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*Stuffing the Scarecrow: The Anti-Americanism of George Grant and Pierre Vadeboncœur*

**Abstract**

Anti-Americanism in Canada experiences upswings and downswings and, since September 11, 2001, has made a return, in spite of the wishes of historian Jack Granatstein who in 1996 declared that it was “dead as a dodo.” A comparative study of two examples of the genre, George Grant’s *Lament for a Nation* (1965) and Pierre Vadeboncœur’s *Trois essais sur l’insignifiance* (1983), demonstrates that English and French Canadian anti-Americanism share a similar foundation in their resentment and in their stress on the purity of their societies’ foundings. Both Grant and Vadeboncœur believe that American Protestantism is corrupt; they defend ideologies, Red Toryism and Quebecois separatism, that have hindered the development of a Conservative political tradition in Canada; and they admire France. Grant’s fascination with Céline brings to the foreground the similarities between Canadian anti-Americanism and European anti-Semitism. The increase in anti-Americanism in Canada since September 11, 2001 represents an inevitable turn toward nationalism after a twenty-year period of continentalism.

**Résumé**


The global rise of anti-Americanism in the eighteen months between the Islamist terrorist attack against Manhattan and Washington, DC on
September 11, 2001 and the start of the Second Iraq War on 20 March 2003 had an enormous impact on Canada and effectively put an end to twenty years of friendly relations with the United States. Since 1774, when British Parliament passed the Quebec Act and successfully dissuaded French Canadians from joining the American Revolution, Canadian thought has moved back and forth between continentalism and nationalism, the latter perspective never straying far from its foundation in mistrust of “America.” In Yankee Go Home? Canadians and Anti-Americanism (1996), historian Jack Granatstein argued that Brian Mulroney’s re-election in 1988, and the Free Trade Agreement that was its immediate result, symbolized the definitive victory of continentalism. In effect, during the 1990s, Canadian anti-Americans found it difficult to make their case. However, the new forces at work since the revelation of American vulnerability are again pushing Canadian thinking, particularly in Quebec, away from continentalism.

On 18 November 2002 in Montreal’s La Presse, editorialist André Pratt wrote, “I continue to be astonished by the scale of the present anti-American current in Quebec. If we are to believe several of our readers, the terrorist menace has for all intents and purposes been invented by the Bush administration to justify its aggressive policies! ” Anti-Americanism in Quebec has two sources: first, a native variant that emphasizes the province’s “colonial” status and, second, a French variant that stems from the influence on the Quebecois and francophones worldwide of France’s “obsession anti-américaine” as it manifests in newspapers like Le Monde.

A one-sentence paragraph opens Canadian journalist Knowlton Nash’s book Kennedy and Diefenbaker (1990): “We were the original anti-Americans.” In Here: A Biography of the New North America (2001), New York Times reporter Anthony DePalma writes, “Canadians can be considered the original anti-Americans; their feeling of antipathy toward certain aspects of the United States date to the first days of the new republic.” Canadian historian Frank H. Underhill joked, “The Canadian is the first anti-American, the model anti-American, the archetypal anti-American, the ideal anti-American as he exists in the mind of God.” Canada is, in fact, an excellent laboratory for studying anti-Americanism. In the 1770s and 1780s, the Protestant Loyalists who rejected the United States’ new freedom from monarchy and established religion travelled, or were forced, into British North America — today Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime provinces — which led them into cohabitation with French-speaking Catholics. The two founding groups of the Canadian Confederation are, as Nash, DePalma and Underhill recognize, the world’s first anti-Americans.

Anti-Americanism in Canada is thus a tradition. Canadians can embrace or stand aloof from it, but the tradition will go on with or without them. Rooted in the eighteenth century, anti-Americanism begins in Quebec with
France’s defeat in the French and Indian War, and in English Canada with Britain’s defeat in the American Revolution. These reverses led many Canadians to conceive of their nation’s origins as being purer than that of the “materialist” American republic, an enduring sentiment of moral superiority substituting for military victory.

The last sharp upturn in anti-Americanism in Canada occurred between 1965, the outbreak of the Vietnam War, and 1984, when Pierre Elliott Trudeau stepped down after fifteen years as prime minister. Two particularly virulent books that bracket this period offer insights into the enduring themes of Canadian anti-Americanism revived in the aftermath of 9/11: George Grant’s *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (1965) and Pierre Vadeboncœur’s *Trois essais sur l’insignifiance* (Three Essays on Insignificance) published in Montreal and Paris in 1983.

The following essay seeks to identify the perennial themes of the Canadian Confederation’s two anti-American traditions, specifically through these two books. It will not, however, place *Lament for a Nation* and *Trois essais sur l’insignifiance* in the context of their authors’ larger intellectual projects: in Grant’s case, his critique of technology and modernity; in Vadeboncœur’s, his articles in favour of Quebec’s independence, and his art and literary criticism.7 *Lament for a Nation* mourns the downfall of John Diefenbaker’s Progressive Conservative Party government in April 1963. Grant attributes its failure to the impossibility of conservatism in an era during which “American modernity” imposes uniformity and destroys local cultures.8 *Trois essais sur l’insignifiance* analyzes James Cain’s novel *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), Judy Chicago’s feminist sculpture *The Dinner Party*, exhibited at the Musée d’art contemporain in Montreal in 1982, and a passage from Julian Green’s *Journal* set in Harlem in 1933. In them, Vadeboncœur identifies three phenomena that he believes to be typical of “America”: the “liquidation of culture,” “religion reduced to the level of bit player,” and the victory of an arbitrary “raw reality without philosophy.”9

Grant was born in 1918 in Toronto. Vadeboncœur was born in 1920 in Strathmore on the island of Montreal. Coming to maturity in the 1940s, the English Canadian became a university professor, while the French Canadian worked for 25 years as a union official before committing himself in 1975 to writing full time. In his book *Radical Tories*, journalist Charles Taylor places Grant in the Red Tory tradition. A “Tory” because of his loyalty to English-Canadian Loyalism, Grant also became a hero to the new Left, a “Red,” in the 1960s during the Vietnam War because of his equally strong commitment to pacifism. Vadeboncœur published articles in the 1950s in *Cité libre*, at that time Quebec’s most important reformist magazine, but he radicalized in the 1960s, becoming an *indépendantiste*, a
socialist, and an admirer of the Cuban revolution. *Les deux royaumes*, his 1978 book on the loss of “spiritual” values, however, “disconcerted” some of his readers on the secular Left.10

Both Grant and Vadeboncœur revere Europe in their writings. As Canadians they struggle with their existence in North America, and their contradictory feelings about the continent stem from their lack of “groundedness,” expressed by Northrop Frye in his oft-quoted insight that the Canadian writer, instead of asking the question “who am I?” seems to be asking “where is here?”11

An admirer of Grant, Ian Angus has worked to formulate a uniquely Canadian philosophy. The difficulties in articulating it, to his mind, indicate a “deep danger” in the idea of such a national philosophy and in Canadian culture itself. The danger has two parts:

The first is simply envy. We have never been at the top. Canadian culture is permeated with resentment of those who are and consists, in many secret ways, of strategies of self-promotion. The second is more subtle and may be called “the purity of origins.” Since we have never been in charge, we do not have to take responsibility for the way things are.12

In Angus’ terms, Grant and Vadeboncœur are both resentful of the United States’ power and influence and convinced of the purity of English- and French-Canada’s origins.13 Grant combines his anti-Americanism with a preference for “Greek” over “Judaic” Christianity; his complex attitude toward Judaism brings to the foreground the relationship between European anti-Semitism and Canadian anti-Americanism. Vadeboncœur’s veneration of French art informs his resentment of the long reach of American culture.

Grant: A Fearful Hatred14

In his late teens and early twenties, Grant considered John Dewey and William James his favourite philosophers. He read Robert Frost and Hart Crane, and admired Franklin Roosevelt. However, in “Canada Must Choose: The Empire, Yes or No?” (1945), a pamphlet published when he was 27, Grant firmly rejected the continentalism of his youth and reintegrated into a Canadian nationalist perspective.15 The image that he formed of the United States at that time was set in stone. With the zeal of a reformed apostate, Grant would for the rest of his life reject pragmatism, modernity, liberalism, progressivism, corporations, capitalism, and technology, all of which to his mind became “American.”

Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s postwar novels *D’un château l’autre, Nord* and *Rigodon* fascinated Grant. Calling it “the greatest literary masterpiece of this era,” Grant deeply admired the trilogy, which chronicles Céline’s
odyssey through Europe in the final days of World War II. Yet the French novelist’s pre-war anti-Semitic pamphlets troubled Grant. Gerald Owen compares Céline’s “pacifist hatred” in these pamphlets to Grant’s “anti-nuclear anger” in *Lament for a Nation*, charitably adding that the Canadian, however, “did not leap into a lie, let alone into a wilfully lying fantasy as Céline did.” Nonetheless, Grant’s anti-Americanism plays the same obsessive role in his thought that anti-Semitism did in Céline’s: the bat in the belfry that won’t stop squeaking.

Grant’s anti-Americanism has political and religious components. In his view, a wise political philosophy served as a foundation for the conservatism of the Loyalists. That philosophy rejected the separation of church and state established by the founders of the United States, a secular nation, in Grant’s mind, whose moral shallowness has corrupted Protestantism, Catholicism and Judaism.

In *Lament for a Nation*, Grant argues that in the United States “skeptical liberalism” has replaced other liberal traditions based on the Church, constitutional government, and classical studies. In contrast, the Loyalists who established English Canada maintained their allegiance to the British Tory tradition with its noblesse oblige and stress on community over individual rights. According to Grant, the Loyalists were less followers of the liberal John Locke than of the Anglican theologian Richard Hooker who, in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1593–1662), argued for a society made coherent through its religion, thus justifying an established church. Janet Ajzenstat writes that, in Grant’s view, “Canadians should be wary of liberal democracy because Canada is inherently a ‘Tory’ nation.” A continentalist, Ajzenstat has opposed Grant’s conception of their nation’s history but admitted in 1998 that “one comes across his arguments constantly in the media and in the political statements of educated Canadians.”

The ambivalent response of Canadians to *Lament for a Nation* began at its publication. *Saturday Night* said the book was flawed but served an admirable purpose. John Gellner wrote that Grant “has made some important and debatable points and, by overstating his case, he will shock thoughtful readers into giving some thought to a very great and very pressing Canadian problem.” Striking the same ambiguous chord, Alexander Brady felt that some points in Grant’s argument were “true, provocative, and brilliantly expressed.” The *University of Toronto Quarterly* reviewer, however, was “disturbed by the author’s exaggeration and distortion in the analysis and the stark black and white colours in which he pronounces judgment and disposes of Canada as a branch plant satellite.” The first reviews of Grant’s future classic often gave the book this kind of backhanded compliment. In *Cité libre*, philosopher Charles Taylor described *Lament for a Nation* as “one of those remarkable books that goes to the bottom of a problem without throwing much light on it.”
In 1965, Grant participated “as a nationalist and a conservative” in a teach-in against the Vietnam War, organized by his nephew Michael Ignatieff at the University of Toronto.24 This event marks the beginning of Grant’s popularity with the nationalist Left. In the decade after its publication, the influence of Lament for a Nation slowly grew. The text that best explains why this occurred is poet Dennis Lee’s “Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space.” First given as a talk at a writers’ congress in Montreal in 1972, the essay is a Grantian howl against continentalism. Paralyzed as an artist by his life in a space colonized by American culture, Lee credits Grant’s essays with giving him the tools to understand his and other Canadians’ “self-hatred and sense of inferiority.” Lee felt liberated by Grant’s description of their Loyalist ancestors as men devoted to the “classical European tradition,” opponents of the “liberal assumptions that gave birth to the United States.”25

Grant and Lee’s caricature of the United States as a monolithically liberal society owes much to sociologist Louis Hartz’s 1955 book The Liberal Tradition in America and its 1964 sequel The Founding of New Societies. Hartz believed the nations formed by European immigration were “fragments,” their political cultures frozen in the historical era of their founding. The United States was a liberal fragment without a relevant socialist party because it lacked a feudal tradition, socialism resulting, in Hartz’s scheme, from a Marxist-type synthesis of feudalism and liberalism. According to Philip Abbott, The Liberal Tradition in America was “the dominant interpretive text in American political thought for a generation,” but in the late 1960s it came under severe attack “and by the 1990s was ‘pretty much dead.’”26

In Canada, Hartz’s theory was taken up by Gad Horowitz, whose 1966 article “Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation” is, wrote H.D. Forbes, the best-known argument about the origins of Canadian culture, and “one of the few things in the field that practically everyone has read and remembers.”27 Horowitz labelled French Canada a feudal fragment and identified a “Tory touch,” a residue of the Loyalist migration, in English Canada.28 The presence of Toryism has thus led to the establishment of an enduring socialist tradition in English Canada, represented in politics by the New Democratic Party.

A continentalist school of thought has formed to combat the portrait of Canada’s origins advanced by Grant and Horowitz. Lament for a Nation and “Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation” are not based on a study of primary documents. Grant and Horowitz deduce the presence of Toryism in Loyalist thought but do not provide empirical evidence to prove it.29 In The Origins of Canadian Politics (1986), historian Gordon T. Stewart provides an alternative view. A comparative study of Britain, the United States and Canada, and based on
the work of J.G.A. Pocock and Bernard Bailyn, the book identifies “court” and “country” parties in the anglo-atlantic culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries organized around platforms of mistrust and faith in democracy. In the United States, the court/country party division manifested in the federalism of Alexander Hamilton and the Democratic-Republicanism of Thomas Jefferson. For Stewart, Canadian Tories were not disinterested paragons of “community” and “tradition” but court party men, many of whom were interested in using the government to enrich themselves, often through patronage. Ajzenstat calls these two parties the “liberal democrats” and the “civic republicans”; the former represented for her by Étienne Parent and Joseph Howe and the latter by Louis-Joseph Papineau and William Lyon Mackenzie, the leaders of the 1837 rebellion.

It is significant that the first chapter of an important 1998 contribution to this school of thought is entitled “Liberal-Republicanism: The Revisionist Picture of Canada’s Founding.” If the evidence continues to mount demonstrating the ideological character of the Grant-Horowitz scheme of Canada’s origins, the “revisionist” interpretation may one day become the dominant approach. During the outbreak of anti-Americanism in the months after 9/11, however, the Grant-Horowitz paradigm continued to provide an intellectual frame for many Canadians.

Under the influence of Hartz, in *Lament for a Nation* Grant argues that political differences among Americans are illusory. Canada’s neighbour, the “most progressive society on earth,” guided by “Jeffersonian liberalism,” desires for individuals “the emancipation of the passions.” In the United States, conservatism is impossible, and Americans who call themselves conservatives are in truth liberals.

Grant also seems to be engaged in a frustrated dialogue with Russell Kirk’s *The Conservative Mind* (1953), which argues that American conservatism does indeed exist and that its founding text is Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). In Kirk’s view, in the 1790s Alexander Hamilton and John Adams formulated American conservatism, which finds its greatest voice in Abraham Lincoln, struggles against the excesses of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, goes into eclipse during the New Deal, and is reborn in the 1950s. A rapid debatable rundown of American political history, this sentence, given its sympathetic tone, is also one that could never have been written by Grant.

Ernest Manning’s *Political Realignment* (1967), written like *Lament for a Nation* during Lester Pearson’s term as prime minister from 1963 to 1968, analyzes conservatism from a western-Canadian perspective. Unlike Grant, who mourns the passing of Loyalist conservatism, Manning planned its adaptation to a new era. He proposed “a rationalized two party federal political system.” Manning felt that the Progressive Conservative Party, “for reasons not primarily of its own making,” was the vehicle for bringing
together his Social Credit movement and other groups on the right.\textsuperscript{36} His proposal was realized in 2003 when Peter MacKay and Stephen Harper negotiated the merger of the Progressive Conservative Party and the Alberta-based Canadian Alliance to form the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC). The formation of the CPC is in part recognition by its leaders that the Grantean Red Tory current is riddled with contradictions that have hindered the articulation of a coherent conservative tradition in Canada.

In \textit{Lament for a Nation}'s most famous sentence, Grant states that “the impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada.”\textsuperscript{37} He calls Canada a branch plant society of the United States; for him, the new CPC, a political formation oriented more toward North America than Europe, would simply be branch plant conservatism. Western Canada, however, is not the Loyalist heartland of Nova Scotia and the southern halves of Ontario and New Brunswick, as shown by Kim Campbell’s angry reaction in the late 1980s to her reading of Grant’s classic. The future prime minister from British Columbia felt that the Canada “lamented by George Grant and others is a Canada whose history is a colonial history … a history in which central Canada has arrogated to itself the right to define what the roles of the components of this country will be.”\textsuperscript{38}

The conflict at the centre of Grant’s thought — whether Canadian conservatism should be oriented toward its Tory past or toward the post-World War II American conservative revival announced by Russell Kirk — has been decided against his wishes. The resentment of Kim Campbell and many others has led Canadian conservatism to separate from the Loyalist homelands and take root in western Canada. I would argue that in the future conservative thought — using the CPC as its political vehicle — will develop the “terrestrial” identity of Canada based on its existence as a neighbour of the United States in North America.

The religious component of Grant’s anti-Americanism found expression in a 1959 lecture that dismissed American Protestantism as “secularized Calvinism,”\textsuperscript{39} and, in \textit{Lament for a Nation}, that criticizes American Catholicism for not questioning “the assumptions of the society that permits it, except in the most general way.”\textsuperscript{40} Secularized or sold out, American Protestantism and Catholicism serve the empire.

In a 1969 essay, “In Defence of North America,” Grant argues that American Judaism is close to the American dream, but that it would be degrading “to say that it has been able to express its riches in American culture when the public contribution of Jews has been the packaged entertainment of Broadway and Hollywood, the shallow coteries of intellectual New York.” Different immigrant groups on the continent have “colored the central current of the American dream,” such as the large role Catholics play in politics or “Jews in communications and intellectual life,” but they have been making contributions to “traditions utterly differing
from the their own.”

Eli Mandel — noting that Grant seems to have forgotten the contributions of English-Canadian Christians such as Innes, McLuhan, and Frye to “communications” — rightly condemns this statement as “not worthy of serious intellectual discourse.”

Later, in a 1983 article on Céline, Grant analyzes the rise of “modern anti-Semitism.” He writes that the Jews were

pouring into western Europe from the east, their religion setting them free from the straining loneliness which was consequent on the impersonal world of mass civilization. They could treat the public world [as capitalists and communists] without thinking of the consequences of destroying it, because they had a nation other than the nation which the public world manifested.

In explaining the “mistake” of a “great artist,” Grant uses a language similar to that of *Lament for a Nation*, which censures the United States for being a “destructive nation.”

In Grant’s thinking, Christianity has Greek and Judaic roots, and he expressed his preference in an interview:

But that does not mean there aren’t grave intellectual differences between Christianity and Judaism. Clearly, for myself, I’m on the side of Christianity that is farthest away from Judaism, and nearest to the account of Christianity that is close to Hinduism in its philosophic expression. I would accept what Clement of Alexandria said: some were led to the Gospel by the Old Testament, many were led by Greek philosophy. This same applies today when there are many ways into the apprehension of what is universal about Christ. What I object to in many modern theologians (particularly the Germans) is that they make Christianity depend on the religious history of a particular people, as told in the Old Testament.

Published two years before his death, Grant’s *Queen’s Quarterly* essay on Céline holds the key to the tortured amalgam in his thought of admiration for Judaism, disdain for the products of American-Jewish culture, disagreement with the argument of German theologians who make Christianity depend on the Old Testament, and his veneration of the French anti-Semitic novelist. At pains not to fall into anti-Semitism, Grant’s analysis nonetheless veers toward apology, especially when he asks his reader to “just read” and understand Hitler’s account of his loneliness in the decaying gaudy world of pre–World War I Vienna. The Jews were supposedly less lonely than the Hitlers of Europe because of their religion.

Grant’s analysis of Céline’s “paranoia” and “hate” concerning the Jews merits close attention. For him, the French novelist was a European pacifist who “thought that the Jews and the English were trying to push the French
into war with the Germans, and that this should be avoided at all costs.” This observation leads Grant, a Canadian pacifist, into an “explanation” of anti-Semitism, which suggests that his identification with Céline is in part an effort to understand his own “paranoia,” a feeling which, he argues, is sometimes justified, and his own “hate,” which he rationalizes in asking: “Aren’t all of us, other than the saints, full of hates of one kind or another?”

Grant writes:

I must first state that it seems to me unimportant to take seriously the political judgments of most of us. They are caused mainly by necessity and chance — occasionally a little by good. They are better understood in terms of comedy than by behavioral science.

Avowedly anti-American and avowedly not anti-Semitic, Grant’s analysis of Celine’s obsession with the Jews reveals the rationalized paranoia and hate that lie behind his own obsession with the Americans.

Sometimes labelled Jewish, Hollywood has long been a favourite target of Canadian anti-Americans. However, in Grant’s view, pragmatism, not Hollywood, is the most “iniquitous” component of American culture. He considers the philosophy of William James as simply a manifestation of dying liberal Protestantism. In Trois essais sur l’insignifiance, Vadeboncœur also laments the degradation of “le protestantisme” in the United States. In a review of William Christian’s biography of Grant, W.J. Hankey identifies the weakness in the argumentation of Canadians who adopt this point of view:

There are blind spots. He [Grant] was not capable — as Canadians frequently are not, their relations being too exigent — of doing justice to the ambiguities in the American “experiment.” The United States is not just the imperial center of the engulfing secular tyranny, she is equally the most vibrant and creative actual Christian society, infinitely more so than the Britain on which Canada depended.

Four months before he died on 27 September 1988, Grant, an anti-abortion activist, admitted that he was confused to find allies in the heartland of “secular liberalism,” and told his future biographer, “One of the things that really surprised me and made me understand that I really didn’t understand the United States was this revival of Pentecostal religion, because naturally I found myself on the same side of the issue about abortion.” After his youthful flirtation with American culture, Grant was blinded all his adult life by what he called “his deep ancestral antipathy to the United States.”

Vadeboncœur: A Profound Hatred

On our arrival in New York, we went first to the business center, Manhattan. This vast temple dedicated to Mammon. What else
could it be dedicated to? Isn’t it the idol’s soul palpitating with vertiginous rapidity, at ground level and in the air, in the noise of these trucks, cars and trains? Isn’t it money that pushes these passersby to walk rapidly, eyes fevered, hurrying to reach the one goal which they fear will flee before them, taking hardly the time to sustain their bodies, entering a restaurant only if they are sure to find a quick lunch? Isn’t it the spirit of the god of money that lives from top to bottom in these monstrous sky-scrapers with their categories of elevators, rapides, express, omnibus, loading and unloading every minute, where masses of salesmen, stenographers, typists and telephone, telegraph, and wireless boys are unable to breathe?54

A French Jesuit published the above paragraph in 1922 in La revue canadienne. When Catholicism dominated Quebec, its clergy often promoted anti-Americanism. Since the Church’s collapse in the 1960s, intellectuals on the Left have been its messengers. Their secularized language, however, retains traces of Quebec’s clerical past. Pierre Vadeboncœur writes:

Our skepticism concerning the United States of America and the severity that I am showing for a culture that represents, in its mass, an anti-metaphysics and an anti-morality, or an absence of metaphysics, of morality, of spirit, of spirituality, an incredible mediocrity — this skepticism, this severity strikes against such power! America imposes its power like a force that will lead to the end of the world; or simply, it has murdered in man too many things and man can no longer judge today what it has done to him.55

This example of leftist anti-Americanism from Vadeboncœur’s Trois essais sur l’insignifiance shares the word “spirit” with Father Tamisier’s article. The spirit —corrupted, according to Tamisier, by its connection to money, and of which Vadeboncœur sees the complete absence in the United States — links the thought of the two men. Tamisier’s warning that the worshippers of Mammon may one day control the world is confirmed 61 years later by Vadeboncœur, for whom Mammon does rule, having left man mediocre, immoral, and spiritually murdered. The culture of the United States stands over the corpse of humanity, a smoking gun in hand.

The first readers of Trois essais sur l’insignifiance tended to have extreme reactions to its condemnation of America. Pierre Quesnel gave it a glowing review in the separatist Le Devoir, calling it “a beautiful book to meditate on.”56 Other critics defended the American artists it denigrates. Jean-Pierre Roy criticized Vadeboncœur’s “strange mythical conception” of James Cain as a novelist who was “inconscient,” while Rose-Marie Arbour defended Judy Chicago from a feminist perspective.57 More ambiguously, Gilles Marcotte offered Trois essais a hedging positive notice in L’actualité, criticizing the author’s lack of knowledge of American
culture but praising him for discovering that our “present values resemble at times a denial of culture, of any possible culture.”

The roots of Vadeboncœur’s 1983 anti-American tract can be traced to New France’s defeat in the French and Indian Wars. Officially recognizing the numeric and military superiority of the continent’s English-speaking Protestant majority, the Treaty of Paris in 1763 ended the dream of a French-speaking Catholic North America. Throughout the nineteenth century, French Canada’s priests and bishops engaged in an ideological war with the modernizing forces infiltrating their country from the United States and Europe. In 1837, Papineau and the Patriots, inspired by the American Revolution, declared war on their British colonial master, while in the 1850s and 1860s, *les Rouges* and the *Institut Canadien* battled an ultramontane clergy. Neither group fared well. The Patriots were militarily defeated, and Monsignor Bourget led a victorious campaign against *les rouges* that reached a symbolic end in 1869 when the Vatican placed the previous year’s “*annuaire de l’Institut Canadien*” on the Index. Liberals and anti-clericals had an impact on Quebecois culture throughout the nineteenth century, but their breakthrough came in the twentieth century when the Church’s hold on the popular culture began to wane, and then collapsed.

Vadeboncœur, educated before Catholicism’s fall, writes surrounded by its various ideological replacements on the political and cultural Left. The passage from clerical to leftist anti-Americanism in Quebec, however, required little change in the substance of its arguments. On each side of the divide, two perceived qualities of the United States are singled out for criticism: its materialism and its love of action for its own sake.

*Trois essais sur l’insignifiance* is, in essence, a reworking of the exemplary anti-American text of the clerical era, *La revue Dominicaine’s* special issue of 1936, “Notre Américanisation.” In that issue, Hermas Bastien wrote that “economics dominates” the United States. Striking the same note, Vadeboncœur condemns American culture because it has reduced humanity to its “economic meaning.” Father Raymond-M. Voyer is not far from that view when he writes that American Catholics are characterized by the stress they place on “action,” which leads them to neglect the “mystical” element of Christian life, a point that in turn resonates with Vadeboncœur, who states that “America is the daughter of the act, not of thought,” and, that by the “primacy of the gesture,” Americans have devised a culture that devastates other cultures and has earned them “their power and their inanity.”

The Dominicans and Vadeboncœur also share the conviction that American culture corrupts women. In 1937, Ernestine Pineault-Leveille wrote that “americanization has unbalanced women,” and that by transforming their character and soul it “menaces the stability of the
family.”63 In Vadeboncœur’s *Trois essais*, feminism is American because, without a philosophical basis, it has entered into the “pragmatism of success.” The essayist feels that the women’s movement has inherited the “anti-spiritual spirit” of the American twentieth century.64 Seeing in its author a misogynist threatened by women, Rose-Marie Arbour calls Vadeboncœur’s argument in this essay “reactionary” and “pointless.”65

Vadeboncœur’s opinions do not issue from the Quebecois extreme. He has won virtually every literary prize the province has to offer, from the most prestigious government award, the Athanase-David Prize in 1976 for his writings up to that time to the Victor-Barbeau Prize in 2001 for his book *L’humanité improvisée*. Publishing regularly in *Liberté* and *L’Action nationale*, and counting among his admirers important critics like François Ricard, Vadeboncœur and his books have been at the centre of the province’s literary thought for 40 years.66

The most important word in Vadeboncœur’s lexicon is “culture.” In *Trois essais* he states, “I have an enormous hunger for culture.”67 It is his view that when France was the centre of Western culture the world had a conscience, but, with the arrival of “American materialism,” man has returned to an “animal morality.”68 The United States’ culture has not replaced France’s; what has occurred is more fundamental. The idea has come to dominate the world that “there is no need for ideas,” and Vadeboncœur wonders: “Would man be a dog?”69

Expressing his dualism, Vadeboncœur’s *Les deux royaumes*, his 1978 essay on “l’esprit,” opens the door into his Manichean conscience, which loves the good (Europe, childhood innocence, the interior) and hates the bad (America, the spiritual poverty of contemporary man, the exterior). *Les deux royaumes* is a quest for the “country of the spirit,” and Vadeboncœur finds it in an interior “space.”70 Like Dennis Lee’s national space, his Canada colonized by America’s philosophy of “essential human freedom,” Vadeboncœur’s space, his “heart of hearts” (*for intérieur*), has been corrupted by the corrupt “liberté” exported to the world by American “inculture.”

For Vadeboncœur, “culture is the worship of the soul,” and the demigod creators of this cult are “the artist, the mystic, the writer.” These are the men and women who have the most contact with the soul. In a 1996 essay he writes, “No one has, in the full sense, more culture than the artist, the mystic, the writer. Because they make it.”71 Like Lee’s Canadian, Vadeboncœur’s Quebecois often feels inferior.72 Vadeboncœur himself overcomes his feeling of inferiority by watching Marcel Dubé’s play “Le retour des oies blanches” or by being in the presence of paintings by the poet Michèle Lalonde. Through these works of art, “the soul takes possession of a good.”73
French Canada’s religious culture also gave to Vadeboncœur and his generation a sense of the “good.” When, in Les deux royaumes, he nostalgically describes his childhood, Vadeboncœur tends to avoid the word “Catholicism” but often respectfully uses the more imprecise linguistic symbol “religion.” Less reserved concerning Jesus Christ, Vadeboncœur describes him as “the only historical character who gives the impression of having entirely existed, as if being itself had played his role.” The writer considers Jesus a revolutionary, like himself, and feels that, in spite of the Quebecois’ entry into “modernité,” Jesus still belongs to them as an example of “absolute dignity”:

Is it because of his words, his legend, because of the fact that we believed that he was himself the living God? We don’t know how to untangle it all. But it is certain in our spirits as the sons of Christendom, this God made man does not seem to have been contingent.

For Vadeboncœur, although the Quebecois, unlike their French Canadian ancestors, may no longer believe Jesus Christ was the “living God,” they have internalized his words and legend; they are still “the sons of Christendom.” Given that America is on the side of bad, he must deny that America also belongs to Christendom, and, thus, he describes the United States as a “post-Christian” nation. Like Grant, he criticizes American Protestantism, but goes further. Protestantism in America started out virtuously, but slowly its spirit turned to “activity” and “exterior possessions.” Like New Yorkers for Father Tamisier, American Protestantism, for Vadeboncœur, worships an idol:

In the end, it wasn’t even a religion, or to put it better, it wasn’t a religion at all, for only a feeling of legitimacy persisted. The entire Protestant conscience, the good Protestant conscience, was engaged in new work. She marked it with her intensity, her exclusiveness, her load of passion and will, her narrow views; so that an idol, taking the place of God, received from the Protestants the service destined to God, without the faithful, for all that, thinking that anything had been subtracted from Him. But look, the American has managed a complete transfer and he has fixed forever his new pole: the exterior.

The late Quebecois critic André Belleau, observing his reactions while reading Vadeboncœur, noted, “I feel myself becoming intolerant and moralizing.”

Conclusion

Globally, the literature of anti-Americanism is enormous. The Canadian contribution to the genre represents the oldest continuous argument against the United States. Lament for a Nation has never been published in the United States and Trois essais sur l’insignifiance has never been translated.
into English. An American publisher who collected and made available such documents would be providing a service to scholars and the public. Only when the myriad texts of worldwide anti-Americanism are read and analyzed together can they be understood and confronted.

More rhetorically violent than Grant and haunted by Quebec’s solitude in North America, Vadeboncœur tends to fold English Canada into the United States and reject “Anglo-Saxon culture.” Grant, on the other hand, embraces French Canada as an ally in his struggle against the United States. Nevertheless, in spite of Vadeboncœur’s rejection of Canada, his Quebecois nationalism has much in common with Grant’s Canadian nationalism.

Grant believes that the dominant philosophy of the United States is “secular liberalism,” while Vadeboncœur calls America “post-Christian.” Grant and Vadeboncœur both equate modernization with Americanization. They view “post-Christian secular liberalism” not as a Western phenomenon that, along with Americans, they have to confront but, rather, as a problem that comes, like a disease, from the south.

Ian Angus’ difficulties in formulating a Canadian philosophy, as well as the long-time dilemma conservatives in the country have had in developing a consensual tradition, stem from the “resentment” and “purity” that suffuse Canadian thought. Grant and Vadeboncœur’s writings present extreme examples of Canadian resentment of the United States as well as of the tenacious belief in Canada’s and Quebec’s pure origins in England and France. Politically, Grant’s Red Toryism and Vadeboncœur’s separatist movement have acted as barriers to the articulation of both a coherent national philosophy and an effective conservative tradition in Canada. In addition, both Grant and Vadeboncœur hold a grudge against American Protestantism. To Grant, American Protestantism is dead, replaced by a morally shallow pragmatism. Echoing Father Tamisier in La revue canadienne, Vadeboncœur accuses American Protestants of worshipping an idol he calls “the exterior” (Tamisier called it “money”).

On the other hand, Grant and Vadeboncœur both admire France. In particular, they respect Charles de Gaulle and defend the Gaullism of the 1960s, when the French president built an independent foreign policy often in opposition to the United States. Concerning France, however, not the politicians but the rebels of French art most deeply move Grant and Vadeboncœur. In 2003, the French Canadian published a book about Rimbaud, while the English Canadian’s study of Céline occupied the last ten years of his life.

Benoît Melançon remarks on the “generic tension” present in Trois essais. Classed first as “essais,” they were later republished as “essais philosophiques.” Melançon feels that Trois essais sur l’insignifiance
belongs to the genres of “la littérature morale” and the pamphlet, and calls Vadeboncœur a moraliste because the French author opposes a “monde moral” to American “inculture.”

Grant’s essays evoke the same generic tension. Some analysts in the United States and Canada would like to consider Grant a philosopher; however, he is more accurately labelled an English-language moraliste, closer to Montaigne than to Spinoza. I would also argue that his anti-Americanism was an impediment to his becoming a philosopher. Like Vadeboncœur’s Trois essais, Grant’s analyses in Lament for a Nation and elsewhere most often operate at the level of the pamphlet and the philosophical essay. He belongs in the company of writers like Vadeboncœur, not with Eric Voegelin and Leo Strauss, two twentieth-century philosophers who influenced him.

Once Grant and Vadeboncœur publicly entered the traditions of English- and French-Canadian anti-Americanism, it took about twenty years before their thought reached the boiling point and they were compelled to write their major texts in this mode. Grant’s 1945 pamphlet “Canada Must Choose: The Empire, Yes or No?” and Vadeboncœur’s 1961 essay condemning the American union movement, “Projection du syndicalisme américain” (“The Negative Influence of American Unionism”), are their first significant statements concerning the United States. John Diefenbaker’s defeat by Lester Pearson, openly endorsed by the Kennedy Administration, led Grant to write Lament for a Nation. Vadeboncœur’s reading of James Cain’s The Postman Always Rings Twice and Julian Green’s Journal and his visit to Judy Chicago’s exhibit The Dinner Party inspired the composition of Trois essais sur l’insignifiance.

In 2002, Jack Granatstein offered a mea culpa for his 1996 claim that Canadian anti-Americanism seemed as “dead as a dodo.” He admits that the recent burst of anti-Americanism once again “consuming many Canadians” proves that the phenomenon continues to flourish. In particular, the “mindless” anti-American “bile” he had listened to on a recent book tour distresses him. Clearly Granatstein’s wishes were ahead of the facts when he announced in the 1990s that Canadian anti-Americanism had been “marginalized, by-passed, and overtaken by events.” All announcements of the final end or triumph of anti-Americanism in Canada will later be proven incorrect. In a speech in 2003, Granatstein showed he seemed to understand this better when he said, “Anti-Americanism has been and to a substantial degree remains Canada’s state religion, the very bedrock of Canadian nationalism, its strength rising and falling with events.” This echoes Underhill, who wrote in 1957 that “there is a periodicity of about twenty to thirty years in these anti-American crises of our Canadian history.” The movement toward continentalism always balances a period of nationalism and vice versa. Thus, after almost twenty years of continentalism, including two free-trade agreements, many Canadians
were ready for a nationalist phase, and the vigorous American response to the 9/11 terrorist attack provided the convenient trigger.

Yet can any given American foreign policy be held responsible for upturns in Canadian anti-Americanism? Only in part, because a study of Grant and Vadeboncoeur’s writings demonstrates that anti-Americanism is the obsessive centre of their thinking and that the specific public or private event that provokes the writing of an anti-American tract is like flipping a light switch. The electricity is in the wire, it’s just waiting to be turned on.

Raised in the anti-American tradition of the United Empire Loyalists — losers in the struggle of political philosophies that accompanied the American Revolution — Grant spent his life nuancing, rationalizing and struggling with his hatred of the United States. A less subtle anti-American, Vadeboncoeur inherited the French-Canadian clergy’s mistrust of the Protestant religious liberty of the United States. The resentment of that clergy — losers in the struggle of Christian confessions that accompanied the French and Indian Wars, and having once dreamed of a Catholic, French-speaking North America — has evolved into Quebec’s leftist anti-Americanism at the beginning of the 21st century. Indeed, now in his eighties, Vadeboncoeur continues to write passionately against the United States.  

Canadian anti-Americanism has always existed alongside a continentalist tradition that promotes friendship with the confederation’s only neighbour. In the twenty or so years following 9/11, however, barring an Islamist terrorist attack on its own soil, Canada will be in a nationalist phase, uncomprehending and often critical of America’s actions in the world.

Notes

2. André Pratt, “Bin Laden ou Bush?” La Presse, 18 November 2002, A8. Throughout this article, all translations from French to English are mine.
6. Underhill is quoted by Granatstein in Yankee Go Home? Canadians and Anti-Americanism, 8.
7. Three themes dominate Grant’s thought: the modern era as relativist and historicist, technology as homogenizing and destructive, and the role of the United States in propagating modernity and technology. His major works are...


13. William Watson writes, “Thus our lower income per capita does distinguish us from the Americans, but would we be so indifferent to this or so quick to discount wealth’s importance if ours were the higher income? If one twin becomes richer and more famous, the other may stew in secret envy, a common Canadian
syndrome as far as the Americans are concerned” (131). And in discussing a government aerospace contract that in 1986 was given to a Montreal company instead of one in Winnipeg that had submitted a lower bid: “Resentment being the Canadian condition, Montrealers were resentful in turn because of the accusation that they won only because the contest was rigged” (209). *Globalization and the Meaning of Canadian Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

14. “English-speaking Canadians, such as myself, have despised and feared the Americans for the account of freedom in which their independence was expressed, and have resented that other traditions of the English-speaking world should have collapsed before the victory of that spirit; but we are still enfolded with the Americans in the deep sharing of having crossed the ocean and conquered the new land.” George Grant, “In Defence of North America,” *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), 17.


17. Céline’s three anti-Semitic pamphlets are: *Bagatelles pour un massacre* (1937), *L’école des cadavres* (1938), and *Les beaux draps* (1941).


33. Grant, Lament for a Nation, 43, 33, 71.
37. Grant, Lament for a Nation, 68.
38. Kim Campbell is cited in Gad Horowitz, “Commentary,” By Loving Our Own: George Grant and the Legacy of Lament for a Nation, ed. Peter C. Emberly (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), 75–76.
40. Grant, Lament for a Nation, 83.
43. Grant, Céline: Art and Politics,” 810–11.
45. Grant, Céline: Art and Politics,” 811–12.
46. Ibid., 805–8.
47. Sylvie Groulx’s National Film Board of Canada documentary À l’ombre d’Hollywood (2000) is a good example of this timeless theme in anti-American thought. The article by Albin Janin, “Le Cinéma,” in La revue Dominicaine’s special issue of 1937 “Notre Américanisation” speaks of an “American, with an Israëlite name, well known in film circles” who “attacked” French films in the province by playing them in double features with dubbed American movies (95).
49. Vadeboncœur, Trois essais, 94–95.
53. Translated from Vadeboncœur’s “une détestation profonde” in Trois essais: “Agitation-inattention, grandiloquence, action sans conscience, existentialisme turpide, primitif et avant la lettre, primauté du résultat pour le résultat, je ne dis pas que ce soit là toute l’Amérique, mais enfin c’est beaucoup l’Amérique, c’est surtout beaucoup de ce qu’on apprend par l’Amérique et de ce qui est passé dans la culture dominante de ce continent. J’éprouve la plus profonde détestation de tout cela” (81). [Agitation-inattention, grandiloquence, action without conscience, base existentialism primitive and before its time, results for the sake of results, I am not saying that this is all of America, but in the end, this is in large part America, above all it is what we learn from America and from what passes for the dominant culture of this continent. I feel the most profound hatred for all that.]
Stuffing the Scarecrow: The Anti-Americanism of George Grant and Pierre Vadeboncor

55. Vadeboncor, Trois essais, 30.
60. Vadeboncor, Trois essais, 54.
62. Vadeboncor, Trois essais, 32.
64. Vadeboncor, Trois essais, 54.
67. Vadeboncor, Trois essais, 12.
68. Ibid., 20, 40.
69. Ibid., 23.
72. Vadeboncor, Les deux royaumes 203.
73. Ibid., 56–57.
74. Ibid., 195.
75. Ibid., 78. Vadeboncor writes of “la révolution du Christ” on page 214.
76. Vadeboncor, Trois essais, 39.
77. Ibid., 95.
79. Barry Cooper casts doubt on the Tory component of Grant’s Red Toryism, suggesting that Grant has reduced Toryism to anti-Americanism, “Review of George Grant: Selected Letters and George Grant and the Subversion of Modernity: Art, Philosophy, Politics, Religion and Education,” Canadian Literature 161/162 (Summer/Autumn 1999).
86. Vadeboncoeur has contributed to the latest wave of anti-Americanism in Canada in articles for L’Action nationale and Le Couac.