

fellow confederationist A.M. Smith who, rather surprisingly, concedes that “[a]s a commercial undertaking, the Intercolonial Railway presents no attraction.” He then adds, however, that “for the establishing of those intimate social and commercial relations indispensable to political unity between ourselves and the sister provinces, the railway is a necessity.”⁸⁶

Although there are many variations on the theme, the theme itself is clear and unambiguous.⁸⁷ Regardless, of how they might differ on the merits of the Quebec Resolutions, the men of 1865 were at one in seeing a close connection between confederation and the great public enterprise of the Intercolonial Railway. That is, they found in railroads, the “high tech” of their day, a path to meaningful compromise that created a great nation. Today there is no dearth of technological innovation; it is the hallmark of our time. Perhaps some bright statesmen in Quebec City or Ottawa will seize upon it to restore that nation.

The Image of the United States in the Confederation Debates

The United States has played a muted role throughout the present constitutional crisis of its neighbor to the north. The official position of the American government has been to encourage Canadians of all stripes to patch up their differences, while it maintains a low profile to avoid aggravating a situation that is already volatile enough. Some attention has been given to the likely impact of an independent Quebec upon the North American Free Trade Agreement, but this question tends to be readily subsumed under the larger question of the economic viability of Quebec as a nation in its own right. Howard Galganov, an outspoken defender of anglophone rights in Quebec, had little to show for his ill-advised trip to Wall Street to discourage American investment in his province because of its language policies. Traditional trade disputes between Canada and the United States continue apace, but this is simply business as usual with little relevance to Quebec’s claims of sovereignty.