sanction of Parliament in the first year of the reign of our great deliverer King William the Third, your majesty at your Coronation solemnly swore that you would, to the utmost of your power, maintain the laws of God, the true profession of the gospel, and the Protestant Reformed Religion established by Law.<sup>72</sup>

While Wilkes and his supporters tried to use this inflammatory attack on the King and the bill, it is likely that it had little effect. The attack was meant to inflame passions, and does not offer any conclusive evidence of the people’s rejection of the Catholic faith. As Sainsbury has said of the Wilkite movement, “it incorporated a tradition of anti-Catholicism that became manifest during the opposition to the Quebec Act; but this tradition was part of an attitude of xenophobia.”<sup>73</sup> Wilkes and his followers might have tried to tap into the tradition of xenophobia, but there is no evidence in the debate that all opponents of the bill agreed with such a position, in fact many Dissenters who objected to the bill simply rejected it based on a lack of equal rights for Dissenters, and such rhetoric was mostly likely only effective within a certain population of those who already supported Wilkes. Based on Wilkes’ favorable attitude towards religious toleration as a key component of liberty, the motivations behind such a line of

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<sup>72</sup> *Middlesex Journal*, 21-23 June 1774.

<sup>73</sup> Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots*, 81.

argument certainly were more political than religious.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, one must view his religious objections to the bill as not being representative of a true religious divide or a fear of Catholicism, but rather as a political tool used as an opportunity to attack North and his ministry. That some thought they would be successful does suggest that it tapped into the sentiments of a portion of society. However, the petition is perhaps best understood as an act to affect the local elections and a political maneuver rather than a crucial ideological statement.

The bulk of the debate over the Quebec Act in the newspapers took place in the form of letters to the editor. None of the papers utilized this more than *The Public Advertiser* which spent a great deal of its coverage printing lengthy letters responding to other commentators. The issues which dominated the letters were not far different from those which stood at the center of the pamphlet debate, the primary issues being liberty and religion with an emphasis on the domestic implications for the bill. Such similarities are important not only to connect the two forms of publication, but also in suggesting that these concerns and ideals were held by a wider population. As discussed in the previous chapter Catholics and Dissenters were still populations viewed with distrust and some amount of fear. The ideal of liberty which sits at the core of the pamphlet debate was also presented as the foundation of the British people in the letters to the editor. While both groups are presented as threats to liberty, it was the threat posed by the King that proved to be the most pressing. As the bill stood for an assertion of the Crown's desire for arbitrary power, liberty was at the heart of the issues discussed in the contemporary press.

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<sup>74</sup> Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots*, 158.

Connecting the two separate spheres of publication, one which only reached a limited audience and expressed the position of a few select individuals and another which reached a much larger audience and offered the possibility of participation to any of the paper's readers, is crucial to discovering a unified set of ideas common to both audiences. That the ideas expressed in the pamphlets were not limited to those few individuals who came into contact with pamphlets allows the debate examined in the preceding chapter to carry more weight in understanding the larger form of British identity. The debate was not exactly the same in both mediums of expression; however, the underlying concerns were strongly connected. What this spirited and broad debate shows is that the Quebec Act deserves consideration as a divisive and important piece of legislation in the late eighteenth century. That it gained such prominence in the press and in pamphlet literature, even if for a short time, makes understanding reactions to the bill important. The significance to contemporaries of the issues addressed within the bill, and perhaps more importantly the debate itself, warrants further exploration.

For those who opposed the bill there were serious threats posed in its passing. One of the first letters to the press after the Commons had started its debate trumpeted: "Englishmen beware! Absolute monarchy is advancing upon you with hasty strides. You have too much spirit to wish that generous Ardour for Liberty in the Americans should be suppressed and too much good sense not to see, that if the Flame is there extinguished and Despotism established, ye will yourselves be smothered in the Smoke."<sup>75</sup> Liberty and the British identity were under attack from a system of rule that the British, unlike much of Europe, had been able to avoid. However, if the foundations of the British self-

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<sup>75</sup> *The Public Advertiser*. 8 June 1774.

image were destroyed across the Atlantic then surely the King hoped to do the same at home. The *Evening Post* and *The Middlesex Journal* expressed similar concerns. The theme was repeated throughout the debate by various critics. Much as in the pamphlets, the fear in the papers arose not from the nature of French law, nor from a fear of the French Other, but rather from the perceived designs of the King and his ministers towards establishing an absolutist monarchy. Such fears were possible because of the accepted stereotypes of French law and Catholicism; however neither was blamed for this threat, they only stood to signify what was possible. A letter from a reader who called himself Lucius Junius Brutus pointed to what was threatened by the bill, “Are the People of England so depraved, tamely to submit to this most violent Outrage upon the constitutional Liberties of British subjects? What is become of that glorious Spirit of Liberty which animated our renowned Forefathers? That Sacred Fire, which Burnt for Ages with such resultant brightness in the patriotic bosoms.”<sup>76</sup> While the language was dramatic and meant to rouse dissent, it still spoke to an ideal that liberty “animated” the British people, a theme common to contemporary commentators. At stake was not only their freedom, but also that which had been so crucial to those who had come before them. However, such dire predictions were also met with claims of the resounding strength of English liberty, and one especially interesting metaphor was offered in the *London Evening Post*: “Luxury may undo this country and her colonies, but the hand of oppression gives the tennis ball of liberty so violent a blow, that she rebounds with

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<sup>76</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 24 June 1774.

double vigor and velocity and escapes the hand that meant her disgrace.”<sup>77</sup> A threat to British identity was expressed with regard to the colonial theatre as well.

The threat posed by the bill to British subjects in Quebec, and in the colonies as a whole, animated the debate in the press. For English liberty and law made one British, whether in the home islands or abroad. A letter from the commentator “X” illustrated the importance of English law, emphasizing that while the people of Quebec might have technically been British subjects, it was not until they lived under English law that they truly became British; therefore, by not extending English liberty the Quebec Act denied them true British citizenship. The commentator argued that,

I say the Inhabitants of Canada are yet Subjects of France (for by this Act the Proclamation is made void) unless you will admit the Law of England there. The Act does not anywhere declare that the Inhabitants of Canada shall be subjects of Great Britain, and therefore that they are yet left where they were when they were first conquered.<sup>78</sup>

Yet the Canadians were not the only subjects denied their rights. The fact that people of British descent were to be subjected to French law and denied their constitutional rights as British subjects was also an area for concern. However this fear was often part of the larger issue of the Crown’s, and at times the Church’s, desire for arbitrary power.

Religion was often used as a means to emphasize the problems of internal threats to liberty and the lack of freedoms for Dissenters in the British Isles. The King and the Bishops were often attacked for what was portrayed as an unwillingness to defend the Protestant faith. The Bishops were especially derided for what was seen as an attempt to take power similar to that held by bishops in the Catholic Church. In addition to accusing

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<sup>77</sup> *London Evening Post*, 10-12 June 1774.

<sup>78</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 18 July 1774.



the Bishops of being consumed with temporal concerns and pleasures, a commentator claimed that, “they may now wish to change hands; the Protestant religion may not give them sufficient arbitrary power.”<sup>79</sup> Letters often questioned the motives of the Bishops in the Lords, and the Church of England as an institution, in not opposing the religious aspects of the bill. A cartoon from the *London Magazine* illustrates such distrust extremely well (See Figure 1). It was clear that the Bishops in the image are in favor of the bill as they dance around it to the pleasure of other Bishops, the Devil and others. The motivations of the Bishops in supporting the bill are not evident, except for perhaps a little push from the Devil, but it was obvious that they were at least not neutral in their position on the issue. Much was made of the bill’s failure to grant freedoms to dissenting



Figure 1: “The Mitred Minuet” BMC 5228 1 Aug 1774 (*London Magazine*, July 1774)

<sup>79</sup> *London Evening Post*, 25-27 June 1774.

Protestants, who many argued were much closer to the Bishops in faith than the Catholics, pointing to an underlying current of division and dissatisfactions between the established Church of England and Dissenters.

Numerous commentators also portrayed the King as utilizing the Catholic Church in Quebec to gain arbitrary power. As one writer stated of the threat from the King's power over his Catholic subjects, "an army therefore of Catholics, on so convenient a spot as Canada, a spot which, from its particular location is the key to the whole of the American continent, may either stand still, or be called into action *in terrorum* as occasion requires."<sup>80</sup> Echoing claims made in the pamphlets, critics argued that the propensity of Catholics to obey arbitrary power made them the perfect tool to destroy liberty, first in the colonies and then in the home islands. The impact of the bill was especially worrisome for Dissenters who saw the Church's attempt at creating Bishoprics in the North American colonies as a move for greater control and a threat to their liberty.<sup>81</sup> While this argument was based in anti-Catholic sentiments, the implied threat came not from Catholics, who were only a danger when ordered by a despotic ruler, but rather from George III and his ministers. While Catholic tendencies might have fostered the King's desire for arbitrary rule, the largest threat came from internal divisions and threats to liberty. On the surface these concerns were religious, but at a deeper level they were concerns of legal and political freedom within the British government.

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<sup>80</sup> *London Evening Post*, 6-8 July 1774.

<sup>81</sup> Keith Mason, "Britain and the Administration of the American Colonies" in *Britain and the American Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson, 21-43 (New York: Longman Press, 1998), 43. and Troy O. Bickham, *Savages within the Empire: Representations of American Indians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), 217.

Dissenters were also dissatisfied with the bill, but were more troubled over their own lack of toleration than they were the toleration of French Catholics. One letter early in the debate argued that it was ironic that the bishops in the Lords had given toleration to Catholics when for the previous two sessions they rejected the same freedoms for Dissenters. The author sarcastically concluded that Dissenters should reapply for toleration, “as their Lordships are now become such Friends to Liberty of Conscience.”<sup>82</sup> The complaint of a lack of toleration for Protestant Dissenters motivated a great deal of the anti-Catholic rhetoric which arose in the press. Yet, beneath this rhetoric it was implicit that Catholicism was only the means to express dissatisfaction, with religious and political policies at home, and the underlying current of division between Britain’s Protestants. Later in his letter to the editor the author stated that,

I am prone to think, that if Dr. Tillotson, &c. who preached and so wrote so powerfully against those [Catholic] Principles in the last Century, were now alive, it would be hard to prevail upon them to concur in a Bill which establishes Popery in any Part of his Majesty’s Dominions, and then throw out two of the Dissenters, which only prayed for a mere Toleration of their Religion without penalties.<sup>83</sup>

The division largely mirrors the debates of toleration for Dissenters which appeared in the pamphlets, and serves to question the strength of a shared Protestant identity beyond superficial rhetoric.

Supporters of the bill found several avenues to respond to attacks on the Quebec Act, and like much of the debate their points mesh well with those made in the pamphlets of the period. The primary means of responding to opponents was to question their motivations and the willingness of the British public to buy into such divisive attacks. As

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<sup>82</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 11 June 1774.

<sup>83</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 11 June 1774.

a letter to the editor in the *Middlesex Journal* argued, “The clamour raised against the Quebec Bill is as unjust as it is absurd, and while it betrays a total ignorance of policy and legislation, proves also that the malevolence of faction wishes and seeks every opportunity to thwart the Minister in all his measures, not from conviction or a principle of justice, but from folly and wickedness.”<sup>84</sup> Responses to attacks on the bill often took this line of argument. For many of those who supported the bill, a majority of the attacks and much of the rhetoric stemmed not from any true conviction, but rather from an attempt to attack the government whenever possible. Opponents were often labeled as being unhappy that their position was not politically viable in Parliament and were therefore simply acting out in the face of failure.

For those who defended the bill, the fact that it was created by men qualified to make such policy decisions was an important point of defense. In addition, supporters argued that the bill had been thoroughly debated and passed by both houses, a sign of the legislation's strength as a piece of imperial policy. As one letter argued, “the most immanent men for Wisdom and political Knowledge that this or any other Country can boast of, after Years of deliberate Attention and mature Consideration, have formed a Code at once adapted to the Desires and Dispositions of the Canadians, and calculated to secure their Affection to the Mother Country.”<sup>85</sup> By painting the opponents of the bill as ignorant reactionaries and the framers as intelligent men who put years of thought into the bill, supporters hoped to cool the effectiveness of the heated rhetoric used by their opponents.

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<sup>84</sup> *The Middlesex Journal*, 19-21 June 1774.

<sup>85</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 15 June 1774.

Those who defended the bill often cited its fulfillment of the ideals of liberty by granting the Canadians the government they desired. Much as in the pamphlets, liberty was fulfilled not in the forced implementation of English law but rather in the spirit of English liberty and natural law by granting people the government which fulfills their nature. As a letter stated in the *London Chronicle*, “I cannot, either as an Englishman, a Protestant, or a Politician, help thinking [the Quebec Act] framed upon the strictest principles of justice and humanity, peculiarly adapted to the genius of the Canadians, and calculated for promoting their happiness and affectionate attachment to this country.”<sup>86</sup> Another in the *Public Advertiser* argued that the Quebec Bill was “warranted by all the Laws of Nature, of Justice and of Necessity.”<sup>87</sup> The connection between natural laws and government was an important idea. As mentioned in the previous chapter this principle was part of the foundation for the supposition that the British were represented as a people by their laws and their unique ideal of liberty; for the true representation of a people was the government that they form to bind them together. As in the pamphlet literature, the fact that the overwhelming majority of people living in Quebec were French Canadians made the bill necessary and just. That a minority of the population was from the British isles was not an issue, and many argued that enforcing a system of law that was the opposed to the nature of the vast majority of inhabitants would best serve neither liberty nor the empire.

Another defense which was common in the pamphlet literature was the obligations of the Crown and Parliament to fulfill the Treaty of Paris. The claims of

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<sup>86</sup> *The London Chronicle*, 16-19 July 1774.

<sup>87</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 20 June 1774.

attempts at arbitrary power or other hostile motives were rejected by the use of the Treaty and its provisions for religious toleration and protection of property rights. By fulfilling these rights, the supporters of the bill argued, the Parliament was acting on the ideal of English liberty in granting toleration to religious and legal traditions and also in fulfilling the promises made to the people of Quebec. It is not necessary to rehash these points further, but it is important to recognize that they were a key part of the debate in the press, just as in the pamphlets. Supporters used such a defense to argue that the King and Parliament desired to uphold the ideal of English liberty, which also showed that far from seeking arbitrary power they were adhering to legal agreements. Such arguments, used correctly, could effectively respond to claims that the King and his supporters sought to ignore the traditions of English Common Law to take power for themselves. Although such ideas were not expressed directly in such a defense, the implications of their arguments are readily apparent.

Supporters of the bill vehemently rejected attacks of the bill on religious grounds. As one letter stated, “The body of the people are too sensible to be alarmed in these our days for Popery; and these knaves that fret and fume at present will soon grow tired of the sound of their own groans.”<sup>88</sup> As with the attempts to show the opponents of the bill to be disingenuous in their rhetoric, supporters tried to paint anti-Catholicism as a motivation that would no longer incite the British public. The rejection of the religious rhetoric from the opposition centered on the lack of any real threat from Catholics, and on the assumption that the British would be no better than those attacked as arbitrary rulers by forcing their religion on the conquered people of Quebec. As one letter stated, “The

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<sup>88</sup> *The London Chronicle*, 28-30 June 1774.

Days of Conversion by Sword are now over among every polished people.”<sup>89</sup> The commentator’s statement referred to both the Protestant desire to force their religion on the Canadians, but also to the supposed threat posed by Catholics in the Empire and abroad. As in the pamphlet literature many supporters were more than happy to point to the threats posed by Dissenters in the past century and contemporary Britain.

The understanding that Dissenters were not viewed as a unified part of the Church of England was implicit in much of the debate. The threat they posed in the home islands was a historical fact to many writers. Much like attacks on the Catholics from the opposition, the fear was not one of religious principles but rather one of political control and liberty. As a letter in the *Public Advertiser* implied, Dissenters were refused toleration not because of their religious beliefs, but because of the threat they posed to the political stability of the nation. As the author stated, “Restrictions instituted by our law, with respect to Dissenters, are instituted merely from POLITICAL Motives; and that the Spirit of the ESTABLISHED PROTESTANT CHURCH is in itself most benignly averse to persecution of EVERY kind. It has on this Account never laid any restraint upon the Conscience of the Subject, but where the Restraint was judged UNAVOIDABLE necessary for the general Security of the Nation.”<sup>90</sup> Dissenters represented a threat that had to be controlled like any other. Much was made of the rebellious nature of religious Dissenters in the American colonies, who were contemporary proof that Dissenters were not necessarily better friends to the Empire than the French Catholics in Quebec. As was often pointed out by commentators, the French Catholics had never rebelled and showed

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<sup>89</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 29 June 1774.

<sup>90</sup> *The Public Advertiser*, 23 July 1774.

no signs of doing so. The debates which raged in the papers over the issues contained within the Quebec Act point to a concern for liberty above all else and a division among the various religious factions within the British Empire.

The debate surrounding the Quebec Act in the contemporary press suggests that conceptions of a unified Protestant identity and a fear of the threat from outside Britain are exaggerated. Those concerned with the Quebec Act showed a much greater desire to address the issue of liberty, whether implicitly or explicitly, than they did any other issue. Much as in the pamphlet literature, liberty was at the center of many of the concerns contemporaries had over the Quebec Act. When religion figured prominently, it was often used to highlight more domestic concerns and emphasize divisions among Protestant factions. In both Parliament and in the pages of the newspapers, those concerned with the Quebec Act sought to use it as a vehicle to address concerns which went far beyond the actions of the bill. What is implicit in all of the rhetoric and debate is the concern for, and importance of, liberty to the British people.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE QUEBEC ACT IN THE AMERICAN COLONIES

To fully understand British reactions to the Quebec Act it is necessary to explore contemporary reactions in the place where the British identity would soon splinter. Limiting the expansion of the American seaboard colonies was a major goal of the Quebec Act and for this reason the bill was, and is, considered with the Coercive Acts.<sup>1</sup> Reaction to the Quebec Act, like the other bills passed to control the seaboard colonies, was largely divided between two main camps, those who supported the actions of the crown and its critics, who sought if not independence then at least minor interference from the metropolis. The analysis within this chapter will rely heavily on the debate in the pamphlets of the North American seaboard colonies, which will be referred to as the American colonies. Although the focus of only a minor portion of this debate, the Quebec Act was often overshadowed by the previous Coercive Acts and the tea tax, the last remnant of the Townshend Duties: despite its limited discussion, the bill was still an important part of colonial grievances. The debate within the colonies looked much like that which took place within Britain. Opponents saw the bill as establishing Popery and arbitrary power and as constituting a serious threat to liberty and freedom within the British colonies; supporters saw the bill as simply fulfilling the duty of the Crown and Parliament to the Treaty of Paris and as an act of sound governance.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jack Sosin, *Whitehall and the Wilderness: The Middle West in British Colonial Policy 1760-1775* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961); and P.J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empire: Britain, India and America c.1750-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

A crucial issue within this debate – one so large that it entered into the substance of the dispute in Britain – was the willingness of the Americans to cry foul over the passage of the Quebec Act, especially its religious toleration, at the same time that the Continental Congress asked the Canadians to join the American colonies in opposition to Parliament and offered to recognize their right to practice Catholicism.<sup>2</sup> Their anger over toleration of Catholicism and the other justifications for opposing the bill seem ambiguous in the face of such contradictory actions. The value for historians of understanding the reaction, even if opposition was inflated to help create leverage on issues of trade and taxation, comes from the terminology used and how participants of the debate framed the points of contention. The terms used to frame the debate allow us to explore and understand the conceptions of Britishness expressed by contemporaries.

In looking at the debate, this chapter explores the wider debate over colonial regulation that took place during 1774 – 1775 and places discussion of the Quebec Act in this context. Much as in the debate in Britain, the nature and extent of English liberty was central to justifying the actions of Parliament or of the rebellious colonists. Ideas of freedom and arbitrary power were complicated with the rights given to chartered colonies or the duties of those colonies to support the home island. Religion lost none of its importance across the Atlantic and the nature of the denominations which practiced in the colonies made the fear of religious control that much more acute.<sup>3</sup> Add to an already tense situation a growing idea among American colonists that they were now separate from and equal to their counterparts living near the metropolis, and the debate took on

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Continental Congress 1774, *A Letter to the Inhabitants of the Province of Quebec* (Philadelphia 1774).

<sup>3</sup> Troy O. Bickham, *Savages within the Empire: Representations of American Indians in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2005), 217,228-229.

contours different from the debate within Britain.<sup>4</sup> While the Quebec Act was important in the colonies, the fact that it was often overshadowed by more threatening legislation meant that individually it was not as relevant in the American debate over colonial policy as in Britain. If anything the inclusion of the American debate in this work highlights the growing divide between colony and parent state and the different ways that British identity operated within the American colonies. While this wider debate over the actions of Parliament raged, the Quebec Act was somewhat lost in the shuffle and was often secondary to the larger economic issues. However, there is still a great deal that can be understood about the tensions between the colonies and the home island and the importance of identity to both in their limited discussion of the Quebec Act.

The primary focus of the debate within America was on the right of Parliament to tax and regulate the internal affairs of the colonies versus the rights of the colonists to regulate themselves.<sup>5</sup> The debate was directly linked to ideas of the rights of British subjects, in regards to their unique constitutional rights and the rights given to all people through natural and divine law. The numerous points of contention are best represented by the colonists' unhappiness with the tea tax, and their strong reaction against the Coercive Acts, of which the Quebec Act was considered to be a part. Beyond the colonists' formulation of their rights based on charters and ideals of English liberty, religion was an important aspect of this debate. Religion was central not just in the Protestant-Catholic divide – or, more importantly, the Protestant denominational divides

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<sup>4</sup> Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*, 179-181; and Eliga H. Gould, *Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 192-193.

<sup>5</sup> John Derry, "Government Policy in the American Crisis 1760-1776" in *Britain and the American Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson, 44-63 (New York: Longman Press, 1998), 48-60.

– but also with regard to the rights colonists claimed based on religious principles.

Unlike the debate which took place in Britain, the domestic nature of the Quebec Act was an obvious reality, especially as it was linked so closely to bills which directly regulated the actions of the American colonies.<sup>6</sup>

Colonists opposed to the bill were quick to point out that those who supported the crown were against the rights of Englishmen and the rights of mankind. As Alexander Hamilton wrote, “That they are enemies to the natural rights of mankind is manifest, because they wish to see one part of their species enslaved by another.”<sup>7</sup> Hamilton and others who attacked the Coercive Acts argued not only that the colonists were fighting for the true rights of all British subjects, as they saw their interpretation of the ideals of English liberty as the true form, but also that their cause fulfilled the natural rights of man. Perhaps more heavily than opponents of the Quebec Act in Britain, opponents of the Coercive Acts and the Quebec Act in the colonies relied on European Enlightenment thinking to support their cause.<sup>8</sup> Their ideas of colonial rights and the rights they expected as British citizens were shaped by this intellectual influence.

In the colonial pamphlets used for this work there was a strong appeal to the Enlightenment ideals of natural rights, especially those granting the right to representation and freedom from laws or taxes passed without the peoples’ consent, and commentators presented these rights as superseding the ideals of English liberty. While the constitutional principles held up by both sides are important, the colonists were by no

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<sup>6</sup> Frank O’Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century: British Political and Social History 1688-1832* (London: Arnold, 1997), 193.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress* (New York: 1774), 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 27.

means willing to allow British legal tradition to stand as the last word on their right to reject taxation and control, or even to rebel. As contemporary critic Philip Livingston stated, “To consent to laws binding upon us, is one of those rights we enjoy as men, and not merely as Englishmen.”<sup>9</sup> Beyond setting up the right of the American colonists to representation and consent in the laws directly affecting the American colonies, Livingston also emphasized the idea that the source of liberty, rather than originating in the English tradition, was God.<sup>10</sup> In doing so Livingston spoke of “American liberty” and fed into a trend in many of the pamphlets of drawing a strong distinction between Americans and Britons. Livingston was by no means the only, or the first, author to make claims to the superiority of natural rights and the idea of an “American liberty”. The growing schism, both in terms of identity and ideology, makes the debate in the American colonies valuable in recognizing the power of the ideals of English liberty on the home island. As the American colonies became more resistant to colonial regulations and began to see themselves as equals to those in the metropolis their conceptions of liberty would become increasingly important.<sup>11</sup> In the pamphlets there was an implication that if English liberty had ever fulfilled the natural rights of man, George III and Parliament had abandoned those ideals. As in Britain, the Enlightenment ideals of natural rights and government by consent showed how the ideals of English liberty made the British a people united by shared values and a system that protected and represented those ideals.

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<sup>9</sup> Philip Livingston, *The Other Side of the Question* (New York, 1774), 15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empires*, 315.

Commentators dissatisfied with Parliament felt that the British system, in its treatment of the colonists, was no better than a despotic regime. As the minister John Lathrop argued,

Figure to yourselves all the calamities which are felt by the inhabitants of France and Spain, or other parts of the World where despotism is established, and I will be bold to say, we could have no security against calamities equally great, unless in the virtue of the reigning Prince, were the laws which have been passed, with respect to America, since the last war, fully carried into execution.<sup>12</sup>

The argument that the British government abandoned the natural laws gave many authors license to claim that the Americans were trying to uphold those ideals and therefore had the right to resist. As Charles Lee argued, “If this continent should be stained with the blood of a single citizen, it can never be charged to the unreasonable pretensions of the people, but to the Barnards, Hutchinsons, and some other traitors of a similar stamp,” and he continued, “History tells us that the free states of Greece, Thebes, Sparta, Athens, and Syracuse, were all in their turns subjugated by the force or art of tyrants. They almost all in their turns recovered their liberty and destroyed their tyrants.”<sup>13</sup> A violent separation from Britain was not only justified by history, but the blame for such a reaction was to be put squarely on the shoulders of those who had rejected liberty for tyranny. Although certainly motivated by factors other than philosophical ideals, the fact that the American colonists differentiated themselves along the lines of liberty and government points to how important these factors were in forming a British, and later American, identity.

Petitions written by the Continental Congress and the New York General Assembly did not directly attack the British government and the perceived injustices as

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<sup>12</sup> John Lathrop, *A Discourse Preached December 15 1774* (Boston, 1774), 27.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Lee, *Strictures on a Pamphlet entitled, “A Friendly Address”* (Philadelphia 1774), 14-15.

much of the other printed material did. In fact, both made claims to certain rights based on American colonists' position as British subjects. Yet even as they claimed to want unity and pledged allegiance to the Crown, it is implied that if the British continued to ignore American colonial grievances they would look for other ways to secure their rights. What is important about these petitions is the language used to connect the British people and liberty, as an inherent part of their makeup. As the petition from the Continental Congress stated: "Your majesty, we are confident, justly rejoices, that your title to the crown is thus founded on the title of your people to liberty; and therefore we doubt not but your royal wisdom must approve the sensibility that teaches your subjects to anxiously guard the blessings they received from divine providence."<sup>14</sup> Claims to the natural and divine nature of British liberty played to the ideal of British identity, which pervaded the discussion of the Quebec Act in the previous chapters. As the New York petition suggests, they thought that they were "intitled to our birthright, an equal participation of *Freedom* with their *Fellow Subjects in Britain*." and they "wish only to enjoy the Rights of *Englishmen*, and to have that Share of Liberty, and those Privileges secured to us, which we are intitled to, upon the Principles of our FREE AND HAPPY CONSTITUTION."<sup>15</sup> Laying claim to rights that they reasonably expected would never be recognized allowed them to claim, as many of the pamphlets did, that they were denied the rights promised by nature, God and birth. Therefore, the colonists opposed to the actions of Parliament argued, they had legitimate reasons to rebel against the parent state. Using the ideals of liberty and the constitution aimed at the heart of the British

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<sup>14</sup> U.S. Continental Congress 1774, *The Petition of the Grand American Continental Congress* (Boston 1774), 5.

<sup>15</sup> New York General Assembly 1775, *To The Most Excellent Majesty. The Humble Petition of the General Assembly* (New York 1775), 2.

identity was the strongest possible argument to justify independence. If the core of one's identity had been violated, then there was no reason why violent outbursts were not justified.

Protestant ministers who opposed the treatment of the colonies also used religious justifications for possible rebellion. Two printed sermons from Thanksgiving Day, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 1774 by John Lathrop and Joseph Lyman, both dissenting clergymen in the American colonies, provide strong examples of the religious justifications used to support the American cause. For Lathrop, God blessed the American colonies with success and prosperity. Yet, he argued, Britain after the Seven Years War had begun to attack the rights of the people living in the colonies. He declared that these rights and the prosperity gained through God should be defended. While claiming throughout the sermon his desire to see peace and unity restored he stated that, "when the parent State is contending with us, nothing but the *last* extremity, -- nothing but the preservation of *life*, or that which is of more importance LIBERTY, can prevail with us to make resistance."<sup>16</sup> In concluding his sermon Lathrop implied that the actions of Parliament justified armed resistance and hoped it would change its ways to avoid a bloody conflict.

Lyman used the American colonists' position as Dissenters to make the religious case even more forceful. "You may depend on it for a certainty, that when your civil liberty is once gone, your religion will be driven into corners," he declared, and then continued extorting his audience by concluding "therefore I say again, prepare for the conflict."<sup>17</sup> The separation from the British even on the religious front exemplifies how

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<sup>16</sup> John Lathrop, *A Discourse Preached December 15th 1774* (Boston, 1774), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Lyman, *A Sermon Preached at Hatfield Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> 1774* (Boston, 1775), 26.



Protestant faiths were not as united as one would think. Dissenters were still very wary of the treatment they received in Britain and feared for that same suppression being extended to the colonies.<sup>18</sup> The one protection they felt they had, the ideal of liberty, seemed to be crumbling before them as the Parliament took ever greater control over the colonies.<sup>19</sup> The growing assumption of a fundamental separation between the parent state and the American colonies was one that the supporters of the Crown and Parliament had to deal with. Not only did they have to reincorporate the colonists into the fold of English liberty and British political structures, but they had to also show that Dissenters were not under threat from an ever-increasing control.

Those loyal to the crown defended the actions of Parliament using two main arguments. First, commentators attacked the extent to which colonists were claiming their rights based on their ideal of liberty. Secondly, the authors argued that the charters which established each of the colonies never restricted the amount of control the King, or Parliament, held in regulating the American colonies. By attacking the two main intellectual justifications for rebellion, those being the natural rights of man and the laws created by the Crown and Parliament, loyalists hoped to show more reasonable Americans that there was little justification beyond passion and greed behind the actions of the colonists attacking the bill. The authors also used religion to address the actions of the Americans, but in a significantly different way from that of their opponents. They weaved these three points together to shape a fully formed argument against opponents of the bill. While supporters of the crown were acting out of certain traditional divisions

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<sup>18</sup> See Bickham, *Savages Within The Empire*, 217, on the plan to create Bishoprics in North America.

<sup>19</sup> Keith Mason, "Britain and the Administration of the American Colonies" in *Britain and the American Revolution*, ed. H.T. Dickinson, 21-43 (New York: Longman Press, 1998), 43.

within the colonies and British political traditions, their rhetoric has value for two important reasons. First, while they were traditionally loyal to the crown and its actions, it by no means meant that they had to continue along traditional divisions. Much as the Rockingham Whigs set aside their traditional oppositional stance, those loyal to the crown could easily have set aside their loyalty if the bill was truly a threat to liberty. Secondly, whatever their motivations, much like Wilkes and his followers in Britain, the words they use and the concepts invoked in defense of the crown are critical in understanding conceptions of liberty and Britishness.

Those loyal to the crown were not opponents of liberty; rather they understood the ideals of English liberty and British constitutional government differently. Samuel Seabury, an Anglican minister and loyalist, in responding to Alexander Hamilton wrote, “I also agree with you, ‘that Americans are entitled to freedom’,” but as he continued he argued that, “all men, of all countries and degrees, of all sizes and complexions, have a right to as much freedom as is consistent with the security of civil society.”<sup>20</sup> It is this final caveat that Seabury used to argue against the rights of Americans to simply rule themselves as they saw fit. For within the British Empire a supreme authority was required or there was no reason to set up an Empire; if each colony was independent of the Crown and Parliament then anarchy would ensue.<sup>21</sup> By giving liberty boundaries, supporters of the crown tried to counteract the broad claim to rights and privileges made by North American colonists. To reply to the ideas of those against the bill, supporters positioned Enlightenment thought in a way which returned the British system of

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Seabury, *A View of the Controversy Between Great-Britain and Her Colonies* (New York, 1774), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Seabury, *A View of the Controversy Between Great-Britain and Her Colonies* (New York, 1774), 9-11.

government and liberty to the realized ideals of the Enlightenment.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, Seabury set up the British system as the closest one could get to complete liberty without creating anarchy. After citing the drawbacks of returning to the state of nature and the beneficial realities of the British system, Seabury lamented that he, “cannot help regret our having *left* it, by the *equity, wisdom* and *authority* of the [Continental] Congress, who have introduced in the room of it, confusion and violence; where all must submit to the power of a mob.”<sup>23</sup> The importance of responding to the ideas of liberty expressed in the American colonies was crucial to turning back the tide of colonial resentment. Thus, according to Seabury, taking the ideals of the Enlightenment too far could lead to disastrous consequences. It could foment rebellion, thus destroying a shared British-American identity.

Contemporaries believed that shared identity was crucial to maintaining loyalty between the British government and the colonies across the Atlantic. Only if they identified with the people living at the center of the Empire would the people at the edges be willing to obey its authority. The formulation of power in the empire was based on the assumption that all those British settlers living under its control, would continue to conceive of themselves as British subjects and therefore subject to control from the crown and Parliament.<sup>24</sup> If British settlers denied that they were fully British, either by seeing themselves as somehow different from those at the core or by claiming the core no longer represented the true nature of the British people, then it could make colonial

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<sup>22</sup> To understand the pervasiveness of Enlightenment thought in the colonies and the influence of the English legal tradition see, Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 26-33.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Seabury, *A View of the Controversy Between Great-Britain and Her Colonies* (New York, 1774), 8.

<sup>24</sup> Eliga Gould, *The Persistence of Empire*, 142-146.

regulation difficult. As the unified identity began to splinter problems could arise, as Thomas Bradbury Chandler pointed out in his pamphlet *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans*. Chandler suggested a link between unbridled liberty and the growing division between Britain and her colonies,

We have been intoxicated with such draughts of liberty, as our constitution would not bear; and under this intoxication, we have conceited that all the privileges indulged us were the effects of fear. From thinking, we have proceeded to speaking, disrespectfully of our mother country; and our language now is – “It is contrary to reason and nature, that the petty island of *Britain* should govern, and give laws to, the extensive and mighty regions of *America*.<sup>25</sup>

Chandler did not attack the ideal of liberty, but rather the ideas of greatly expanded rights and liberties that had taken root in the American colonies. Like Seabury, Chandler supported the English idea of liberty and the government of the British Empire. The British simply did not take the ideas of the Enlightenment nearly as far as their American brethren.

Those who supported the crown and Parliament also sought to show that the American colonists were demanding legal rights that were never promised or ratified. The claim to rights through charters was a common tactic by the colonial legislatures and the Continental Congress. For supporters of the crown this idea had to be addressed to maintain any legitimacy. Chandler argued forcefully that the rights granted in a charter were not meant to create a fully independent colony. As he asked his readers, “Can you be made to believe that it was ever the intention of the Crown, to establish by charter a power of legislation, in any of the colonies, that is sovereign, independent and

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<sup>25</sup> Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans* (New York 1774), 25.

incontrollable by the supreme authority of the nation?”<sup>26</sup> Chandler pointed out several other flaws in the use of charters in the colonies’ push for localized control to ultimately show that, “in reality, no proper right of the colonies is infringed by the late act of Parliament.”<sup>27</sup> While specifically referring to the tea tax, Chandler used his broader argument to refute the idea that the colonies had the right to reject Parliament’s actions. He aimed to show that the Parliament had a right to set boundaries on both individual and colonial rights.

Seabury used a similar line of argument in attacking the idea that the colonial legislatures had the right to govern themselves. However, he also tried to show how historically the charters were never intended to confer such rights. As he stated, “The right of colonists to exercise legislative power, is no natural right. They derive it not from nature, but from the indulgence or grant of the parent state, whose subjects they were when the colony was settled, and by whose permission and assistance they made the settlement.”<sup>28</sup> He then used several pages to show, in great detail, how the colonial charters never created a right to exist independent of, or without oversight from, Parliament.<sup>29</sup> In rejecting this aspect of the critics’ claims commentators removed the non-ideological claims that could be used to justify rebellion on the basis of a suppression of their rights.

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans* (New York 1774), 12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Seabury, *A View of the Controversy Between Great-Britain and Her Colonies* (New York, 1774), 10.

<sup>29</sup> Samuel Seabury, *A View of the Controversy Between Great-Britain and Her Colonies* (New York, 1774), 10-14.

Religious justification for rebellion was an important factor especially with a large number of Dissenters living in the colonies.<sup>30</sup> Increased control by Parliament could mean a limit on the ability of Dissenters to participate in colonial government; this fear and division will be implicit in the colonial reactions to the Quebec Act. Religion was used by supporters of the crown and Parliament as well, and though they were mainly members of the Church of England these supporters were quick to point out the religious obligations of all Christians. Chandler used religious justifications to restrain the advance of rebellion. In pointing out that in rebellion “the bands of society would be dissolved, the harmony of the world confounded and the order of nature subverted,” he aimed to show that rebellion would send society into the state of nature.<sup>31</sup> However he used this idea of subverting the natural order to tie into religious obligations, as God was the creator of that order. A few lines later he emphatically pointed out that in rebellion “the guilt of [rebellion] is so aggravated, that Christians are required, under the heaviest penalty to avoid it.”<sup>32</sup> Chandler argued that not only would rebellion go against the Enlightenment ideals of a social contract meant to maximize liberty and return the colonies to a state of nature, but that such an act would also go against God and his design for mankind.

Much of this chapter has dealt with the response to Parliament’s actions against the American colonies on the whole. While these responses are important and counted for a majority of the debate in American colonial pamphlets, it is still important to understand the way that the Quebec Act fit into the larger debate. Much of that said of

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<sup>30</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 95-98.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans* (New York 1774), 5.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

the bill fits well within the themes and tensions explored previously in this work.

However, as would be expected, the focus shifted away from the threat to Britain and to the threat to the American colonies.

As with the debate in Britain, the bill's colonial critics were quick to latch on to what they considered an implicit threat. Livingston argued that the power of a tyrannical king who controlled the province of Quebec under the provisions of the Quebec Act was a major threat to colonial liberty. Contemporary generalizations of Catholicism played into this fear, for as Catholics were prone to obey arbitrary power the king could effectively manipulate them to act according to his will. In addition, not only could the Catholics be used as tools of suppression in this view, but the precedent set implied a grab for arbitrary power over the whole of Britain and the empire. The threat may not have come directly from the Catholics themselves, what they and the bill stood for brought liberty and possible threats to it towards the surface. While he did not look favorably on Catholics, for Livingston the real threat came from the Crown. He asked whether, "a country has no great reason to fear the loss of its liberties, when surrounded by a multitude of slaves; especially when those slaves are imbued with principles inimical to it, and united together in one common interest, profession and faith, under one common head, and supported by the weight of a large empire."<sup>33</sup> While the united nature of a Catholic Quebec was part of the danger for the colonies, it alone was not enough to create a threat to liberty. More threatening was the power the crown had to unite and control the people of Quebec. Thus, the crown was perceived as orchestrating the threat to American colonial liberty. Alexander Hamilton was extremely critical of the toleration

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<sup>33</sup> Philip Livingston, *The Other Side of the Question* (New York, 1774), 25.

of the Catholic faith and the lack of a trial by jury in the Quebec Act. Yet again we find in his argument distrust, not of the people or culture of Quebec, but of the motivations and implications of the Quebec Act. The precedent it set for the American colonies implied a looming threat at their borders. Hamilton lamented that “Parliament was not contented with introducing arbitrary power and popery in Canada, with its former limits, but they have annexed to it the vast tracts of land that surround all the colonies.”<sup>34</sup> He hinted that not only had Parliament attacked liberty as an ideal but also the colonies directly, as the seaboard colonies lost access to a great deal of land, which created an economic loss and the possibility of extended attacks on liberty. The threat of an open claim to arbitrary power motivated dissatisfaction on both sides of the Atlantic.

The responses of the dissenting ministers were focused on the religious impact of the bill. Yet as in Britain, the reaction was not so much about the nature of Catholicism or a rejection of its tenets — although the typical anti-Catholic rhetoric was not lacking. Instead it was focused on the ability of the Parliament to impose arbitrary rule over the colonies and limit their religious freedoms. The threat was not primarily the Catholic Church, but instead the power of Parliament to force its will on the American colonies. As *An Address of the Presbyterian Ministers* asked, “by virtue of this power they have established popery in Quebec and the arbitrary laws of France; and why may they not do the same in Pennsylvania or North-Carolina?”<sup>35</sup> Contemporary feelings that a future threat to religion and liberty was possible were also expressed as a direct result of the bill. As Lymon stated, “the Quebec Bill was made, as it was said in Parliament, and has been

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<sup>34</sup> Alexander Hamilton, *A Full Vindication of the Measures of Congress* (New York: 1774), 26.

<sup>35</sup> Philadelphia Presbyterian Church 1775, *An Address of the Presbyterian Ministers* (Philadelphia, 1775), 6.



repeatedly avowed since, in order to be a curb upon the licentiousness of the other colonies. By which we are to understand, that the bill was framed for a restraint upon the freedom and liberties of the ancient English colonies.”<sup>36</sup> The perception of the bill as a direct limitation on the colonies was the best reason to list it as one of the Coercive Acts. As discussed previously, contemporaries felt that the Church of England was also looking to impose greater religious control on the American colonies, especially with the rumored creation of a North American bishopric. Such a development brought fear to many Dissenters who depended on the toleration afforded to them in the American colonies. Such actions were seen as a direct threat to American colonial liberties.<sup>37</sup> These fears were illustrated in a cartoon printed in the *Political Register* a few years prior to the Quebec Act (See Figure 2). The mob pushing the Bishop’s ship back off colonial soil is worried about more than simply religious freedom. The implications of a Bishopric in the colonies linked religious and secular liberty and emphasized the threat such a development posed to both. John Lathrop gave the Quebec Act serious consideration, and as a minister focused solely on the impact of establishing Catholicism in Quebec.

Lathrop spent nearly five pages of his sermon addressing the Quebec Act. It is in the footnotes of his printed sermon that the real fear of Parliament’s power to establish a religion in the Colonies is suggested. Lathrop made the argument that the Quebec Act provided an opportunity for the High Church Anglicans to begin their attack on Dissenters. The reason for the Anglican dislike of Dissenters was that they “in

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph Lyman, *A Sermon Preached at Hatfield Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> 1774* (Boston, 1775), 25.

<sup>37</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 95-98. and Keith Mason, “Britain and the Administration of the American Colonies”, 43.



Figure 2: "An Attempt to Land a Bishop in America" BMC 4227 1 October 1769 (*Political Register*, 1769)

general, have been friends to the rights of mankind and honest enough to oppose Tyrants in church and state.”<sup>38</sup> Lathrop claimed that the role of Dissenters in the revolutions of Britain earned them the distrust of the High Church officials. To back his claim he quoted at length from *An Address to Protestant Dissenters of All Denominations*, a pamphlet printed in Britain and discussed earlier in this thesis. Lathrop quoted a passage which argued that the Quebec Act was meant to first attack the American Dissenters, who were descended from the British Dissenters, as a prelude to the final attack on Dissenters within Britain.<sup>39</sup> Contemporary reactions suggest that this division of Protestant sects, and the fear of conflict between the two, was of more importance on both sides of the Atlantic than any real fear of a Catholic resurgence in the British Empire.

In the petitions to the king, the Quebec Act held widely different levels of importance. The Continental Congress did not distinguish the bill from other colonial grievances about the spate of legislative restrictions passed by Parliament. No special treatment was given to the bill; therefore the reaction to the bill must be associated with the thinking behind the congress’s rejection of the other Coercive Acts.<sup>40</sup> The New York Petition gave a bit more detail and reasoning for their reaction to the bill. While the toleration of Catholicism did warrant a mention, the largest area of concern was the economic impact of the bill. In terms of Catholicism the New Yorkers’ only remark was that “the indulgence granted by it to *Roman* Catholics, have given great Uneasiness to the Minds of many of your Majesty’s *American* Subjects.”<sup>41</sup> However this was a passing

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<sup>38</sup> John Lathrop, *A Discourse Preached December 15th 1774* (Boston, 1774), 31.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. Continental Congress, *The Petition of the Grand American Continental Congress* (Boston 1774).

<sup>41</sup> New York General Assembly 1775, *To The Most Excellent Majesty. The Humble Petition of the General Assembly* (New York 1775), 3.

worry compared to the economic damage the petitioners saw coming from the bill. They argued that the bill was “injurious to this Colony, as it almost entirely destroys our important *Indian* trade.”<sup>42</sup> The petition devoted an entire paragraph explaining the economic damage and gives only a single line to religious concerns. Both colonists and those in Britain understood the economic importance of trading with Indians, and it is implied in contemporaries’ responses that those concerns were more important than religious issues.<sup>43</sup> While religious concerns or concerns over the growth of arbitrary government on the colonial borders may have made for lively debate within the colonies, it appears to have been a minor issue when appealing to the King in colonial disputes with Parliament; making the Quebec Act difficult to understand in the American colonial context. While it was viewed as an attack on colonial liberty, as a religious threat to the Dissenters and as an economic threat, it actually played a limited role in the wider debate over colonial policy. The fact that the text of the bill was not directly aimed at the American colonies, even if its intent was implicit, might have made it less of a concern. Whatever the reasoning behind the bill, it ultimately proved only a footnote in the larger revolutionary motivations.

Those loyal to the crown and Parliament did not greatly differ from their allies in the metropolis and offered similar response to critiques found on both sides of the Atlantic. Chandler dealt with the charges of establishing Catholicism and that the people of Quebec would be denied the right of trial by jury. He defended both of these in much the same way as supporters of the act in Britain. In defending the religious aspect he

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>43</sup> Bickham, *Savages Within The Empire*, 89-90.

argued that the bill only tolerated Catholicism and did nothing more than what was expected under the Treaty of Paris. He also pointed out that Protestants, or any person residing in Quebec including Catholics, could declare themselves Protestant and no longer be held to the tithes that Catholic priests were granted under the bill. In much the same way Chandler defended the initial lack of a jury trial in civil cases by arguing that they could be added later through the government overseeing Quebec.<sup>44</sup> Chandler summarized the purpose of the Quebec Act as,

to secure to a new colony the religious toleration that it had a *right* to demand, and otherwise to ease the minds of a numerous body of people, whose behavior towards government had been decent and unexceptional since they owed it allegiance, and who were likely to prove his Majesty's *most loyal and faithful subjects* in his American dominions.<sup>45</sup>

Chandler ended his point with a slight to the Americans and alluded to the fact that had they simply shown loyalty they might have received what they wanted. That Chandler stuck so closely to the defenses offered by commentators in Britain offers little to speculate about how his perception of British identity might differ. However, these similarities do point to the importance of shared identity: as a loyalist Chandler would have felt a strong connection to a British identity and therefore would have surely been influenced by arguments that made their way across the Atlantic.

Samuel Seabury, like Chandler, offered a similar defense to those in Britain on the points of religious toleration and trial by jury. He tried to ease the fears of arbitrary government by arguing that, “the French laws will only be in use till the inhabitants are better reconciled to the laws of England. These last will be gradually introduced by their

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Bradbury Chandler, *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans* (New York 1774), 20-21.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

own legislature. Their own legislature have also the power of introducing trials by a jury, and the *habeas corpus* act, wherever they think they can be introduced with advantage.”<sup>46</sup>

The issue of trial by jury was central to many of the attacks on the bill and also central to defenses of the bill, the prominence of the issue suggests that the protection of liberty was fundamental in the minds of British subjects. By taking the right of a judgment by your peers away from those trying to adjudicate a dispute, the power is put into the hands of the government. By creating more government authority that rests outside that of the people, the ideal of liberty is threatened. While the similar lines of argument across the Atlantic may seem redundant within this thesis, they offer an important insight into the shared ideal of British identity that was able to span the ocean through various forms of influence, be it trading goods or ideas.

With the American Revolution only a few years off, numerous points of tension can be offered to explain the split. It is implicit though that the ideal of liberty, especially economic, was at the heart of the disagreement between the core and the periphery. While economic concerns might be an easy way to explain the motivations behind the looming American Revolution, there is also a strong ideological undercurrent. That the terminology of liberty was deemed the proper way to express the growing divide between the two sides of the Atlantic puts its importance into sharp focus. Although the Quebec Act was not the central concern in this debate it played an essential role for the colonists in making the Coercive Acts more than just a direct response to the Boston Tea Party and helped to show a larger threat to the American colonies as a whole. For the colonists

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<sup>46</sup> Samuel Seabury, *A View of the Controversy Between Great-Britain and Her Colonies* (New York, 1774), 35.

their conception of liberty was threatened and they were not willing to let their brand of liberty be destroyed by Parliament or the King. They had inherited the true nature of the British people and if rebellion was necessary to protect it than they were willing to fight that battle.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Contemporary reactions to the Quebec Act fit into familiar patterns, whether religious or political, and the consistency of contemporary ideals and terminology used to understand the implications of the bill is striking. In reacting to the Quebec Act, contemporaries, whether for or against the bill, used many of the same ideas of liberty to justify opposing positions. It is this very flexibility that makes liberty such a powerful ideal to unite disparate peoples under a shared identity. Cultural and religious unity were by no means the norm within Britain and its empire, and though it would be easy for the historian to unite the people of Britain in a Protestant identity, contemporary reactions do not make such a formulation obvious or compelling. Rather a breadth of religious and political opinions calls for something else in understanding British identity at the close of the eighteenth century. Contemporary reactions to the Quebec Act suggest that liberty stood at the center of this identity.

Printed materials provide an important insight into the reactions to the bill and allow the ideals which permeated society to be understood in context with competing points of view. While determining the form and size of the contemporary readership is difficult, it does not make these sources impotent to explain and explore the past. The ideals of liberty explored in this thesis are consistently explained in terms that are related regardless of the commentator's position on the bill. Such a unanimity points to a basic foundational idea of liberty shared by the British people. Not to say that all British people understood liberty in the same way. However, there is implicitly a level at which



liberty, an ideal which was a historical trait of the Anglo-Saxons passed on to their English ancestors and then extended to the Scottish people at the Act of Union (1707), is the unique organizing and foundational principle of the British people. Time and time again in the printed debate this ideal is used to justify religious toleration, religious exclusion, extensions or reductions of power, and ultimately rebellion. Dissenters argued that British liberty gave them the same rights of toleration given to Catholics in Quebec and others argued that the very nature of the British people was under duress as the crown and Parliament sought arbitrary power. That this term was so broad and able to unite the British people is compelling. Yet at the same time it raises any number of additional questions.

If liberty was the uniting principle of the British people, then how did such an ideal and identity mesh with those who were denied liberties and access to political expression? How did Catholics in Britain fit into and understand such an identity? The Irish, while not British, were a direct example that liberty was not to be extended to all under British rule. Numerous other groups who would be incorporated into the empire learned a similar lesson. The list can go on, what of all women, and a large portion of men, who were denied the right to vote? Many of these issues would be addressed in the coming century but others were not addressed, much less resolved, until the twentieth century. Questions over the relationship between an identity focused on a political union and the still powerful cultural identities are also raised by this thesis. While a British identity might figure prominently for a person living in the empire outside of Britain, or those working directly for the institutions of the British state, how did it function for the average person living in Scotland, England or Wales on a daily basis?

Understanding identity or nationalism is not an easy task, as both can exist at numerous levels. However, when talking of the umbrella identity that was the British identity, contemporary reactions suggest that liberty was the unifying principle. There is no evidence that other identities did not flourish under this larger identity, or that it even meshed any of the various cultures it incorporated.<sup>1</sup> Such a fact does not change the importance of such an identity, nor does it remove the nature of its impact on contemporary society. A unified identity was crucial in the functioning of the British Empire and only a broad and inclusive ideal like liberty was able to provide the foundation for the British people.

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<sup>1</sup> For all the distance that may exist between Colley's position and my own I fully agree with her conception of the British identity in relation to the other identities within Britain, Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 6.

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New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

**VITA**

Name: Aaron Lukefahr Willis

Address: P.O. Box 161210, Austin, Texas 78716

Email Address: aaron.lukefahr@gmail.com

Education: B.S. Political Science, Santa Clara University, 2004  
M.A. History, Texas A&M University, 2007