

# **Pedantic Hero: An Analysis of David Mills Contributions to a Canadian Approach to International Law**

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## **Abstract**

David Mills (1831 – 1903), a longstanding Member of Parliament, an academic and a Supreme Court judge, was one of the first English-speaking Canadians to take a professional interest in international law. While Mills is primarily remembered for his distinguished career in Parliament and his expertise in constitutional law, his contributions to international law are largely unrecognized. However, in addition to teaching international law at two Canadian universities, Mills published extensively on international law issues most notably, the South African War and the Alaska Boundary Dispute.

During Mills' career, the new Dominion of Canada struggled to establish a national identity, while maintaining ties with Britain and the United States. By the turn of the century, Canadians were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their country's inferior position, and sought increased status within these relationships. To further this nationalistic goal, a group of Canadian politicians, including David Mills, looked to international law and policy.

Mills was a well-known proponent of the Canada's involvement in the South African War. His extensive commentaries on the subject provide insight into how loyalty to Britain coupled with an increasing Canadian nationalism contributed to Canadian imperialism and involvement in this war. Mills also wrote extensively on the Alaska Boundary Dispute, and used international law, particularly treaty interpretation, to support Canada's legal position in this dispute. Mills' views on the Alaska Boundary Dispute provide insight into Canadian-American relations and growing anti-American sentiments in turn-of-the-century Canada. Mills' commentaries on the South African War and the Alaska Boundary Dispute provide a window into the history of international law in Canada in the years following Confederation, a time when Canada was developing a self-conscious national identity.

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