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Stories of Confederation

Reference Guide

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Act of Union, 1840

Passed by the British Parliament in July 1840 and proclaimed in February 1841, the *Act of Union* brought Upper and Lower Canada (present-day Ontario and Quebec) together under a single assembly and government, as recommended in the **Durham Report**. The two were now called the United Province of Canada, and were subdivided into Canada West and Canada East. Each region received an equal number of seats in the assembly; English became the sole official language.

British Empire

The term British Empire refers collectively to Britain's overseas territories and colonies. At its height in the late 1800s and early 1900s, the British Empire spanned the globe, and came to be known as "the empire on which the sun never sets." Britain supported Confederation because it believed that a single dominion would be easier to defend, and less costly to administer, than several small, separate colonies.

British North America

British North America refers collectively to the British **colonies** and territories of northern North America. The term was used mostly between 1783 and 1867, but it has a longer history.

British North America Act, 1867

The *British North America Act* was a law passed by the British Parliament to create the **Dominion** of Canada as a domestically self-governing federation. The Act divided law-making powers between one federal parliament and several provincial legislatures, and it outlined the structure and operations of both levels of government.

Colony	A colony is an area or country under the political control of a more dominant country. In most cases, a colony is occupied by people from the more dominant country and their descendants. In British North America, what we now call provinces were previously referred to as colonies.
Confederation	In Canada, Confederation refers to the union between Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec to form the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Between then and now, six more provinces and three territories have joined Confederation.
The Crown	The Crown, or monarch, is Canada's head of state. The <i>British North America Act</i> vested executive authority in Queen Victoria and her successors. The Crown is represented at the federal level by the Governor General , who acts on the advice and with the consent of the prime minister and government.
Dominion	In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the term dominion referred to a semi-independent state within the British Empire. Canada achieved dominion status in 1867; other parts of the British Empire (e.g., Australia, New Zealand and South Africa) achieved dominion status in the early 1900s.
Durham Report	The Durham Report was commissioned by the British government to determine the cause of the rebellions of 1837–1838 . Lord Durham, who wrote the report, came back with three recommendations: institute responsible government , unite Upper and Lower Canada (present-day Ontario and Quebec) and assimilate French speakers.
Elected assembly	An elected assembly refers to the elected part of a legislature (or law-making body). It's made up of politicians who are each elected to represent a particular group of people, or constituency. The assembly meets to formulate, discuss and pass laws.
Governor General	The Governor General is the monarch's representative at the federal level in Canada, and carries out constitutional and ceremonial duties on behalf of the monarch. After responsible government was achieved in each of the British North American colonies , the role of the Governor General became more ceremonial.
Immature electorate	An electorate refers to all the people of an area who are eligible to vote in an election. The term immature electorate was used as a criticism of responsible government , by suggesting that the electorate was naive and inexperienced, and therefore wouldn't make good decisions.
Indigenous peoples	The term Indigenous peoples refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples who are the original inhabitants of the land now known as Canada.

New Brunswick	New Brunswick was one of the first four provinces to join Confederation in 1867. Across the province, opinions were mixed. Some people feared New Brunswick would lose power to the larger provinces — Quebec and Ontario . Others were worried about threats from the United States, and wanted the protection that Confederation would afford.
Newfoundland	Officials from Newfoundland attended the Québec Conference, but not the Charlottetown or London conferences that ultimately led to Confederation. People in Newfoundland were divided. Those opposed to Confederation feared they would pay high taxes and be conscripted into Canadian wars. Newfoundland did not join Confederation until 1949.
Nova Scotia	Nova Scotia was one of the first four provinces to join Confederation in 1867. The debate for and against joining drew many arguments from each side. Shipbuilding, fishing, farming and trade had made Nova Scotia a flourishing colony. Some were afraid their needs would be ignored if they became part of a larger union. Others favoured Confederation because it would mean access to a railway and a wider Canadian market, and could limit American expansionism.
Ontario (Canada West)	Ontario was one of the first four provinces to join Confederation in 1867. Since 1841, Ontario (called Canada West) and Quebec had been joined together as the United Province of Canada — a single British colony with one assembly and one government. (Before this union, Ontario was called Upper Canada, and had its own assembly and government.) Many people in Ontario believed that Confederation would solve three problems: it would enable the British North American colonies to jointly defend themselves, facilitate trade between the colonies, and end political deadlock by restoring separate provincial governments to Ontario and Quebec. Large and densely populated, Ontario had no fear of being overrun, which was a concern of the Maritime provinces.
Parti rouge	The Parti rouge was a radical liberal party from Canada East (Quebec), in operation from the 1840s to 1867. The Parti rouge fought for democratic reform and opposed Confederation.
Prince Edward Island (P.E.I.)	P.E.I. did not become part of the Dominion of Canada until 1873, despite hosting the famed 1864 Charlottetown Conference. The province was initially interested in a union of the three Maritime colonies but, ultimately, saw little benefit in joining a larger union of the British North American colonies in 1867.

<p>Quebec (Canada East)</p>	<p>Quebec was one of the first four provinces to join Confederation in 1867. Since 1841, Quebec (called Canada East) and Ontario had been joined together as the United Province of Canada — a single British colony with one assembly and one government. (Before this union, Quebec was called Lower Canada, and had its own assembly and government.) There was considerable tension between Canada East and West. The French-speaking inhabitants of Canada East, facing an often-hostile English-speaking majority, were determined to protect rights to their language, culture and institutions. Fear of losing such rights led many French Canadians to oppose Confederation. Others saw Confederation as the best way to safeguard and enhance these rights because it would grant Ontario and Quebec separate provincial governments.</p>
<p>Rebellions of 1837–1838</p>	<p>In the first half of the 1800s, Crown-appointed members of conservative local elites — known as Tories — monopolized political power in Upper and Lower Canada (present-day Ontario and Quebec). Reform movements sought greater power for elected representatives of the people. The failure of peaceful attempts to reform the system led to armed rebellions in Upper and Lower Canada in 1837 and 1838. The rebels were defeated by government forces, but their actions had set the stage for the Durham Report and the <i>Act of Union</i> — key events in the lead-up to Confederation.</p>
<p>Representation by population (rep by pop)</p>	<p>Representation by population (known as rep by pop) is a political system that bases the number of elected representatives on an area's population. Under the 1840 Act of Union, both regions in the United Province of Canada — Canada East (present-day Quebec) and Canada West (present-day Ontario) — were granted an equal number of representatives, despite Canada East having a greater population. Politicians from Canada East complained that they were underrepresented in this system, and so they began demanding rep by pop in the early 1840s. The situation began to reverse itself over the following decade as Canada West became more populous than Canada East: now it was politicians from Canada West who demanded rep by pop!</p>
<p>Responsible government</p>	<p>The term responsible government refers to a government that is accountable to the people and that depends on the support of an elected assembly. Before responsible government was achieved in British North America, Crown-appointed members of conservative local elites — known as Tories — monopolized political power in each of the colonies.</p>
<p>Tory</p>	<p>In Upper and Lower Canada (present-day Ontario and Quebec) over the first half of the 1800s, the term Tory referred to members of local elites who were English-speaking, Protestant and conservative.</p>