Hello and welcome history friends patrons all to our special series on my PhD thesis. Last time we concluded on our second chapter which examined the idea of insult. We saw that exceptions to the script of seeking satisfaction did exist, and that insult was, essentially, in the eye of the beholder. Palmerston could choose to take offence at Greece’s mistreatment of David Pacifico, yet declare that Britain was not offended when Spain rudely expelled her ambassador. It’s almost as though political as well as ideological motives suffused NH, and these were expressed through the rhetoric used in the statesmen and press. Here, we begin a new chapter with a focus on AA relations. If the timeline of 1838 to 1846 is giving you déjà vu, then you should be reminded that all patrons have access to our 12 part series called Diplomacy, BR VS USA, which goes into more background detail for this period. I wouldn’t go as far as saying that you need to listen to that series before listening to this chapter, but it is true that some of the nuances of AA diplomacy and some of the gaps in context which time and space forced me to gloss over here have been covered in more detail elsewhere. If this series is feeling a bit dense right now, then you could do worse than to revisit that series, released in early 2023.

That being said, this chapter takes a different focus to the others, as it tasked exclusively with AA diplomacy, and Europe is largely sidelined. It is noteworthy that these confrontations were taking place parallel and often simultaneously to events in Europe and elsewhere. The Opium War, Eastern Question, and a general deterioration in AF relations were all ongoing as successive British governments tried to fix the American problem. And what a problem it was. Years of disagreements and temporary fixes had been passed down to the Whig government in the late 1830s, but only after Peel’s Conservatives took office was much progress made. Palmerston arguably suffered from having too much on his plate at once, but when the Whigs left government in autumn 1841, they were replaced by an administration which was better positioned to do business with Washington. This business revolved around the question of compromise. Could a degree of give and take be acceptable to the publics of both powers, or were intractable problems always destined to pull the two English speaking powers apart?

Washington and London both grappled with insults, but the promise of trade opportunities was definitely an incentive. Border disputes fanned additional flames, but when Peel’s government in particular took the reins, there was little appetite for war with the US. In a time where the Tories were attempting to redefine their position on the domestic economy, palpable in Peel’s gradual conversion to abolishing the protectionist Corn Laws, a friendly America with beneficial trade deals could improve British prospects during the general economic and agricultural slump of the 1840s. But to make these compromises, to resolve these differences, Peel and Melbourne before him would have to defend these choices, always being wary of the rhetoric of NH, and its potential to ruin the picture they were painting. It was necessary to coopt the support of newspapers to make this case, as we’ll see in later sections of this chapter, and this was where Palmerston’s replacement as FS, the Earl of Aberdeen, truly shines through.

This research highlights the fact that while the rhetoric of NH could aid the government in framing and justifying its policy, it could also constrain them. In fact, I would argue that this constraining aspect of NH’s rhetoric is a major theme of this chapter, which further deepens our understanding of how NH worked, or was said to work. With the opposition – now featuring Palmerston – always waiting in the wings to lament the damage done to NH, Aberdeen would be forced to take Palmerston’s tactic to the next level. Although Palmerston had used his contacts with newspapers to his advantage, Aberdeen felt compelled to lean on The Times, Britain’s most prolific newspaper, to change the narrative around AA relations, particularly over the fate of Oregon. Before this though, Melbourne and Palmerston had to contend with troubling news out of the US. Following a dangerous Canadian rebellion which resulted in the death of a US citizen and the destruction of private property, everyone’s favourite randomer Alexander McLeod was determined as the culprit. New York claimed to have found their man, but not even Washington was sure. Palmerston, of course, was more than willing to use this insult to British citizens as a chance to cry foul, but first he would have to actually spend some time away from his European schemes, and this proved easier said than done. It’s all still to come, so I hope you'll join me as we open a new chapter.

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**Chapter Three**

**Insult and Compromise in Anglo-American Relations: 1838-1846**

**Introduction**

As Rebecca Matzke has noted, the period between 1838 and 1846 was one of constant crisis in Anglo-American relations,[[1]](#footnote-1) exacerbated by the burning of the *Caroline* [1837], the detention of Alexander McLeod [1840-41], the *Creole* controversy [1841], the resolution of the North-East boundary between Canada and the United States [1842], and the Oregon Treaty [1844-46].Throughout this period of crisis, negotiation was the sole means of resolving disputes, though such negotiations would have to be conducted carefully, particularly when national honour was at stake. In fact, the rhetoric surrounding national honour made Anglo-American compromise more difficult, and compelled British governments to increase their military capacity.[[2]](#footnote-2) The extent to which the ethic constrained each power’s freedom of action was recognised by the *Globe*, which carried the *Boston Daily Advertiser*’s comments in April 1840:

National honour…imposes an insuperable objection to an adjustment; it compels each party to be its own umpire, and to insist on the other party being governed by its decision. One party must yield, and by the same rule, this can be done only after the chances of war have been appealed to. If we cannot concede any part of our claim to the spirit of compromise and the love of peace, neither can Great Britain. The two parties, in this view of the matter, stand precisely in the same light. Great Britain can no more recede without dishonour, if there be anything in this idea, than we can.[[3]](#footnote-3)

These sentiments encapsulate the recurring theme of this chapter. National honour placed immense pressure upon contemporaries, who understood that whenever they failed to adhere to its requirements, they could expect its accompanying rhetoric to be used against them. As demonstrated in previous chapters, national honour was a contested political space. Lord Melbourne’s Whig government had enjoyed popular approval thanks in large part to Palmerston’s fulfilment of its tenets. However, the Foreign Secretary faced immense challenges in applying these tenets when confronted by American intransigence, notwithstanding the treatment of Alexander McLeod, which constituted an insult. Similarly, when Sir Robert Peel’s Conservatives assumed power [1841], the Earl of Aberdeen struggled to defend the Webster-Ashburton Treaty against critics such as Palmerston, who insisted that he had made excessive concessions to American bluster. Interestingly, when attempting to resolve the dispute over Oregon, Aberdeen proved more adept, and utilised his press and personnel contacts to bypass the rhetoric of national honour, and present the eventual settlement as an honourable, favourable compromise.

This suggests further nuances inherent in the honour-script. Statesmen could fail to succeed in their efforts to press its principles, without much consequence, while they could also push national honour aside when the ethic proved inconvenient to political or strategic gain. Further, this chapter reveals further depths to the lexicon of honour, particularly in the realm of negotiation and compromise. What is clear is that contemporaries on both sides of the aisle could not ignore national honour. This section will assess the rhetoric of national honour in this crisis period of Anglo-American relations. It will also explore the relevant themes which the mutual antagonism of the two parties brought forward. It will be argued that national honour was used to unify British political sentiment and to attack political rivals, while the exclusion of the ethic complimented the resolution of disputes, by making compromise more acceptable.

It is worth highlighting that many of the studies used for this chapter are several decades old. While they provide valuable context and debates – including the use of the press to bypass outcry – these scholars never interrogated national honour or its rhetoric, despite referencing such concepts throughout their narratives. National honour exists in the background of their analyses, yet it will be argued here that the ethic provides a deeper explanation for the difficulties faced by Anglo-American negotiators. It constrained statesmen, and subjected them to uncomfortable rhetoric, both in Parliament and in the press. It should also be noted that *The Times* is prioritised above other newspapers, as it had ‘an influence over public opinion in England,’ described as ‘proverbial,’ while benefiting from its political independence, high-quality editorials, and unrivalled reporting.[[4]](#footnote-4) It is therefore important to observe *The Times*’ shift towards the Conservatives, and the pivotal role it played in aiding Aberdeen’s resolution of the Oregon question. The rhetoric of national honour was prevalent in these trends, and recommends greater analysis to comprehend this crisis period of Anglo-American relations.

**3.1: Insult and Concession in the McLeod and Maine Boundary Disputes**.

The eruption of revolt in Upper and Lower Canada in late 1837 represented the beginning of a crisis period in Anglo-American relations.[[5]](#footnote-5) While officially neutral, some American citizens enlisted with the Canadian rebels, increasing cross-border tensions.[[6]](#footnote-6) Although Britain supressed the revolt by December, one confrontation in the American portion of the Niagara River caused the destruction of a privately owned American vessel, the *Caroline*, and the death of Amos Durfee, an American citizen.[[7]](#footnote-7) American President Martin van Buren protested,[[8]](#footnote-8) but Palmerston effectively ignored this protest.[[9]](#footnote-9) As shown in Chapter One, he concentrated on the deterioration of the Ottoman Empire and the resolution of the Eastern Question.[[10]](#footnote-10) This resolved in Palmerston’s favour, he expected the resounding approval of his peers when Parliament reconvened in spring 1841, but instead, Palmerston was confronted by the imprisonment of Alexander McLeod in New York. Arrested in November 1840, McLeod was held responsible for Durfee’s murder and the burning of the *Caroline*, and the controversy continued into the following year.[[11]](#footnote-11)

McLeod’s detention was presented to Parliament on 8 February 1841.[[12]](#footnote-12) His treatment was decried as an insult, and his fate was closely associated with the national honour.[[13]](#footnote-13) The constitutional complexities of the United States, and New York’s freedom of action to deal with McLeod, caused additional irritation and confusion.[[14]](#footnote-14) Shortly thereafter, Palmerston underlined his determination to demand McLeod’s release upon threat of war with the United States, a course which amounted to an ultimatum.[[15]](#footnote-15) There was nothing unfamiliar in Palmerston’s position. Whether it was Captain Elliot in Canton or David Pacifico in Athens, contemporaries had used the rhetoric of national honour to impress the close connection of the ethic to the treatment of British subjects overseas. According to Avner Offer’s honour-script, the insult which had been incurred had to be repelled, lest the nation be said to suffer dishonour, and a loss in security. In pragmatic political terms, this outcome was intolerable for Palmerston’s presentation of himself and his foreign policy. He had no choice but to apply the same principles which had recently been applied to France and China. The Foreign Secretary’s response would have to be sufficiently satisfactory to maintain his political consistency and meet the demands of national honour. If he failed, Palmerston could expect that the same rhetoric which he had used in moments of crisis would be deployed by his political and press adversaries against him.

The raw shock at the insult initially benefited Palmerston, and his stance was applauded by occasionally surprising allies. Speaking to the Commons on the McLeod issue in early March 1841, the Irish MP and later participant in the Young Ireland Rebellion William Smith O’Brien asserted that while Britain did not seek war, ‘She could not, however, maintain her rank as the greatest nation of the world, if she allowed herself to be insulted,’ and ‘she could not be entitled to claim the allegiance of her colonial subjects if she did not extend to them adequate protection.’ Recalling Palmerston’s success in defying France and preserving Ottoman integrity, O’Brien urged him to display ‘some portion of the vigour he had shown in connection with the affairs of the East.’ This would involve the despatch of ‘a strong fleet off the North American harbours, and a powerful army along the line of the British American boundary than by mere unsupported diplomacy.’ Should the country require greater increases in defence spending, O’Brien felt assured ‘that the House would support them in measures necessary for the maintenance of the honour and character of Great Britain in every part of the world.’[[16]](#footnote-16) The solution, O’Brien declared, was to show Washington that Britain was in earnest via a demonstration of British power.[[17]](#footnote-17)

During a debate on increased military estimates later in the month, Sir Robert Peel expressed approval of the increases. He qualified this by declaring his preference for peace, before reassuring Members that if ‘the interests, the honour, the essential welfare of the country involved in war, he could forget that counsel’ and ‘standing by the ancient fame and reputation of this great people,’ he would ‘lend his voice for war, in order to prove to the world that our military fame stood now as high as ever.’ Notably, in reference to the United States, Peel voiced his support for Palmerston’s stance, arguing ‘it would not be for the true policy of this country to purchase any settlement of the present difficulty by any unjust concessions.’[[18]](#footnote-18) In his letter to the Queen, John Russell commended this ‘remarkable’ speech, interpreting Peel to have said that ‘much as he disliked war,’ if ‘the honour or interests of the country required it, he should sink all internal differences,’ and support the government. Russell recalled the ‘loud cheers’ which accompanied these declarations, and believed the speech ‘very creditable’ to the Conservative leader.[[19]](#footnote-19)

*The Times* echoed these sentiments, explaining that Britain could afford to dispense with ‘a false sense of honour’ because ‘Our appetite for military glory, if ever it had a place in British policy, has been satiated to the full.’ Yet, *The Times* asserted that ‘the paramount necessity of preserving our dependencies from lawless aggression, and of protecting the life of a British subject who has done his country good service in that particular,’ could ‘never be permitted, consistently with our national honour, to give place to any other considerations whatever,’ even if ‘war with all its calamities should be the inevitable consequences.’ The release of McLeod would be ‘as indispensable to British honour as it would be creditable to American justice’, and the Americans were further cautioned that while Britain had won her glory and ‘peacefully sheathed her sword’ in recent years, ‘She will brook much – everything except a compromise of her honour – rather than draw it again.’[[20]](#footnote-20) McLeod pleaded not guilty that month, and New York’s Governor, William Seward, attempted to assuage British fears by committing to McLeod’s fair treatment, while also insisting on the maintenance of state rights.[[21]](#footnote-21)

It did not seem to matter that the case against McLeod was not particularly strong. The evidence consisted of McLeod’s drunken boasts,[[22]](#footnote-22) and dubious statements from New York’s officials, who appeared determined to acquire their own satisfaction for the *Caroline*’s destruction. There was some criticism of this tenuous evidence,[[23]](#footnote-23) but McLeod’s predicament may be viewed as a consequence of Palmerston’s failure to resolve the *Caroline* controversy. The historian Kenneth Stevens noted that ‘disagreement on the issues probably could have been narrowed if the British government had responded’ in 1838 with a prompt ‘expression of regret’ about the *Caroline* in languagewhich did not have to constitute an apology.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Yet, this is to misunderstand Palmerston’s true intentions, as it understates his political acumen. As Wilbur Jones discerned, Palmerston was willing to force the matter with America because he understood that while ‘members in the Commons were lethargic and even bored when a foreign affairs issue involved some narrow political or economic interest,’ an issue ‘bearing on national honour would rally not only the Whig-Liberal coalition, but would bring the Conservatives to their feet en masse.’[[25]](#footnote-25) As this research project has shown, the Foreign Secretary was adept in sensing such opportunities, not just in domestic politics, but also abroad. British naval force had been deployed to great effect in China and Syria, which demonstrated to Washington that Britain could project its military power wherever it was needed, while providing Palmerston with additional political capital.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Important changes in American personnel also influenced the crisis. By April 1841, John Tyler had assumed the Presidency, while Daniel Webster became his Secretary of State. Webster was known in England, and had visited the country in 1839.[[27]](#footnote-27) Of additional importance was the appointment of known Anglophile and abolitionist Andrew Everett as American ambassador to London during the summer.[[28]](#footnote-28) As these appointments were learned of, London improved its North American military position. Canada received over 10,000 soldiers since the revolt, alongside four steamers and patrol boats on the Great Lakes.[[29]](#footnote-29) British understanding of American vulnerabilities could also be leveraged; the discrepancy in naval power between the two powers, the inadequacy of American coastal defences, and the capabilities of steam technology informed Palmerston’s defiance.[[30]](#footnote-30) The American ambassador to France reported that Britain’s Mediterranean fleet had moved to Gibraltar, and expected that these vessels were preparing to rush to Halifax, where they would prepare for war or, at the very least, back up Palmerston’s diplomacy with a firm naval hand.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Yet, this intensity of feeling on both sides of the Atlantic gave way, by April, to a kind of détente, and the subject largely disappeared from Parliament. Palmerston was then informed of Captain Elliot’s preliminary peace treaty with China, which left him ‘mortified and disappointed.’[[32]](#footnote-32) Writing to the King of Belgium, the Queen appreciated that Elliot ‘completely disobeyed his orders and *tried* to get the *lowest* terms he could,’ for which he was replaced.[[33]](#footnote-33) This unimpressive result recommended a focus on McLeod to distract the public and rally the government, but following the initial outcry, Palmerston did not use the insult as energetically as he had in previous crises. In fact, McLeod’s predicament had become increasingly complex. One issue was the government’s opacity regarding responsibility for the *Caroline*, and a refusal to present public correspondence which had been made available to members of Congress.[[34]](#footnote-34) Domestic politics had also become unfavourable. Facing defeat over the Sugar Duties bill and budget, Melbourne’s Whig government appeared close to resignation.[[35]](#footnote-35) In May, Palmerston pressed Melbourne for the dissolution of Parliament,[[36]](#footnote-36) to which the Queen assented in June, and anticipation over the looming General Election occupied much of the summer.[[37]](#footnote-37) This context is important, as it weakened Palmerston’s position, thereby reducing his ability to leverage the insult for political gain.

Amid these Parliamentary and political distractions, the British press kept McLeod’s predicament alive. *The Times* was key to this campaign; it identified the American constitution as a key obstacle to satisfaction, as it enabled Washington to declare ‘with great solemnity that the entire affair belonged to a particular province of the federal republic, with whose internal rights no interference could be constitutionally exercised.’ *The Times* lamented that ‘Month after month was spent in this sort of fencing,’ while ‘A spirit of animosity between the two countries was rapidly and perilously engendered.’ It observed with palpable frustration that ‘the original pretext, that the central Government could not interfere with the legal jurisdiction of an independent state belonging to the Union’ was rendered hollow by the Attorney General’s presence at McLeod’s trial. *The Times* thus believed that the ‘discreditable shuffle’ over McLeod would follow the course prescribed by American law, and Britain would be forced to wait until his trial in October. Because of these delays, ‘the cauldron has boiled over, and exhausted itself in idle and contemptible vapour.’[[38]](#footnote-38)

To some, Washington was not the only party responsible for this curious climbdown. The *Hull Packet* complained that ‘This is a case upon which no compromise ought to have been permitted.’ London should have insisted upon ‘The instant discharge of Mr McLeod,’ and if denied, ‘New York should have been blockaded, and if necessary, bombarded.’ It was understood that ‘The Americans, like the Chinese, can only be dealt with through the medium of their fears; nor will they ascribe the forbearance of England to any other cause than an inability to vindicate her rights, and to protect her people.’ With a hint of nostalgia, *The Hull Packet* concluded that in the past, ‘Mr McLeod would not have been suffered to remain in prison an hour longer than an armament could have been sent from this country to release him,’ yet now, ‘we are fallen on evil times,’ which it blamed on ‘the incubus of liberalism’ which ‘seems to be freezing all our energies (except when we can bully minor states) and is gradually sinking us lower and lower in our own estimation, as well as that of our neighbours.’[[39]](#footnote-39) Similarly, by early May 1841, *The Times* was blaming Melbourne’s government for the crisis, arguing that if Ambassador Fox in Washington had been ‘backed with suitable energy at home, McLeod would have been at large a considerable while ago, and the honour of Great Britain would have been proportionally unsullied.’[[40]](#footnote-40)

In a Commons session of 7 May, Joseph Hume called for the publication of correspondence related to the incident.[[41]](#footnote-41) John Russell’s response was unhelpful, as the Secretary for the Colonies claimed that ‘the production of the correspondence in question would not enable the hon. Gentleman to attain the object he had in view.’[[42]](#footnote-42) Sir Robert Peel did not support this request.[[43]](#footnote-43) Conversely, Thomas Duncombe reminded Members that ‘Whether that information were withheld or not,’ it was McLeod’s fate that truly mattered since ‘the feeling throughout the country was this – that our national honour was compromised by the detention in prison of Mr. McLeod.’[[44]](#footnote-44) Duncombe thus asked whether the government meant ‘to allow Mr. McLeod’s trial to proceed?’ as ‘He had been already imprisoned for six months, and the people of England had a right to know why.’[[45]](#footnote-45) This was a prescient challenge; did Palmerston not wish to acquire redress for insult? If New York was permitted to continue their proceedings, would this not suggest McLeod had been abandoned?

*The Times* maintained its criticism of Washington’s ‘endless shuffles and shirkings,’ over its right to interfere in New York’s actions, which were ‘all tending to affront our national honour, and to inflict the grossest injustice upon a British subject.’[[46]](#footnote-46) In fact, the question of who should have jurisdiction to try McLeod did affect Washington’s ability to resolve the crisis, and the matter was delayed into the summer.[[47]](#footnote-47) The ‘complicated legal manoeuvres’ between New York’s Senate, the Presidency, Governor Seward, Congress, and the Supreme Court prevented the construction of a coherent American policy towards McLeod.[[48]](#footnote-48) Domestic American disputes, twinned with delays caused by cross-Atlantic communications and the unavailability of essential documents, created a predictable void in information as Parliament was dissolved in late June.[[49]](#footnote-49) Further, just as Britons perceived their honour at stake in McLeod’s fate, Daniel Webster identified American honour with the *Caroline*. Washington’s efforts to leverage one issue against the other were unsuccessful, but while the *Caroline* issue remained outstanding, London was unlikely to enjoy much American goodwill.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Palmerston had waited several years before informing Washington that the *Caroline* had been destroyed on official orders, rather than on the initiative of Canadian locals, yet even then he refused to clarify whether the Americans were due reparation.[[51]](#footnote-51) As McLeod would not be released until the *Caroline* issue was resolved, these delays could give the impression that the Foreign Secretary was merely waiting on events. In late June 1841 *The Times* criticised ‘the abject manner in which Lord Melbourne’s Government has digested, in the case of Mr McLeod, the most flagrant insult ever offered to a great nation,’ which has ‘brought the British name into general contempt, and destroyed that salutary fear of our power in the United States which was the surest guarantee for the continuance of peace.’ A reduction in this fear meant a reduction in prestige, and Palmerston’s ‘vaunted foreign policy’ had ‘entangled us in wars and intrigues throughout the world’ and ‘stained the national honour.’[[52]](#footnote-52) Commenting on the damage done by a month of silence on the matter, *The Times* reflected in early August that French newspapers ‘contend that the honour of Great Britain is compromised,’ as ‘the British Government would not move in the affair until the result should become known.’[[53]](#footnote-53)

The following day, *The Times* returned to McLeod’s fate by commenting on the ‘diplomatic reserve’ and ‘legal quibbling’ which obscured the questions Britons might have had. Yet, ‘the people of England have not lost sight of the main fact that one of the Queen’s subjects is rotting in a foreign gaol, under a charge of having done an act which the British Government acknowledges and applauds,’ but which Washington intended to punish. Remarking on the pitiful state of the controversy, *The Times* concluded that ‘If anything could add to the humiliation of allowing a British subject…to be tried as a felon for a gallant action performed against a band of outlaws and pirates,’ it was ‘that a demand for his release made by a British Minister should be followed by no result, and that the strong and united opinion of this country should be ineffectual even to accelerate the tardy formalities of the law.’[[54]](#footnote-54) Evidently, no amount of public uproar would dissuade the Americans from proceeding as they had intended. Because of this, the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* feared ‘that the detention of Mr McLeod as a prisoner in the United States, will ultimately lead to hostilities,’ while noting that ‘It remains to be seen whether our Ambassador will not be immediately recalled, or whether this country will submit to such outrage and insult.’[[55]](#footnote-55) Other organs assigned blame to McLeod himself, whose decision to submit to American jurisdiction meant that he was ‘either ignorant of his real position as the servant and accredited agent of a nation, or careless of the honour and respectability of the British government.’[[56]](#footnote-56)

When Parliament reconvened in late August, John Roebuck discerned that if the *Caroline*’s destruction was viewed by Washington a national outrage, then McLeod’s detention arising from that destruction could not remain a local affair.[[57]](#footnote-57) Palmerston agreed, and emphasised the need for redress notwithstanding the complexities of the Republic since ‘If a wrong were done, redress must be given,’ and ‘if the laws and constitution of the country did not enable the Government to give that redress,’ then Washington ‘must either alter the laws and change their constitution, or submit to the alternative which every country, in such a case, was like a private individual, entitled to adopt.’[[58]](#footnote-58) Washington could not obscure its responsibility to British demands by hiding behind its constitution which, as Palmerston also pointed out, did not allow for New York’s independent line from the Federal Government in any case.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Yet, compared to the traditional standards of activity directed against such insults, it was difficult to deny that Parliament was distracted by the looming change in government.[[60]](#footnote-60) During a debate in late August which finally moved Melbourne’s government to resign, one Member asserted that ‘whatever was done to McLeod’ was ‘done to the British nation.’[[61]](#footnote-61) Another reiterated the principle that the very trial of McLeod ‘compromised our national honour,’ since although ‘we might save the shedding of his blood, we could not redeem our character in regard to the original question,’ that question being, the inherent injustice of New York’s decision to hold McLeod responsible for British policy.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Significantly, *The Times* blamed Palmerston and his colleagues for their ‘dilatory and apathetic forbearance’ and for instructing Ambassador Fox in Washington ‘to endure so long the interminable American shufflings which still postpone and peril the honourable adjustment of this dispute.’ *The Times* challenged why McLeod was still to be brought to trial, and why New York was permitted to frustrate British rights and patience. Although ‘the mere disrepute which this affair brings upon Whig statesmanship is comparatively of little consequence,’ of far more importance was ‘the very serious extent to which it compromises the honour of the British nation.’ It opined that ‘every hour of [McLeod’s] detention is a deliberate insult to the British realm,’ and complained that ‘The Americans have given us every thing our own way, but they will not give us Mr. McLeod. Now this, we say, is an unbearable impertinence, derogatory in the highest degree to our national honour and character.’

If Washington would not guarantee against New York’s usurpation of British rights in the future, then ‘the insulted honour of Great Britain must forthwith redress itself by adopting the last resource,’ since ‘Americans are alone responsible for the prompt and vigorous demonstrations which the vindication of British honour would seem to render inevitable.’[[63]](#footnote-63) The Colonial Society concluded similarly that if McLeod was executed, the Queen would ‘direct the energies and resources of the empire over which Her Majesty rules, in vindication of a national wrong,’ which ‘if suffered with impunity, would leave our numerous and widely-dispersed colonists at the mercy of every lawless and unprincipled aggressor, and thus endanger the safety, peace, welfare, and honour of Her Majesty's possessions.’[[64]](#footnote-64)

In the mind of such editorials, an insult to a British subject was an insult to the British nation, and the inability to defend its citizens amounted to an admission of weakness which rivals would take advantage of. By mid-October, *The Times*’ rhetoric intensified in the absence of any news, commenting that ‘whatever the fate of McLeod, the day of reckoning with Great Britain remains,’ because ‘Her Majesty’s Crown and dignity have sustained an aggravated assault in the person of McLeod. Reparation, in some shape or another, cannot be dispensed with.’ *The Times* was clear that ‘War we do not desire. Nay, short of sacrifice of national honour, we would adopt almost any alternative to avoid it.’ *The Times* did not adjust its language for the benefit of a new Conservative government, though it continued to hold Palmerston responsible for the errors made in seeking reparation.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Now in opposition, Palmerston had moved on from demanding satisfaction from Washington, and prepared to recast himself as a leading critic of any overly generous settlement with the United States, despite having done materially little to settle these controversies himself. There were ample opportunities for tension regarding the inflammatory practice known as the right of search,[[66]](#footnote-66) which must be viewed in the context of slavery’s role in British foreign policy.[[67]](#footnote-67) Indeed, during his final weeks in office, Palmerston arguably inflamed tensions further by asserting British privileges in the right of search, ensuring that Sir Robert Peel’s administration would have to expend political capital to resolve such a contentious issue.[[68]](#footnote-68) It has been argued that this stance was not mere opportunism, and can be reconciled with Palmerston’s consistent opposition to slavery itself.[[69]](#footnote-69)

The controversy over McLeod’s fate remained acute into the autumn, but impatience gave way to relief when his acquittal was confirmed during a week-long trial in mid-October, with news of his release reaching Britain in early November. Although London had warned that his execution would result in war, McLeod was not acquitted because of Palmerston’s threats,[[70]](#footnote-70) but from a lack of evidence.[[71]](#footnote-71) President Tyler upheld that McLeod had been acquitted ‘by the verdict of an impartial and intelligent jury,’ affirming his relief at the somewhat stilted anti-climax.[[72]](#footnote-72) Indeed, it may be argued that the McLeod episode, while containing many of the features in common with similar insults, lacked much of the fervour – at least among Ministers – which accompanied them. Facing defiance in such a distant theatre, Palmerston had little choice but to await the trial’s outcome. The increasing likelihood of a Whig resignation certainly affected his ability to leverage the insult against his opponents for political gain. Parliament’s inconsistent schedule, not to mention its distraction with pressing commercial matters, also meant that whatever the true extent of public outcry, the insult was not pressed as far as Palmerston later authorised during the Trent Affair, when he was in a much stabler political position.

McLeod’s return to Canada suggested that Anglo-American relations could improve, particularly as a new Tory administration would now direct negotiations. However, the year-long confrontation over McLeod ‘merely lifted the lid from a box filled with problems and points of conflict’ between the two powers, and Conservative Foreign Secretary the Earl of Aberdeen believed that a dedicated mission to Washington would negotiate a resolution of these controversies.[[73]](#footnote-73) Yet, he would have to be careful of not going too far in meeting American demands. Any suggestion that Aberdeen had agreed to excessive concessions could be linked to national dishonour, and would be politically disastrous for the Tories. Jones observed that Cabinet support for Aberdeen’s American policy was only possible ‘if his compromises did not involve British honour,’ because ‘if a question of honour was raised, the Duke of Wellington would lead the walkout, and the Prime Minister would fall in line behind him.’[[74]](#footnote-74)

In December 1841, Lord Ashburton, a scion of the House of Baring who enjoyed extensive American connections, was appointed to the head of this special mission.[[75]](#footnote-75) The Maine-Canada boundary and the right of search – of prime importance to tackle the continuing slave trade – were key priorities. Both issues were likely to rouse American emotion, but there was at least an appreciation of the fact that the status quo of Maine’s unsettled border was unsustainable.[[76]](#footnote-76) Both parties had attempted to support their claims through the acquisition of archival material, though the accuracy of such documents was heavily contested.[[77]](#footnote-77) Aberdeen hoped Ashburton could overcome such difficulties, as his appointment would bypass Ambassador Fox in Washington, whom Aberdeen believed ineffectual.[[78]](#footnote-78) Thomas Le Duc underlined the importance of Canadian defence in the government’s considerations, highlighting prestige as a mostly Palmerstonian concern.[[79]](#footnote-79) Kenneth Bourne added that Peel and Aberdeen prioritised the increase of Anglo-American trade above ‘squabbles over frontiers or even national honour,’ and believed Ashburton’s American connections recommended him for the appointment.[[80]](#footnote-80)

But the United States had their own list of subjects they were eager to resolve, and clarification over the slave trade was among the most prominent.[[81]](#footnote-81) The right of search linked American national honour to slavery, insofar as it highlighted the indignity of British interference with American ships.[[82]](#footnote-82) In his article examining Webster’s use of propaganda within the Treaty, Richard Current wrote that ‘American war hawks were shrilly clamouring for redress of all their real and fancied wrongs.’ These demands included:

…an uncompromising settlement of the north eastern boundary controversy; outright title to all the Oregon country; apology and indemnity for the destruction of the ship *Caroline* in the Niagara River…and a clear renunciation of the alleged rights of search and impressment on the high seas.[[83]](#footnote-83)

British newspapers were aware that McLeod’s acquittal did not represent the end of the controversy. In early November 1841, *The Globe* observed that ‘It is not consistent with national honour that the claims of either nation upon the other should continue unsettled,’ while acknowledging that ‘at any moment these disputed questions may be revived, and be converted into a casus belli between the two governments.’[[84]](#footnote-84) The *Colonial Gazette* observed that ‘Of the occasions of difference between the United States and Great Britain, two are proper subjects of negotiation.’ The first was ‘the boundary question; involving both the national point of honour and certain private interests,’ adding that ‘It seems impossible to dispose of the point of honour except by the arbitration of a third power.’ The second point was the more general issue of America’s frontier with Canada, which remained porous, and subject to complication so long as the ‘defect’ existed in America’s constitution, which enabled her component States to take an individual line.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Palmerston’s failure to leverage the McLeod insult to his advantage did not deter him from seeking an opportunity to upset the new government. It was certainly easier to launch these attacks from opposition benches, but Palmerston saved the bulk of his rhetorical fury for the following year when the details of the settlement were revealed. Yet, as Brown noted, Palmerston’s concern was not wholly for ‘prestige,’ but in displaying ‘firmness’ during the boundary question, as the former Foreign Secretary also wished to enforce Britain’s ‘right of search’ for American vessels involved in the slave trade.[[86]](#footnote-86) Palmerston wanted Ashburton to include provisions to this end in the eventual Ashburton-Webster Treaty, but correspondence published in *The Times* on 1 January 1842 between Aberdeen and America’s former Ambassador, Stevenson, confirmed that the United States viewed the right of search less as a moral issue or one of international law, and instead as a dispute ‘involving high questions of national honour and interests, of public law, and individual rights.’[[87]](#footnote-87)

Further controversies complicated the picture. In November 1841, the *Creole* sailed into Nassau under the command of a crew of rebellious slaves.[[88]](#footnote-88) As slavery was illegal under British law, the slaves acquired British protection from local Americans who attempted to force them to return, and under threat of fire, the *Creole* returned to New Orleans without its human cargo.[[89]](#footnote-89) Just as Britons saw the treatment of their citizens within the context of the national honour, American Senators interpreted American honour in the incident.[[90]](#footnote-90) The details reached Washington in spring 1842, just before Ashburton arrived. American outrage at the *Creole* hampered Ashburton’s progress, and by June, the *Creole* threatened to sink the negotiations altogether.[[91]](#footnote-91) Ashburton persevered, depending on the good offices of Webster to formulate a compromise on a wide range of issues. The settlement was described by Wilbur Jones as ‘a splendid example of burying an insoluble problem under a mass of acceptable verbiage.’[[92]](#footnote-92) Anglo-American interpretations of the right of search were allowed to exist side by side, in recognition of the volatile nature of the controversy.

President Tyler proved amenable to compromise over the *Caroline*, accepting an apology for the delay in communications, while not demanding an apology for the act itself.[[93]](#footnote-93) Webster reciprocated with an apology for the delay in releasing McLeod.[[94]](#footnote-94) Regarding the Maine boundary, compromise was facilitated by the lack of any uniform military opinion in London, and Aberdeen granted Ashburton leeway to cede more territory around the St John River, while preserving Quebec’s defensive advantages.[[95]](#footnote-95) With the *Caroline*, *Creole*, right of search, and Maine Boundary resolved, the Webster-Ashburton Treaty was signed on 9 August, and ratified by the Senate three weeks later.[[96]](#footnote-96) While not interpreting national honour in the issues then debated, Aberdeen appreciated that its rhetoric could be weaponised against him if Washington acquired excessive concessions. Similarly, Daniel Webster suffused the Treaty in propaganda and leveraged vague language to proclaim victory and guard against the potential weaponization of its articles against him.[[97]](#footnote-97) In the long term, however, this search for a domestic political victory exacerbated Anglo-American suspicions, particularly over the right of search, and damaged trust in future negotiations. This included the most notable exclusion from the treaty – a settlement of Oregon.[[98]](#footnote-98) It was maintained as a disputed territory jointly administered by London and Washington, despite rapidly filling with American settlers.[[99]](#footnote-99)

But this omission did not reduce Aberdeen’s optimism, as he reflected to Ashburton, ‘The good temper in which you left them all, and the prospect of continued peace, with, I trust, improved friendly relations, far outweigh in my mind the value of any additional extent of Pine Swamp.’ Aberdeen understood that any concessions to the Americans, however excessive they might appear on the surface, could be justified if the treaty ushered in a new era of peaceful cooperation. However, by omitting Oregon, Aberdeen placed his faith in an uncertain future. If the Americans attempted to clarify Oregon’s status in a hostile manner, critics could argue that Aberdeen had encouraged them by his concessions in this treaty.[[100]](#footnote-100) Unfortunately for Aberdeen, this was precisely what happened, though he could not have anticipated the impact of James K Polk’s Presidency.

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With the issues of McLeod and the Maine boundary resolved, could AA relations be expected to improve? It seems naïve to think so, considering the controversy which existed over Oregon, and the more belligerent messaging from Polk’s presidency. Lacking this hindsight, Peel and Aberdeen were forced to try and patch things up as much as possible, hoping that the mutual interests of London and Washington would draw them closer together. These mutual interests should not be discounted, but an atmosphere of defiance and national pride were also in the air. Although the compromises should be lauded, the reception which greeted the WA treaty showed that it was easier to acquire a treaty than it was to maintain its popularity. If Britons linked concessionary policies with the Tories, then it wouldn’t be long before Palmerston returned to the Foreign Office, and the Whigs resumed power. But despite these challenges, and many more in domestic politics, Peel’s government proceeded with a cautious policy of accommodation with Washington. This approach was sensible, but as we’ll see in the next episode, it reckoned without the lightening rod which was James K. Polk. I hope you'll join me for that, but until then my name is Zack and you have been listening to the first section of our thesis’ third chapter. Thanks for listening and I’ll be seeing you all soon.

1. Rebecca Berens Matzke, ‘Britain Gets Its Way: Power and Peace in Anglo-American Relations, 1838-1846,’ *War in History*, 8, No. 1 (Jan 2001), 19-46; 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Howard Jones discerned that ‘Vital interests — matters of national honor — prevented Webster and Ashburton from considering a settlement of the *Caroline* matter by treaty provision.’ Jones, ‘The Caroline Affair,’ *The Historian*, 38, No. 3 (May, 1976), 485-502; 500. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Boston Daily Advertiser* in *The Globe*, 27 April 1840. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Thomas C. McClintock, ‘British Newspapers and the Oregon Treaty of 1846,’ *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, 104, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), 96-109; 100-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. T. P. Dunning, ‘The Canadian Rebellions Of 1837-38: an Episode in Northern Borderland History,’ *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, 14, No. 2 (Dec, 1995), 31-47 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Marc L. Harris, ‘The Meaning of Patriot: The Canadian Rebellion and American Republicanism, 1837-1839,’ *Michigan Historical Review*, 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), 33-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Jones, ‘The Caroline Affair,’ 491-492. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Britons observed that Washington had prohibited its citizens from participating in the revolt, and that the *Caroline* had intervened illegally, forgoing her rights as a result. One contributor complained that British forbearance induced the American Government ‘to deceive themselves into the idea that England was afraid of them, and nothing but the most straightforward and decided conduct on the part of Great Britain will undeceive them.’ *Morning Chronicle*, 12 Feb 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Although the Foreign Office ignored the matter, Ambassador Fox in Washington did defend British actions, focusing on the ‘piratical’ nature of the vessel, and the British right to self-defence. R. Y Jennings, ‘The Caroline and McLeod Cases,’ *American Journal of International Law*, 32, No. 1 (Jan., 1938), 82-99; 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Chapter One. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Milledge L. Bonham Jr., ‘Alexander McLeod: Bone of Contention,’ *New York History*, 18, No. 2 (April 1937), 189-217; 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. HC Deb 8 Feb 1841 vol 56 cc. 367-74; HL Deb 8 Feb 1841 vol 56 cc. 364-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In the Lords, the Earl of Mountcashell explained that the McLeod case was, ‘in a public point of view, a matter of more importance than some individuals might suppose,’ because ‘It was, in fact, very nearly connected with our honour as a nation; and he did hope and trust that the Government would take active and energetic steps to assert, maintain and uphold, the character of this great country.’ HL Deb 8 Feb 1841 vol 56, cc. 364-6. The *New York Inquirer* noted the British press was ‘loud in its denunciations of this country; and both parties in Parliament united in the opinion that it was a national affair, involving the honour of the British nation.’ *New York Inquirer* in *Morning Chronicle*, 26 March 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ‘The national honour’, *The Times* complained, ‘has been already and grossly outraged by the seizure and detention of McLeod’, and it was ‘notorious to all the world’ that the Americans were now holding a single man responsible for the policy of the authorities in Canada that McLeod served. For Washington thus to argue that New York, and not the Federal Government, had jurisdiction in the matter, was to add ‘levity and ridicule to insult and oppression.’ *The Times*, 5 March 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Palmerston informed Ambassador Fox in Washington that he spoken with Ambassador Stevenson in London, and that he told him ‘as a private friend that if McLeod is executed there must be war. He said he quite felt it; that he is aware that all parties have but one feeling on the subject, and he promised to write to the President as well as officially by today’s post.’ Viscount Palmerston to Henry Fox, 9 Feb 1841 in Bourne, *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England*, Doc. 28, pp. 254-255. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. William Smith O’Brien, HC Deb 5 March 1841 vol 56, cc. 1354-6 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Though not all were convinced. William Ewart offered that ‘When we were unopposed to any enemy, we should not be too anxious to vaunt of our power.’ Joseph Hume underlined the complexity of law, insisting ‘it was too soon for the hon. Member to appeal to war till he had seen whether these transactions had been in accordance with the law of the country in which they had taken place.’ *Ibid*, cc. 1356-1357. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. HC Deb 5 March 1841 vol 56, cc. 1384-1387. Peel’s calls for peace were echoed by others that lamented the sharp increase in military expenditure over the previous decade. Joseph Hume ‘deeply regretted to see a war establishment imposed on the country, while it was said we were in a state of profound peace.’ *Ibid*, cc. 1372-1373. Ministers disagreed, and Lord John Russell argued that ‘considering the state of relations that had lately prevailed, and the dispositions manifested by various countries to increase their establishments, that it appeared to him our own force ought to be increased.’ *Ibid*, cc. 1379-1380. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Lord John Russell to Queen Victoria, 6 March 1841 in *The Letters of Queen Victoria. A Selection from Her Majesty’s Correspondence between the years 1837 and 1861*, Vol I (London, 1908), p. 373. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *The Times*, 17 March 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Milledge L. Bonham Jr., ‘Alexander McLeod: Bone of Contention,’ 196-197. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Chambers, *Palmerston*, p. 199. The *Morning Chronicle*’s Philadelphia correspondent criticised McLeod’s conduct as ‘very ridiculous’, and urged him to remember the advice of King Solomon in the future, that ‘a still tongue is the sign of a wise head.’ *Morning Chronicle*, 6 April 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. The Globe later reflected that ‘No man will swear that he saw McLeod shoot Durfee,’ and that the witness who attempted to claim otherwise ‘proved to be a miserable wretch, who could not tell in what year the Caroline was destroyed, and he was advised by the state’s attorney to take the first boat west.’ *The Globe*, 20 Oct 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Kenneth Stevens, *Border Diplomacy: The Caroline and McLeod Affairs in Anglo-American-Canadian Relations, 1837-1842* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1989), pp. 19-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Jones, *American Problem*, p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Matzke, ‘Britain Gets its Way,’ 25-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Webster had provided legal advice to the House of Baring, a giant of British banking and finance circles, and had made a favourable impression during his stay. See Charles M. Wiltse, ‘Daniel Webster and the British Experience’, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 85 (1973), 58-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Everett’s appointment also underlined the growing domestic conflict between southern slave states and northern abolitionists. Matthew Mason, ‘The Local, National, and International Politics of Slavery: Edward Everett's Nomination as U.S. Minister to Great Britain,’ *Journal of the Civil War Era*, 6, No. 1 (March 2016), 3-29; John O. Geiger, ‘A Scholar Meets John Bull: Edward Everett as United States Minister to England, 1841-1845,’ *New England Quarterly*, 49, No. 4 (Dec., 1976), 577-595. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Jones, *American Problem*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Matzke, ‘Britain Gets Its Way,’ 26-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. That American ambassador also gauged the mood of French newspapers, which appeared somewhat divided; opinions were printed in favour of American firmness, while others believed Washington was bent on war, a misreading of the situation that cannot have helped to encourage London. See Bonham Jr., ‘Alexander McLeod: Bone of Contention,’ 199-200. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Palmerston to Queen Victoria, 10 April 1841 in *The Letters of Queen Victoria.* Vol. 1, p. 374. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Queen Victoria to King Leopold of Belgium, 13 April 1841 in *Ibid*, p. 376. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. This may have been caused by the government’s own confusion over its legal culpability for the *Caroline*’s destruction, as John Campbell, later Lord Chancellor, reflected that while Lord Grey ‘told me that he thought we were quite wrong in what we had done,’ he was ‘clearly of opinion that although she lay on the American side of the river when she was seized, we had a clear right to seize and destroy her, just as we might have taken a battery erected by the rebels on the American shore, the guns of which were fired against the Queen’s troops on Navy Island.’ Jones, *American Problem*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Lord Melbourne to Queen Victoria, 7 May 1841 in *Letters of Queen Victoria*, I, p. 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Lord Melbourne to Queen Victoria, 8 May 1841 in *Ibid*, I, p. 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The government survived a vote of confidence by a single vote on 5 June. See John Russell to Queen Victoria, 5 June 1841 in *Ibid*, I, p. 417. Melbourne’s government resigned in late August, see Viscount Melbourne to Queen Victoria, 28 Aug 1841 in *Ibid*, I, p. 437. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. *The Times*, 19 April 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. *Hull Packet*, 23 April 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. *Supplement to The Times*, 8 May 1841, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Hume complained that ‘the House had been entirely misled and abused by the allegation of the noble Lord, that an answer had been given,’ to American requests for reparation. Joseph Hume, HC Deb 6 May 1841 vol 57, cc. 1495-1496. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Lord John Russell, *Ibid*, cc. 1495-1496. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Peel insisted ‘it would be most unwise to attempt to force a Minister of the Crown to produce a correspondence after such a declaration as the noble Lord had made.’ Sir Robert Peel, *Ibid*, cc. 1496-1497. While he did request more information on McLeod’s status, Peel feared that the correspondence ‘might give a most unfavourable view of the case as regarded this country.’ *Ibid*, cc. 1497-1498. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Thomas Duncombe, *Ibid*. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. *Ibid*, cc. 1498-1499. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. It also hoped that ‘The motion of Mr. Hume for the production of our American Minister's correspondence relative to the destruction of the Caroline’ would recall public attention ‘to the case of Mr. McLeod, whose grievous and protracted injuries have for some time been rather lost sight of, amidst the pressure of other engrossing questions which have lately agitated the country.’ And it noted impatiently that the Queen’s ‘Crown and dignity are at this moment subjected to as much contumelious treatment in the person of McLeod as when the fussy instructions were first sent to Mr. Fox to insist on the prisoner's release, or else to demand his passports.’ *The Times*, 8 May 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Milledge L. Bonham Jr., ‘Alexander McLeod: Bone of Contention,’ 202-203. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Scott Kaufman and John A. Soares Jr., ‘"Sagacious Beyond Praise"? Winfield Scott and Anglo-American-Canadian Border Diplomacy, 1837–1860,’ *Diplomatic History*, 30, No. 1 (Jan 2006), 57-82; 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. HL Deb 22 June 1841 vol 58, cc. 1594-6. Parliament was prorogued on that date, and did not convene again until 19 August. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Jones wrote that Webster’s approach ‘was not illogical since both involved national honour more than any specific interest.’ *American Problem*, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Howard Jones, ‘The Caroline Affair,’ 497. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *The Times*, 24 June 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. *The Times*, 4 Aug 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *The Times*, 5 Aug 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 7 Aug 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. *Dublin Morning Register*, 26 Aug 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Roebuck asked ‘whether the government of the United States of America, had admitted that responsibility, and had demanded reparation for the outrage and injury done to the Caroline, being a vessel belonging to the United States?’ The question was important because ‘if they demanded reparation for the injury done by the attack, it did not lie in their mouth to turn round and say, that the state of New York was the only power which had jurisdiction.’ John Roebuck, HC Deb 26 Aug 1841 vol 59, cc. 265-266. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Palmerston, *Ibid*, cc. 266-267. The Foreign Secretary reiterated the inconsistency of Washington’s stance, since its demand for reparation had been made ‘upon the ground of an injury done to the United States,’ and for this reason ‘it was on that very account impossible for the United States to turn round and deny redress in the case of McLeod, on the ground that this was a question between Great Britain and the State of New York.’ *Ibid*, cc. 269-270. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Palmerston quoted from Article 10 of the constitution, which declared that ‘No state shall enter into any treaty, alliance, or confederation, or grant letters of marque or reprisal; no state shall, without the consent of Congress, lay any duty of tonnage, keep troops or ships of war in time of peace, enter into any agreement or compact with another state, or with a foreign power, or engage in war, unless actually invaded, or in such imminent danger as will not admit of delay.’ *Ibid*, cc. 269-270. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Chambers, *Palmerston*, pp. 202-205. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. P. M. Stewart, HC Deb 25 Aug 1841 vol 59, cc. 228-229. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Mr Christmas, HC Deb 27 Aug 1841 vol 59, cc. 369-370. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. *The Times*, 31 Aug 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. *The Times*, 31 Aug 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *The Times*, 12 Oct 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Richard W. Van Alstyne, ‘The British Right of Search and the African Slave Trade,’ *Journal of Modern History*, 2, No. 1 (Mar., 1930), 37-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Bernard H. Nelson, ‘The Slave Trade as a Factor in British Foreign Policy 1815-1862,’ *Journal of Negro History*, 27, No. 2 (Apr., 1942), 192-209. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Brown, *Palmerston*, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Palmerston arranged a five-power anti-slavery treaty, and established a precedent whereby Portuguese slaving vessels would be stopped and boarded to hamper the trade. Chambers, *Palmerston*, pp. 200-202. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Matzke acknowledged this, writing that ‘it is impossible to credit the jury's decision to Britain's show of force,’ though adding that ‘Britain's strong stance seems to have had an intimidating effect in Washington.’ ‘Britain Gets its Way,’ 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Milledge L. Bonham Jr., ‘Alexander McLeod: Bone of Contention,’ 209-217. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Scott Kaufman and John A. Soares Jr., ‘"Sagacious Beyond Praise"?’, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Jones, *American Problem*, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. *Ibid*,p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Wilbur Devereux Jones, ‘Lord Ashburton and the Maine Boundary Negotiations,’ *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 40, No. 3 (Dec., 1953), 477-490; [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Efforts to resolve the border through arbitration a decade before had failed, but the appetite for compromise had not vanished. Francis M. Carroll, ‘Kings and Crises: Arbitrating the Canadian-American Boundary Dispute and the Belgian Crisis of 1830-1831,’ *New England Quarterly*, 73, No. 2 (Jun., 2000), 179-201. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Derek Kane O'Leary, ‘Archival Lines, Historical Practice, and the Atlantic Geopolitics behind the 1842 Webster-Ashburton Treaty,’ *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 110, No. 4 (2021), 176-191. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Jones, *American Problem*, pp. 17-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Thomas Le Duc, ‘The Maine Frontier and the Northeastern Boundary Controversy,’ *American Historical Review*, 53, No. 1 (Oct., 1947), 30-41; 32-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Bourne, *Foreign Policy of Victorian England*, p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Parliament’s 1833 Abolition Act greatly influenced American abolitionists, while exposing fissures within American politics in the decade that followed. See Joseph T. Murphy, ‘The British Example: West Indian Emancipation, the Freedom Principle, and the Rise of Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1833–1843,’ *Journal of the Civil War Era*, 8, No. 4 (Dec 2018), 621-646. Southern States were concerned at Britain’s abolitionist mission, and some identified American honour with the right to continue the trade. See Howard Jones and Donald Allen Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny: Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington, 1997), pp. 71-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Howard Jones, ‘The Peculiar Institution and National Honor: The Case of the Creole Slave Revolt,’ *Civil War History*, 21 (1975), 28–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Richard N. Current, ‘Webster's Propaganda and the Ashburton Treaty’, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 34, No. 2 (Sep., 1947), 187-200; 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *Globe*, 2 Nov 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *Colonial Gazette*, 4 Nov 1841. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Brown, *Palmerston*, p. 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ambassador Stevenson believed that ‘of all the principles’ asserted in British naval superiority, ‘few probably could be selected of a more offensive and objectionable character’ than those Palmerston presented, and Stevenson added that: ‘Such a power once submitted to…there would be no species of national degradation to which it might not lead.’ Stevenson disclaimed any responsibility for slave ships who might falsely raise the American flag for its protection. Although apparently eager to supress the trade, Stevenson insisted that ‘it cannot consent to do so by sacrificing the rights of its citizens or the honour of its flag.’ *The Times*, 1 Jan 1842. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Anita Rupprecht, ‘“All We Have Done, We Have Done for Freedom”: The Creole Slave-Ship Revolt (1841)

    and the Revolutionary Atlantic,’ *International Review of Social History* (2013), 253-277; 259-261. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Edward D. Jervey and C. Harold Huber, ‘The Creole Affair,’ *Journal of Negro History*, 65, No. 3 (Summer, 1980), 196-211; 203-204. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. John C. Calhoun demanded that President Tyler inform the Senate what steps had been taken for ‘the punishment of the guilty, the redress of the wrong done to our citizens and the indignity offered to the American flag,’ adding that the incident was ‘most dangerous to the peace and quiet of the two countries.’ Ambassador Everett in London decried the incident as ‘a direct offense against the honor and independence of the country, the more dangerous as carrying in its very nature an inducement to multiply occasions for its recurrence.’ John O Geiger, ‘A Scholar Meets John Bull,’ 587. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Jones, *American Problem*, p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. *Ibid*, p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Jones highlighted the political danger for Ashburton if he made a full and frank apology, writing that ‘Respect for America's honor required Great Britain to admit that the acts were wrong, but the new conciliatory ministry of Sir Robert Peel saw political danger in apologizing, especially since New York had tried a British subject who had obeyed government orders. Though the Caroline incident was no longer inflammatory, some American politicians hoped to capitalize on its emotional appeal, while others considered an apology essential to national honour.’ Howard Jones, ‘The Caroline Affair,’ 499-500. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. *Ibid*, 501. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Bourne, *Foreign Policy of Victorian England*, pp. 50-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Lyon G. Tyler, ‘President John Tyler and the Ashburton Treaty,’ *William and Mary Quarterly*, 25, No. 1 (Jul., 1916), 1-8; 7. A comprehensive account of these negotiations have been provided by Ephraim Douglass Adams, ‘Lord Ashburton and the Treaty of Washington,’ *American Historical Review*, 17, No. 4 (Jul., 1912), 764-782. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Current, ‘Webster's Propaganda and the Ashburton Treaty,’ 188-189. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Frederick Merk, ‘The Oregon Question in the Webster-Ashburton Negotiations,’ *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 43, No. 3 (Dec., 1956), 379-404. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Kenneth E. Shewmaker, ‘Daniel Webster and the Oregon Question,’ *Pacific Historical Review*, 51, No. 2 (May, 1982), 195-201; 197-198. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Jones, *American Problem*, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)