TEACHING ABOUT RACISM AND ANTI SEMITISM IN THE CONTEXT OF QUEBEC'S HISTORY PROGRAMS

ABSTRACT

This article locates teaching about racism and other issues of citizenship in the context of history programs in Quebec. It treats their history and their curricula concluding with the need for new approaches in our teaching of national history.

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This brief paper locates teaching about racism within a pedagogical conundrum. For the past half century, history programs in Quebec have been unable to escape a fundamental contradiction between themes that speak to survival of a conquered French Catholic people and those reflecting a persistent and flourishing pluralist society. To give setting, I summarize succeeding programs of national history since the 1960s and speak to their ideological contexts. The basic thrust of the paper, as Quebec authorities move to impose a new program, is the need to refresh our approach in teaching national history and to reduce a deadening tendency to political correctness. As well as suggesting the opening of Quebec's teaching of national history to competing narratives, I plea for a re-thinking of our training of teachers and for restoring the relations between academic historians and Ministry officials responsible for programs. Instead of papering over conflicts in the Quebec past with a view to what Scot historian Michael Fry has called "the inculcation of a sense of fellowship with people in the past", I suggest that by admitting instances of racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, or violence in our history, we can give context and understanding to the civic issues facing young people today.[1]

The Setting:

Let's start with certain givens. First, it is not research into the history of neither Jews nor anti-Semitism in Quebec that is lacking. Scholars like Gerald Tulchinsky, Arlette Corcos, and Ruby Heap have shown the struggle for Jewish place in the Roman Catholic and Protestant educational systems, in labor and unions, and in universities.[2] Historians Denis Vaugeois, Allan Greer, and Sylvie Taschereau have examined the political, social, and economic experience of Jews across the early history of Quebec. The place of Jews in English Canada as "undesirable settlers" or as students to be systematically excluded from institutions like McGill University have been described by Pierre Anctil and are summed up effectively by Irving Abella's and Harold Troper's effective title None is too Many.[3]

The second given is the inexorable link that is made between issues of race and the national question. The refusal to permit Ezekiel Hart, the first elected Jew, to take his seat in the Lower Canadian assembly 1808, xenophobia in the work of Abbé Lionel Groulx, Quebec's most important Catholic nationalist intellectual, and the remarks of Quebec premier Jacques Parizeau concerning the relationship between the loss of the 1995 referendum on independence and the "ethnic" vote, underline

how issues of racism merge with Quebec nationalism into a sticky ball of wax. Prominent intellectuals like Mordecai Richler and Gérard Bouchard kept this debate on the front-burner while Esther Delisle described an embedded anti-Semitism in the conservative Quebec of the 1930s.[4] The progress of the independence movement – election of a pro-independence government in 1976 and two sovereignty referendums (1980 and 1995) – have ensured that ethnicity and race remain sensitive issues that lap inevitably into pedagogy and the teaching of national history.[5] Outside of Quebec, English Canadians have regularly pilloried Quebec nationalism as a modern form of "ethnic self-determination", "similar to the various minority ethnic movements that sought self-determination within the Habsburg Empire". Implicit is the sentiment that Quebec is biologically intolerant and undemocratic: "quite simply", David Bercuson and Barry Cooper concluded in 1991, "Quebec nationalism does not conform to the usual and prudential politics of bargaining and mutual accommodation."[6]

The Development of Programs of National History

These tensions are mirrored in conflicts over the teaching of national history, the historicism of racism, and methods of teaching citizenship. These debates are not particular to Quebec. France has had fierce controversy over the presentation in textbooks of its colonial experience and, in the United States, the furious polemic around the removal of Paul Revere and other "white male heroes" from centrality in American history has included Lynne Cheney, wife of the Vice President. In China, the re-writing of school histories with little mention of Mao has brought sharp reaction.[7] Before the secularizing of Quebec in the 'Quiet Revolution', the teaching of History was grounded in the link between religion and the survival of the nation.[8] Courses in Catholic schools emphasized New France, its explorers, and martyrs, the humiliation of the British Conquest in 1759-60, and the struggles of a French Catholic rump in a hostile North American world. Protestant schools in Quebec had their own history program, one that directed students to a sense of the superiority of Britain's constitutional traditions and economic practices. Students from schools in English Montreal for example, might be taken to the McCord Museum where they observed the world's finest collection of the memorabilia of General James Wolfe, martyr for the British cause in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

We can date the modern period in education in Quebec from the Royal Commission on Education in 1963 (Parent Commission). Its recommendations resulted in establishment of the Province's first Ministry of Education and institution of a government-approved, common curriculum of history that would be applied universally across the province in both Roman Catholic and Protestant schools; textbooks for these courses required Ministry approval. Secularization had powerful and perhaps unanticipated results. Moral instruction, usually in the guise of civics, was downloaded to history teachers. They had to interpret both historical context and the complex cultural makeup that enveloped issues of race, tolerance, and citizenship. Not surprisingly, classroom teachers had to present history courses that were schizophrenic and torn between an inclusive geographic and social-studies approach and the imperative to give students a sense of what was now referred to as "the Quebec nation", essentially an ethnic entity perennially threatened in the Canadian federation by an aggressive English Canada.[9] Social democratic régimes such as those governing Quebec after 1960 turned to the state as an economic lever, as a front-line protector of language and culture, and as the mother lode of national memory and survival. Soon to be named Minister of Education where he would initiate the history program of 1983, Camille Laurin insisted that state intervention had to be used to protect the collective rights of the majority from the English-speaking minority's untruthful use of the discourses of individualism and liberalism:

> Les privilèges de la minorité anglo-québécoise sont ainsi le fruit d'un rapport de force historique et accidentel, mais celle-ci tente de masquer ce fait incontestable et elle cherche surtout à le perpétuer en le présentant comme l'expression d'un droit formel qu'il faut maintenir au nom des intérêts supérieurs de l'humanité.
>
> Cette idéologie prend racine dans les thèses de Stuart Mill, de Hume, des encyclopédistes français et de tous leurs disciples. Or, il est devenu clair que le respect des droits individuels, entendus au sens de cette idéologie libérale, devient un mensonge et une hypocrisie…[10]

Curricula for elementary and secondary schools introduced in 1983 remained impaled on these horns. The Grade 11 course, "the History of

Quebec and of Canada" (the course title itself implicitly separating Quebec from Canada) reflected these ambiguities. "National history", it reported, "must in particular awaken students to problems – keys to their collectivity and contribute to the development of a social conscience."[11] Alongside this understanding of the other, a unit in the same program instructed teachers to "Explain the Conquest, its causes and immediate effects" and to help students understand "the movements at the basis of national history."[12] Other units brought students back to the "coexistence of different cultures", "the diversity of interests of social groups", and the "impact on society of immigration."[13]

Two other elements are relevant to understanding the framework in which racism would be presented in history courses. First, was the separation, evident as early as the 1980s, of academic historians from curricula, from significant influence with officials in the Ministry of Education, and from contact with teachers in the schools.[14] This is a very different model from the United States where the Organization of American Historians was one of the partners in the Council which developed the National Standards for History.[15] In Quebec, Ministry officials took their distance apparently seeing academic historians as too specialized and too distant from classroom realities. They turned instead to the province's expanding Faculties of Education and their specialists in the teaching of history. With a primary concern in pedagogy, they were less interested in the narrative and context of historical scholarship and in history as a discipline in the humanities and social sciences. In 1992, the Ministry of Education reinforced this separation placing the training of history teachers (as well as other disciplines) under the responsibility of education faculties.[16]

These contradictions re-surfaced in the Task Force on the Teaching of History (Lacoursière Commission) set up by the Quebec Government in 1995. Its laudable goal was to "return national and world history to its rightful place as a fundamental discipline in the education of young people in Quebec."[17] The Ministry ensured broad ethnic representation and I represented the English-speaking community of British background; another spoke for native people, and another, the cultural communities. Our debates, does this surprise you, focused on the familiar contradiction – what our report called "the structuring of our identity" and "history as a form of civic education."[18] Our report avoided the term "Quebec nation" opting instead for the term "Quebec society" and concluded that previous courses had been too

> "structured around the historicity of the presence of the francophone community of French origins and to a certain extent around the Anglophone community of British origins. The Task Force believes that special attention should be given to the historicity of the presence of certain cultural communities in Quebec such as the Black, Jewish, Italian and Chinese communities…"

Our report prompted sharp reaction. Jack Jedwab and Max Anderson for example, objected that it was "timid" in failing to expose the "xenophobia" of Lionel Groulx and vague on how to teach about cultural communities.[20] On the nationalist side, Jean-Marc Léger, director of the Lionel Groulx Research Foundation, was ballistic in what he saw as the Task Force's "evacuation of the notion of national identity" in the favour of political correctness. Charging that the Task Force had been intimidated by lobby groups hostile to all that was French, he attacked the insertion of national history into "a multicultural perspective" in which the very mention of French Canadians had been subordinated to that of the question of cultural communities.[21]

In the decade since that report, ministry officials, committees, and consultants have grappled with different models that might structure the program. Quebec for example, might have been included into the larger context of "civilization", essentially francophone. Inspired by André Malraux and a Gaullist vision of a larger francophone cultural world, this framework was put forward by Denis Vaugeois as early as the 1960s. As the province's first coordinator of history teaching, he was responsible for the first pedagogical guide of the new Quebec Ministry of Education, La civilisation française et catholique au Canada (1966).[22] This attempt to establish a comprehensive set of values including equality, liberty, and democracy within the context of a broadly-based and pluralist francophone society can also be observed in the writing of Gérard Bouchard. Perhaps because of the impact of larger concepts of globalization, the place given to 'Americanité' as a factor in Quebec culture, or the weakening of 'Francophonie' in the face of Hispanic and English-speaking worlds, this approach has not penetrated significantly into actual programs.[23] It has been much more successful as a model for national museums in Canada, to

wit the establishment by both Quebec and Ottawa of museums of civilization.

Multiculturalism with its implied tolerance and equality has been a manna for English Canada since its introduction in 1972. However, its de-emphasis on founding societies and the particular history of a franco-québecois nation has made it a non-starter, an anathema to Quebec intellectuals and authorities. Just as untenable in the past, but a model I return to below, is the narrative of a larger Canadian history in which French Canada would be given a pan-Canadian context and in which French Canadians as a cultural and ethnic entity would be placed in the history of the larger Canadian federation. This approach has been favored by Jean-François Cardin and Claude Couture.[24] Another means of introducing diversity into a program on national history is by granting coherent treatment to its composing minorities. This model is central in the National Standards program for teaching history in the United States and was also evident in a Quebec Government inquiry in 1997. The Inchauspé Commission or Groupe de travail sur le réforme du curriculum recommended that the national history of Quebec give prominent place to three elements: native peoples, the English-speaking community, and recent immigrant groups.[25]

The curriculum now under consideration (2006) for application in an obligatory two-year secondary school course in national history falls between the cracks of these various models. Reflecting the argument of Gérard Bouchard, it places the territory of the St. Lawrence at its core is a territorial model showing the place of natives, French Canadians and later immigrants in this space. The problem is two-fold.[26] What, critics ask, is the particular specificity of the St. Lawrence Valley as a "new" society as compared to the larger Canadian society? And from the nationalist quarter, critics decry placing French Canada on an equal footing with natives or other charter members.

The proposed curriculum has other serious difficulties. It places "citizenship" on an equal footing with "history" subordinating the narratives of history to a 'teaching and learning' approach.' The proposed secondary program, "History and Citizenship Education" builds upon elementary school courses in Geography, History and Citizenship. These emphasize concepts of territory in space and time. In the first year of secondary-school, students are to expand this understanding of the organization of territory, are to learn to interpret these territorial challenges, and are to develop civic conscience on a planetary level.[27] In the second year, students are to learn more complex social realities with a view to assuming responsibilities as citizens. Society is presented as "pluralist" and as one with a "diversity of values" giving students "the possibility of understanding their social identity in the respect of differences". Units such as "Living Together and Citizenship emphasize that political correctness is totally in the saddle: historical narrative and any sustained concepts of 'Race' or ethnicity have been washed out in a larger concept of Territory – "a social space to which humans have given particular organization".[28]

Conclusion:

While this curriculum is still under review and, before a generation of Quebec students understand the past from its perspective, several issues might be re-considered:

1. The training of teachers of history under the aegis of Faculties of Education needs re-examination. Classroom teachers should be first trained in a discipline with training in pedagogy as a subsequent supplement.

2. A much broader community and academic base should be involved in the actual process of developing a national history program. As it now stands, academic historians are often reduced to newspaper columns or commenting on drafts that produced in the Ministry of Education coteries. This would allow a more coherent treatment of issues such as racism, the charter, and anti-Semitism in the Quebec past. A broadly-based, and public panel of specialists in Quebec and World History should be at the core of the process.

3. Although the program is universal in all Quebec schools, with textbooks approved by the state and testing by a province-wide exam, political correctness and bland statements of citizenship must, in this writer's opinion, give way to a mission of historical literacy in which students understand cultural, political, and social issues in their historical context. Abortion, gay marriage, violence, smoking and drug use, and anti-Semitism have histories in Quebec and these, albeit painful, are necessary for student understanding of their

society and its demands. Quebec has developed maturity since the Quiet Revolution, a sense of self that should permit presentation of multiple historical narratives that make up the Quebec experience. This approach would combat the lingering alienation of minorities and would foster a sense of national identity. In my view as well, a larger sense of Canadian culture and society must be introduced. Finally, state control over history content must be loosened with confidence shown to the different constituencies that make up Quebec's body politic. This may lead to divergent historical narratives but this corresponds to historical scholarship and to the experience of Quebec's diverse citizenry.

Notes

[1] Cited in the Guardian, 9 May 2006.

[2] Tulchinsky, Taking Root : the Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community (Toronto: Lester, 1992); Corcos, Montréal, les Juifs et l'école (Sillery: Septrentrion, 1997).

[3] Taschereau, Échapper à Shylock : la Hebrew Free Loan Association of Montreal entre antisémitisme et intégration', Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française, 59, no. 4 (printemps 2006), pp. 451-480; for McGill see Pierre Anctil, Le rendez-vous manqué. Les Juifs de Montréal face au Québec de l'entre-deux-guerres (Québec: IQRC, 1988) pp. 59-108; Irving Abella and Harold Troper, None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-48 (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1983).

[4] Richler, Oh Canada, Oh Quebec (New York: Knopf, 1992); Pierre Anctil, Ira Robinson, et Gérard Bouchard, Juifs et Canadiens français dans la société québécoise (Sillery: Septentrion, 2000); Delisle, The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-Semitism and the delirium of extremist right-wing nationalism in French Canada from 1929-1939 (Toronto: Davies Publishing, 1993), p.44.

[5] Examples of Jewish alienation abound. See for example, Michael Brown assertion that "…other than Montreal, there are few Jewish communities outside the Arab world today where 80 percent of the population has considered emigrating. Despite the reassurances offered by a number of French-Canadian leaders, there persist among Jews fears of fascism, persecution, and second-class status in the Quebec of the future." Jew or Juif? Jews, French Canadians, and Anglo-Canadians, 1759-1914 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1986), p.6; or, see Régine Robin's fear of Québécois "witch-hunting" in 'the Wanderer' cited in Jocelyn Maclure, Quebec Identity: The Challenge of Pluralism (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003) p. 115.

[6] David J. Bercuson & Barry Cooper, Deconfederation: Canada Without Quebec (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1991), p. 8. To this can be added the controversy surrounding Linda Kay's National Post article (6 August 2006) 'The Rise of Quebecistan' attacking the presence of nationalist leaders Gilles Duceppe and André Boisclair in a Montreal march for peace in Lebanon in which Jewish leaders were absent. Even more recent is the uproar over Jan Wong's charge (Globe and Mail, 16 September 2006) that Montreal's three school shootings can be explained in part by Quebec's linguistic intolerance.

[7] Le Monde, 21 janvier 2006; for the History Standards debate in the U.S. see the New York Times, 3 April 1996 and, for China, the New York Times, 1 September 2006.

[8] Félix Bouvier, 'La mutation de l'enseignement de l'histoire proposée par le Rapport Parent', Bulletin d'histoire politique, vol. 12, no. 2, p. 131.

[9] Learning from the Past: Report of the Task Force on the Teaching of History (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 1996) p. 11; The Schools of Quebec: Policy Statement and Plan of Action (Quebec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 1979), p. 26; Gérard Bouchard, La réécriture de l'histoire nationale au Québec. Quelle histoire? Quelle nation? (Chicoutimi: IREP, 1998); p. 5.

[10] Laurin presenting Bill 101 in the Quebec Legislature, 19 July 1977, cited in Jean-Claude Picard, Camille Laurin. L'homme debout (Montréal: Boréal, 2003).p. 488.

[11] Guide pédagogique. Histoire du Québec et du Canada, 4e secondaire (Québec : Direction générale du développement pédagogique, 1984) p. 7 : "L'histoire nationale devrait plus particulièrement l'éveiller aux problèmes – clés de sa collectivité et contribuer à développer sa conscience sociale".

[12] Ibid., p .52.

[13] Ibid., p. 14.

[14] Jean-François Cardin, 'Les historiens et le dossier de l'enseignement de l'histoire: chronique d'un passage du centre vers la marge', Bulletin d'histoire politique, 14, no.3 (printemps 2006) p. 60.

[15] http://nchs.ucla.edu/standards1.html.

[16] See 'La formation à l'enseignement secondaire général. Orientations et compétences attendues', (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 1992) and the protest of historians in the Bulletin de l'Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française (automne 1992), pp. 1-4. Nor was this separation inevitable. In the United States, Gary Nash, director of the National Center for History in the Schools, is a distinguished research scholar of race and class and former President of the Organization of American historians. National Standards for United States History (Los Angeles: National Center for History in the Schools, 1996) p. 261.

[17] Learning from the Past: Report of the Task Force on the Teaching of History (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 1996) p.ix.

[18] Ibid., p. 4.

[19] Ibid., p. 48.

[20] 'Retour vers le futur (commentaire sur le rapport Lacoursière)', Bulletin d'histoire politique, vol. 5, no. 1 (automne 1996), p. 52.

[21] 'L'histoire nationale révisée à l'aune du multiculturalisme', Bulletin d'histoire politique, vol. 5, no. 1 (automne 1996), p. 60, 62.

[22] Daniel Moreau, 'Les réformes de l'enseignement de l'histoire nationale, du rapport Parent au rapport Lacoursière', Bulletin d'histoire politique, 14, no. 3 (printemps 2006), p. 33.

[23] Gérard Bouchard, 'La réécriture de l'histoire nationale au Québec. Quelle histoire? Quelle nation? (Chicoutimi: IREP, 1998), p. 8; for an introduction to the literature of Americanité see Gérard Bouchard et Yvan Lamonde (dirs.), La Nation dans tous ses États. Le Québec en comparaison (Montréal: Harmattan, 1997).

[24] Histoire du Canada. Espace et difference (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval, 1996).

[25] Réaffirmer l'école, Rapport du Groupe de travail sur la réforme du curriculum (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 1997) p. 136.

[26] Gérard Bouchard, 'La réécriture de l'histoire nationale au Québec. Quelle histoire? Quelle nation? (Chicoutimi: IREP, 1998), p. 19.

[27] 'Histoire et éducation à la citoyenneté' (Québec : Ministère de l'Éducation, 2006), p. 8

[28] 'Histoire et Éducation à la citoyenneté' (Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation, 2006), p. 8