In 1760, British control over New France, specifically Quebec, was ossified through a combination of military occupation and the subsequent surrender of the French forces in Montreal. Just three years later, the Treaty of Paris officially established British sovereignty over the territory. Pioneering a fresh perspective in historical research, Nancy Christie from the University of Western Canada probes business and legal archives, political writings, and newspaper materials to unveil a stronger interconnectedness between the post-1760 military administration and the defeated French Canadian populace than previously acknowledged or envisioned. She pays particular attention to the disparate interpretations and reactions to the highly controversial Quebec Act. Her investigation yields a host of discoveries that countervail the official British exegesis that the assimilation of the British and French cultures after the conquest of New France was seamless and occurred with minimal animus. In this boldly revisionist exploration, Christie delves into a pivotal yet insufficiently examined epoch within Canadian history prior to Confederation: the span between the British conquest of New France and the uprisings of 1837–8. Contrary to established notions of increasing harmony between the British Empire and its new French-speaking, Catholic populace, Christie posits that this era was characterized by heightening ethnic and political discord. Amid the efforts of imperial authorities and the colonial English community to maintain control over the French Canadian majority, an exacerbation of divisions unfolded. This was a materialization of British imperialism achieved through avenues such as constitutional reforms, labor laws, trade, cultural influences, and even instances of direct contestation.

Christie's lucid exposition underscores the role of ideology in shaping the integration of Quebec into Britain's dominion. Scrutinizing the post-conquest English- and French-language press in the colony, she traces the interplay between proponents and critics of imperial policies, drawing from the discourse of court and country delineated by historian J. G. A. Pocock. The narrative reveals that the eventual adoption of a "country" (or radical Whig) stance by the French Canadians largely stemmed from the Quebec English community's gradual embrace of an increasingly parochial, anti-French British identity. This cultural shift, in turn, impelled numerous English-speaking colonists to abandon their own country-oriented rhetoric, espousing instead the language of the "court" (or authoritarian Whigs), lending support to the British establishment. By probing colonial legal archives, Christie unveils how this somewhat intricate dispute materialized in the everyday
lives of both English- and French-speaking settlers. Similar scrutiny is applied to the roles of masculinity definitions, trade practices, master and servant regulations, and family governance in shaping the British imperial exertions in Quebec.

The book deserves commendation on multiple fronts, most notably for Christie's skillful excavation of primary sources that offers readers a palpable sense of what it was like for English- and French-speaking colonists, as well as officials in Quebec and Britain, to navigate the intricacies of imperial governance. The tumultuous and frequently violent nature of the ordinary interactions experienced by British subjects is portrayed in a startling manner, particularly when juxtaposed against earlier historical interpretations that suggested a gradual and peaceful coexistence between French Canadians and their imperial rulers. The study elucidates the motivations that drove the francophone leaders of the Lower Canadian rebellions of 1837–8, along with their habitant supporters, to risk everything in their quest to challenge the influence of the English-speaking community and overthrow British dominion.

Traditionally, the military and political records of the administration have primarily presented the official standpoint. However, Christie's work uncovers some of the underlying dynamics at play. Quebec represented one of the earliest foreign territories integrated into the British Empire, distinguished by its language and civil law. Resorting to coercion would have been unwise and impractical, as noted by Lord Durham in his communication with the home government. The preferable approach was to maintain the status quo. In essence, the concept of British imperialism in the region, often perceived negatively, had a benign aspect. Although the influence of the British governor's personality could subtly shape matters, the overall tone was nonintrusive. Consequently, Quebec, or Lower Canada, achieved a distinctive and separate legal status through a British Act of Parliament in 1791. Aspirations and efforts toward revolution were stymied, contributing to the reinforcement of conservative tendencies.

Christie's work exhibits few flaws and is a testament to exhaustive research and acute methodology employed toward revealing a hitherto unknown aspect of this chapter of British-French relations in Canada after the defeat of New France. More efforts perhaps could have been made toward comparing Britain's official parliamentary and metropole policies in other locales of their far-flung empire. This could have revealed either a universality to Westminster's peremptory procedures in dealing with its colonies or an unambiguous distinction in how the forces of litigation were marshaled when overseeing their French subaltern subjects. In all, Christie has successfully accomplished unearthing what she described as “the darker aspects of a growing trend for a close-knit empire which involved enunciating greater differences between Britons and ethnic and racial ‘others’” (p. 37).