

The Idea of Liberty in Canada during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions, 1776-1838 (McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Religion)

Michel Ducharme



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In Idea of Liberty in Canada during the Age of Atlantic Revolutions, 1776-1838, Michel Ducharme shows that Canadian intellectual and political history between the American Revolution and the Upper and Lower Canada rebellions of 1837-38 can be better understood by considering it in relation to the broad framework of revolution in the Atlantic world between 1776 and 1838. Inspired by intellectual histories of the Atlantic world, Ducharme goes beyond the scholarly focus on Atlantic republicanism to present the rebellions of 1837-38 as a confrontation between two very different concepts of liberty. He uses these concepts as lenses through which to read colonial ideological conflict. Ducharme traces political discourse in both colonies, showing how the differing fates and influence of republican and constitutional notions of liberty affected state development. He also pursues a number of important revisionist historical claims, including the idea that nationalist politics were not at issue in the period and that "responsible government" was never a Patriote party platform or interest. Taking a wider view allows Ducharme to provide a solid understanding of the ideological substance of political conflict and shows that, starting in 1791, Canadian colonial political culture revolved around an ideal of liberty that differed from the liberty at work within the revolutionary movements of the late eighteenth century but was nonetheless born of the Enlightenment.

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