

Building A Nation

Reasons for Confederation

#1 - Political deadlock and Great Coalition

#2 - Railway linking the colonies

#3 - Cancellation of the Reciprocity Treaty

#4 - The threat of American expansion

#5 - Great Britain wanted the colonies to be more self-sufficient

#6 - Desire to expand settlement into Rupert's Land

#1 - Parties in the Legislative Assembly

Canada West

Liberal-Conservative Party

John A. Macdonald

vs.

Reform Party

George Brown

Canada East

Le Parti Bleu

George-Étienne Cartier

vs.

Le Parti Rouge

Antoine-Aimé Dorion

#1 - Coalition

- In 1841, Canada West and Canada East were part of United Canada
- Each region had an equal number of seats in their joint Legislative Assembly
- To form a government with a majority, at least one party from each section had to co-operate in a coalition

#1 - Political Deadlock

- In the 1860s, the coalition government in power had a difficult time getting a strong enough majority to pass legislation
- This led to political deadlock and frequent elections and changes of government
- The fact that the leaders in Canada West, George Brown and John A. Macdonald were bitter enemies made the situation worse

#1 - The Great Coalition

- In 1864, George Brown announced that he was willing to work with his political enemies
- This co-operation was called the Great Coalition
- The members of the Great Coalition were willing to work together, and could stay in power long enough to pass laws and make improvements, such as building railways

#2 - Obstacles

- By 1860, Canada West, Canada East, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick each had its own railway
- However, no railway joined the colonies
- United Canada was separated from the Atlantic colonies by the mountains in Gaspé and the northern part on the state of Maine
- The St. Lawrence River froze each winter, stopping water transportation between the colonies

#2 - Advantages

- An intercolonial railway would overcome these obstacles
- The distance between the colonies would seem much shorter
- Trade could be increased among the colonies and speed up mail delivery
- In the case of war, especially attack by the US, a railway would move troops quickly from one colony to another

#2 - Grand Trunk Railway

- By 1860, the Grand Trunk Railway, which ran from Sarnia in Canada West to Rivière-du-Loup in Canada East, was bankrupt
- The Grand Western Railway, which ran from Niagara River to Windsor, also was in financial trouble
- Railway building in British North America came to a halt
- However, politicians and businessmen were beginning to dream of a new country united by a railway

#2 - Grand Trunk Railway

- By 1860, the Grand Trunk Railway, which ran from Sarnia in Canada West to Rivière-du-Loup in Canada East, was bankrupt
- The Grand Western Railway, which ran from Niagara River to Windsor, also was in financial trouble
- Railway building in British North America came to a halt
- However, politicians and businessmen were beginning to dream of a new country united by a railway

#3 - Cancellation of the Reciprocity Treaty

From 1854 to 1865, there was free trade between the British North American colonies and the United States under the Reciprocity Treaty.

This allowed agricultural products and raw materials to be sold across the border without high tariffs being paid.

The colonies had stronger trade links with the United States than with each other.

#3 - Cancellation of the Reciprocity Treaty

In 1865, the United States ended the Reciprocity Treaty.

People in the colonies of British North America began to think of joining together so they could trade among themselves with no tariffs.

They hoped that this would increase their economic prosperity.

#4 - American Civil War

- The British North American colonies were concerned about a possible American invasion
- People thought that if the colonies united, they would be better able to defend themselves
- The relationship between the British North American colonies and the US was uneasy because Britain had supported the South in the conflict

#4 - Fenian Raids

- These fears seemed to become reality in 1866
- Fenians from the United States made several armed raids across the border into British North America
- Fenians were a group of Irish Catholics in the US who wanted to end British rule over Ireland
- Since they could not attack Britain directly, they decided to attack her North American colonies

#4 - Manifest Destiny

- After the Civil War, Americans continued to move westward, following their belief in Manifest Destiny
- After obtaining lands formerly controlled by Spain, Mexico, France, and Great Britain, many Americans believed it was their fate to occupy all of North America

#4 - Americans in the Red River Settlement

- During the late 1860s, the Red River Settlement experienced a population boom
- Historically a community of francophone Métis, and a minority of English-speaking mixed-bloods, the settlement received an influx of Americans
- The Americans wanted to join the United States, and favoured annexation

#4 - Colony of British Columbia

- An influx of American miners came to the Fraser Canyon during the gold rush in the late 1850s and 1860s and had settled in the area
- Many British Columbians felt they had more in common with California than with eastern British North America

#5 - Great Britain's attitude

- In the mid-1860s, Great Britain's attitude towards her colonies began to change
- Since the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the policies of mercantilism were no longer in effect
- Opinion was divided as to whether the colonies were still a benefit to Great Britain

#5 - Arguments For/Against

In Favour of Colonies

- Source of raw materials
- Market for manufactured goods
- Opportunity to emigrate

Against Keeping Colonies

- Burden on British tax-payers
- Should pay for their own government and defence