

Thinking Historically

- HS Establishing **historical significance**
- E Using primary-source **evidence**
- C&C Identifying **continuity and change**
- C&C Analyzing **cause and consequence**
- HP Taking a **historical perspective**
- ED Considering the **ethical dimensions** of history

Figure 6-2 George Brown was a journalist and politician who became known for his belief in “rep by pop”—representation by population.

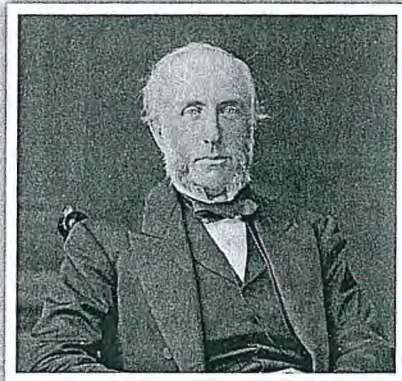


Figure 6-3 George-Étienne Cartier



Figure 6-4 John A. Macdonald



CHALLENGES FACING BRITISH NORTH AMERICA

Since the 1840s, the colonies of British North America (BNA) had faced a variety of internal challenges and external pressures that helped push the colonies toward Confederation.

POLITICAL DEADLOCK

As you learned in Chapter 4, Britain had declared in the *Act of Union* of 1841 that the two Canadas—Canada East and Canada West—would have equal representation in the elected assembly of the Province of Canada. Britain made this decision because Canada East’s population outnumbered Canada West’s population, and this guarantee of equal representation was supposed to allay Canada West’s fear of domination by French Catholics. However, instead it led to **political deadlock**, in which government decisions could not be made because each side blocked the other from advancing any agenda.

By 1861, due to a large influx of immigrants into Canada West during the 1850s, the census showed that Canada West had almost 300 000 more people than Canada East. Because of this demographic change, George Brown, a prominent leader in Canada West, began to advocate that representation in the legislature should be according to population. “**Rep by pop**” would give equal representation to each vote in the assembly. “Rep by pop” became a rallying cry among people in Canada West who agreed with Brown’s views. Canada West’s political leaders saw “rep by pop” as a democratic way to further their own agendas; French Canadian leaders saw it as an attempt by Canada West to assimilate them.

FORMING NEW ALLIANCES

Two increasingly influential leaders in the assembly, George-Étienne Cartier from Canada East and John A. Macdonald from Canada West, began to work together to try to remain in control of the tumultuous elected assembly of the Province of Canada. They both believed that representation by population was not the answer to Canada’s problems and they opposed Brown’s ideas.

Cartier, Macdonald, and Brown realized that the political deadlock highlighted their colony’s French–English duality. Despite their different beliefs, all three men agreed that the *Act of Union* was not working and that they could play a crucial role in changing the future of Canada.

ECONOMIC AND GEOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

While political deadlock challenged the Province of Canada, the economy and wide geographical distances were having an effect on all the British North American colonies. Those who supported the idea of **Confederation** (a political union of the colonies) started promoting it as way to end their economic troubles, in part by creating a great railroad to connect the colonies.

TRADE AND FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, Britain had given goods and resources coming from British North America preferred treatment. However, by 1840, Britain started to do away with this preferential treatment. In 1846, Britain repealed the *Corn Laws*, which had been in effect since 1791. This repeal had a devastating effect on the Province of Canada's economy. The *Corn Laws* had placed a lower import duty on wheat and grains coming into Britain from British colonies. Without the protection of the *Corn Laws*, Canadian wheat and flour had to compete with grains from many more countries. Canadian wheat and flour became more expensive, so exports to Britain dropped by over 60 percent.

The Province of Canada was thrown into a recession, a period of economic decline. Some Canadians started to think in terms of a continental rather than a colonial trade system. They began to believe that they should manufacture their own products and find markets for these products within the colonies of British North America. The British North American colonies began to look at working with one another as opposed to working one-on-one with Britain.

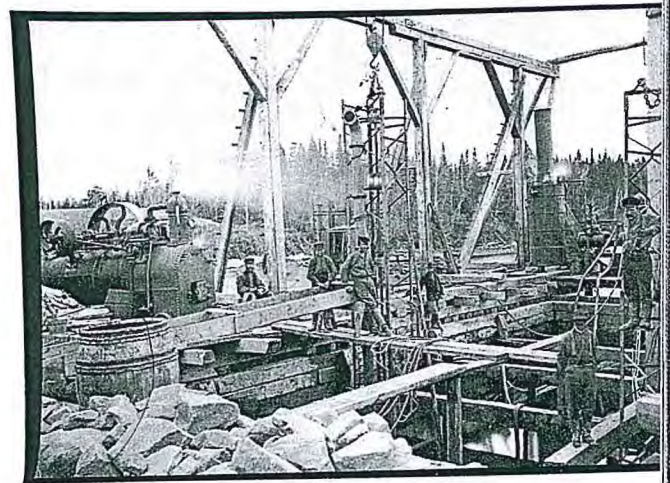
CC What infrastructure would British North America need if the colonies were to trade with one another? What challenges might these infrastructure needs pose?

LINKING THE COLONIES: THE ROLE OF THE RAILWAY

Leaders quickly realized that if trade between the colonies was to be a viable option, an effective system of rail transportation would have to be built to link the East to the West. If a railway was expanded across the prairies and into British Columbia, raw goods could be transported from the West to manufacturing points in the eastern part of British North America. It was also believed that the building of the railway would help open up new settlement opportunities and establish a stronger British presence in the West.

Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Province of Canada all had their own railroads, but the costs were staggering and each government was struggling to cope with the debt from building its railroad. If the railroad system was to expand, the colonies would need to work together. This way they would be able to invest in the railway as one unit and negotiate with possible investors and builders as a single entity. The independent colonies started to look toward the future together.

Figure 6-5 This photo shows the building of a railway bridge, circa 1870, in New Brunswick. The high costs of building railways placed enormous stress on the budgets of small colonies. Confederation was looked upon by some leaders as a way of sharing the debt load and a step toward creating a railway across the continent.



CHECKFORWARD

You will learn more about Canada's railway development in Chapter 8.

TERRITORY AND TRADE CHALLENGES FROM THE UNITED STATES

Another challenge that pushed British North America toward Confederation was the atmosphere of conflict in North America. The American Civil War and its immediate aftermath not only encouraged the union of the British North American colonies, but also directly determined the form that their government took.

THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

It is necessary to have a basic understanding of the **American Civil War** in order to understand how it affected British North America. Between 1861 and 1865, several southern states declared their secession (withdrawal) from the United States and formed the Confederate States of America. The United States government rejected the southern

secession and declared that the act was a rebellion. Largely over the issues of slavery and control over economic and political decision making, the Confederate States fought against the northern states (known as the Union States) in a bitter and brutal war. The war ended in 1865, with the North defeating the South, but the effects of the American Civil War reached far outside the geographical boundaries of the United States.

Britain and France both proclaimed neutrality in the war. However, Britain's booming textile industry needed cotton, which was produced in the

southern states. In 1862, Union ships attempted to block shipments of cotton from leaving the South. To avoid the blockade, British investors built ships called blockade runners. These small, fast ships were able to smuggle cotton out of the South to Britain. Many Americans in the northern states began to look suspiciously at Britain, because although the British government still declared its neutrality, it did little to stop the blockade runners. Britain's lack of complete neutrality increased American–British tensions.


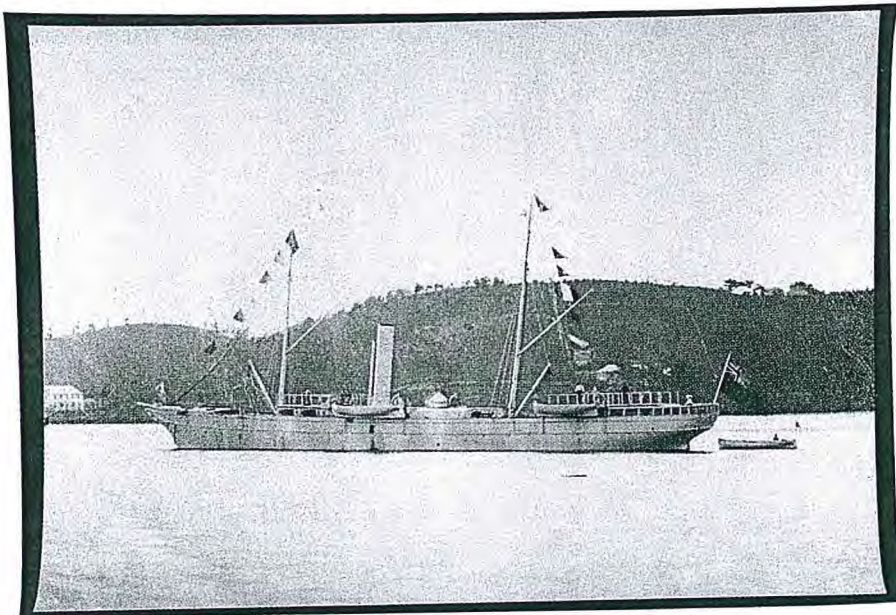
 Why would Britain's relationship with the United States affect British North America? Suggest potential consequences.

Figure 6-6 The British blockade runner, *Dee*, was one of many ships used to continue trade with the Confederate States by evading the Union blockade.



THE TRENT AFFAIR

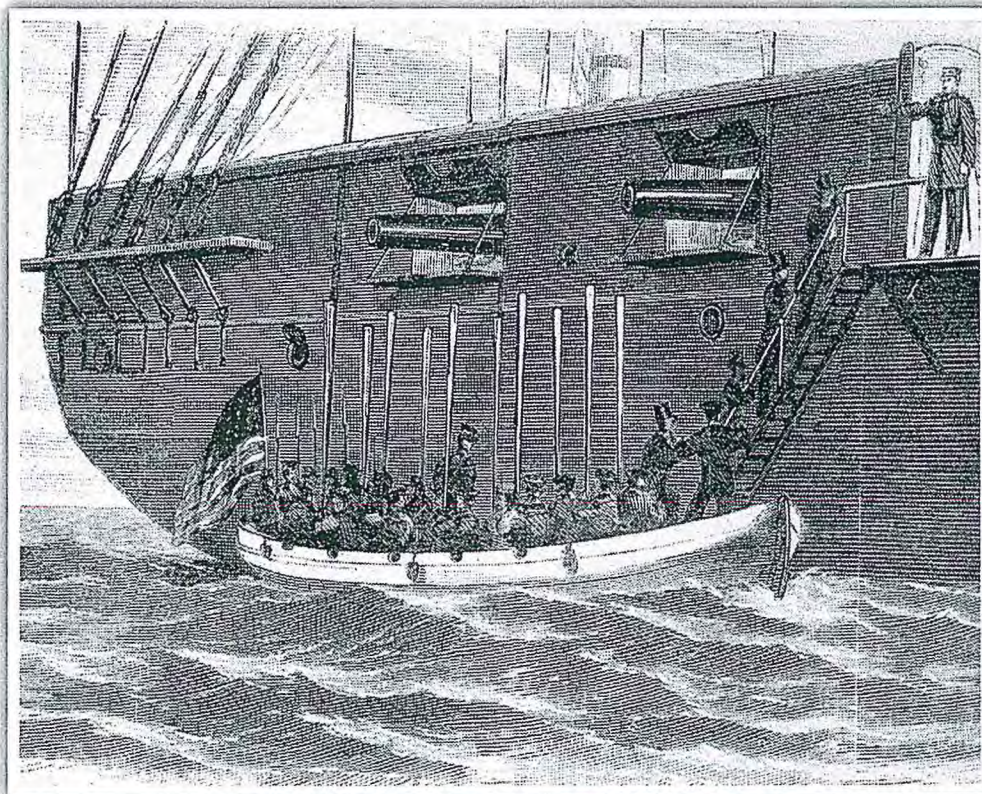
In November 1861, an American warship stopped the British mail ship *Trent*, which was heading back to Britain with two Confederate agents on board. They were travelling to Britain to ask for British support for the Confederate cause. The Americans took the two agents prisoner, despite the ship being in neutral waters. Britain threatened to retaliate if the agents were not released. American President Abraham Lincoln freed the prisoners as he did not want to have to face a war with Britain while he was also fighting the Confederate States. Despite the release of the prisoners, the relationship between America and Britain remained strained.

Because Britain had threatened to retaliate, some Americans wanted to get back at Britain by attacking British North America. In response, the British dispatched 14 000 troops to British North America. Because there was no railway, it took a long time to transfer the troops to where they were needed. Although the United States never did attack, it is likely that British North America would not have been able to defend itself due to its inability to quickly transfer troops.

ST. ALBAN'S RAID

In the autumn of 1864, a group of Confederate soldiers attacked the town of St. Alban's, Vermont, using Montréal as their base. After the raid, the soldiers escaped back across the border to avoid prosecution. British government authorities arrested the soldiers, but later released them. The United States government was furious, and it threatened British North America if future attackers were not turned over to American authorities. The threat of attack from the United States made the British colonies realize that, as separate entities, they had little or no means to defend themselves.

Figure 6-7 On November 8, 1861, a Union Navy vessel captured two Confederate agents travelling to Britain on a mail ship. This event strained American-British relations in what became known as the *Trent* Affair.



VOICES

They [the United States] coveted Florida, and seized it; they coveted Louisiana, and purchased it; they coveted Texas, and stole it; and then they picked a quarrel with Mexico, which ended by their getting California . . . Had we not the strong arm of England over us, we would not now have had a separate existence . . .

— Thomas D'Arcy McGee, Member of the Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada

UNITED STATES EXPANSIONISM: MANIFEST DESTINY

During and after the American Civil War, there was concern in British North America that because Britain, and by connection British North America, was perceived as supporting the Confederate States, the United States would now look at its northern neighbour in anger and might retaliate. Underlying these fears was the popularity of the doctrine of **Manifest Destiny** among many Americans at this time. Manifest Destiny was a belief that the United States was destined, by God, to control all of North America. During the 1840s, the Americans were expanding across the continent, leading to the **annexation** of Texas in 1845, even though Mexico still claimed Texas as its own. After the Mexican–American War (1846–1848), the United States acquired New Mexico and California for \$15 million. The United States also looked to the northwest lands of the continent as a rich source of natural resources.

The outbreak of the American Civil War strengthened the sense of Manifest Destiny. A vocal group of American expansionists believed that once the war was over, the United States should turn its attention to the annexation of British North America. Although the ultimate goals of Manifest Destiny were never reached, the popularity of the idea undoubtedly weighed on the minds of many British North American leaders and residents.

E Examine how light and dark are used in the painting. What impression does this technique give viewers? Look at the left side of the painting. What and who is “America” clearing out of the way for the newcomers?

Figure 6-8 *American Progress*, by John Gast, 1872. The idea of Manifest Destiny continued in the United States well after the American Civil War. In this painting, “America” is shown floating over the plains, guiding the way for farmers, the railway, and stage coaches.



FENIAN RAIDS

Besides the American Civil War, other American problems threatened British North America. In 1859, a group of Irishmen formed a brotherhood, called the **Fenians**, in the United States to promote the liberation of Ireland from British control. The Fenians believed that if they could capture some British North American colonies, they could hold the colonies ransom in return for Ireland's freedom. In 1866, the Fenians made several attempts to raid British North America.

In the spring of 1866, for example, the Fenians launched a small strike against New Brunswick. Five Fenians crossed the border, held up a customs officer, tore down the Union Jack (the British flag), and then were forced back across the border by the New Brunswick militia and British troops.

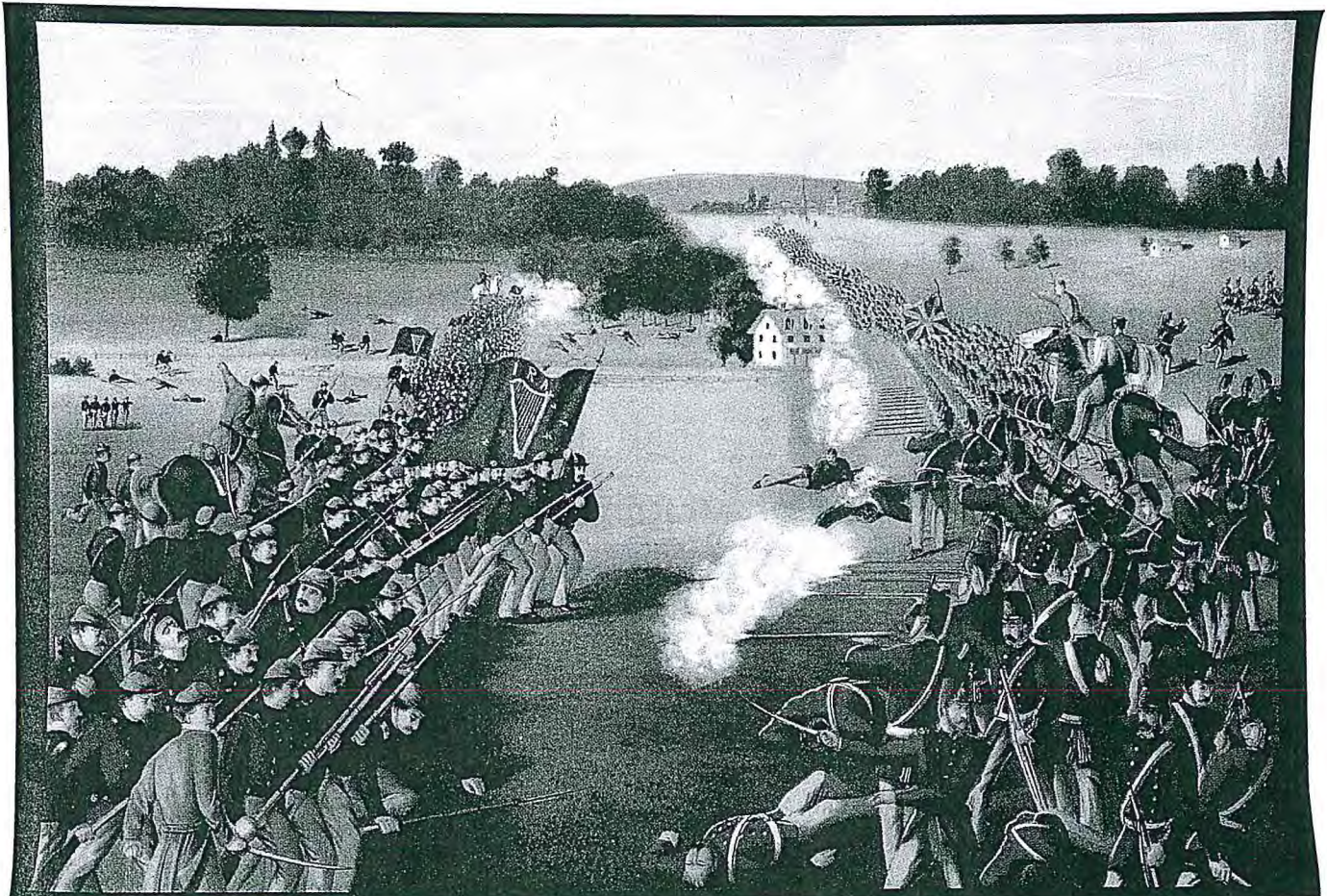
A second Fenian attack was more serious. On May 31, 1866, about 1500 Fenians crossed the Niagara River into Canada West. In the Battle of Ridgeway (near Fort Erie), fighting took place between the Fenians and a force of Canadian militia and British soldiers. On June 3, the Fenians retreated across the border, after killing six Canadians and wounding thirty others. Fenian raids into British North America continued until 1871, including an attempted raid into Manitoba that failed before it reached the border. The Fenian raids helped promote a desire for a union among the BNA colonies, which began to believe they needed a united defence.

VOICES

We are the Fenian Brotherhood,
Skilled in the art of war,
And we're going to fight for Ireland
The land that we adore,
Many battles we have won,
along with
The boys in blue,
And we'll go and capture Canada for
We've nothing else to do.

— Fenian marching song

Figure 6-9 The Battle of Ridgeway was the largest and deadliest of the Fenian raids into British North America.



THE END OF RECIPROCITY

Along with the other threats from the United States at the time, an economic influence nudged British North Americans along the path to union. In 1854, the United States and British North American colonies agreed to a **Reciprocity** Treaty that allowed for free trade on products such as timber, grain, coal, livestock, and fish. In the spring of 1866, the United States cancelled the Reciprocity Treaty. One reason for the cancellation was that some Americans believed that if the United States could cripple the economy of British North America, the British colonies would be forced into a union with the United States. However, that was not the result.

Now that British North America had lost its second guaranteed market in the past twenty years, leaders realized that their economic fortunes were tied to the policies of other nations. This realization made many British North American leaders see the benefits of closer economic and political cooperation with one another.

VOICES

I am in favour of a union of these provinces because it will enable us to meet . . . the abrogation [cancellation] of the American Reciprocity Treaty . . . I do not believe the American government is so insane as to repeal the treaty. But . . . if they do repeal it, should this union of British America go on, a fresh outlet for our commerce will be opened up to us.

— George Brown, *Legislative Assembly, Province of Canada, 1865*

THE IMPERIAL NUDGE: BRITISH SUPPORT FOR CONFEDERATION

After the mid-1840s, Britain's colonies were no longer regarded as precious economic assets to the empire. By the 1860s, British authorities indicated a growing desire to have colonies, such as those in North America, assume a greater financial responsibility for their own defence in order to reduce the burden on British taxpayers. Many British officials welcomed any ideas, such as Confederation, that might permit the colonies to be more independent and reduce the need for financial and military support.

Britain also believed its own relationship with the United States might improve if British North America was more independent. Britain did not want to have responsibility for managing British North America's relationship with the United States, as well as its own. Britain promised low-interest loans for railway development as an enticement for the colonies to support Confederation. Colonial governors who did not support Confederation were replaced by governors more sympathetic to the idea.

RECALL... REFLECT... RESPOND

1. What factors within British North America were pushing some of the colonies toward Confederation?
2. What external factors influenced Confederation?



Causes of Confederation

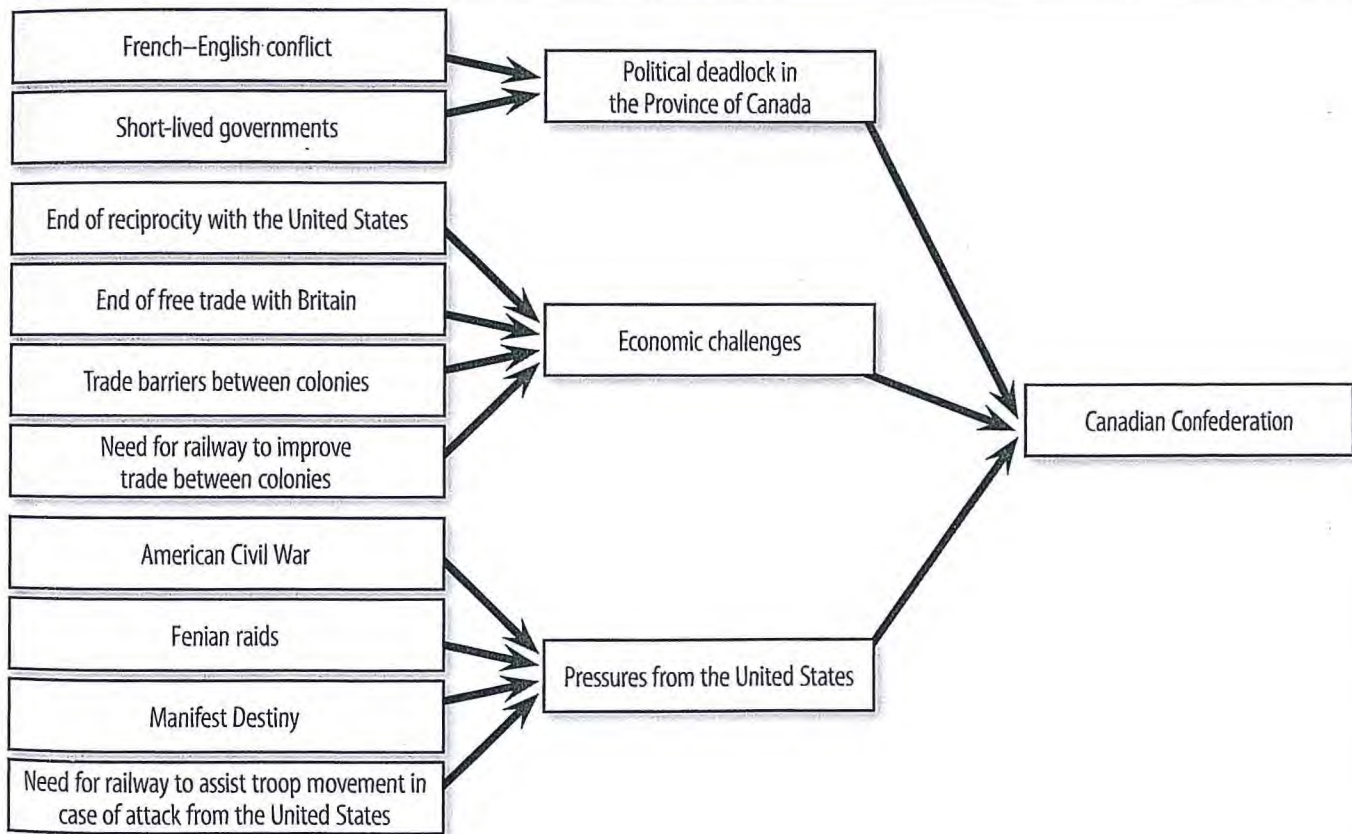
As you engage in historical thinking, there are two things to keep in mind about cause and consequence. First, it is important to remember that events often have multiple causes. Second, broad underlying causes are often as important as immediate causes.

Confederation is an excellent example of how multiple issues resulted in a historical event taking place. In examining the diagram below, you will notice how difficult it is to argue that one particular issue caused Confederation. Instead, many issues contributed to Confederation. Notice also that within

each of the general issues or topics that caused Confederation, there is a more specific cause of Confederation. You can see that causation in history is not a simple matter.

One of the challenges that historians face is assessing not only what the causes of a historical event were, but also which of the causes may have played the most significant role. In many cases, you will find that historians are able to agree on the general causes of a historical event, but may disagree on the most significant factor.

Figure 6-10 Major Direct Causes of Confederation



1. In this chapter we look at the causes that led to Confederation. If you were to continue the chart, what might be some of the consequences of Confederation (think about peoples, provinces, and the economy)?

2. With a partner, brainstorm a current event or issue that has multiple causes. Outline the various causes in a chart similar to the one above.