HISTORY, CITIZENSHIP and Identity in Canada

BY Jack Jedwab



"Frontenac en route pour Cataraqui" par John Henry de Rinzy / National Archives of Canada / C13325

DURING THE 1990'S THE STRENGTHENING OF CANADIAN CITIZENSHIP HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT FOCUS OF MANY OF THE COUNTRY'S POLICY-MAKERS AS WELL AS AN IMPORTANT SEGMENT OF THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY. KNOWLEDGE OF NATIONAL HISTORIES TENDS TO BE REGARDED AS A FUNDAMENTAL DIMENSION OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION. IT IS BELIEVED THAT MORE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CANADA'S PAST WILL LEAD TO GREATER ATTACHMENT TO THE NATION AND THIS WILL IN TURN RESULT IN A STRENGTHENING OF CITIZENSHIP. BY CONSEQUENCE, THERE HAS BEEN A GROWING CONCERN OVER THE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CANADA'S HISTORY AMONGST THE POPULATION.

National citizenship tests commonly include questions about a country's history and the one administered by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) is no exception. An analysis of these tests in Canada and elsewhere provides valuable insight into that which governments regard as the essential elements of historical knowledge about a country not only for immigrants but by extension for the entire population. The tendency of citizenship questionnaires is to focus on the origins of a country. In Canada such tests pay considerable attention to aboriginal peoples (i.e. what are the three main groups of aboriginal peoples), the French presence (i.e. who are the Acadian people and when did settlers from France first establish communities on the St. Lawrence River?) and the British presence (i.e. who were the United Empire Loyalists?). The enactment of Confederation is also the object of an important number of questions (i.e.what does Confederation mean?) in the citizenship test. Questionnaires pay little attention to the period 1867 through 1970 and the next major focus of the Canadian test is around the introduction of the Charter of Rights. For those who are interested, CIC does provide special features on the history of immigration to Canada; however, with regard to citizenship tests, it is fair to assume that only a certain amount of information is integrated about the country's past.

IMMIGRATION

Much attention has been directed at the impact of the influx of immigrants over the last twenty years on the country's collective memory. The 2001 census will reveal that some one out of five Canadians were not born in Canada. In the United States less than one out of ten persons are not born in that country. Throughout much of Canada the ethnic composition of the classroom has evolved considerably.

CIC sends the following message to immigrants: 'As a newcomer, you want to enjoy life in Canada without losing what is important to you. You will change as you adapt to Canada. However, you do not have to give up your personal or cultural identity. You may keep your cultural traditions, provided they are not harmful to Canada as a whole or to any individual Canadian. Canadians understand that Canada is a land of many cultures. In part, this is because Canada is a country made up of many peoples. It has been said that Canada is a "nation of immigrants", because all Canadians – except the First Peoples – share common immigrant origins.'

The growing diversity of the population in such a relatively young nation is believed to have significant ramifications for what are regarded as the defining features of Canada. Columnist Gwynne

Dyer has argued that such things as the Meech Lake Accord will be irrelevant to many immigrants arriving from far away places. But it is unclear that the Accord is relevant to non-immigrant Canadians. By consequence, how can we expect new Canadians to possess a good knowledge of the country's history when, according to numerous surveys, so many non-immigrants lack such knowledge? Can we expect them to share a passion for the Canadian past that many of us simply do not possess?

It would be a mistake to assume that immigrants are less attached to Canada by virtue of their not being as rooted or possessing an inferior knowledge of the country's past. Surveys confirm that with regard to various dimensions of Canadian identity immigrants' degrees of attachment are either equally high or higher than that of non-immigrants.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION CANADA, INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND QUEBEC'S MINISTRY OF RELATIONS WITH CITIZENS AND IMMIGRATION

Citizenship tests provide the basis for a governmental history. To prepare for the exam one would consult the information offered by CIC to new Canadians. Given that it has special responsibility for immigration, the province of Quebec offers its own information to new arrivals. It differs considerably in emphasis from the information that CIC disseminates to immigrants around Quebec's historic realities. In effect CIC avoids giving information that may be construed as overtly political and keeps more to early history and socio-demographic matters. Below are a series of comparisons in the type of information given by the two departments about their respective histories.

BEGINNINGS

Before the French and the English came to Canada there were groups of First Peoples in every region. Distinct nations of Indians lived on the East Coast, in the Central area, on the Plains and on the West Coast. The Inuit lived in the North.

The First Peoples in Canada developed unique cultures based on where and how each group lived. In the central plains, where groups of families cooperated in hunting buffalo, they would follow the animals and resettle often. The Indians of the Pacific Coast fished from the sea and were able to develop permanent villages. In the North, the Inuit lived by the sea in the winter and traveled inland in the summer.

Over the years, the First Peoples have worked to raise awareness of their identity among Canadian governments and the general public. They have also worked to apply their distinctive rights to lands and resources and to govern themselves within Canadian society.

The first inhabitants of Quebec were the First Nations people and the Inuit. Some of the First Nations people were the first to raise vegetable crops in the fertile land along the St. Lawrence River. The Aboriginal peoples in this region were fur traders who taught the early settlers how to survive. Today, many Aboriginal communities remain throughout the province. Settlers from France first established communities along the St. Lawrence River in the early 1600s. Today, Quebec society reflects this heritage.

More than three-quarters of the Canadians who live in Quebec speak French as their first language. Over one-third of the population in Quebec speak both French and English, making it the province with the highest number of bilingual Canadians. The province preserves and promotes the historic language and culture of its French-speaking citizens.

European explorers first came to North America in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, the area that is now Canada was not settled until the 17th century. The British and the French were the first two European groups to move here in large numbers. Each group brought its own language, system of government, laws and culture.

LE QUÉBEC : UNE SOCIÉTÉ PLURALISTE

Le Québec est une société pluraliste. La majorité d'origine française cohabite avec une minorité d'origine britannique, avec des nations amérindiennes et des gens de diverses origines et cultures venus d'ailleurs dans le monde (CIC).

L'arrivée de tribus asiatiques, via l'Alaska, remonte à plus de 12 000 ans. Quant aux Européens, sauf pour quelques incursions aux IXe et Xe siècles, ils ne s'installent pas sur ce territoire avant les années 1500. À cette époque, plusieurs nations autochtones l'occupent ou le fréquentent déjà.

1534 : Jacques Cartier prend possession des lieux au nom du roi de France, ouvrant ainsi la voie aux activités de pêche commerciale et de traite des fourrures.

1608 : Samuel de Champlain fonde le premier poste permanent à Kébec (Québec), nom qui signifie « passage rétréci » en langue autochtone. Ainsi s'amorce la colonisation de la Nouvelle-France (MRCI).

TO CONFEDERATION

Formal constitutional development in Canada began with the Edict creating the Sovereign Council of Quebec in 1663, whereby the French established

New France as a royal province and made provision for civil government. Following the transfer of Canada to British rule, the Royal Proclamation of 1763 established, among other things, certain principles respecting civil government in Quebec and relations with aboriginal peoples.

In the years immediately preceding the American Revolution, the British government became increasingly engaged in the question of how to maintain the loyalty of its new Canadian subjects. Mindful of the significant cultural differences between Quebec and the rest of British North America, the Westminster Parliament passed the Quebec Act, 1774, authorizing the use of French civil law and permitting the free exercise of the Roman Catholic religion. This act is the original legal source of Quebec's subsequent position affirming its continuing recognition as a distinct society in North America (IGA) .

In 1837-38, there were revolts in Upper and Lower Canada and demands for a system of responsible government. Constitutional government was suspended. The Durham Report which followed made two key recommendations.

1. That Upper and Lower Canada be joined in a single legislative union, the use of French be proscribed, and the assimilation of the Francophone population by the Anglophone population be fostered;

2. That responsible government be established.

The Union Act, 1840 sought – but failed – to achieve the first objective. Eight years later both English and French were placed on an equal footing for all official purposes. Although the Union Act had not provided for responsible government, this second objective was achieved under Canada's "unwritten" Constitution – the traditions, customs, practices, and legislation of greater or lesser importance that almost inevitably supplement or complement the written constitution of any state (IGA).

Canada was created in 1867 when Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick joined together. This act is celebrated each year on July 1 as Canada's official birthday. The name Canada may have come from the word "Kanata" in the language of the Huron-Iroquois Indians, which means a village or settlement.

The first Canadian Immigration Act was passed in 1869. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, advertising brought immigrants from Europe. Some settled in towns and cities, and others provided labour for factories, mines and lumber camps. Many were farmers who turned the western prairie into wheat fields. The building of our national railways by immigrants joined the East and West coasts and opened the interior for settlement (CIC).

1759 : Alors que la guerre de Sept Ans oppose la France et l'Angleterre, l'armée anglaise de Wolfe défait les troupes françaises de Montcalm sur les plaines d'Abraham à Québec. 1763 : La France cède le Canada à l'Angleterre, ce qui déclenche un courant d'immigration anglo-saxonne. Cet influx s'amplifie avec la venue de Loyalistes fuyant les États-Unis pendant la guerre d'Indépendance (1775-1783). Au milieu du XIXe siècle, le quart de la population québécoise est anglophone. La Proclamation royale abolit les lois françaises et exclut les catholiques des charges publiques. Résolus à conserver leur langue et leur religion, les francophones résistent et assurent leur survivance par une forte natalité.

1774 : L'Acte de Québec rétablit le droit civil français et reconnaît la religion catholique.

1791 : L'Acte constitutionnel instaure un régime parlementaire et partage le pays en deux provinces : le Haut-Canada à majorité anglophone (l'Ontario) et le Bas-Canada à majorité francophone (le Québec). Le nouveau régime permet l'émergence d'une élite politique qui réclame des droits accrus pour le Canada français. L'Angleterre refuse d'accorder un gouvernement responsable au Bas-Canada.

1838 : Le mécontentement des Patriotes mène à des affrontements armés avec les troupes britanniques. Celles-ci en sortent victorieuses.

1840 : L'Acte d'union réunit les deux provinces, ce qui place les francophones en situation de minorité. Il permet toutefois la reconnaissance de la langue française au Parlement et dans les lois.

1867 : L'Acte de l'Amérique du Nord britannique consacre la fédération des provinces du Canada, alors composée du Québec, de l'Ontario, du Nouveau-Brunswick et de la Nouvelle-Écosse. Le Québec dispose dorénavant de son propre parlement et de pouvoirs exclusifs dans certains domaines tels que l'éducation et le droit civil (MRCI).

HISTORIES OF UNITY AND DISUNITY

Although Quebec has been calling for increased provincial powers for years, the election of the Parti Québécois in 1976, on a platform calling for a dramatic distancing of Quebec from the rest of the Canadian federation, made constitutional renewal seem all the more pressing. In late 1979, the Parti Québécois government released a paper on Canadian federalism that called for a radical recasting of the Quebec-Canada relationship. The paper did not advocate Quebec's complete institutional withdrawal from Canada, but rather called for the creation of a very loose "partnership" between Quebec and Ottawa, called "sovereignty-association". A referendum to seek a mandate to negotiate such an arrangement was set for May 20, 1980. On May 14, the Prime Minister of Canada promised Quebecers a "renewed federalism" if they voted "No" in the impending referendum (IGA).

On October 6, 1980, the federal government indicated that it intended to patriate the Constitution unilaterally (without the consent of the provincial premiers) by introducing a Joint Address to the Queen in the House of Commons. Eight of the provinces immediately protested this unilateral action. Manitoba, Quebec, and Newfoundland referred the matter to their courts and the matter was ultimately referred to the Supreme Court of Canada by the federal government. On September 28, 1981, the Supreme Court of Canada rendered its decision that a "unilateral" patriation of the Constitution was legal. But it added that a "substantial degree" of provincial consent was required by constitutional convention before the federal-provincial

relationship could be fundamentally altered by a request to Britain for constitutional amendment.

In the wake of the Court's decision, the federal government convened another First Ministers' Conference on November 2, 1981. Ottawa and the provinces, with the exception of Quebec, ultimately agreed on a package of constitutional reforms, including the patriation of the Constitution with an amending formula and a charter of rights; a commitment to equalization; the strengthening of provincial control over natural resources; and the recognition and affirmation of the existing rights of Canada's aboriginal peoples. However, the Quebec government continued to dissent, arguing that Quebec's claims had been ignored, that a deal had been reached without Quebec's knowledge, and that the Prime Minister had reneged on his promise of "renewed federalism". On December 1, 1981, by resolution, the National Assembly rejected the patriation package. Indeed, throughout Quebec, the patriation experience left many feeling wounded and isolated (IGA).

The Government of Canada remains committed to modernizing the federation and to working in partnership with the provinces. It is the federal government's belief that this collaborative approach will strengthen national unity and advance our efforts to fully recognize the diversity of Canada including the unique character of Quebec (IGA).

1959 : La fin du régime de Maurice Duplessis amorce une mutation profonde et rapide sur les plans politique, social et économique - la « révolution tranquille ». Cette réforme des institutions, de l'éducation et des affaires sociales s'appuie sur le principe de l'universalité. Elle annonce la montée d'une nouvelle catégorie de gens d'affaires dynamiques et l'arrivée massive des femmes sur le marché du travail. L'image du Québec est définitivement transformée. Les débats sur la prépondérance du français et sur la spécificité de la culture québécoise ne sont pas terminés pour autant.

1974 : Le français est proclamé langue officielle du Québec.

1975 : La Charte des droits et libertés de la personne est adoptée par l'Assemblée nationale du Québec. Entrée en vigueur en juin 1976, elle vise essentiellement l'harmonisation des rapports des citoyens entre eux et avec leurs institutions, dans le respect de la dignité humaine.

1976 : Le nationalisme qui sous-tend la révolution tranquille mène à l'élection du Parti québécois de René Lévesque.

1977 : La Charte de la langue française est proclamée pour assurer le maintien du caractère francophone du Québec.

1980 : Par voie de référendum, la population rejette le projet de souveraineté-association avec le reste du Canada.

1990 et 1992 : Alors que le Parti libéral, dirigé par Robert Bourassa, est au pouvoir, les projets d'accords constitutionnels avec le reste du Canada échouent à leur tour.

1995 : Un deuxième référendum, tenu par le gouvernement du Parti québécois alors mené par Jacques Parizeau, est également défait.

1996-1998 : Nommé chef du Parti québécois et premier ministre en 1996, Lucien Bouchard est confirmé dans ce poste lors des élections provinciales de décembre 1998. Le Québec tente toujours de redéfinir sa position au sein de la fédération canadienne. Il reconnaît sa composition multiethnique et démontre son ouverture sur le monde, dont témoigne son adhésion à l'Accord de libre-échange nord-américain (ALENA), tout en continuant d'affirmer sa situation particulière de seule société francophone en Amérique du Nord (MRCI).

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CONCLUSION

Clearly the information disseminated by Quebec resembles that provided by federal immigration authorities in regards to the break between the Confederation period and the 1960's. However the Quebec Ministry of Relations with Citizens and Immigration focuses far more on political events than does Citizenship and Immigration Canada. This said, information about political events in Canada is provided by the federal Intergovernmental Affairs Ministry. Clearly historic information can vary depending upon whom one considers to be the group that they wish to reach. The opportunity for reconciling the historic accounts respectively given by CIC and IGA with that of MRCI would no doubt be an interesting exercise.

The interpretation of historic events can have significant political ramifications. In 1995 Canada narrowly overcame a threat to its political future that is rooted in historic conflict. Whether a good dose of knowledge about Canada's history would have helped to resolve this matter remains unclear. After all while some contend that a better knowledge of Canada's history will result in more support for Canadian unity, in Quebec there is a belief that a greater awareness of that province's history amongst its population will lead to more support for Quebec sovereignty. In the end it may not be knowledge of basic historic facts that is critical to a stronger attachment to the nation, rather it is how and by whom the events are being interpreted.

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