WHAT
"WE"
CHOOSE
TO
FORGET
FAMINE FIVE ROSES FLOUR
ESTD 1759
GUINNESS
Speak White
LE 30e DU 30 OCTOBRE '95
Loi 101 au cégep!
SPEAK FRENCH
LE QUÉBEC AUX QUÉBÉCOIS
VOTONS DUPLESSIS
"DUPLESSIS gives us the province"
"1970, c'était la semi-finale... la prochaine, ce sera la finale."
HISTORIC QUEBEC ANGLO
NON NON NON EST QUÉBÉCOIS
CHARLES DE GAU
1759: La conquête du Québec
YOUNG'S
Oy Rex Rodgers

What We Choose To Forget

A Quebec Story of Unshared Memories

Appreciation for What We Choose To Forget

Guy Rex Rodgers has a remarkable ability to reveal the humanity that lies beneath Quebec's complex history and politics. He demonstrated this with great sensitivity and finesse in his documentary film What We Choose to Remember. His new book, fittingly titled What We Choose to Forget, builds on that work with depth and insight. Ours is a complex society that resists simple explanations, yet Rodgers opens this world with clarity and grace, helping us better understand ourselves while offering the rest of the country a window into our lived reality.

Frank Baylis P. Eng.
Co-Executive Chairman / Baylis Medical Technologies Inc.
Former MP Dollard-Desormeaux

Drawing on years of documentary filmmaking and conversations in more than fifty communities across the province, Rodgers examines how relations between francophones, anglophones, and allophones were shaped—not accidentally, but historically. His approach is patient, humane, and deeply grounded in lived experience, attentive to voices and histories that are too often missing from Quebec's dominant narrative.

Richard Walsh Smith
Educator, writer and activist

What We Choose to Forget is an impressive piece of work. Rodgers has a narrative skill that makes for a read that flows like water, at one level offering fly-on-the-wall descriptions of friendly encounters with a wide range of Quebecers, at another an eye-opening discovery of hidden truths they reveal about our history, or histories. Guy Rodgers is telling English Quebecers our history in a novel way. If you are part of it, the stories will make you proud and remind you that this is your home. If you are not part of it, they will show you that Quebec's English-speaking communities are a valuable part of the province's social, cultural, economic and political fabric.

Christopher Neal
Montreal-based writer, retired journalist and communications manager

I like all these oral histories. There's an intimacy and frankness to them. They're like private confessions. We haven't had very many deeply personal conversations in the English-speaking community about political and sociological change like the ones featured in this documentary film and book project. This is valuable piece of sociological work. And What We Choose to Forget, the conclusion to the project, is a welcome addition to the published works relating to the place of English and the English-speaking community in Quebec.

David Johnston
Reporter and editor, The Montreal Gazette, 1981-2014
Quebec and Nunavut regional representative of the federal Commissioner of Official Languages, 2014-22

Rodgers' work updates the historical conversation first established by Ronald Rudin's The Forgotten Quebecers and Clift and McLeod's The English Fact in Quebec. The inclusion of allophone voices is especially pertinent given the changing demographics of the province. For future historians, What We Choose To Forget will doubtless become indispensable to a historical understanding of Anglo-Quebec in the first half of the 21st century.

Raymond Jess PhD
School of Irish Studies,Concordia University

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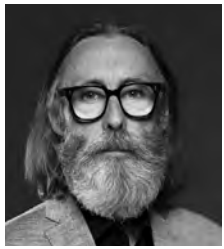
This PDF version of the book contains hundreds of hyperlinks to online media: films, music, historical archives and media coverage of the events described in the book.

Information about the print edition plus news and reviews can be found at the website below.
www.whatwechoose.ca

For Louise, Émilie, Marc, Mathis, Louis, Ellie, Victoria,
James and Henry.

About the Author



Guy Rex Rodgers arrived in Quebec as a young adult to study at the National Theatre School, and was immediately enamoured with, and often baffled by, Quebec's history, culture and politics. Rodgers has been a writer, translator, filmmaker and community activist: founder of the English Language Arts Network (ELAN), co-founder of the Quebec Writers' Federation (QWF) and the Quebec Drama Federation (QDF). In 2015, he was appointed a companion in l'Ordre des arts et des lettres du Québec. In 2020, Rodgers began filming a documentary about waves of immigration, and how immigrants successfully adapted to Quebec since it adopted the first language laws half a century earlier. His three-year tour of Quebec, as the government imposed harsh new language laws, is the story of What We Choose To Forget.

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What We Choose To Forget

A Quebec Story of Unshared Memories

Guy Rex Rodgers

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Prologue

Few nations tell the truth. They prefer stories that make citizens feel good, tales that make the nation's youth proud of their ancestors and confident in their future. Quebec's narrative is unusual. It is the story of a conquered people, dominated for centuries by foreigners. At first glance, it appears to be a history imposed by the conquerors, the English. In fact, the popular history of Quebec has been astutely constructed as an inspirational underdog tale. Against impossible odds, a scraggly mutt fights for its rights, dignity, culture and beloved language.

It is a good story. Great heroes are defined by the power of their enemies. Asterix's village had to battle the invincible Roman Empire. Quebec has had to fight two of the most powerful empires the world has ever known: Great Britain and the United States of America. The British invaded, oppressed or exploited almost every country on the planet. I spent my young adult years in Australia, founded as a penal colony for Britain's political and social riff raff, where my Aussie mates deeply resented arrogant "Pommie bastards." And how many countries have not been exploited by the American Empire? The Australia of my youth saw the CIA engineer a constitutional crisis to remove Gough Whitlam's Labour government because it was getting too curious about what the Americans were doing in secret military bases on Australian territory.

Quebec's underdog story has a ring of truth. It is perfectly plausible to me that the British and American Empires had conspired to subjugate Quebec's habitants. When I first moved to la belle province in 1980, I bought into the story and could have been persuaded to paint my face blue and white like *Braveheart's* William Wallace and gallop into battle shouting, "Freedom!" I learned to speak French and found a francophone partner. We lived in French neighbourhoods and sent our kids to French schools. We bought our first house in Rosemont, near Montreal's Botanic Gardens, far east of Saint-Laurent Boulevard, the traditional divide between Montreal's French east side and the English-dominated west side. I wondered if I was the first Anglo ever to venture so deep into

French territory, until one day I came across an English church. Then I discovered an English-language school — still operating! How could that be explained?

I discovered that Rosemount had been home to more than 100,000 English speakers in the mid-twentieth century. Neighbouring Hochelaga, the heart of the French-speaking working class, also had English schools and churches in the 1950s. Those Anglo communities are smaller now, but they formerly thrived, so why are immigrants told that the territory east of Saint Lawrence Boulevard has always been French?

A few years ago, I moved to Outremont, the traditional home of Quebec's francophone elite, and was puzzled by street names that sounded more like Edinburgh than Paris: McDougall, McNider, McCulloch and Stuart. I was surprised to learn that Outremont in the 1930s was 50 percent English speaking and the first pioneers were almost entirely Scottish. A century earlier, the entire city of Montreal had been more than 50 percent English speaking. These were startling discoveries to me.

Very few nations tell the truth about their past. Quebec is no exception. Quebecers want to feel good about themselves and their fight for survival. The problem with the underdog tale is that it requires a villain, a Big Bad Dog of a different breed.

In 2020, I began shooting What We Choose to Remember, a documentary film about Anglos, allophones[1] and immigrants in Quebec. It was the 50th anniversary of the October Crisis, the culmination of almost a decade of Front de libération du Québec (FLQ)[2] urban terrorism targeted at foreign domination. My purpose in making the film was threefold: First, I wanted to document the preceding tumultuous half century while the eyewitnesses were still alive and lucid. My second purpose was to celebrate efforts by Quebec's English speakers and allophones to assist the francophone majority in eradicating the economic and social inequalities of the mid-twentieth century. The third reason was to examine the

[1] *Allophone is a Quebec term to designate immigrants whose mother tongue is neither French nor English.*

[2] *The FLQ was a militant independence movement in operation between 1963 and 1970.*

dividing line between "us," the loveable de souche[3] underdogs, and "them," the unlovable foreigners.

Simultaneous with the film's release, the government of Quebec legislated the first major revision of Quebec's language laws since the 1970s. It was puzzling to people who thought the inequalities of the previous generation were history. The new problems seemed questionable, divisive and politically motivated. I spent the next thirty months touring my film around Quebec in fifty-five communities, engaging with thousands of people in post-screening conversations about past victories, current satisfactions and a descending cloud of gloom.

This is not a tale of unspeakable violence. There are no horrifying villains and, sadly, few inspiring heroes. It is a simple human story about fear, vulnerability and tribal defences. This is a story of loveable underdogs, all struggling to preserve their histories, languages and cultures. Their tragedy is what they have chosen to forget — about themselves and each other.

Guy Rex Rodgers
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[3] *De souche (i.e., "old stock") is a term I will use to identify descendants of the original French-speaking population of Nouvelle France. The term francophone includes a broader group of French speakers. The term Québécois is even broader and encompasses francophones, anglophones and allophones.*

CHAPTER 1:

A Documentary Film, a New Language Law and a Tour

In 2012, the streets of Montreal filled with university students protesting a modest increase in tuition fees. The Quebec Liberal Party had mismanaged public security so badly that civil rights lawyers rebuked the government and law enforcement. Parents and grandparents took to the streets in solidarity with the students. It was summer. We banged pots. Youngsters pushed the limits of public nudity. There were moments of violence but remarkably few. In hindsight, it felt like a celebration of living in a normal society, where citizens rally together to defend shared values.

In 2019, half a million Montrealers joined Greta Thunberg to tell politicians and capitalists that climate change was the most serious problem in the world and that they wanted action now! The crowd on the streets for the climate march was young and old, from babes in arms to seniors with walking sticks, and as diverse linguistically and ethnically as Montreal. It felt like a normal society, where citizens rally together to defend shared values.

In May 2022, a few thousand English speakers gathered to protest anticipated attacks on their language rights. The government of Quebec was drafting new language legislation because they claimed Quebec needed stronger laws. Older people in the crowd could remember

previous language protests, expensive court challenges, street battles, bomb threats, explosions, kidnappings and deaths.

Parti Québécois (PQ) governments twice attempted, and failed, to separate Quebec from the Canadian Confederation. Between the mid-1960s and 1995, hundreds of thousands of citizens and innumerable corporations joined the exodus out of Quebec, triggering a long, cold winter of economic stagnation. Then, sometime after the second referendum in 1995, battle-weary troops declared a truce. Québec Inc.[4] turned its attention to creating wealth and prosperity. Quebec flourished.

In the 1960s, unilingual francophones earned salaries lower than unilingual anglophones and far lower than bilinguals. By 2020, unilingual francophones were earning more than bilingual anglophones and allophones. In the 1960s, it was common practice to conduct meetings in English for the convenience of a single boss, though most of the employees were francophone. By 2020, francophones could work, shop and play in their mother tongue almost everywhere in Quebec. The grievances of the 1960s were history. It had been a remarkable, and mostly peaceful, transformation within a single generation.

The most frequently cited irritation in the current political environment was *Bonjour-hi*, but francophones who were irritated at being greeted in a store with the English word *hi* could receive service in French in 97 percent of cases simply by asking. And yet the governing Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) party announced that the linguistic sky was falling and the government needed to create an iron dome of language defence.

I went to the Bill 96 street protest out of curiosity. A large, banner-waving crowd gathered on the grounds of Dawson College. Montreal had seen many large, energetic crowds defending Quebec's French language and culture. A public protest to defend the English language was rare. I collected quotes and shot some B-roll footage for a possible documentary film in case this protest against new language restrictions developed into a movement of consequence.

The feisty crowd of English speakers set off to march through the

[4] *The term Québec Inc. refers to a collaborative economic model developed during the Quiet Revolution to coordinate economic policies of Québec's government with activities of Québécois, primarily francophone, businesses.*

streets of Montreal waving anti–Bill 96 signs while police kept the peace from a non-provocative distance and shoppers — particularly francophones — tried to figure out what the protest was all about. The eternal vulnerability of the French language in Quebec, surrounded by an ocean of English speakers, is a given. Any government can score easy political points by promising to fight for French.

Bill 96 street protest, May 14, 2022.

The francophone majority in Quebec finds it hard to imagine that the English-speaking minority also feels vulnerable. *English is everywhere! The internet is English. Music and movies are English. You have schools, hospitals, newspapers, radio and TV stations! Anglos can live in Quebec without speaking a word of French. What is your problem?* Then there is the classic, *You are the best-treated minority in the world!*

It was difficult for shoppers to understand why a throng of Anglos had taken to the street to protest. Few of the sidewalk observers had any knowledge of Bill 96 but some of them — particularly francophones — understood that Anglos always object to laws that strengthen the French language. The "best-treated minority in the world" speaking the most powerful language in the world is not an obvious underdog. It is not easy to explain the "loss of rights" for Anglos in the context of francophone-minority communities throughout the rest of Canada that do not have

universities, hospitals, newspapers, radio stations or a very real possibility of living a full life in their minority mother tongue. Francophones couldn't imagine the CAQ government making Anglos suffer anything more serious than removing *hi* from the controversial public greeting, *Bonjour-hi*.

The march ended outside the premier's office on Sherbrooke Street, across from McGill University's Roddick Gates. Premier François Legault was nowhere to be seen. The Anglo protest ended with a few speeches, amplified by an old-school megaphone.

A group of young francophones staged an anti-English protest on the other side of Sherbrook Street, outside the gates of McGill University. They were few in number but loud and aggressive. Older people in the crowd remembered the McGill français protest in 1969, a lifetime ago, but it was so loud, aggressive and intimidating that it had left indelible memories. The Anglo protest was neither loud nor aggressive. The megaphone fell silent and marchers drifted away.

A month later, Bill 96 became law. Legal experts warned that the revised language law had serious negative implications and it was excessively complex, with new Bill 96 clauses linked with old Bill 101 clauses in multiple ways that made it difficult to anticipate how they would be interpreted or implemented. The most obvious concern was that the CAQ government had invoked the Canadian constitution's notwithstanding clause, which effectively eliminated minority-language rights otherwise guaranteed by federal and provincial charters of rights and freedoms. The notwithstanding clause made it impossible for those denied their constitutional rights to appeal to the courts for protection.

The government had not defined the problem that required such extreme remedies. Bill 96, incredibly, gave the government power to enter your business based on an anonymous complaint, without warning or warrant, and inspect the data on your computer systems and electronic devices. The state could fine your business up to $20,000 should the data not contain the requisite amount of French.

Nothing about this new language legislation felt normal. Bill 96 was complicated and designed to be implemented in multiple phases, over several years. The Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses

provided a detailed analysis on their website. Other business blogs such as *Preply* explained the economic implications. Bill 96's impacts on health, education and existential well-being for English speakers would only reveal themselves fully over the next three years.

Why was this happening? Why was the CAQ government pitting francophones who had voted for them against English speakers and immigrants who hadn't? Or was that the answer? Francophone media agreed with the CAQ that the French language was in peril and that urgent action was required. Most of the francophone media also agreed that Anglo objections were utterly predictable. One notable exception was Yves Boisvert's « L'insolence d'être un Anglo » published in *La Presse* May 15, 2022 — the day of the protest march:

> French is doing quite well in Quebec. If it is declining in Montreal, it's because francophones are relocating to the suburbs. And immigrants are settling en masse in the city. However, the immigrants, chosen by Quebec, are either francophone, have learned to speak French, or are in the process of doing so, thanks in part to mandatory French-language education. This is a success we forget to celebrate. It's easier to count the number of times an employee has approached you in English or said, "*Bonjour, hi.*"[5]

The most shocking evidence of linguistic decline that the CAQ could muster was a decrease in the number of unilingual francophones. The birth rate among francophones-de-souche crashed in the 1960s and never recovered, so Quebec could only maintain its workforce by immigration. Immigrants could, and did, learn French but they could not change their foreign mother tongues. More Anglos than ever were speaking French but they, too, could not change their mother tongue. The CAQ's focus on decreasing numbers of unilingual francophones felt like a deliberate demonization of Quebecers who are not unilingual francophones.

Non-francophones wondered why the language spoken at home was suddenly declared a linguistic crisis despite everyone speaking French at work and in the public sphere. Part of the reason for increasing rates of bilingualism (and the decline of French unilingualism) was that young

[5] *My translation, here and in subsequent quotations of this article.*

francophones also wanted to learn English. Part of the reason that more than 50 percent of Montrealers were foreigners was that mother tongue francophones-de-souche, as Boisvert noted, were leaving the metropolis to live in the off-island suburbs. He also recognized both the mean-spirited nature and ineffectiveness of Bill 96, which would punish English speakers without providing any tangible benefits for French speakers:

> Bill 96, while justified in substance, contains a series of new rules whose effectiveness is highly questionable, but which certainly herald a series of bureaucratic problems. How does French gain because an employee of the Bar, or the Collège des médecins, or any other professional body, would no longer have the right to speak to an English-speaking lawyer or doctor to resolve a technical problem? The bill is full of these seemingly innocuous little things, which will only create more regulatory pettiness and provide no protection of the French language.

Bill 96 triggered conversations about moving from Quebec that mirrored the mass murmuring about leaving during the bitterly contested second sovereignty referendum. In 2022, young Anglos, despite their high levels of proficiency in French, once again began to wonder if they had a future in a society that stigmatized bilingualism and the use of languages other than French. Would a future government repeal Bill 96? Defending Quebec's language and culture is always popular with the majority of voters. Appearing to yield to pressure from "the conqueror" will always be a losing proposition.

Repealing the law appears unlikely but the future is notoriously unpredictable. It is wiser to try to make sense of the past, which can teach important lessons. A decade before Bill 96 passed, in 2012, when I spoke to youth about the language issue in Quebec, they suppressed a smirk. "That is such a boomer thing! We're all bilingual and trilingual. Our generation is united around real issues like climate change and equity." Language in Quebec will always be an issue but the "language crisis" the bill attempts to address is not by any measure as urgent or serious as high school dropout rates, illiteracy, crumbling infrastructure and the declining quality of health care.

During the street protest in May 2022, I had no inkling that I would spend the next thirty months travelling around Quebec, visiting more than fifty Anglo communities, talking to thousands of Quebecers — young, old, Anglos, allophones and francophones — hearing their stories about past challenges, present satisfactions and serious concerns about the future. I began touring Quebec because of a documentary film I made about contemporary Quebec history, viewed through the eyes of immigrants whose roots did not penetrate to pre-Conquest Nouvelle France. The project had initially consisted of six short videos based on waves of immigration. They attracted the attention of Quebec broadcaster MAtv, which provided funding to turn them into six half-hour episodes for a TV series. MAtv also provided funding to create a subtitled French version of the series.

Then Canada's national broadcaster, CBC, funded me to make a one-hour special about English speakers in Quebec, adding new interviews with francophones about their linguistic fears and proposed solutions. Then the National Film Board (NFB) provided assistance for

Poster WWCTR

a feature-length documentary combining parts of the original interviews with new footage and historical material. The production model was improvised every step of the way, as was my career as a filmmaker. When I interviewed people who moved to Quebec during the waves of immigration sparked by the covid pandemic, I was still executive director of the English Language Arts Network, a service organization I had created almost twenty years earlier to assist Quebec's English-speaking artists. Unlike big-time producers, who budget as much for promotion as they do for production, I had spent my entire promo budget on a poster and a publicist for the launch. The rest of the journey would depend on word of mouth and good will. Like hitchhiking, these methods are inexpensive but unreliable.

The only confirmed interest in my film came from the Hudson Film Festival. The world premiere took place the day before the Bill 96 march. As I walked through the protest crowd, taking photos and asking questions, I encountered friends and colleagues and was surprised how many of them had seen episodes of the TV series, *Waves of Change*, which was still being broadcast on MAtv, or had seen reviews of the new film *What We Choose to Remember.* They were happy I had made a film presenting the reality of being a non-francophone in Quebec. My documentary's message was the antithesis of the justification for the CAQ's language legislation.

The film showed Anglos, allophones and immigrants who had learned French and supported the spirit of René Lévesque's Bill 101. They saw themselves as part of a success story, in stark contrast to the CAQ government's declarations that previous language laws had failed miserably because the island of Montreal was overrun by foreigners whose mother tongue is not French. Many of the young people who worked on my film were educated in French because of Bill 101. French was their primary language but not their mother tongue. Were they dangerous foreigners?

Clint Ward, founder of the Hudson Film Festival, programmed *What We Choose to Remember* to open his 2022 festival because it mirrored his own lived experiences. Clint arrived in Quebec in the 1950s, at a time when many Anglos were comfortably unilingual; his career as an international airline pilot did not require him to speak French. Nor did social

life in Hudson, a well-to-do Anglo enclave twenty kilometres from the Ontario border. The town is an anomaly, in some ways a living museum of Quebec before the first language laws in the 1960s.

I was apprehensive about premiering my film in Hudson. The political antithesis of militant Franco nationalists are angry Anglos, a.k.a. Angryphones, who are frequently present in the comment sections of English-language media ranting about a land they loathe but refuse to leave. I have rarely met an Angryphone in real life and wondered where they reside. Could they be lurking in a resolutely Anglo enclave like Hudson?

	French	English	Other Languages
1931	531 (62 %)	287 (34 %)	30 (4 %)
1971	1,105 (25 %)	3,130 (72 %)	110 (3 %)
2021	1,447 (27 %)	3,394 (62 %)	564 (11 %)

Table 1: Hudson population, 1931 – 2021

The first presentation of any work of art — theatre, music or film — is nerve-wracking. The audience does not know what to expect and the creators, who have been immersed in the work for months or years, have lost all objectivity. A hostile first audience can be the kiss of death. In the weeks preceding the Hudson premiere of *What We Choose to Remember*, publicist Barbara Ford sent press releases to English and French media, who ignored them. Then she made phone calls, which were also ignored.

We wondered if we had made the film sound too historical and boring. Or did the trailer make the film sound like an Angryphone tirade by placing too much emphasis on FLQ bombings? The media silence was unnerving until we got a first review. And then another. And then all the Anglo media — press, radio, TV and blogs — covered the film. *The Suburban*: "Compelling new documentary a 'must watch' for all Anglos." *Cult MTL*: "The Quebec Anglo: A new documentary portrays a reality far from the 'pampered elite' myth." *The Montreal Gazette*: "Documentary gives a voice to anglophones." *Quebec Chronicle Telegraph*: "New film dispels clichés about Quebec anglophones."

Clint scheduled two screenings on the opening day of his festival. Some of my family and friends attended the afternoon presentation but most of the audience members were strangers. After Clint welcomed everyone to the opening, the lights dimmed and the film began to play. As writer and director, I had all senses on high alert, listening and watching, trying to interpret the audience's response. The opening scenes of street interviews have intentionally funny moments. The audience laughed, in the right places. The applause at the end sounded enthusiastic but there was a talk scheduled with the audience after the screening and an open-mic Q&A can drag a public conversation in strange directions.

Audience members said they identified with the people on screen who arrived in different waves of immigration. Although they might have roots in different countries, and may have come to Quebec with different languages and religions, immigrants that arrived during the same period shared social and cultural experiences. The audience also identified with the interviewees' efforts to learn French and to ensure their children acquired good second-language skills. Many of the older folk in Hudson speak minimal French but they have encouraged their children and grandchildren to adapt to the new reality.

One of the instant stars of the film was Maura McKeon, who attended the afternoon screening. Maura, a retired history teacher and proud Anglo, gets a laugh in the film when she vows to defy Quebec's language police by having the epitaph at her final resting place written in English. The film ends with participants indicating their sense of belonging in Quebec by a show of hands, with ten fingers indicating the strongest sense of belonging. Maura casts the final vote. After reflecting for a dramatic moment, she boldly thrusts both hands into the air, defiantly displaying all ten fingers. The audience cheered Maura's assurance that Quebec has been her family's home for two hundred years and no one can take it away from her.

Between screenings, Clint took me to an adjacent restaurant for dinner, accompanied by William Floch, sous-ministre adjoint, Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise, and his wife, Joanne Pocock. The Secretariat for Relations with English-speaking Quebecers had funded my documentary project and Bill was keen to see the audience

response. We were joined for dinner by David Johnston, Quebec representative for the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, and his colleague Charles Taker, a Magdalen Islands native who was also one of the people interviewed in the film. Over dinner, we spoke about our mixed roots because everyone who worked on the film — on screen and behind the scenes — was identified in the end credits by their family's pre-emigration roots.

This conversation caught the attention of our waitress, whose roots were in Syria, Lebanon and Armenia. She asked about the film and said she would like to see it. Her shift did not end until after the evening screening, so I gave her the link to see the film. A week later, she sent an email touching on themes that would recur repeatedly during the tour: education, language skills and accents:

> I thoroughly enjoyed your documentary and learnt new things about the history of my province that were not discussed in high school. I identified a lot during the "work" segment. I am able to speak to clients in both languages, but it is pretty clear that I'm an anglophone. More times than not I receive criticism for my French accent. I get asked if I am an immigrant, and when I reply that I'm not, I'm then asked why I don't speak better French.

Clint and I returned to the theatre for the evening screening. Word of mouth from the earlier presentation had been good and the evening crowd was larger. Many friends attended, including Betty Esperanza, who worked closely with me on the project from the very beginning, and Barbara, our publicist. Two more stars of the film were in attendance: Rod MacLeod, representing first-wave Scottish immigrants, and Lorraine O'Donnell, representing first-wave Irish immigrants. Rod and Lorraine have deep personal histories in Quebec. They are also professional colleagues whose expertise in Quebec history made them invaluable research allies.

The evening screening confirmed that audience members from widely diverse backgrounds identified with the people on screen and their stories. The lively post-screening conversation continued at the bar until last call. The film had passed the audition, at least among Anglos and allophones.

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Next, the Knowlton Film Festival booked my film. No part of Quebec has a stronger Anglo history than the Eastern Townships a.k.a. les cantons-de-l'Est a.k.a. l'Estrie.[6] Prior to the British Conquest of Nouvelle France, only small parts of the eastern region had been developed by European immigrants. Many of the new settlers came up from the USA seeking good land to farm. The following wave of settlers came from Britain. English speakers in the Townships have a strong sense of the role their ancestors played in pioneering the region's agriculture and industries. I was happy to present *What We Choose to Remember* in Knowlton. Most Anglos have not yet adapted to calling the town by the official name of the merged communities: Lac Brome.

The screening was booked in a roadhouse popular back in the 1990s, when author and provocateur Mordecai Richler was a regular visitor at the Thirsty Boot. New management was trying to revive the legendary pub and they hosted film screenings under the auspices of the Knowlton Film Festival. It is a small venue but the place was packed and the informal ambience of a bar made for a lively screening and even livelier post-screening conversation that continued until closing time.

	French	English	Other Languages
1931	298 (30%)	659 (67%)	33 (3%)
1971	1,250 (31%)	2,705 (66%)	105 (3%)
2021	3,196 (55%)	2,408 (41%)	221 (4%)

Table 2: Knowlton population, 1931 – 2021

One woman in the Townships audience, aware that the Abenaki were the main inhabitants of the region until the eighteenth century, asked why my film did not discuss Quebec's Indigenous history. I replied that the concept for my film was waves of English-speaking immigrants arriving in Nouvelle France. The Indigenous story is far older and more complex. It

[6] *Place names are complicated in Quebec. They are different in English and French. Some English speakers use traditional English forms — Saint Lawrence Boulevard, Mount Royal — while others use French forms — Boulevard Saint-Laurent, Mont-Royal. Spelling of place names has changed over time. Historic St. Catherine Street is now Saint Catherine Street or Rue Sainte-Catherine. Place names used in this book will reflect the language, culture and age of the person speaking.*

The Thirsty Boot – Knowlton Film Festival

would have been a disservice to try to represent the Indigenous story with a few brief references.

Several audience members talked about ancestors who farmed or worked in the region's mills. Language and religion were important topics. One man talked about growing up Catholic and the complications of attending both an English Protestant school and a French Catholic church. A woman shared a story about her Scottish ancestors still speaking Gaelic in the 1970s. The audience did not talk about friction with francophone neighbours. The two linguistic communities in the Townships collaborate regularly. Intermarriages were common. A high percentage of Townshippers are bilingual. Nonetheless, a tone of sadness tinged the conversation. The English heritage of the Townships was disappearing as English speakers drifted away, which was happening in all rural parts of Quebec.

That could have been the end of the story. We put a copy of *What We Choose to Remember* on YouTube so it was available to anyone who wanted to see the film. More accurately, it was available to anyone who heard about the film, but without promotion, it was invisible. Before the Hudson launch, my film received significant coverage in the English media and was unlikely get more without a major injection of cash or a newsworthy, fresh angle.

A regular documentary producer would turn to the festival circuit, a global network that has a place for every type of film, but my experiences in

Hudson and Knowlton convinced me that I had filmed a story for audiences in Quebec. That was the conversation I wanted to stimulate. But how?

My decades of work as a community activist had made me friends in many community organizations in most regions of Quebec. They did not all have a cinema, but they had community centres, school gyms and church basements equipped to present a screening. I began to contact executive directors to ask if they would be interested in showing the film. They were. I had no money to pay for travel or accommodation. Did communities in remote parts of Quebec think the film was sufficiently important for them to cover travel costs? They did.

Invitations arrived randomly at first, but as word of mouth spread, and the negative impacts of Bill 96 became clearer, I received invitations from entire regions of Quebec. As I toured their towns and listened to their stories, patterns began to emerge. The oldest settlements in Quebec sprang up along the St. Lawrence Valley. Later settlements followed its tributaries: the Richelieu River, la rivière du Nord, the Chateauguay Valley, the Ottawa Valley, the Gatineau River. Then railways brought new settlements and new industries. Roads only became the primary form of travel in the mid-twentieth century. Travelling around Quebec in a car distorts all sense of when settlements were built and why.

After thirty screenings, the plan of this book was taking shape. Each chapter would explore a region of Quebec. Each region has a different story to tell. The tour was a journey through physical space but also a journey through time. The rest of this chapter is an account of the two first community screenings, dramatically different in their history, geography and local culture. I am particularly grateful to Jessica Synnott in Gaspésie and Sharleen Sullivan in Rouyn-Noranda. They were the first to share *What We Choose to Remember* with their communities and recommend it to other regions, long before I had any expectation of an extended tour or any ideas about a book.

The Gaspé Peninsula extends from the Gulf of Saint Lawrence to the New Brunswick border on the Baie-des-Chaleurs. It is a long drive from Montreal so I was happy to fly into Gaspé airport and be greeted by Jessica, executive director of Vision Gaspé Percé Now! Her regional association has its office on St. Patrick Avenue in Douglastown. I had

previously driven Route 132, which follows the coast around the Gaspé Peninsula, and knew that some of the towns have English names, but English-speaking communities are discreet and their presence is invisible to the casual visitor.

My official visit to the region was a pretext for a crash course in local history. Mi'kmaq were the main inhabitants prior to the arrival of Jacques Cartier in 1534. The first European settlers were fishermen from Normandy and Brittany, as well as French-speaking Protestant (Huguenots) fishermen from La Rochelle. The town of Gaspé was the scene of several battles between the French and English. Sir William Phips and his troops burned the village in 1690. Because of hostilities between French and British armies in the 1750s, including the brutal Acadian deportation, settlers fled the Gaspésie region, and by 1760, the European population had dwindled to a few hundred souls. After the Conquest, the region was repopulated by British Loyalists from the USA and fishermen and traders from Britain and the Channel Islands. In 1775, Felix O'Hara built what would become the oldest house in Gaspé. Alfred Carter created the Gaspé coal company and built a large wharf in 1870 that made the town prosperous. At the time of Canada's first census in 1871, the population of Gaspé had reached almost 1,000. The complex linguistic, ethnic and religious backgrounds of early settlers is reflected in the bicultural name of the first bishop of the dioces e of Gaspé: François-Xavier Ross. The English-speaking population of the Gaspé agglomeration is now 11 percent but bilinguals exceed 30 percent.

	French	English	Other Languages
1871	269 (38%)	701 (72%)	-
1921	317 (53%)	431 (57%)	16 (1%)
1961	2,048 (79%)	526 (20%)	29 (1%)
1996	13,805 (85%)	2,240 (14%)	205 (1%)
2021	13,150 (88%)	1,660 (11%)	137 (1%)

Table 3: Gaspé population, 1871 – 2021

The first screenings of *What We Choose to Remember* in the region were held in September 2022 at the York River Community Hall a

few kilometres south of Gaspé and in a yellow A-frame in Barachois. The latter is a village across the broad bay from Percé and is part of a sprawling agglomeration of communities where 22 percent of the population is English speaking. The entire region has experienced population decline since the 1990s as young people — French and English — left for education and work.

While I was in the region, Quebec was preparing for a provincial election. Earlier that year, in June, Premier Legault had declared that the language situation in Quebec was as precarious as Louisiana. The comparison was preposterous. Louisiana is a small state where only two percent use French, mainly because the state government banned teaching French in public schools for half a century (1921-74). Francophones in Nouvelle France were never denied education in French, and since Confederation, education in Canada has been a provincial jurisdiction so Quebec has full control over its schools.

During the election campaign, minister of immigration, francization and integration Jean Boulet declared that « 80 percent des immigrants s'en vont à Montréal, ne travaillent pas, ne parlent pas français ou n'adhèrent pas aux valeurs de la société québécoise ».[7] This slur was so egregiously false, particularly from a minister who had access to facts that contradicted every point he made, that Premier Legault removed Boulet from the immigration portfolio. After the victorious election, Boulet returned as minister of labour, viewed by most observers as a promotion.

The anti-foreigner rhetoric was so disturbing that even a beloved francophone immigrant like biologist and humourist Boucar Diouf felt compelled to remind ethnic nationalists that Quebec's childless future depends on immigrants. To alienate immigrants would be a dangerous strategy for Quebec:

> Puisque se passer de l'immigration n'est pas une option, surtout pour un gouvernement qui se targue d'être celui de l'économie, mieux vaut travailler à se faire des alliés qu'à les pousser de l'autre côté avec des déclarations qui lient louisianisation du

[7] *"Eighty percent of new immigrants do not work, do not speak French or do not share our values." Nahila Bendali, « La Vérif : les propos de Jean Boulet sur l'immigration sont-ils exacts ? », Radio Canada, September 28, 2022.*

> Québec et immigration. Adopter un discours qui ferait sentir le nouvel arrivant plus comme une solution potentielle que la source principale du problème serait bien plus constructif lorsque vient le temps de parler de ces enjeux, si préoccupants soient-ils.[8]

Legault's CAQ party was on a winning streak and they would ultimately win the election in October. Many of us hoped that once Legault and his team felt securely entrenched, they would turn away from divisive identity politics and focus on important issues like health, education and the economy. But while I was touring my film in mid-September, half a month away from the election, the results were still firmly in the realm of speculation.

	French	English	Other Languages
1871	959 (55%)	761 (44%)	7 (1%)
1931	1,085 (71%)	430 (28%)	12 (1%)
1996	3,210 (81%)	775 (19%)	15 (- %)
2021	2,380 (77%)	660 (22%)	40 (1%)

Table 4: Percé population, 1871 – 2021

The post-screening conversations in Gaspé and Barachois were largely about language. Some of the families have been formed from mixed marriages and the children are comfortably bilingual. Other families are uncomfortably unilingual and struggle to acquire functional second-language skills. Small schools do not have the resources to be able to offer immersion programs so the only regular training is during French classes. Because many of the children arrive bilingual, the French classes tend to offer a high level of instruction, which is good for the bilinguals, but it leaves behind the kids from unilingual families. Parents can also send their children to French school but the process can

[8] *"Shutting the doors to immigration is not an option, especially for a government that prides itself on prioritising the economy. It is better to work to make allies than to push them away with declarations linking immigration to the 'Louisianization' of Quebec. Adopting a discourse that would make the newcomer feel more like a potential solution than the main source of the problem would be much more constructive when the time comes to talk about these issues, however worrying they may be." Diouf, « La langue du Legault Land », La Presse, June 4, 2022.*

be traumatic for the children and difficult for unilingual parents if they cannot help with homework.

The Barachois Recreation Centre, which also serves as the community library and bingo hall

One woman spoke of being born to unilingual Anglo parents who bought a house on a street inhabited entirely by francophones. To ensure that their daughter mixed with the other children, the father built a playground in the backyard for all the neighbourhood children, thereby ensuring that his daughter had friends, and she became fully bilingual. Not all parents have the resources or the vision for such an ambitious solution. Families that raise bilingual children are most likely to remain in the region and prosper but their identity is not traditionally Anglo, particularly if one parent is francophone. They have an evolving hybrid identify. One woman told the story of a five year old describing his linguistic identity to his teacher: "My father is English. My mother is French. And I'm a mixed-up kid." The bilinguals I met did not fit into binary boxes but appeared happy with their mixed identity and confident about their future.

The future for Anglos who are unilingual or have limited French skills is less certain, though their families may have lived in the region for many generations and contributed to its historical development. Young people with limited language skills must leave the region to find work. Unilingualism depletes the community but bilingualism can deplete the English-speaking community in a different way, creating complex identities and multiple opportunities.

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Sharleen Sullivan, executive director of Neighbours Regional Association of Rouyn-Noranda, invited me to Rouyn-Noranda. As my flight approached for landing, psychedelically coloured tailing ponds came into view. We were in mining territory.

Most visitors would have no reason to suspect that Rouyn-Noranda built its airport on the site of a village founded by David McWatters, who discovered a gold mine there in 1932. The town of McWatters became a haven for Protestant immigrants, including the parents of a young man named Jimmy Hines (1935 – 2014). He changed his name to Jimmy James and became a popular country and western singer who had hit singles on the American charts at the same time as Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis Presley. James divided his time between Nashville and Rouyn-Noranda, where he hosted popular TV music programs *Jamboree* and *Ranch 4* in the 1960s. His wife, Linda Lee, whose family migrated to Abitibi from the USA and grew the adjacent Anglo village of Farmborough, was also a popular singer.

The rugged Canadian Shield has a long history of mining: silver, gold, copper, nickel, cobalt, lithium and rare earth elements. In 1911, Nova Scotian prospector Edmund Henry Horne (1865 – 1953) crossed the Ontario border forty kilometres to the west and entered Quebec, where he discovered deposits of silver and staked claims that he optioned a decade later to the Toronto-based Thompson-Chadbourne Syndicate, which created Noranda Mines Limited. The company would eventually employ more than 32,000 workers and amass assets in excess of $11 billion.

The city of Noranda was built around the Horne mine and smelter. It was a company town, laid out in regimented grids. Noranda, during the early decades, had a large English-speaking population. The adjacent city of Rouyn was mostly French and grew organically, without central planning. The two communities worked together and played together — particularly their rival hockey teams. By the time the towns merged in 1986, the conglomeration was mostly French speaking.

	French	English	Other Languages
Noranda 1941	1,189 (33%)	2,059 (56%)	411 (11%)
Noranda 1971	7,790 (72%)	225 (2%)	2,725 (26%)
Rouyn 1941	7,474 (85%)	1,233 (14%)	101 (1%)
Rouyn 1971	16,780 (94%)	645 (4%)	395 (2%)
Rouyn-Noranda 2021	42,313 (96%)	953 (2%)	743 (2%)

Table 5: Rouyn and Noranda population, 1941 – 2021

I met a war bride who arrived in Noranda in 1946. "Back then," she said, "the town was so English we might as well have been living in Ontario." Noranda had a daily English-language newspaper — the *Rouyn-Noranda Press* — with a circulation of three thousand. Now the entire English-speaking population has fallen below one thousand.

Neighbours Regional Association of Rouyn-Noranda screened my film in a recently revamped venue whose marquis identified it as Le Petit Théâtre. Its original identity, carved in stone, was still visible, and unforgotten: Remembrance House, 1948.

From the 1930s to the 1970s, Rouyn-Noranda was also home to a significant Jewish community. A few months before my visit, a group of ex-residents published a book about the Jewish community of Rouyn-Noranda. They were merchants, doctors and professionals who drifted away during Quebec's years of national affirmation and political turmoil. One of the writers visited Rouyn-Noranda while researching the book:

> Walking down the main drag, we received confused looks as we conversed unapologetically in English. It was clearly not something the locals were accustomed to hearing. But while there were hardly any Jews left living in the place my dad had once called home, we did find the facade of the synagogue — where he once attended Hebrew school four times a week and had his bar mitzvah decades ago — untouched. The three of us stood in shock as we stared at the plaque that read "Kneseth Israel Congregation." The interior of the building had been converted into apartments, but Hebrew writing and *Magen David* remained on the exterior brick wall as proof that the community existed.[9]

[9] *Quoted in Mike Cohen, "The Jewish Community of Rouyn-Noranda: Re-*

Remembrance House has been converted to Le Petit Théàtre but the original inscription in stone is proof that an English-speaking community had existed, and still does, albeit in greatly reduced numbers. A good crowd of them turned out for the film and stayed for the post-screening conversation. The cabaret seating and bar gave the evening congenial ambience.

Le Petit Théâtre / Remembrance House

One of the men at the screening, a lithe figure with a bushy beard, identified himself as a "Fro." I would learn that francophones in Rouyn-Noranda have a local word for foreigners: les Fros. For non-francophones, the word evokes hurtful memories of exclusion and hostility.[10] This man's parents were Russian and Polish and came to Quebec after the Second World War. He spoke the languages of his parents until school age and then enrolled in the English school. During filmed interviews and touring, I heard stories from many people who grew up between the 1920s and the 1970s about tribal conflict that escalated into physical battles: English against French, Catholic against Protestant, Christian against Jew, native born against immigrant. The Russian Polish Fro shared

membered by Those Who Lived in the Small Northern Quebec Community," *The Suburban, October 6, 2023.*

[10] *After the screening, I did some research on the word's origins. One of the most celebrated local musicians is Richard Desjardins, who first came to prominence in a band called Abbitibbi. During his subsequent solo career, Desjardins wrote a song called « Les fros » and I found a live performance on YouTube. In his preamble to the song, Desjardins explained that foreigners — his examples are Ukrainians and Poles — were brought to Quebec to work in the mines, where they were exploited in many ways. Desjardins also explained that French Canadians would not take jobs in the mines because "they would have plenty of time underground when they were dead."*

many of the traumatic experiences of first-generation immigrants but his story had a happy ending, of sorts. During the turbulent decades, he had been cautious about speaking English in public but bilingualism eventually worked to his advantage: Many English-speaking artists perform in Rouyn-Noranda during their Eastern Canadian tour and the Russian Polish Fro speaks to them during intermission and after the show. His unilingual friends ask him to act as translator so they can also socialize with the visiting musicians.

The film revived memories for the older people in the audience, some that had almost been forgotten; others were indelible. People who lived through the period of national affirmation from the FLQ years to the second referendum in 1995 will never forget the fear, being the target of anger, and of feeling unwelcome. One woman spoke about attending Saint-Jean-Baptiste celebrations in the 1970s and getting the message that it was a Québécois celebration, so why would an Anglo want to attend? Those were the years of mass exodus. The people at the screening in Rouyn-Noranda had stayed or returned. They adapted to the new social contract in which French became the official language of Quebec.

Some aspects of the transformation were purely symbolic and seem comical now. Only the older people in the audience understood the footage in my film borrowed from William Weintraub's documentary *The Rise and Fall of English Montreal* about the eradication of apostrophes. Bill 101 wanted to make the public face of Quebec French so it became illegal, for example, to have a sign reading "Eaton's." The apostrophe and the *s* had to be removed or painted over. An unadorned (and ungrammatical) "Eaton" was acceptable.

Yet Bill 101 revealed a darker side when the doors of English schools closed to all students except "historic Anglos." Francophone children were removed from English schools, as were immigrant children. After Bill 101 became law, English-speaking immigrants were also barred from attending English schools. The transition period was traumatic for families and children. One woman in the audience remembered language police dressed in black coming into her elementary class and reading out the names of children not eligible to be educated in English. The distressed children were taken away.

Post-screening conversation in Rouyn-Noranda.

The Rouyn-Noranda audience was the first to mention Bill 96. One notorious provision in the law was to deny immigrants government services in any language other than French after residing in Quebec for more than six months. A recent immigrant in the audience had studied French full time for eight months and was still far from being able to converse in her new language, particularly about complex issues like health care. The six-month provision appeared disconnected from all reality except the symbolic value of "waving a big stick at immigrants and warning them not to side with the English."

Another woman in the audience spoke at length about her family's multi-generational journey, which echoed experiences shared by many first-wave immigrants. Her ancestors arrived in Quebec in the 1840s and settled in the Eastern Townships, until her grandparents moved to Noranda in the 1930s to work in the mines. She was educated in English and most of her friends were English speakers. Being identified as an Anglo had been a distinct disadvantage when she was a child during the first referendum and a young parent during the second referendum. Like most Anglos, she made considerable efforts to improve her French. She married a francophone and sent her kids to French school but she mostly spoke English at home so the children would become bilingual. As in most bilingual families, the children's language skills developed differently. Each child makes different friends, plays different sports and has a different relationship with their parents. It is extremely difficult to attain mother-tongue competence in two languages, so most children will be stronger in one. A child who is weak in French, or has a pronounced

English accent, will find it harder to succeed in Quebec and is more likely to relocate to an English-speaking province or country where their bilingualism will be valued. The Ontario border is just a few kilometres west of Rouyn-Noranda.

The day after the screening, I was given a guided tour of the city by Sharleen Sullivan (raised in Noranda) and her francophone husband, Yves (raised in Rouyn). They told me more stories about local history. Variations on the same economic and social patterns would be repeated in many rural and remote communities. Money came into Quebec from Canada, the USA or Britain to develop a resource. The bosses would usually speak English — and be referred to as "les Blokes." The employees came from many origins, relocating within Quebec or arriving as immigrants.

Then came the 1960s, the FLQ, the election of the PQ, Bill 101, the 1980 referendum, the failed Meech Lake Accord, the failed Charlottetown Accord and the brutally divisive 1995 referendum. During the years of tension and turmoil, large numbers of Anglos and allophones relocated to Montreal or left Quebec altogether. The pioneering role of les Fros and the departed Anglo families are being forgotten by the francophone majority.

CHAPTER 2:

Montérégie

The Montérégie region takes its name from a chain of igneous intrusions that remained after receding glaciers scraped away the soft surrounding rock, leaving dramatic stumps jutting above the surrounding plain. There are eight of them. The best known is Mount Royal, which towers over the city of Montreal — or did until manmade towers crowded out the city's skyline.

I lived in Saint-Bruno in the Montérégie region for a number of years when my kids were young. Very few of my Montreal friends ever paid a visit to Saint-Bruno or could even remember the name of the town. *Saint-Lambert? Saint-Hubert? Saint-Hilaire?*

Mont-Saint-Bruno viewed from Mont-Royal.

I used to ask if they had ever stood at the lookout on Mount Royal and gazed across the St. Lawrence River. "Over on the South Shore you can see a chain of hills that stretches all the way to the Eastern Townships. Do you know what the nearest peak is called?"

"No…"

"Mount-Saint-Bruno. Someone with a good arm could hit it with a rock thrown from Mount Royal."

That is a slight exaggeration. But the Montérégie region begins on the south side of the St. Lawrence River. You can get there by metro or ferry, cross the Jacques Cartier Bridge by foot or bike, drive across the venerable Victoria Bridge to Saint-Lambert and Greenfield Park, the Samuel de Champlain Bridge to Brossard, or the Honoré Mercier Bridge to Kahnawake and Châteauguay.

It is surprising that the region just across the river is terra incognito so for many Anglo Montrealers. It puzzled me for years. The distance is not geographic but psychological. The relationship between citizens of Montérégie and Montreal is comparable to the relationship between Quebec's English speakers and francophones. People from the South Shore visit Montreal regularly, many work or go to school there, but Anglo Montrealers rarely visit the South Shore except to drive through it on their way to the Townships. Similarly, English speakers encounter francophones everywhere, and many are in romantic relationships, but meaningful Anglo encounters are far less frequent for most francophones.

The history of the Montérégie region is much more French than the Eastern Townships. The Richelieu River flows through the heart of Montérégie from Lac Champlain to Sorel-Tracy. Fort Chambly was built on the river in 1711 to defend Nouvelle France from the New England colonies. The villages and farms along the Richelieu's banks were Patriotes territory, where local rebels fought the British Army in 1837 at Saint-Denis and Saint-Charles.

Fun Fact #1: The very francophone town of Sorel-Tracy was once known as William-Henry. During the American Revolution of 1776, large bodies of troops travelled from Lake Champlain down the Richelieu River to its juncture with the St. Lawrence. At the end of the war, Sorel became a clearing house for the steady stream of Loyalist refugees from

the south. When Prince William Henry, Duke of Gloucester, visited Sorel in 1787, the town took the name of William-Henry, which it retained until 1845. Few traces of the British history remain except for the municipal park whose paths crisscross in the form of a Union Jack, retaining the imperial landscaping.

Fun Fact #2: One of the most elite golf clubs in North America sits discreetly on the dappled flanks of Mount-Saint-Bruno. The course was designed by Willie Park Junior during his 1916 – 1924 tour of North America. Why would wealthy Anglos build a golf course on Mount Bruno rather than on Mount Royal, closer to their homes in Westmount? Golf is a summer game and several Montreal millionaires built summer homes on Mount Bruno,[11] transporting their families there by train to escape heat and disease in the city after the Victoria Bridge opened in 1860. The first two stations heading east were Saint-Lambert and Saint-Bruno.

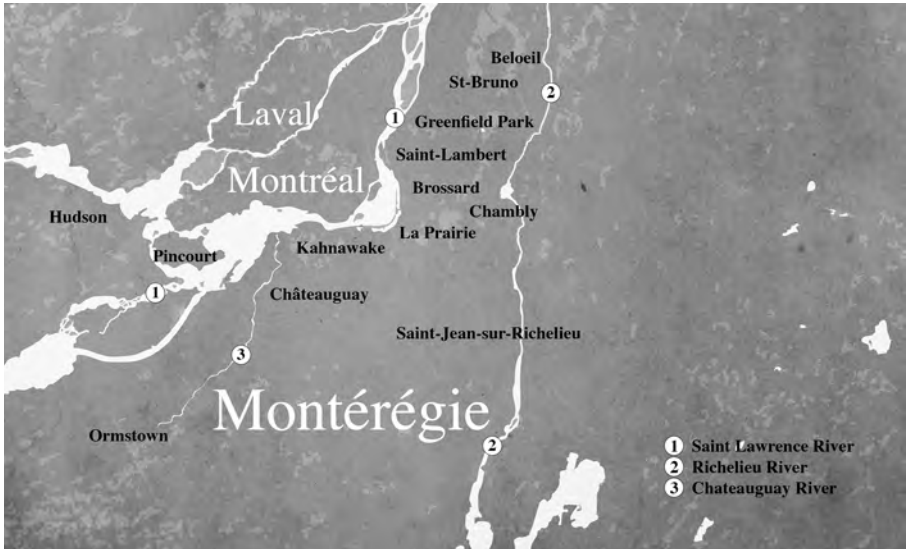
Grand houses, tennis courts, ivy-draped stonewalls, dappled lanes and private docks on pristine lakes continue to offer a fairy-tale lifestyle for an affluent few, thanks to historic droits acquis in the midst of what is now a beautifully maintained provincial park. Guy Laliberté, founder of Cirque du Soleil, acquired one of the heritage properties in the 1990s, renovated it extravagantly and threw legendary parties for jet-setting celebrities during Montreal's Grand Prix weekend.

When I moved to Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville in the 90s, many of my neighbours were empty-nester Anglos who were retiring and moving away, selling the homes they had bought in the postwar decades to young families. A town like Saint-Bruno offers an idyllic environment for children: soccer fields, skating rinks, swimming pools and bike trails, plus hiking and skiing on the mountain, and all only a stone's throw from Montreal.

In recent years, francophone relocation from Montreal to the off-island suburbs has been compared to "white flight" in the USA. The comparison is at best circumstantial. It is true that large numbers of francophones have relocated from the island to Montreal's South Shore and it is also true that large numbers of immigrants have taken up residence in older

[11] *English speakers traditionally referred to the mountain as Mount Bruno, while Francophones preferred Mont-Saint-Bruno.*

neighbourhoods on the island, but have francophones fled the island to get away from foreigners or were they simply attracted to a higher quality of life and better value for their real estate dollar?



Map 1: Montérégie

My film had ten screenings in Montérégie, and there could have been more because dozens of towns in the region have English-speaking communities. The screenings were mostly organized by regional associations, which have been a feature of Quebec's English-speaking communities since the 1970s. "With the election of the Parti Québécois [in 1976], the English discovered they existed as a group, at least in the hearts and minds of the French majority. It might be said that the English 'community' in Quebec was invented by the French."[12] Individual community groups united to form Alliance Quebec, an advocacy group that was prominent in the 1980s but declined in the 90s, when member groups disaffiliated. The leadership vacuum stirred the federal government's Department of Canadian Heritage to bring together fifteen regional and sectoral organizations to better manage program and funding priorities

[12] *Reed Scowen, A Different Vision: The English in Quebec in the 1990s, Maxwell Macmillan Canada, 1991, p. 25.*

under the Official Language Minority Communities Program. In 1995, that ad-hoc group became the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN). Montérégie is large enough to have three regional associations: Montérégie East Partnership for the English-Speaking Community (MEPEC, 2018), Assistance and Referral Centre, Health and Social Services (ARC, 2011), and Montérégie West Community Network (MWCN, formerly the Chateauguay English Community Network, 2016). Montérégie's regional associations were not created back in the turbulent 80s. They are recent creations, pragmatically responding to the needs of aging, declining communities.

	French	English	Other Languages
1931	1,371 (96 %)	53 (4 %)	-
1971	10,510 (86 %)	1,600 (13 %)	165 (1 %)
2021	22,313 (93 %)	673 (3 %)	863 (4 %)

Table 6: Beloeil population, 1931 – 2021

Karoll-Ann Carrier, executive director of MEPEC since 2019, hosted two screenings in eastern Montérégie, in Beloeil, where the seigneurie was created in 1694 on the banks of the Richelieu River, close to Mont-Saint-Hilaire, and in Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville, where the seigneurie de Montarville was created in 1710. The seigneur's stone watermill at the top of Mont-Saint-Bruno is now an orientation centre for park visitors. The seigneur de Montarville's manor house was occupied by rebels during the Patriotes rebellion in 1837 – 1838. A century later, a significant English-speaking community had begun to form, which flourished after the Second World War, but another century later it was disappearing.

	French	English	Other Languages
1931	896 (90 %)	92 (10 %)	-
1971	9,500 (60 %)	5,790 (37 %)	490 (3 %)
2021	21,265 (84 %)	2,383 (9 %)	1,886 (7 %)

Table 7: Saint-Bruno population, 1931 – 2021

Suburbs like Saint-Bruno and Beloeil experience less tension than Montreal but historic frictions flicker just below the surface. One year at a friend's birthday party, the wife (francophone) said a few celebratory words about her husband (anglophone) and addressed him in English. One of her friends interrupted the speech and demanded that she continue « en français, s'il te plait », which triggered a fiery argument between the two women that encapsulated Quebec's conflicting attitudes to language, echoing former PQ leader and Québec Inc. magnate Pierre Karl Péladeau. It was true that 90 percent of the people at the party were francophone, though it was also true that most were comfortably bilingual. Nonetheless, the indignant friend believed, as a matter of principle, that a "public speech" should be made in French, Quebec's only official language. The wife, au contraire, believed she could speak whatever language she wanted in her own home, to her own husband. After an intense interruption, the party continued, in English and in French, and the two women remained best friends.

MEPEC'S community space in Beloeil

MEPEC's screening in Saint-Bruno was booked at the Legion, a non-descript building from the outside but as convivial inside as a British pub. Norm Haslam, a teacher friend, organized a second screening for retired teachers at the Mount Bruno United Church, which was a pillar of the English-speaking community back in the 1960s when it was built, picturesquely located beside the city's central park and the lake fed by spring water flowing down from the mountain. The smaller community of Beloeil screened my film in their storefront offices on Route 116, serving guests tea, cookies and popcorn.

The average age of the audiences in Saint-Bruno and Beloeil was over sixty-five and many in attendance shared stories about their school days, learning French and developing relationships with francophones. Then they shared stories about people who left, including some of their own children, and the reasons for the departures: bad experiences here, better opportunities elsewhere.

These people were highly knowledgeable about Quebec's history. The Patriotes rebellion was of particular interest because some of the major battles were fought directly across the Richelieu River at Saint-Denis and Saint-Charles. "Take the Patriotes rebellion," one man said. "I taught high school history and the textbooks never mention that Mackenzie and his rebels in Ontario were fighting over the same issues at the same time. Both rebellions were about representation and democracy, not language."

"Did the textbooks mention that the military commander of the Patriotes here was Thomas Storrow Brown?" another man asked. "Or that the commander in Saint-Denis was Wolfred Nelson?"

"It's not just old history that's lost," added a woman. "I was at the dog park a couple of years ago. It was the fiftieth anniversary of the October Crisis and we were talking about the FLQ bomb threats and how frightening it all was."

A man added, "The CIL [Canadian Industries Limited] explosives factory in McMasterville was targeted by FLQ, so the army guarded it."

The woman continued, "A young francophone woman asked what we were talking about, and when we told her, she accused us of lying. 'That didn't happen,' she said. Which meant, we think, that urban violence by the FLQ was never taught in her high school history classes. But we were there. We had bomb threats at our school. We saw it. It did happen…"

"The young people are starting to forget that school boards were confessional until 1997. It was so interesting to see in the film about the Catholic schools turning away immigrant children. A lot of people don't remember that happened."

Audiences in Saint-Bruno and Beloeil were concerned that the CAQ government was exploiting fears about language and immigration to create divisions between the francophone majority and all the others who could be portrayed as threats. However, they hoped things would settle

down now that the CAQ had won the election the previous fall with a second — even larger — majority and should feel safe to work on bigger problems in education and health.

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ARC represents the central section of Montérégie and they arranged screenings in Chambly, Greenfield Park and Brossard. An old friend organized an additional screening in Saint-Lambert. These four communities could hardly be more different.

Chambly is the oldest. In 1609, Samuel de Champlain explored the Iroquois River (subsequently renamed in honour of Cardinal Richelieu) and the large lake that would be named for Champlain himself. After navigating the rapids at the strategic location where Fort Chambly would be built a century later, Champlain wrote in his journal: "The approach to the rapids is a sort of lagoon into which the water flows down, and it is about three leagues in circumference. All this region is very level and full of forests, vines and butternut trees. No Christian has ever visited this land, and we had all the misery of the world trying to paddle the river upstream." Chambly was and is a predominantly francophone settlement.

Saint-Lambert is located within the former La Prairie seigneurie, established in 1636. It remained mainly French speaking and was minimally developed until 1860, when trains crossed the St. Lawrence via the Victoria Bridge. The first South Shore station was at Saint-Lambert, which became an important passenger and freight stop, evident in the city's architecture. Many old industrial buildings were built near the railway tracks. The origins of Saint-Lambert are indicated in the old street names: Queen, Regent, Victoria, Alexandra, Prince Arthur.

When streetcars arrived from Montreal in 1909, urban development rapidly followed. New residents built beautiful homes along the waterfront, Riverside, and the perpendicular streets: Birch, Pine, Oak, Maple and Walnut. Saint-Lambert had an English-speaking majority population by 1881, and 100 years later, 60 percent of the residents were still English speakers.

Commuter access to the South Shore for less wealthy families became possible after 1912, when the Montreal and Southern Counties Railway

laid eighty kilometres of track from Old Montreal to Chambly along the Richelieu River. The names of the new stations were whimsically inviting: Greenfield Park, Sunlight City, Springfield Park, Castle Gardens and Highland Gardens.

If you were to trace a line on a map from the Victoria Bridge to Chambly, you would still find neighbourhoods named Greenfield Park, Springfield Park and Castle Gardens, though they have been absorbed into the expanding suburbs of Longueuil. The Montreal and Southern Counties Railway gave the South Shore quick, year-round access to the island, enabling working-class Montrealers to escape crowded urban jungles for

Victoria Bridge: The Eighth Wonder of the World in 1860

fresh air, green fields and parks. The names of the new developments evoke paradise; the reality was different. As John Riley explains in *The History of Greenfield Park,*[13] jerry-built houses along unpaved streets were modest and working class, sometimes barely shacks:

> Men and women building homes in Greenfield Park constructed them in stages, often working on a particular part of the structure each weekend, with the help of friends and relatives. Some people claim their grandparents set out from Montreal on a Friday evening after work, carrying in a horse-drawn wagon over the Victoria Bridge everything they would need for the weekend's labour. For the first couple of weeks, they would set up a tent on their property. When the frame of the house was finished, they

[13] *John Riley explains in The History of Greenfield Park: 1910 – 1975 (General Store Publishing House, 2005*

would sleep in the partially completed house until the work was done. When the first settlers arrived in Greenfield Park, the closest stores where supplies could be purchased were in Saint Lambert.

Some of the neighbourhoods, like Greenfield Park, were British and Protestant. Others, like East Greenfield, were Irish and Catholic. V.M. Manning remembered them as working-class communities:

> Land in East Greenfield was sold for building lots to people from Montreal — a great many of them from Point St. Charles — because of the Montreal & Southern Counties Railway, where most of them worked. "The Point," they called it. Others worked at the Northern Electric, which was in that area. All were English-speaking, a great many Irish.
>
> "In 1916, my father was working at the Grand Trunk Railway shops in Point St. Charles. One of his workmates wanted to join the army, as the First World War was raging in Europe. This man had bought some land on the South Shore and, having no use for it, sold it to my father. The land was inspected by my parents, some building material was bought, and a small shack with a flat roof was built. We lived there while a seven-room house was built to house the growing family of three boys and one girl. This was the first lonely house on that side of the track. The subdivision was called "Upper Springfield" (later known as Pinehurst). Across the track was the village of East Greenfield, comprising about thirty houses and shacks (mostly shacks)." [14]

Castle Gardens was the smallest of modern Saint-Hubert's neighbourhoods. It was located near what is now Grande-Allée and Rue Jonergin (originally named Ireland Street). Springfield Park was located between what is now Rue Kimber and Boulevard Cousineau. It was also originally an English-speaking area.

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The city of Brossard is newer, incorporated in 1958. Its rapid development coincided with the postwar baby boom and the erection of the Samuel de Champlain Bridge in 1962. Brossard is now home to a

[14] *Online memoires of V. M. Manning*

population of more than 90,000 and has become the most diverse city in Quebec. Only 43 percent of the citizens speak French at home, followed by English (18 percent), Mandarin (6 percent), Yue (4 percent), Spanish (4 percent) and Arabic (3 percent). Thirty different linguistic groups each constitute at least 1 percent of the population.

	French	English	Other Languages
1931	845 (90%)	94 (10%)	-
1971	8,505 (74%)	2,640 (23%)	325 (3%)
2021	27,387 (88%)	1,612 (5%)	2,135 (7%)

Table 8: Chambly population, 1941 – 2021

ARC booked Randall Hall community centre for the Chambly screening. Linguistic tensions in Chambly are minimal because the few Anglos living there do not pose a threat to the French-speaking majority. A significant English-speaking population inhabited the region in the mid-twentieth century but most of them left during Quebec's exodus years.

Many of the citizens have lived and worked in Montreal. One man who attended the screening — a francophone married to an Anglo woman — had seen the trailer for the film and leapt to the conclusion that my film was rewriting history to make the case that Anglos had been victimized by the FLQ and other nationalists. He came to the screening to set the record straight, that the true victims of oppression were his people. Back in the days of his youth, his unilingual francophone mother had been "humiliated by clerks at Eaton's who refused to serve her in French." He wanted it to be clear that French Canadians, like his family, had been oppressed and humiliated until they finally fought back. They were not villains but rather victims forced to defend their rights. I asked him to watch the film and then we would talk. After the screening, he had calmed down and agreed that many mistakes were made in the past, on both sides, and that we can all learn from them.

These are incendiary topics in Quebec, which is the reason they are rarely discussed in public gatherings. Most of the screenings of my film organized by regional associations were semi-private gatherings, which made them therapeutic: Participants could speak candidly about their

experiences, victories, frustrations and fears in a way that is impossible in mixed company. Immigrants and outsiders in every community quickly learn the limits of their freedom of speech rights. I discovered as a teenager in Australia that an immigrant who praises the adoptive country is popular: *I love this sunburnt country. It's so much better than snow and ice!* But criticism by a foreigner is not tolerated: *Love it or leave it!* Or, as they say Downunder, *If yez don't like it heah, mate, why doncha bugger orf!*

Learning to screen what you say depending on your company is Human Nature 101. When my kids were teenagers, I belonged to a men's group that met weekly to share stories and advice about problems with work, marriage and parenting. It was therapeutic because we could be candid (and vent) in ways that were impossible (suicidal!) with our workmates, wives or kids. The goal of talking about our problems was to understand the causes and find solutions. Nonetheless, I would not have wanted my wife, kids or colleagues to hear those unfiltered conversations.

In chapter four, I share the example of a francophone who worked in English and had many Anglo friends but had never once in her life heard an Anglo or an immigrant say a negative thing about Quebec. My film, and "all the complaining people" in it, shocked her profoundly.

	French	English	Other Languages
1931	88 (6%)	1,356 (94%)	-
1971	5,305 (34%)	9,019 (59%)	1,035 (7%)
2021	8,199 (49%)	4,350 (26%)	3,681 (22%)

Table 9: Greenfield Park population, 1931 – 2021

Greenfield Park is different world, with a strong English history. During the First World War, the city could not hold regular town meetings because so many Greenfield Parkers were serving in the Canadian Forces. During the Second World War, the Park, as the locals call it, had one of the highest participation rates of military volunteers in Canada. Appropriately, my film was screened at the Royal Canadian Legion, located on Empire Street near the corner of Churchill Boulevard, named in honour of the pugnacious wartime leader of the British Empire.

A topic that came up in Greenfield Park was the myth of the wealthy

Greenfield Park Legion

Anglo elite. Most of the families in the Park are working class. Their ancestors worked side by side with francophones in sweatshops and escaped the same inner-city slums. They understood the victimized mentally of Quebec's formerly oppressed majority but found it puzzling that the official history of Quebec only includes francophones as victims of past oppression and points the finger of blame at all English speakers.

A question that came up concerned the exodus that occurred between 1965 and 1995, when hundreds of thousands of people left Quebec. Who were they? A reasonable hypothesis is that Quebec's historical enemy — the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant and unilingual elite — would have been the most likely to feel targeted during the years of national affirmation and were therefore the most likely to leave. Greenfield Park was originally very British and Protestant. Surprisingly, there is little information about this massive population loss, apart from their language. I have never seen any granular data about the religious, ethnic or political profiles of the people who left. However, I do know that when I was recruiting participants for my documentaries, it was hard to find first-wave immigrants from the UK who self-identified as Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. It was far easier to find Irish Catholics and Scottish Celts.

Greenfield Park only established its first Catholic church in 1964. However, many of the people at the Greenfield Park screening wanted to discuss Catholic schools. I had heard stories over the years — and had filmed several of them for my documentary — about non-Christians turned away from Quebec's French Catholic schools. This

was particularly true of Jewish children because Montreal received two large waves of Jewish immigrants, first in the 1880s and again after the Second World War. I also knew that non-Catholics — all forms of Protestants, even Greek Orthodox kids, though they are not historically or theologically Protestants — were turned away from Catholic schools. I also heard stories about immigrants from France being sent to English schools, though they spoke only French because their families were either Huguenots or Jewish.

One woman at the screening shared an interesting variation of the story. Her grandparents immigrated from France and wanted their children to be educated in French. The problem was that the Catholic schools would not accept atheists, so the family pretended to be Catholic and attended Mass for the children to be educated in French.

I had known that Quebec had English Catholic schools, created for the Catholic Irish, but the screening in Greenfield Park was the first time I understood that Catholics from Italy, Poland, Germany and other European countries were also turned away from French Catholic schools and sent to English Catholic schools. The most plausible explanation for French Catholic schools turning away immigrants was that the children were non-Christian or non-Catholic. But why were immigrant Catholics turned away from Catholic schools? It was certainly not because they were the wrong religion. As the tour progressed, I seized every opportunity to speak to Catholic immigrants about their experiences.

	French	English	Other Languages
1981	6,536 (32%)	12,460 (61%)	1,430 (7%)
1996	14,910 (73%)	3,705 (18%)	1,875 (9%)
2021	16,160 (71%)	2,593 (11%)	4,096 (18%)

Table 10: Saint-Lambert population, 1981 – 2021

The screening in Saint-Lambert was sponsored by St-Barnabas Anglican Church. Reverend Brian Perron was a friend long before his midlife career shift, when he quit a successful career in sales to enroll in McGill University's School of Religious Studies and then received ordination as an Anglican priest. One income stream for St-Barnabas is

renting its Memorial Hall for film screenings, so it was equipped with a first-class projection system.

The ambience of the Saint-Lambert screening was very much in step with what one expects of a rural community. Church members prepared fish, chips and coleslaw in the kitchen and the hall was decorated for a banquet. After dessert, lights were dimmed and the screening began.

The film sparked memories of the FLQ crisis. Then–Liberal Member of the National Assembly Pierre Laporte was kidnapped from his home on Robitaille Street in Saint-Lambert while throwing a football with his nephew. The first woman who spoke said the FLQ events were vivid and personal for her. She lived a block away from the Laporte family and across was the street from Laporte's sister-in-law, whose residence was "the starting point for the funeral cortege that drove to Saint-Eudes church, which is now condos." She found it interesting that none of the people interviewed in my film mentioned the War Measures Act. "It was a big thing. Police used it to arrest hundreds of people who had absolutely nothing to do with the FLQ. My mother, who was an old lefty, was upset about the War Measures Act and made herself very unpopular in Anglo Saint-Lambert by criticizing Pierre Trudeau and the army."

Many of the people at the screening were young adults in 1970 and retained indelible memories of the events of the October Crisis: British diplomat James Cross was kidnapped on October 5. The FLQ manifesto was read on radio on October 8, and Laporte was kidnapped two days later by Paul Rose, Jacques Rose, Francis Simard and Bernard Lortie. On October 15, lawyer Robert Lemieux organized 3,000 students in a rally at Paul Sauvé Arena to show support for the FLQ and Labour leader Michel Chartrand announced that popular support for FLQ was rising: "We are going to win because there are more boys ready to shoot members of parliament than there are policemen." On October 17, Laporte's body was found in the trunk of a car at the Saint-Hubert airport.

It was impossible in October 1970 to know how many people were actively fighting with the FLQ but during the previous seven years they had detonated hundreds of bombs and killed half a dozen people. The danger was serious and terrifying. Then–Prime Minster Pierre Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act and sent the Canadian Army to quell

what he described as "apprehended insurrection." Hundreds of innocent people were also arrested. Opinions at the screening were divided. Some thought the War Measures Act had prevented worse violence. Others thought it violated human rights and "contributed to lingering resentment among separatists."

Personal memories of the October Crisis also varied considerably. One woman said, "I was a student at McGill when I first saw soldiers with guns on street corners but I don't remember being nervous. Was it youth? Naiveté?" A man said that his parents were immigrants from England. "My mother used to say, 'We lived through a war! This is nothing.' For postwar immigrants, letter boxes exploding was nothing compared to a two-ton bomb blowing your house to smithereens!" The woman who mentioned the War Measures Act added, "There were the cars that circled the block for days afterwards. Disaster tourists, I suppose. There was something vulture-like about them. And there were heavily armed soldiers on the Laportes' front porch and we saw them every time we walked over to get the bus to the metro. Once my father was stopped on his way to the bus because they'd cordoned off some streets, having had a tip that one FLQ cell or another was located in that part of Longueuil. And I remember the day the Longueuil train didn't stop at Île Ste-Hélène[15] because the authorities were planning to use the Expo site as a place for having James Cross handed over by the FLQ."

In hindsight, the FLQ was mostly a handful of kids caught up in the revolutionary spirit of the 60s. After Laporte was killed, popular support for the FLQ withered. Pierre Vallières, writer of « Nègres blanc d'Amérique » (1968), published a book in 1977 entitled *L'Execution de Pierre Laporte* to present his conspiracy theory that Laporte's murder had been carried out by the Canadian government, which then blamed it on the FLQ to undermine the independence movement and justify the War Measures Act. In 1982, Francis Simard, in collaboration with the Rose brothers and Bernard Lortie, published *Pour en finir avec October*, a memoir that took full responsibility for Laporte's execution. A strange

[15] *The stop is now called Jean Drapeau.*

interview filmed in 1993 shows Vallières confronting Simard and refusing to believe his eyewitness account of Laporte's death.

Another stream of conversation in Saint-Lambert involved language training. Olga Melikoff, Murielle Parkes and Valerie Neale were leaders of the parent group that created Canada's first bilingual education program at Margaret Pendlebury Elementary School in 1965. Their education activism laid the groundwork for the French immersion system that spread throughout Canada. One woman at the screening had studied at Margaret Pendlebury shortly after the innovative program was pioneered. A man had started school in 1968 at St. Lambert Elementary School, which had also adopted the bilingual program. Many of the students from Saint-Lambert became fully bilingual years before Quebec's English schools made serious efforts to offer quality second-language instruction.

A woman born in Trois-Rivières recalled how extraordinarily English Saint-Lambert had appeared when her family bought a house there in 1968. "I was especially glad that your film covered anglophone communities outside Montreal. After growing up in a very French environment, I remember walking down to the [Saint-Lambert] village with my two siblings and marvelling at all the English street names: Walnut, Maple, Pine. Just like in books, we thought. I had expected it to be wonderful, living in a place where one could speak English outside the home-school-church triangle, but I ended up feeling homesick and becoming more determined to speak French!"

Language, per se, had not been a problem for the people at the Saint-Lambert screening. The man who had been educated at St. Lambert Elementary School said, "The problem in Quebec is not language. It's politics." He shared a story about one of his first jobs working for the Kings Transfer Van Lines created by the Irish O'Donnell family in Griffintown. When other workers from Griffintown and Pointe-Saint-Charles asked where he lived on the South Shore, he would always say, "I'm from the Park" because it was a good working-class area. He would never mention his actual home in Saint-Lambert because it was perceived as the Westmount of the South Shore: Anglo and wealthy.

The final comments in Saint-Lambert came from a francophone woman who had grown up in an entirely French environment but decided

she wanted to attend an English university so she enrolled at Concordia, expecting to be ridiculed for her limited skills in English. To her surprise, and relief, she met other students in the cafeteria from many different backgrounds. "I watched your documentary with my French Canadian eyes and found it so interesting to see all those people who chose to come to Quebec. They have so much courage!" The room applauded her own courage to enroll at an English university where she knew no one. She added, "My kids still laugh at my English and their father's French. They have been bilingual from birth."

	French	English	Other Languages
1971	16,740 (71%)	4,935 (21%)	1,780 (8%)
2021	35,285 (40%)	12,596 (14%)	40,118 (46%)

Table 11: Brossard population, 1971 – 2021

The final screening in central Montérégie was in Brossard. Debra Dorey greeted me in the basement of the Good Shepherd Catholic Church. As expected in Brossard, the audience represented dozens of cultures and many of the people in the room were first-generation immigrants. Some had intentionally immigrated to Quebec because they wanted to live in a French-speaking society. Others had thought they were coming to Canada or America and were surprised to discover a predominantly French-speaking culture. They were also surprised by the ongoing friction between the English and French communities.

Much of the conversation in Brossard touched on the contradiction between warm personal relationships with francophone friends and neighbours and the official message emanating from the government that foreigners are a problem, particularly if they speak English. The audience in Brossard viewed Quebec's conflicts through a broad global and historical lens.

"Conflict over two languages? I come from India where we manage to get along with 120 languages and 19,500 dialects!"

"Most people in the world speak more than one language."

"My sister is married to a Swede. In Sweden, everyone learns English. That doesn't stop them from having a strong Swedish culture."

Good Shepherd Catholic Church, Brossard

"I speak five languages and can read five others. Why are Quebecers afraid of being bilingual?"

Brossard would not have been the setting for a good conversation among mixed company. An eavesdropping ethno-nationalist would have been scandalized and condemned the conversation as Quebec bashing. I did not hear ranting by people who dislike Quebec. I heard a lament from immigrants who love Quebec, or have tried to, but the relationship has not always been reciprocated.

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The next series of screenings in Pincourt, Chateauguay and Ormstown were organized by the MWCN regional association, which serves the western section of Montérégie that extends to the borders with New York and Ontario.

	French	English	Other Languages
1971	2,645 (45%)	3,030 (51%)	225 (4%)
2021	6,486 (55%)	2,496 (22%)	2,698 (23%)

Table 12: Pincourt population, 1971 – 2021

Pincourt is a municipality on Île-Perrot, in the lake where the Ottawa River from the north meets St. Lawrence flowing from the Great Lakes. The town is a short drive and bridge crossing away from Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, a picturesque village on the western tip of the island of

Montreal. Legault, premier of Quebec and founder of the CAQ, grew up in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue. People on both sides of the bridge are proud of their communities, which they see as welcoming, family friendly and respectfully bilingual. It is a mystery to locals how Legault could have developed such animosity toward his former English-speaking neighbours. What did they do to incur his wrath? Or what does the lack of Anglo friends from his youth say about Legault?

Everyone in the region had heard the story about Legault, the aspiring politician declaring his separatist bona fides at a PQ convention to convince the socially progressive delegates why they should trust a wealthy businessman. Legault's quote has become infamous: "I grew up in the West Island and I hate the English as much as you do!" It is a disturbing declaration, if it is true. I will return to it in chapter eight.

The audience in Pincourt fully understood the need for Bill 101 half a century earlier. Prior to Bill 101, the West Island was very English. One man in Pincourt shared a story of working at a bookstore in nearby Beaconsfield back in the 1960s. A francophone customer looked around and then asked where she could find the French books. The clerk replied, "Ville d'Anjou, Madame." This anecdote elicited a roar of laughter because Anjou is located forty kilometres east. But that has changed. Anglos have become the minority in most communities. The children and grandchildren of the old-school Anglos have learned French.

One of Quebec's new myths is that everything would be fine if all immigrants were mother-tongue francophones. I made a documentary for CBC in 2022 and interviewed several prominent francophones, including the president of la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and asked about Quebec's declining birth demographics, increased immigration and language. Several mother-tongue francophones assured me that if more — or all — immigrants spoke French, there would be no problem with "le vivre ensemble." This short phrase is heavily freighted with meaning. *Vivre ensemble* means literally "living together" but metaphorically it means sharing language, culture and values. The audience in Pincourt wanted to know if I had been showing my film to francophone audiences. I told them we had just completed work on a subtitled French version. They wished me luck and hoped that the film

might change some of the persistent pejorative myths about Anglos.

During the tour of my film, many francophones came to the screenings. Most were spouses or friends and were sympathetic to Anglo realities. Other francophones who came to the screening were immigrants from elsewhere in Canada, Haiti, the Maghreb, France, Belgium or Switzerland. They identified with the immigrants in my film and scoffed at the notion that a shared language can guarantee liberté, égalité et fraternité. Sharing a language has not spared other nations from revolutions and civil wars. Why would Quebec be any different?

Immigrants are realistic about the cost of immigrating to a new country. As a Ukrainian immigrant in the film says, "When you leave your country, you lose your network. Your network is your net worth. You become instantly poor." Quebec erects many barriers for immigrants by not recognizing foreign credentials or work experience but immigrants would find it easier to work through the challenges if they did not repeatedly hear that all social problems can be magically solved by speaking French. This fantasy of ascribing to language alone the miraculous power of ensuring a happy "vivre ensemble" is particularly galling for immigrants who arrive in Quebec with the right language but the wrong pigmentation, religion or accent.

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Next stop was Chateauguay, located south of Lake Saint-Louis, where the St. Lawrence River widens alongside the West Island of Montreal. Chateauguay was the scene of an important battle in the War of 1812, where Lieutenant Colonel Charles de Salaberry and 400 troops turned back 4,000 Americans en route to attack Montreal. French is the mother tongue of 55 percent of Chateauguay residents. Other first languages are English (28 percent), Spanish (3.1 percent), Russian (2.0 percent), Arabic (1.9 percent) and Romanian (1.2 percent). Many of the citizens declare roots in Ireland and Italy. Catholics (46.5 percent) greatly outnumber Protestants (5.5 percent).

A railway bridge was constructed from LaSalle across a narrow stretch of the St. Lawrence to the Mohawk reserve at Caughnawaga (now Kahnawake) in 1886. The Saint-Laurent Railway Bridge was expanded

in 1910 and commuter trains made it possible for Montrealers to live in communities like Chateauguay. The Honoré Mercier Bridge, completed in 1934, also increased commuter traffic.

	French	English	Other Languages
1971	10,735 (60%)	6,215 (35%)	990 (5%)
2021	28,057 (55%)	13,647 (28%)	8,650 (17%)

Table 13: Chateauguay population, 1971 – 2021

I have been interested in Chateauguay ever since I heard Beau Dommage's song "Harmonie du soir à Chateauguay." The lyrics about toes dipped in the placid water at the end of a dock make it sound like an idyllic summer haven. The Chateauguay Valley and the Chateauguay River are bucolic but the city of Chateauguay is a mixture of suburban, commercial and industrial.

Pauline Wiedow founded the Chateauguay Focus Group in 1999 to provide support for people like her unilingual Anglo mother. In 2004, the group became the Chateauguay English Community Network (CECN). That was the same year I founded the English Language Arts Network (ELAN) and I met Pauline through collaborations between ELAN and CECN. ELAN began modestly, with two part-time employees. Pauline ran CECN as a volunteer, and with other volunteers, for many years. I was always impressed by her dedication and drive. By 2016, Pauline was receiving enough funding from the governments of Canada and Quebec to rename her group the MWCN, which now operates several offices and provides services throughout the entire western Montérégie region, which is home to 90,000 English speakers.

MWCN sponsored the screening in Chateauguay at the beautifully equipped Centre culturel George-Vanier. The post-screening conversation touched on several familiar themes: education, language, accents, the FLQ years, adaptation and recent concerns that half a century of effort to learn French and adapt to a new social contract had been in vain. Here, the audience voiced concern about the new language laws that guarantee services in English for historic Anglos since it was not clear how a historic Anglo could prove that status if an uncooperative

Le centre culturel George-Vanier, Chateauguay

bureaucrat chose to deny service. The new law leaves no doubt, however, that service will be denied to English speakers who are not historic.

What does it mean to be a "historic Anglo" in Quebec? The legal definition is that you must have a certificat d'admissibilité à l'école anglaise. The standard qualification is to have received primary school education in Quebec or Canada, though there are some exceptions. Foreign immigrants who arrived as high school students, university students or employees — even if they have lived in Quebec for fifty years and paid taxes all their lives — do not qualify as historic Anglos. Because they do not have a certificat d'admissibilité à l'école anglaise, they cannot expect to receive services in English. An older woman at the screening lamented that she had lived in Quebec since the 1960s but was not educated here, and now in her old age she feared being denied services in English. Other people deplored the lack of support from Canada's federal government:

> "Isn't this supposed to be a bilingual country? Or is it only bilingual outside Quebec?"
>
> "This is my country too. My ancestors are buried here. We have to stay and fight!"
>
> "It's too late. We are an expendable and soon-to-be-extinct species…"

The conversation was turning dark when Pauline took the microphone, recounting her own story of being born to a unilingual English mother and bilingual French father, of struggling through the years of

bomb threats, anti-Anglo rhetoric and the exodus of friends and family. Pauline admitted it had been hard for her in the role of community group executive director to attend meetings entirely in French and write grant applications and reports in French but, in her experience, collaborations between Anglos and francophones had never been better. MWCN collaborated with many community organizations and government agencies, and everywhere Pauline went she found friends and allies. "The problem right now is this government, but they won't be in power for ever." On this point everyone could agree, even if they did not share Pauline's optimism about a better future under the next government.

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The third and final screening in western Montérégie was in Ormstown, located in the beautiful Chateauguay Valley, farming country near the New York border. In 1820, the young settlement of Ormstown was populated by Protestants from Scotland and Northern Ireland. The valley's heritage remains embedded in the names of its towns and villages: Huntingdon, Hinchinbrooke, Howick, Havelock, Hemingford, Elgin, Franklin and Godmanchester.

	French	English	Other Languages
1971	795 (52 %)	710 (47 %)	15 (1 %)
2021	2,468 (65 %)	1,258 (33 %)	70 (2 %)

Table 14: Ormstown population, 1971 – 2021

The Chateauguay Valley Regional High School had a good auditorium and projection system, so that is where we held the screening. Ormstown was the most emotionally charged post-screening conversation in the entire tour, which I did not expect from a farming community with a long history of bilingual cohabitation.

Some of the people in the audience had never mastered French. One eighty-year-old woman was disturbed that meetings in the town hall were now conducted entirely in French. She felt isolated. Another woman who had left Quebec shortly after graduating high school had returned to care for her elderly parents. The section of my film about the FLQ crisis

triggered such painful memories that she had to leave the auditorium until she could regain her composure. She was committed to staying with her parents as long as they were alive but found it impossible to find work without a better level of French.

Many of the audience members had deep roots in the region. One woman talked about her ancestors arriving in 1795 and planting the first apple orchard. A man shared a story about living in a nearby town called Nitro, where Defence Industries Limited (DIL) built a plant in 1940 to produce nitroglycerine used in explosives. The DIL plant was kept under heavy security during the FLQ years to prevent theft.

A woman told the story of her family coming to the Ormstown region from Scotland in 1829. The family cleared the land and built the farmhouse they had inhabited for eight generations. "We will have been here for two centuries in a few years and I seriously wonder if the government of Quebec will recognize what we have contributed, or would [they] rather see us disappear?"

Nobody in the room jumped up and said, "C'mon, that's crazy talk!" The question was perfectly reasonable during the CAQ regime and the answer was unknowable.

Ormstown was the first audience to speak about Bill C-13. The Government of Canada was undertaking the first major revision of Canada's Official Languages Act (OLA) in a generation. The OLA was originally created to protect the minority French language within Canada and then was extended to provide support for the minority English-speaking community within Quebec. It is true that the globally dominant English language is not vulnerable in Quebec, in Canada or anywhere else. But it is also true that communities of English speakers in Quebec were feeling vulnerable. Community organizations serving seniors and youth received funding because of their status under Canada's OLA. If the minority status were removed, would funding also disappear? How long would the communities survive without assistance from the federal government? The regional associations that invited me to screen my film would struggle to provide volunteer services only and perhaps cease to exist. The people in Ormstown who were following the federal language debates felt that the English minority within Quebec was being abandoned

by Canada's federal government: "We are the forgotten people of Canada. It's as if we don't exist…"

When Canada enacted the OLA in 1969, the country had been wrestling with two competing European languages for more than two centuries. The British Conquest of 1759 – 1763 was remembered as a brutal invasion of the St. Lawrence Valley in Quebec and for Acadians in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The North-West Rebellion of 1885 was devastating for the Métis in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and the hanging of Louis Riel sparked outrage. In 1890, Manitoba abolished French as an official language, triggering the Manitoba Schools Question. In 1912, Ontario attempted to solve its language problem by assimilating its francophone citizens with Regulation 17, which made English the sole language of instruction in publicly funded elementary schools. Protestants believed the use of French in Ontario schools threatened the province's integrity as an anglophone and Protestant enclave. However, many of the champions of repressive Regulation 17 were (English-speaking) Irish Catholics. French-speaking minorities in every province and territory of Canada had struggled to maintain their language, culture and dignity. The only province in Canada with a French-speaking majority was Quebec, which entered the twentieth century lagging behind English Canada according to indicators of wealth, education and influence. In 1960, the Quebec Liberal Party, led by Jean Lesage, launched the Quiet Revolution after campaigning under the slogan, « C'est le temps qu'ça change ».[16] Two years later, they rallied support to nationalize electricity with the slogan, « Maîtres chez nous ».[17] Until the Quiet Revolution, higher education was accessible to only a minority of French Canadians because of the generally low level of formal education and the expense involved. Then, from 1963 to 1970, the FLQ committed over 150 bombings, bank robberies and kidnappings during an extended campaign of domestic terrorism and Quebec was seriously threatening to separate.

Leading up to Canada's creation of the OLA, the country was in turmoil. In 1969, following the recommendations of the federally appointed Royal

16 *"It's time for things to change."*

17 *"Masters in our own home."*

Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Canadian Parliament enacted the OLA, which gave English and French official status in organizations and institutions under federal jurisdiction. The OLA's main innovation was to institute official bilingualism throughout the Canadian federal government and to encourage Canadians to embrace bilingualism as a feature of Canadian identity.

Bilingualism was not embraced by the entire nation but a significant number of Canadians sent their children to immersion schools, inspired by the Saint-Lambert model. The OLA assisted minority-language communities across Canada, first French speakers in English Canada and then English speakers in Quebec. Former Commissioner of Official Languages Graham Fraser documented this difficult cultural transformation in his 2006 book *Sorry, I Don't Speak French: Confronting the Canadian Crisis That Won't Go Away*.

The principal intended beneficiary of the OLA — the francophone population of Quebec — rejected all notions of institutional bilingualism. Quebec's response to the linguistic turmoil of the 1960s was to pass its own language act. In 1974, Quebec's National Assembly, led by Robert Bourassa's Liberal government, enacted Bill 22, the Official Language Act, which made French the only official language of Quebec. In 1977, Lévesque's PQ government passed Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language, which established French as the language of government, education, business and commerce; required French instruction for immigrants; limited access to English elementary and high schools; required commercial signs and ads to be in French; and required large businesses and non-profits to use French in the workplace.

For half a century, English Canada aspired to be bilingual, though only 9.5 percent of its citizens could speak both languages in 2021. Quebec claimed to have only one language while 46.4 percent of its citizens were bilingual. Canada's OLA was assigned a multi-billion-dollar budget for the benefit of French-speaking minority communities across Canada as well as regional associations and community groups for the English-language minority in Quebec. Little of the money was allocated to Quebec's French-speaking majority. These political and conceptual contradictions were denounced when the OLA was revised in 2023 as

Bill C-13: An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

Legault's CAQ government argued that French was Canada's minority language, not English, and all language indicators for the decline of French were flashing red, so urgent action must be taken, and every available resource must be marshalled to defend the French language. The CAQ was joined by the Bloc Québécois in Ottawa to argue that a coherent case could be made to allocate funds to vulnerable minority French-speaking communities across Canada, but that it was absolutely incoherent, and a provocation to Quebec, that Anglo special interest groups were receiving millions of dollars to "anglicize Quebec."

The arguments were effective. Opposition parties in Ottawa supported Quebec's concerns while the governing Liberal Party of Canada was divided. Francophone Liberals, with the exception of ex-astronaut Marc Garneau, supported the priority of protecting French in Quebec and across Canada. Only a handful of MPs from Quebec, mostly English speakers, defended the English-speaking minority in Quebec, for which they were attacked by CAQ MNAs, Bloc MPs and the French-language media. Every attempt to engage in a reasoned debate about the data concerning the decline of French was drowned out by accusations that the dissident MPs were puppets controlled by the powerful Anglo elite in Westmount and the West Island.

Meanwhile, in the suburbs, towns and villages of Quebec, English speakers who were not part of any powerful elite felt under attack by Bill 96 and abandoned by the rest of Canada with Bill C-13. It is highly unusual for the opposition parties to support the government in power while its own members demand amendments and threaten to vote against a law. It was all too complicated for most people to process but they understood the stakes were high and whatever was about to change was unlikely to be good for Quebec's minority within a minority.

CHAPTER 3:

Laval, Lanaudière and the Laurentians

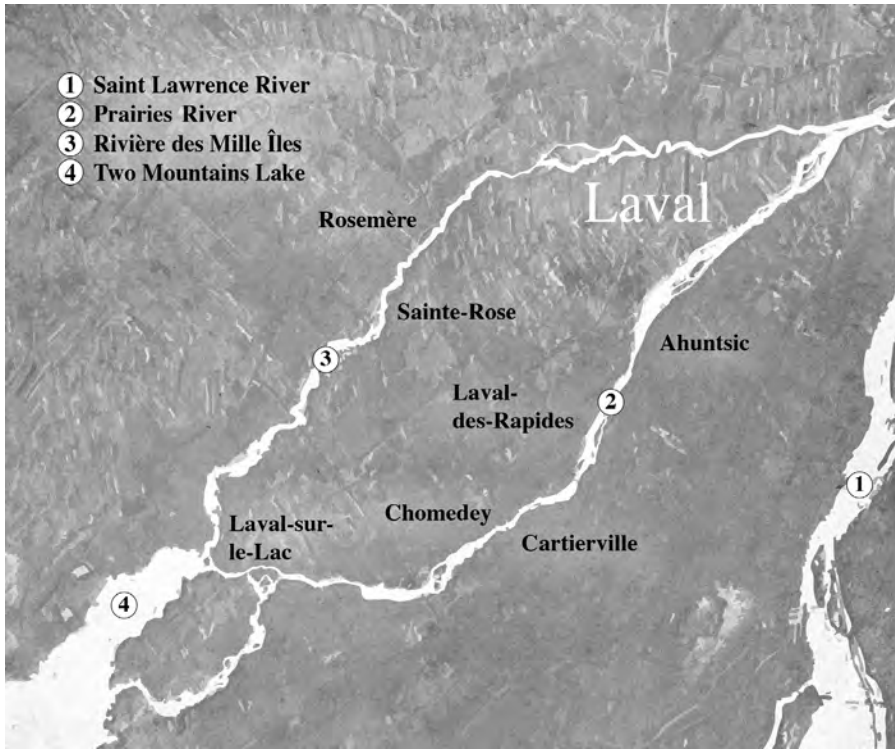
For the next leg of the tour, I travelled to the north side of the St. Lawrence River. First stop was Laval. In 1636, the island that is now Laval was granted to La compagnie de Jésus (the Jesuits), which named it *Île Jésus* (Jesus Island) — still its official name. A century later, the Jesuits built a church at Sainte-Rose on the north side but development of the island was slow, apart from farming.

In 1836, a wooden bridge connected the area that is now Cartierville, on the Montreal side of the river, to what is now Chomedey, on the Laval side. The Cartierville Bridge[18] was rebuilt in steel in 1882, which increased access to Montreal. Thirty years later, Laval-des-Rapides became the island's first large municipality.

On the western tip of the island, Laval-sur-le-lac was founded in 1912 as a tourist resort. Le Club Laval-sur-le-lac, North America's oldest private francophone golf club, was established in 1917, a year before the Mount Bruno Country Club on the South Shore. By 1950, the population of *Île Jésus* had still not reached 40,000, while Montreal had passed 1,000,000.

Laval came of age in the 1960s for a number of reasons. The baby boom created demand for new homes and the central region of the island of Montreal had filled up, so the housing cost-to-travel distance ratio

[18] *Later replaced by le pont Lachapelle (Lachapelle Bridge).*



Map 2: Laval

made Laval attractive for Montrealers. After the Médéric Martin Bridge was built in 1958, the new Laurentian highway was constructed through the heart of aptly named Laval-des-Rapides. Finally, it was quick to travel between a home in Laval and work in Montreal, especially to industrial areas like Saint-Laurent that expanded with the construction of the Metropolitan (1957 – 1971) and Decarie (1965 – 1967) highways.

My wife, Louise, grew up in Laval-des-Rapides when housing developments were replacing fields and woods. The first time she took me there to meet her parents and five brothers, I felt like I was entering foreign territory. I heard no one on the bus speaking English and Louise told me that Anglos in her family's neighbourhood were rare. Her family greeted me with reserve. I represented the worst kind of Anglo: He doesn't speak French? Not a word? When they discovered I had only been in Quebec a few months and had arrived from Australia, they understood why I spoke

no French but were skeptical that I would ever make the effort to learn.

Louise's father had grown up in northern Ontario and his English was excellent. Louise's mother was an Acadienne from New Brunswick and her English was very good. Louise's eldest brother was studying at McGill University, but in all the years I have known him he has rarely switched to English for my sake. When I arrived in Montreal in September 1980, Quebec's indépendantistes were still grieving the lost referendum in May. When Louise's father came to Montreal a generation earlier to study at Université de Montréal, some students from McGill antagonized him for speaking French on St. Catherine Street. They told him to, "Speak white," the phrase that symbolized Anglo arrogance in Michèle Lalonde's scathing 1968 poem.

Louise's eldest brother had bitter linguistic experiences at McGill, and francophone students at the National Theatre School had many grievances against English bosses, English money and English power. I understood why they resented a certain type of Anglo and would not speak to me in English. I see it now as a form of tough love. The message was clear: "If you want to live in Québec, the least you can do is learn our language."

The first time Louise's family took me to church, her father introduced me to a politician seated in the pew behind us. He said a few words I did not understand but we shook hands and exchanged polite nods. It was only later that I encountered the myth that the entire Catholic population of Quebec abandoned religion and embraced secularism around the time of Expo 67. The rejection of Catholicism was not as rapid — or complete — as secularists portray it. Doubts about religion and dissatisfaction with the Catholic Church had been simmering for years prior to the great flip from religion to irreligion but they were not openly discussed. Skeptics kept their disbeliefs to themselves because the cost of dissent was high. Sunday Mass, for believers and doubters alike, had been a gathering place where isolated farmers could see friends and share news. Suburban churches only gradually ceased to be the ideal place for a politician to greet constituents and hear their concerns. The politician who shook my hand in 1980 was not some relic of the pioneer past but a young star of the future, elected for the first time with the PQ in the

previous election. Bernard Landry would become vice-chair of the PQ under Jacques Parizeau (1989 – 1994), deputy premier under Lucian Bouchard (1995 – 2001) and then premier of Quebec (2001 – 2003).

I was invited to screen my film in Laval by Kevin McLeod for AGAPE, the community organization that provides social services to the English speakers of Laval, particularly youth and seniors. *Agapé* is a Greek word that means love, in a selfless and charitable sense. The word is found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in a verse often read at weddings: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."[19] These are good values for a community organization that provides social services to vulnerable people but religious references were no longer in tune with Quebec's secular climate.

In 2019, the National Assembly adopted Bill 21 (An Act Respecting the Laicity of the State). The purpose of the legislation was "to confirm the province's secular status and to prohibit the wearing of religious symbols by civil service employees in positions of authority and by teachers in the public sector." The law did not dictate practices in the private sector but overtly religious references were no longer a good strategy for marketing or for receiving government funding.

Bill 21 had been both controversial and divisive. France originally conceived of secularism during the French Revolution when mobs pillaged churches and attacked priests. Quebec imposed Bill 21 with a similar anti-religious hostility toward Islam and other religions that displayed "ostentatious" symbols such as hijabs. Bill 21 was also the first time Legault's CAQ government used the notwithstanding clause to impose the will of Quebec's French-speaking, formerly Catholic majority. Repression of minority rights and religious rights in the name of religious neutrality had proved popular with the CAQ's base and unpopular with communities that felt unreasonably oppressed. Many of the people who protested Bill 21 also denounced Bill 96.

A summer tornado warning was in effect the afternoon of the Laval screening but a crowd of intrepid folk braved the elements to watch my

[19] *1 Corinthians 13:4 – 8.*

film and share their memories. Laval had the fastest-growing English-speaking population in Quebec, though Vaudreuil in Montérégie is close behind. The old Anglo community in Chomedey has declined, as many young people have moved to Montreal or left Quebec, but other historical English speakers had relocated from apartments in Montreal to homes in the suburbs. In recent years, new immigrants have also chosen to live in Laval.

	French	English	Other Languages
1971	184 120 (81 %)	30 190 (13 %)	13 700 (6 %)
2021	238 004 (55 %)	42 219 (10 %)	153 417 (35 %)

Table 15: Laval population, 1971 – 2021

Many of the people at the Laval screening were second- or third-generation immigrants whose families arrived in Quebec speaking Yiddish, Italian or Greek. Having chosen to stay in Quebec when others left, they understood that I created my film to celebrate a success story and were happy to share their own stories of making successful lives in Quebec. They also had criticisms.

"Why are the Québécois so afraid of other languages?"

"They're afraid of losing their identity."

"We learned other languages but we never lost our identity!"

The audience also wanted to talk about Catholic schools and religious exclusion. "My husband is Italian," said one woman. "He was rejected by the French Catholic school and went to an English school. Our kids are totally bilingual and they speak some Italian."

"It's a mistake to think we were rejected by the Catholic Church," said a man of Italian heritage. "Catholicism is a universal religion. What happened to us was an administrative reassignment to a different department where they spoke English. It was purely bureaucratic."

The explanation made sense. Immigrant Catholic students remained Catholic, though educated in English. For the Church, the language of instruction was incidental. For Quebec's linguistic future, it created a ticking time bomb. Laval had revealed a couple of new insights.

The Chomedey neighbourhood had an established English-speaking community, but in the 1960s and even the 1980s, it was rare to hear

English spoken in adjacent Laval-des-Rapides, where my wife had grown up surrounded by other francophones. Now it is common to hear English there, which sets off alarm bells for linguistic nationalists who imagine that Anglos, anglicized-allophones and recent immigrants are rejecting Quebec's French language and culture. The reality is more complex. Anglos and allophones have made considerable efforts to learn French but they do not see why it is a problem if they speak other languages at home or on the street.

"Back in the 90s, I was not comfortable speaking English in public. Now I am."

"Young francophones also speak English. That's the future."

Those two statements encapsulate the language "problem" that Bill 96 was determined to fix. During the tour's post-screening conversations, many bilingual Quebecers said they had been reluctant to attract negative attention by speaking English in public in the 1980s. Their self-censorship made public spaces sound more unilingual French than they were. When tensions dropped after the 1995 referendum, bilinguals more frequently switched languages in public and spoke out loud. During the same period, Quebec received record numbers of immigrants, who often spoke more English than French, while young francophones began speaking more English because of the internet. The net effect has been a marked increase of English in public spaces and in the workplace.

Linguistic nationalists see Laval as the new battleground where English is winning, though several indicators show the use of French is increasing and only the percentage of unilingual francophones is decreasing. The post-screening conversation in Laval was becoming animated when the room suddenly went dark and the conversation was cut short. We all rushed home before the summer tornado struck with astonishing force.

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The next series of screenings took place north of Laval. The Lanaudière administrative region has only existed since 1987 but many of its settlements date back to the early days of Nouvelle France. Terrebonne sits directly across the Thousand Islands River from Laval. Further east,

on the north side of the St. Lawrence River, are Charlemagne (hometown of singer Céline Dion), Repentigny, L'Assomption and Lavaltrie. A network of tributary rivers connects the St. Lawrence to inland villages like Mascouche and Rawdon.

One of Louise's brothers had a summerhouse at Saint-Calixte, so we had visited the Rawdon area quite often when our children were young. I presumed the population was entirely francophone because I never heard anyone speak English. I was surprised later to learn that Mascouche has an old English-speaking community and that Rawdon was founded by English speakers.

Maura McKeon, the first historic Anglo to appear in my film, describes her immigrant ancestor arriving in Rawdon in the 1820s. During this time, the old French towns of Berthier and L'Assomption were outposts of European civilization but they were also known to Irish and Scottish immigrants making their way to the new townships of Brandon (now Saint-Gabriel-de-Brandon), Kilkenny (now Saint-Hippolyte-de-Kilkenny) and Kildare (now Sainte-Marcelline-de-Kildare). Rawdon was named for a British veteran of the American Revolution and the first settlers came from Boston. They were followed by waves of Irish, Scottish, English and French settlers in the 1820s. Many of the streets still have English names: Queen, Church, Summerhill, Cedar, Pine and Lakeshore Drive.

	French	English	Other Languages
1871	325 (21 %)	1247 (79 %)	6 (-)
1931	1,173 (69 %)	533 (31 %)	1 (-)
1996	2,760 (68 %)	1,070 (27 %)	210 (5 %)
2021	10,041 (87 %)	1,136 (10 %)	388 (3 %)

Table 16: Rawdon population, 1871 – 2021

Rawdon's Irish Catholics established two internationally renowned schools. Saint Anne Convent on Lake Morgan Road dates to Confederation (1867). In the early days it was a primary school for girls and it later became a secondary school. The introduction of bilingual commercial courses in 1938 made Saint Anne famous in Quebec, across Canada and in New England. Over the years, the school has trained thousands

of female students, both in the English commercial course and in the regular high school with intensive English instruction. Saint Anselm College on Queen Street was founded in 1912 as a boys' high school that offered a commercial course in English. In 1948, the college changed its focus and began offering courses in French to students at the end of primary school and the beginning of secondary school. After the first phase of expansion between 1957 and 1958, the institution became Collège Champagneur and taught the first four years of the classical curriculum in French.

Beginning in the 1930s, Rawdon attracted immigrants from Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia and Russia. St. Seraphim Orthodox Church, a Byzantine-style domed chapel, is one of Rawdon's most remarkable buildings.

I was invited to Rawdon by Vanessa Savella and Diane Kyte on behalf of the English Community Organization of Lanaudière. They rented a room at the Centre d'interprétation multiethnique, which could not have been more appropriate for a film about multiple waves of immigration. Some members of the audience had very deep roots in the region and were active in the local historical society.[20]

One of the women at the screening, whose family pioneered a farm in Rawdon in 1822, has the original documents, which were written in French because "back then the notaries were all French, as were most of the doctors." From the earliest days of the settlement, the farmers and

Centre d'Interprétation Multiethnique, Rawdon

[20] *Société d'histoire de Rawdon has a good website.*

villagers were a mixture of English and French. "We spoke English," the woman added. "We spoke French. Everyone helped everyone else."

One woman's grandmother ran a boarding house at Sainte-Julienne, on the other side of the Ouareau River. The girls from the neighbouring farms helped in the boarding house and were all bilingual. The people at the Rawdon screening questioned why so many francophones had been bilingual, particularly young women, and the most likely explanation was that they had been educated at Saint Anne Convent.

A woman educated at the convent shared a story about how the nuns there hated "hash." This forbidden concoction was the mixing of English and French in the same sentence. The bilingual protocol at the convent was to speak full sentences in a single language. Bilinguals are tempted to switch back and forth, grabbing the word they are looking for in whichever language presents itself first. Linguistic purists loathe this hashing of language as much as the Saint Anne nuns. Parents of bilingual children also negotiate hashing protocols with their children. Theories change over time. A translanguaging theory from the Institute of Education Sciences, for example, recommends not only permitting but encouraging hashing.

The group in Rawdon had many stories about families with mixed languages. One woman was married to a bilingual francophone but one of her brothers was married to a unilingual francophone and the other was married to a unilingual anglophone. The bilinguals offered simultaneous translation services at family gatherings to include everyone in the conversation.

A man in Rawdon told a story that reshaped my vision of Quebec. He trained social workers all over North America to work with refugees and asylum seekers. He would begin his session by inviting everyone to stand up. He would then ask people to sit down if they were born outside Canada. Many did. Then he would ask people to sit down if one of their parents was born outside Canada. Many more did. By the time he asked about grandparents, most of the people in the room were sitting. This is the reality in New World nations and it is one of the points I tried to illustrate in my film with waves of immigration. The first time the trainer conducted the exercise with a group of francophones in Quebec, he was

taken aback to realize that not one person in the group was born outside Quebec or had a parent, grandparent or great-great-great-parent born outside Quebec.

This insight explained some things that had puzzled me for years. After Louise's youngest brother watched my film, he wrote a lengthy commentary explaining why it was difficult for him to feel too sympathetic for immigrants struggling to find work because ancestors on his father's side had their houses in the St. Lawrence Valley burned by the British Army during the Conquest in 1759. I was surprised he expected people who had just arrived in Quebec to know, or care, about something that happened so long ago. I certainly didn't expect him to feel guilty about the French conquest of my British ancestors by William, Duke of Normandy, (aka Guillaume Le Conquérant) in 1066.

The immigrant ancestor exercise made me realize that francophones-de-souche expect English speakers to know their history (of the Conquest) and take responsibility for it. Anglos make the inverse error in imagining that francophones think of themselves as immigrants in the New World. The long conversation in Rawdon was one of the most enlightening of the tour.

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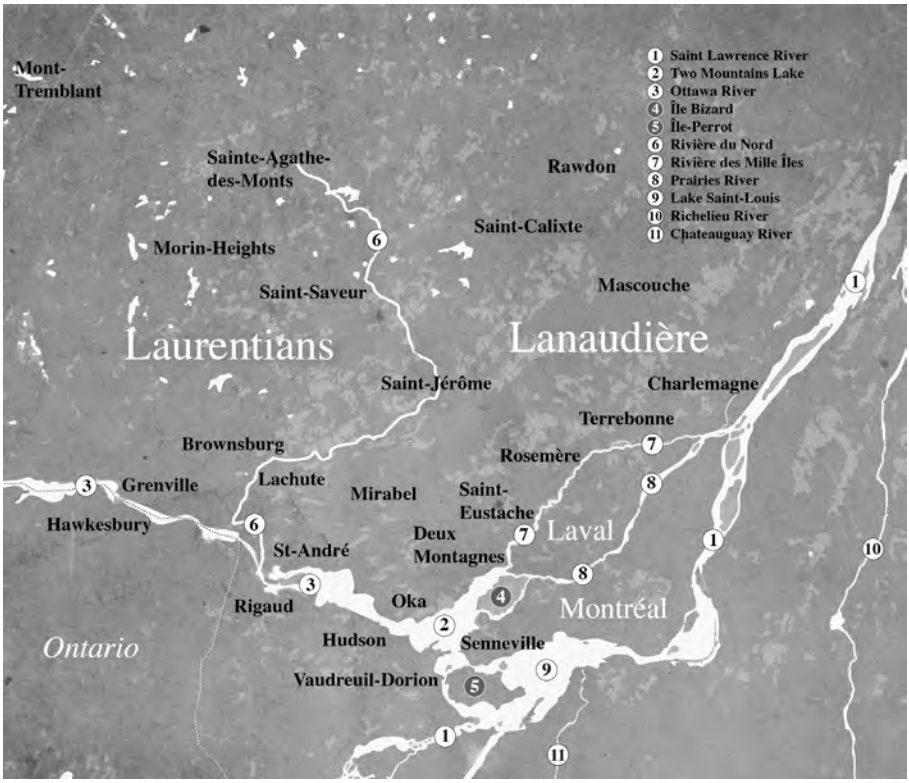
Next stop was the Laurentians. For most Montrealers, the region is associated with mountains, notably Mont-Tremblant, but the waterfront of the Lower Laurentians was settled centuries before the mountainous hinterland. Louis XIV, King of France, granted a vast territory north of the rivière des Mille îles to the soldier and Seigneur Michel-Sidrac Dugué de Boisbriand. The village of Boisbriand was founded in 1750. East of the village, in 1880, JP Withers, a Canadian Pacific Railway officer, set up home along the waterfront. Impressed by the compelling charm of the many wild-growing roses, he decided to name the settlement by combining *rose* with the suffix *mere*, an old Anglo-Saxon word for swamp. The town began to attract a large English-speaking population and Rosemère still has official bilingual status.

The next city moving east along the river is Saint-Eustache. The final battle of the 1837 rebellion was fought here in December, when 1,500



Map 3: Lanaudière and the Laurentians

British soldiers defeated several hundred Patriote rebels, killing 70 and taking 120 prisoners. The church of Saint-Eustache, in which the rebels took refuge, still bears scars from the cannonballs fired by the British artillery. The red coats reinforced their reputation as perfidious adversaries by torching 65 houses and looting the village.[21]

The next town along the waterfront is Deux-Montagnes, known until 1963 as Saint-Eustache-sur-le-Lac. This is where the Thousand Island River meets Lac des Deux-Montagnes. The lake was an important transit hub back in the colony's early days of water travel. The Ottawa River enters from the northwest and from Saint-Eustache-sur-le-Lac you could

[21] *One of the oldest settlements on the Parramatta River in Sydney, Australia, is* Canada Bay. *It was built by convicts shipped to Britain's remote South Pacific penal colony. After the 1837 rebellion in Nouvelle France, fifty-eight French Canadian rebels and two Irish rebels were exiled to Australia. All but one eventually returned to Quebec.*

continue paddling south to Laval-sur-le-lac on Île Jésus, then along the western shores of *Île Bizard* until you reached the western tip of Montreal Island, then on to Senneville, where Sir John Abbott, mayor of Montreal and later prime minister of Canada, built a spectacular waterfront summer home. From Senneville it is a short distance to Île Perrot, where the St. Lawrence flows in from the southwest, then continues through Lake Saint-Louis and all the way out to the Gulf of Saint Lawrence.

The first settlement at the mouth of the Ottawa River is Oka, famous for the cheese originally produced at the Trappist monastery, and for a popular beach. The Oka settlement was first established by Sulpician Fathers as a mission to serve Mohawk, Algonquin and Nipissing converts. Sulpicians assigned the Mohawks to a west-side village now known as Kanehsatake. The Algonquin and Nipissing First Nations were assigned to an adjacent east-side village. Oka is infamous for the Oka Crisis in the summer of 1990, when property developers announced plans to build a golf course on land that included a Mohawk burial ground. The standoff claimed two lives and made headline news for seventy-eight days, giving Canadians a long overdue education about Indigenous history and rights. Alanis Obomsawin's 1993 NFB film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* presents a riveting account of the conflict.

Hudson sits on the opposite side of the Ottawa River, in the Montérégie region. To the north of the river, you pass the hamlet of St. Andrews (now Saint-André-d'Argenteuil), where Abbott was born in 1821. The Argenteuil district in 1871 comprised St. Andrews, Saint-Colomban, Brownsburg-Chatham and Grenville. Many of the settlers in the Argenteuil district were Irish (4,080), Scottish (3,213) and English (1,443).

	French	English	Other Languages
1871	3,902 (31 %)	8,736 (69 %)	12 (-)

Table 17: Argenteuil population, 1871

After Hudson and Rigaud, on the Montérégie side of the river, you pass the border between Quebec and Ontario, where the movie *Bon Cop, Bad Cop* opens with a body impaled on the sign marking the inter-provincial

border. Both sides of the water along here are farming land. The last significant settlement along the Laurentian waterfront is Grenville, facing Hawkesbury on the Ontario side. The towns are connected by the only bridge between Saint-Eustache and Ottawa. I will travel through the Outaouais/West Quebec region in chapter five.

	French	English	Other Languages
1871	552 (25 %)	1,645 (74 %)	26 (1 %)
1931	1,117 (43 %)	1,457 (57 %)	- (-)
1996	780 (42 %)	1,070 (57 %)	25 (1 %)
2021	1,540 (85 %)	245 (14 %)	25 (1 %)

Table 18: Grenville population, 1871 – 2021

Chloée Alary of 4Korners, the local regional association, invited me to the Laurentians and arranged screenings in Grenville, Lachute, Morin-Heights and Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts. I have crossed the Long-Sault Bridge at Hawkesbury many times on the way to Ottawa, occasionally stopping at Grenville for gas or coffee, but I knew nothing about the local history. My first screening in the Laurentians was a few kilometres east of Grenville in farming country near the banks of rivière des Outaouais — known on the Ontario side as the Ottawa River.

When I arrived at St. Mungo's United Church near Grenville at 11 a.m., the parking lot was full of cars and pickups belonging to a group of seniors that meets every Tuesday morning in the church hall for group activities and lunch.

St. Mungo's United Church

The first man who spoke after the film's credits said, "A lot of memories. Some bad times!" His comment triggered a debate about whether it is better to let the past rest in peace or keep it alive and learn from it. The conversation carried us from the Battle of Hastings in 1066 and the Plains of Abraham in 1759 to Queen Victoria's empire and bilingual singalongs at the local tavern.

The audience had roots that stretched far back into both English and French histories. One man's family had a French branch that dated back to les Filles du Roi[22] but because of mixed marriages, divorce and displacement, he is not fluently bilingual. One woman had old English roots but grew up in Arvida, the company town for Alcoa aluminum on the Saguenay River, where she became perfectly bilingual. Most of the people in the group transcended binary notions of English and French. They were interested in connecting with the humanity of the people they encounter on this journey through life. We continued the joyful conversation over soup and sandwiches.

This group made me think of a long-lost, backwoods hippy commune I visited in my teens. They spoke a lot about peace and love. Some of the men wore long hair with bushy beards. Before I left, one of them gave me a CD of bluesy-rock music he had recorded back in the 70s. The cover photo featured his taut, bare-chested torso, shoulder-length hair, drooping biker mustache and a gold ring in his left ear. He looked like many of my teenage friends. We hit it off immediately.

One man in the post-screening discussion spoke about his Dutch family arriving near Mont-Tremblant in 1954. They spoke little French or English but started a flower business and language was never a problem for them. Years later, they relocated to Grenville and language was still no problem. "But that has begun to change. It was nice back when we all got along." Another man mentioned that things were even becoming difficult on the other side of the bridge in Hawkesbury, which has one of the largest francophone populations in Ontario. Some of the young people working in restaurants don't want to speak to customers in English. Another man shared stories about

[22] *Brides imported to the male-populated colony in the 1660s.*

living in many parts of Canada and the USA but always returning to Quebec because of family and because, "This is home. Outside Quebec, something was missing."

The one relatively young person in the room was a visitor whose parents met at McGill University but left Quebec during the exodus in the 70s. As a child, he remembered the thrill of attending Montreal Expos baseball games at the Olympic Stadium with his grandparents. He had lived outside Quebec most of his life and felt cheated out of an important part of his heritage. His story reminded me of filmmaker John Walker, who moved to Ontario in the 70s because he didn't speak French well and felt he had no future in Quebec, though his family's roots in the adjacent region of Brownsburg-Chatham went back generations. In 2017, Walker made a documentary film entitled *Québec My Country, Mon Pays* in which he revisited the Lower Laurentian region of his ancestors and explored his own sense of loss after living outside Quebec for decades. I saw Walker's film when it first came out. Watching it again after visiting the region, I understood the local farm people and their history with greater clarity.

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Next stop was Lachute, half an hour inland. The first time I visited Lachute had been thirty years earlier. A friend had loaned me his country house for a winter weekend with my kids and while sliding down an icy slope I collided with a tree and broke my ankle. Louise and I left our young children with her mother and she drove me to the Lachute hospital. It would never have occurred to me to ask for, or expect to receive, treatment in English. I knew nothing about the local history.

	French	English	Other Languages
1871	688 (44 %)	860 (56 %)	3 (-)
1931	2,784 (73 %)	1,040 (27 %)	8 (-)
1996	9,430 (80 %)	2,265 (19 %)	120 (1 %)
2021	12,075 (87 %)	1, 492 (11 %)	252 (2 %)

Table 19: Lachute population, 1871 – 2021

While visiting Lachute to show my film, I arrived early and walked down the broad Rue Principale, lined with early-twentieth-century commercial buildings. Driving along the main street you might not notice the names of the cross streets: Fraser, Clyde, Water and Bellingham. I saw several churches: Margaret Rodger Memorial Presbyterian Church and St. Simeon's Anglican Church. Because of a declining population, the Lachute United Church has sold the large building it once owned and now occupies shared premises in a repurposed funeral home, which cast the Lachute screening in a somber light.

The half dozen people who came to see the film were all old enough to have personally witnessed events beginning in the 1960s. I asked how much of the town was English when they were young. It was still 25 percent English back then and the audience remembered that the two linguistic communities interacted comfortably.

Rue Principale and Rue Water, Lachute

One of the women had grown up a few kilometres west in Brownsburg-Chatham, where filmmaker Walker was born. "It was different there. All the families on the west side of the river were English, except for one. The French lived on the other side. I never really learned to speak French, although I got good marks at school. The French and English didn't associate much but we all went to the arena to skate and to Nadon's restaurant to smoke."

After the screening, I paid a visit to Brownsburg-Chatham. Street names on the east side of la rivière du Nord are still English (Woodland, Greenwood, Elmwood, Rosedale, Hillcrest), while names on the west side are still French (Saint-Joseph, Saint-Louis, Saint-Georges, de l'Église, du Couvent).

Schools were an important issue in Lachute. One man converted to Catholicism when he married his francophone wife so their kids could be educated in French at a Catholic school. Now his granddaughter wants to learn English and practices speaking it with him. A woman told us that both her parents were francophones from Ontario but they refused to have their children raised in an oppressively religious environment, so they sent her to the English Protestant school where "the level of French instruction was abysmally rudimentary. The French teaching was so bad that it would turn anyone off learning the language. I hear francophones today wondering why their Anglo friends can barely speak French but that was the education they had." A man interjected: "I had a French teacher from England with the worst accent, but I learned French later, on the job. My French is not perfect but I get by just fine."

The audience also spoke of the many industrial towns that had linguistic-economic hierarchies in which the bosses were English. The Catholic convert worked at Val-d'Or in the 1970s and his supervisor was proud of working at the mine for twenty-five years without ever learning a word of French. "Not a good situation." Insular bosses created guilt by association for the English-speaking workers lower in the hierarchy. One woman mentioned the mixed blessing of Abbott being born at St. Andrews. "We're proud that Canada's second prime minister was born near here but it reinforces the myth that all Anglos were part of an elite 1 percent."

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After these first two screenings in the Laurentians, I was starting to get a sense of local history and geography. The next two stops in the region were at Morin-Heights and Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts. From my home in Montreal to Morin-Heights is a seventy-five-kilometre drive. If the traffic is good, I can be there in an hour, and if traffic is bad, I will grumble and

complain that thirty minutes of my life have been stolen. As I approached the Médéric Martin Bridge to cross rivière des Mille Iles, I thought of pioneers making the same journey north, paddling to the mouth of rivière du Nord and then heading upstream, along the way passing through all the oldest Laurentian settlements: St. Andrews, Brownsburg-Chatham, Lachute, Saint-Colomban, Saint-Jérôme, Sainte-Anne-des-Lacs, Saint-Sauveur and then up the Simon River to Morin-Heights. How long did their journey take? How many times did the voyagers have to portage around waterfalls and beaver dams? My final screening would be even farther up la rivière du Nord, past Sainte-Adèle, Val-Morin and Val-David at Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts.

The Laurentian region began its modern era of development in 1876 when Curé Antoine Labelle spearheaded a project to colonize the upper lands by building a railroad to carry passengers and cargo, quickly and in all seasons. Curé Labelle is a character in two popular TV series: *Les Belles Histoires des pays d'en Haut* (1956 – 1970) and *Les pays d'en Haut* (2016 – 2019). This new region, which had something of the Wild West about it, fired the literary imagination. One of Quebe's best-known novels, *Un homme et son péché* by Claude-Henri Grignon (1894 – 1976), is also set in the region during the same period. In this 1933 novel, Grignon created a miserly, ruthless, fearsome, Scrooge-like character whose motivations are so powerfully portrayed that the reader can't help but sympathize with the scoundrel. Although Séraphin Poudrier torments his debtors and destroys his innocent young wife, we lament for him when he loses everything at the end of the book. In Séraphin, Grignon created an iconoclastic, irreligious striver who anticipates the Quiet Revolution, Quebec's rejection of the Church, and the celebration of Québec Inc. The book was spun off into a radio series (1939 – 1962), a feature film by Paul Gury (1949), a comic strip by Albert Chartier (1951 –1970), the TV series (1956 –1970), which Grignon created and supervised, and another feature film version by Charles Binamé (2002).

By the 1920s, Curé Labelle's train brought skiers to the Laurentians on weekends. Félix Leclerc sang about « Le train du Nord ». In the 1940s, Route 117 allowed residents and vacationers to travel on their own schedules and then the multi-lane Laurentian Autoroute in the 70s

made the trip short and safe. It also put an end to rail travel. The route of the old train du Nord is now a nature trail for hikers and cross-country skiers.

The first time I visited Morin-Heights was when Louise and I spent a Valentine's Day weekend in the guest rooms of the Morin-Heights recording studio. It was created by André Paré, whose first taste of fame came in 1969 when he helped record John Lennon singing "Give Peace a Chance" at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal (Suite 1742). Paré created Le Studio a couple of years later as a destination hideaway in the backwoods of the Laurentians, where artists like David Bowie, the Police, the Bee Gees, Cat Stevens, Rush and Keith Richard of the Rolling Stones could make music without distractions. There was nothing there but the large studio, a small lake and the guest rooms, each with individual designs straight out of Hugh Hefner's Playboy mansion: shocking pinks, electric blues, psychedelic wallpaper, thick shag carpets and chunky op art furniture. Ah, the 70s! Crazy times. Tragically, the studio was destroyed by a fire in 2017 and nothing remains but the foundation reclaimed by vegetation.

My second memorable visit to Morin-Heights was an ELAN schmoozer. I had created the organization because of the twenty-first-century renaissance of English-language culture in Quebec. Shortly after launching ELAN in 2004, we started compiling names of professional artists working in English, expecting to identify a few hundred. We soon had a list of more than two thousand names. But who were they? Musicians did not know visual artists. Dancers did not know poets. Mile End artists did not know the NDG scene. And Montreal artists had no idea what was happening off island. To build connections between these diverse groups we began to organize monthly schmoozers, which simply meant reserving a room in a bar or restaurant and sending an open invitation.

The schmoozers became popular and one of the most memorable took place in Morin-Heights on a beautiful summer afternoon in a dappled garden, with a cool breeze blowing to keep the bugs away. Penny Rose hosted us at her house and garden. She and her husband, David Hodgson, were well known in the region for presenting living room concerts. The Morin-Heights schmoozer was memorable because of the diverse group

it brought together: artists who worked in different disciplines (music, visual arts, literature and theatre) and lived in different Laurentian towns. Some of them had never met before. Few thought of themselves primarily as Anglo Quebecers. They were multilingual and well-integrated with the French-speaking majority that surrounded them — but they all enjoyed the afternoon schmoozer with artists who shared their mother tongue.

	French	English	Other Languages
1871	255 (46 %)	302 (54 %)	- (-)
1931	321 (55 %)	259 (45 %)	- (-)
1996	505 (39 %)	730 (55 %)	80 (6%)
2021	3,580 (77 %)	875 (19 %)	215 (4%)

Table 20: Morin-Heights population, 1871 – 2021

Chloée Alary booked the conference room at the Chalet Bellevue ski resort for the Morin-Heights screening. I was happy to see Penny and David in the audience. Old friends Peter McFarlane and his partner, Carole Boucher, came from Sainte-Anne-des-Lacs. The group at Morin-Heights knew a lot about local history.

The town was named after Augustin-Norbert Morin, a government minister and later co-prime minister of the united Upper and Lower Canada. The first settlers of the canton of Morin in the 1840s were mainly Irish. French-speaking settlers followed in the 1850s and most of them were from neighbouring areas such as Saint-Sauveur and Saint-Eustache. Four small hamlets made up the municipality in the early days. Morin Flats, after becoming the downtown core, elevated its status and changed its name to Morin-Heights in 1911.

Most of the audience members in Morin-Heights had lived in the region for many years and they shared stories about the old days. A few audience members were recent arrivals, curious about the region and Quebec. One man asked about Quebec's motto, which features in a scene early in the film. "What does « Je me souviens » actually mean?" Many people during the tour asked the same question. Étienne-Paschal Taché (1795 – 1865), one of the fathers of Confederation, wrote a poem

that began, « Je me souviens / Que né sous le lys / Je croîs sous la rose ».[23] The lily (fleur-de-lys) represents France and the rose represents Britain. The poet's son, Eugène-Étienne Taché, architect of the National Assembly building in Quebec City, had the words carved in stone above the main entrance door. « Je me souviens » officially became Quebec's motto in 1939 but only became popular when the PQ used it to replace « La Belle Province » on Quebec's licence plates in 1978. Historian Thomas Chapais proposed the best definition I have seen: "We remember the past and its lessons, the past and its misfortunes, the past and its glories."[24] In short, interpretation is rooted in the past but malleable, as Belgian filmmaker Thierry Le Brun demonstrated in his playful 2002 NFB film *A License to Remember: Je me souviens*.

After the screening, I drove to Sainte-Anne-des-Lacs for dinner with Peter and Carole. Their house in the woods has an ancient barn in the backyard, which appears oddly out of place among the dense woods. The old part of their home was originally a farmhouse, back in the days when the Curé Labelle was trying to colonize the mountains. It is hard to imagine the land cleared of trees, with potatoes struggling to grow in the shallow soil among the rocks. That failed farming experiment has been overgrown by forest and is almost entirely forgotten. Peter and Carole perpetuate local history by keeping the old barn propped up and in use.

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The final stop on the Laurentian tour was Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts, a city I had only ever driven by on my way to Mont-Tremblant. It is another legacy of Curé Labelle and the old train line. I knew that part of Mordecai Richler's novel *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959) took place in Ste-Agathe, where Duddy dabbled in developing lakeside property. The novel was based on Richler's own experience summering here in the late 1940s, as he related in *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* (Penguin Books, 1992):

> I can well imagine what the Curé Labelle would have thought, because in the immediate postwar years Ste-Agathe became a

[23] *"I remember / That born under the lily / I grow under the rose."*

[24] *From a speech delivered at the unveiling of a bronze statue in memory of the Duke of Lévis on June 24, 1895.*

> veritable Jewish paradise. A minor-league Catskills. Indigenous comics played a flourishing hotel circuit that included Greenberg's, the Castle des Monts, Levine's, the Hotel Vermont, Rabiner's, the Chalet, and many others. Children's camps proliferated on small neighbouring lakes: Camp Hiawatha, Pripstein's, Pine Valley. A Jewish baker set up in town, and there was of course a synagogue and kosher butcher. On Saturdays in July the rue Principal and the rue Tour du Lac swelled with noisy Jewish families parading in their finery tooting the horns of their newly acquired Buicks, lining up for a midnight medium-fat smoked meat on rye at the local deli. (p. 98)

	French	English	Other Languages
1871	1,448 (100%)	- (-)	- (-)
1931	2,397 (87%)	371* (13%)	5 (-)
1996	5,075 (92%)	330* (6%)	125 (2%)
2021	10,214 (93%)	594* (5%)	277 (2%)

Table 21: Ste-Agathe population, 1871 – 2021
**Census numbers do not reflect summer residents.*

I did not know that Sainte-Agathe still has the second-largest population of English-speaking summer cottage residents in the Laurentians. And I did not know Ste-Agathe still has English schools but I discovered this when the entire Grade 10 history class from the Sainte-Agathe Academy came out to see the screening. It was a lovely autumn afternoon, cool but intensely sunny. The trees were ablaze with red and orange leaves. I parked on Chemin du Tour du Lac across from Trinity Church. There were no tourists munching smoked meat on rye, just a few shoppers and dog walkers passing by.

Chloée Alary and her colleague Katie Burke were setting up the projector when I arrived. At every screening prior to Ste-Agathe, most of the audience members were old enough to have been eyewitnesses of the events shown in the film. For the fresh-faced high school students from Ste-Agathe Academy, those days were ancient history. For students born half a century after the boomer generation, I was a ghostly messenger from antiquity.

It was fascinating to ask what they knew about the past and how they experience language and politics today. Language was still a major issue for them. Some had a francophone parent, which gave them an advantage in achieving high-level French skills. Others used sporting activities to improve their French. One boy said, "One of my best friends is super French. He struggles with English and I struggle with French but we're great friends." This comment could have been made by a pioneer farm boy two centuries earlier. A girl spoke of practicing her French with the town's volleyball team. A mother told us that her daughter attended the French high school where her francophone friends want to practice English.

Ste-Agathe is where the multi-lane Laurentian Autoroute ends. I turned south and was back in Montreal less than two hours later. If I had turned north and followed the old Route 117 past Mont-Tremblant, I could have been back in Rouyn-Noranda in six hours. Quebec is a vast territory. Next stop on the North Shore tour was Baie-Comeau, a full day's drive from Montreal. My visit was in winter, so I was happy my hosts offered to fly me there.

The week before my trip to the North Shore a blizzard was blowing our way but skies were still clear the day of my flight when I took a pre-dawn taxi to the airport. I thought I knew all the terminals at Montreal's Trudeau airport — international, national and regional — but the taxi drove me to an industrial backstreet in Dorval and stopped outside a darkened office building. It was not quite 6 a.m. The street was gloomy and silent,

Connection in Quebec City.

without a sign of life. I asked the driver to wait while I walked down a dimly lit driveway to a side door. Inside, an attendant was preparing for the flight. I was the first passenger to arrive, soon to be joined by five more. The glass wall behind the check-in desk looked out on the tarmac, where a small aircraft taxied up. Six passengers soon ventured out into the brutal cold and climbed aboard. It was like flying in a minivan. Thankfully the skies were calm and clear for our flight to Quebec City, where the winter sun was rising as we landed. After thirty minutes waiting in the terminal, I joined four passengers to board another small airplane bound for Baie-Comeau.

The approach to Baie-Comeau was extraordinarily beautiful: icy-blue water, snow-rippled islands, the distant grey mountains and a small city built around winding, hilly streets. I was invited to Baie-Comeau and Sept-Îles by North Shore Community Association (NSCA) and board member Mary Ellen Beaulieu met me at the airport. Because of the unreliability of winter weather and small airplanes, NSCA had booked my flight a day early, which proved to be a wise decision. It would have been impossible to fly during the blizzard that hit that afternoon and raged for the next twenty-four hours. I had a whole day to fill, so Mary Ellen and some of her friends showed me the sights. They picked me up at the Manoir Baie-Comeau and we started our visit on Champlain Street, where an imposing statue of Colonel Robert Rutherford McCormick paddling a canoe dominates Place LaSalle, in front of the paper mill McCormick founded.

The North Shore of the St. Lawrence is not hospitable to farming but the region has long been popular for hunting and fishing excursions. Modern towns and villages were built because of forestry, mining and industries like aluminum. Baie-Comeau followed a familiar pattern. Over in Rouyn-Noranda, a prospector had been looking for gold. Here, the prospector was looking for trees. He was from Chicago. There are a lot of trees between Chicago and the Manicouagan River. Why did he choose this remote place?

McCormick was the publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. While paddling a canoe during a fishing vacation in 1915, he noticed the depth of the water where the Manicouagan River feeds into the St. Lawrence and thought the bay could be the ideal location for a wharf open year-round

to ship the vast amounts of pulp and paper needed for his hungry printing presses. In 1923, the Taschereau government gave McCormick a lease on forests located east of the Manicouagan River for an annuity of $6,000. Construction of the wharf, mill and town were delayed by the Great Depression but McCormick proudly inaugurated the new town of Baie-Comeau in 1938.

Statue of McCormick and his canoe.

McCormick was a larger-than-life character whose work in Baie-Comeau is a minor sidebar in his complex biography but his vision for the town included building a city centre, schools and churches for his workers and their families. The Protestant high school was English (Baie-Comeau High School) and the Catholic high school was French, though English-speaking Catholics received instruction there in English, enabling students, like Brian Mulroney, to make friends in the French community and acquire high-level French skills.

On the other side of Champlain Street from McCormick's statue, you can see the bust of Baie-Comeau's most famous son. Born here in 1939, Mulroney went on to become the prime minister of Canada. Although Mulroney left Baie-Comeau to pursue his education, he retained close relationships with the residents of his hometown, including Mary Ellen and Walter Bisson, who gave me the guided tour. Walter moved to Baie-Comeau from Chicago as a young child but he has the North Shore in his

blood. He and Mulroney met when they were six- and four-years-old and remained life-long friends.

I had previously visited both Baie-Comeau and Sept-Îles as a summer tourist, and though I knew they both had English-speaking communities, I had seen no trace of them. Mary Ellen took me to see the NSCA offices to meet with Jody Lessard and her team. I knew Mary Ellen and Jody from my previous work as executive director of ELAN and I was happy to see them in their home environment. NSCA is a modest operation that plays an important role in its tiny English-speaking community.

	French	English	Other Languages
1941	1,204 (79 %)	329 (21 %)	- (-)
1971	11,240 (93 %)	795 (7 %)	75 (-)
2021	20,042 (98 %)	199 (1 %)	224 (1%)

Table 22: Baie-Comeau population, 1941 – 2021

The guided tour with Mary Ellen and Walter started with rustic St. Andrew and St. George's Anglican Church, across from parc des Pionniers. Built in 1937, it was the first church in the Baie-Comeau area. Constructed in the Tudor style, it has imposing oak trim and dramatic stained-glass windows. The main window, created by Clara Fargo Thomas, depicts local North Shore forest animals rather than saints or martyrs.

Next we visited Sainte-Amélie Church (1938), where the Mulroney family attended Mass. The large sanctuary is bathed in light streaming through stained-glass windows created by Guido Nincheri, who also painted the murals that cover the walls and ceiling with vivid religious imagery. The church shut down in 2010 and the building is now used for artistic, cultural and historic activities, including guided tours for the cruise ships that come to town during the summer.

Both Mary Ellen and Walter volunteer as tour guides during the summer and they shared their stories about the city's colourful characters. Some tourists regard McCormick as just another foreign capitalist who "exploited [Quebec's] natural resources and its people as cheap labour," writes Bily Derien in "The 1949 Asbestos Strike" published

by *Communist Revolution.* When a tourist comments that McCormick was « un maudit Américain »,[25] Walter replies, "I'm happy that maudit Américain came here so we have this beautiful town." McCormick was the only VIP at the inaugural ceremony in 1938 to give part of his speech in French. The Canadian and Quebec officials spoke only in English. McCormick chose to give historical French names to some of the streets, including Champlain and Laval.

It is a popular myth that all foreign capitalists in Quebec were robber barons until driven out during the Quiet Revolution. McCormick is fondly remembered by people who knew him. When they hear criticisms, they are tempted to say, "If McCormick hadn't built a town in the middle of nowhere, who would have done it? The Catholic Church? The Society of Seigneurs? Without him, what would be here to visit now?"

The blizzard was blowing hard the next morning when I walked through the streets of Baie-Comeau trying to imagine what it was like back when the city was much smaller and had a stronger English influence. I pictured young Mulroney switching from English to French as he moved between home, school, church and community. Mulroney's father was a paper mill electrician but the family lived near the manoir among the bosses. I wondered if young Mulroney ever met the old colonel. Mary Ellen told me later that everyone in town knew the colonel, and when he came to visit, he always invited Mulroney to sing for him. The young crooner was paid $50, a fortune back in the 1940s. Did performing for the larger-than-life, trail-blazing, risk-taking conservative from Chicago prepare Mulroney for his political career and a role on the global stage?

By the time I got back to my room, two doors from the Mulroney Suite, I was more than half-frozen but eager for the evening presentation. We screened the film in the ballroom of the Grand Hotel, where NSCA provided a buffet dinner. I heard much more French before the screening than at previous presentations.

The first person to speak after the lights came up was a candidate for the upcoming mayoral election. He was seeking votes from audience members but had interesting things to say about his family's eleven

[25] *"A damned American."*

generations in Nouvelle France/Quebec and of being the second generation born in Baie-Comeau. His main pitch was that we need to get over Old World conflicts to seek unity in our connection to the land, which can unite francophones, Anglos and Indigenous citizens.

The next man who spoke said, "Are you going to show this film in the rest of Canada? I lived in Vancouver for thirty years and there is a lot of animosity toward Quebec. They don't know this history. Your film's a real eye-opener!"

A young francophone woman shared her experience of studying at John Abbott College in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue. She said that, despite the myths, the students in Montreal's West Island weren't unilingual and didn't hate Quebec. She now finds it hard to understand why some francophones continue to feel hostile toward Anglos.

An older francophone said that he lived for several years in Alberta, where he was constantly reminded that he was an outsider with an alien accent. "Your film made me realize that anglophones born in Quebec can feel like outsiders in their own province." Then he talked about how he had been indoctrinated as a child to think of himself as oppressed by the English people. He said, "We were told the English were bad and the French were good. I hope things are changing."

A teacher from the high school spoke about how the school population had shrunk from hundreds of students to an average of six students per grade. He was disturbed by "the blatant populism of Bill 96, which is not trying to solve a problem. It is just catering for votes."

Walter had shared many interesting stories the day before during the guided tour of the city, so I was eager to hear what he had to say after the film. He told a story that began in the early 1960s, when the main source of friction around town was religion. He fell in love with a Catholic girl and thought his affection was reciprocated, but after he went away to study in the Maritimes, she never replied to a single letter. When he came home at Christmas, she would not even look at him, so he eventually got on with his life. Fifty years later, widowed and visiting Baie-Comeau on fishing trip, he was introduced to a lovely woman who had recently lost her husband. She was his teenage sweetheart. He asked, "Why did you never answer my letters?" She replied, "What letters?" After

investigating, she discovered her mother had intercepted and destroyed the mail from the unacceptable Protestant suitor. She had snubbed him during his first Christmas visit because she was angry about not getting any news from him. Fifty years after being separated, they were reunited. It was a beautiful story, and a reminder that in fifty years from now, things that currently seem bitterly divided may have a happy ending.

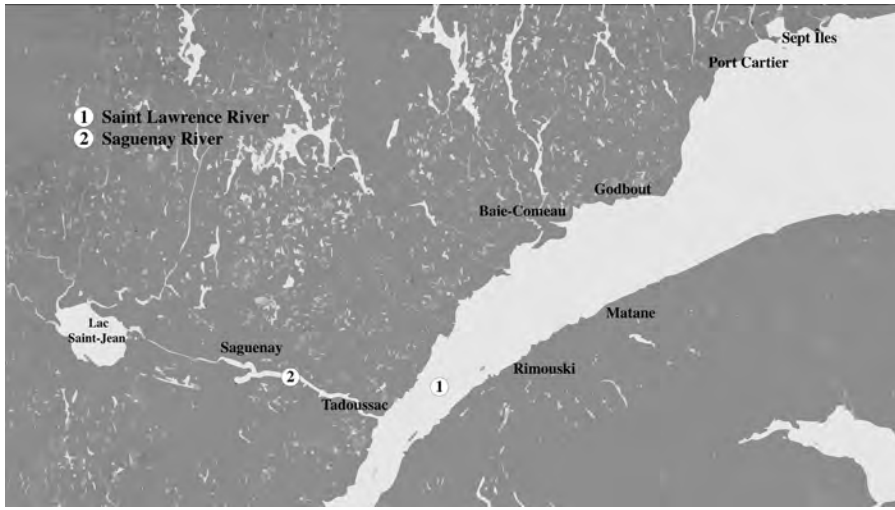
The next morning, when Mary Ellen picked me up at the Manoir Baie-Comeau for our drive to Sept-Îles, the clouds had blown over. The sun was shining in the pale-blue skies and the temperature had dropped many degrees. A few kilometres east of Baie-Comeau, she took me to see the St-Pancrace lookout, a six-hundred-metre-high viewpoint above the fjard (yes, fjard, not fjord) looking out to the St. Lawrence River, which stretches as far as the eye can see. In summer, it must be a majestic view. In winter, surrounded by towering snowbanks and howling winds, it was breathtakingly magnificent.

With Mary Ellen Beaulieu at St-Pancrace lookout.

I had previously driven along Route 138 in summer with hot, humid, pine-scented air gusting through open windows. Winter is a dramatically different experience: icy, dormant, snow-blinding. We passed Franquelin (population 285), which was a booming lumber town in the early twentieth century, and Godbout (pop. 270), where you can catch the ferry across

the St. Lawrence to Matane, then Baie-Trinité (forestry and fishing, pop. 430), followed by a couple of hamlets and then a long stretch of wilderness to Port-Cartier.

Port-Cartier was Colonel McCormick's first experiment on the North Shore. In 1915, he visited rivière des rochers to evaluate its forest potential and then established a settlement on the west side of the river's mouth. The town's original name was Shelter Bay. The post office opened in 1916, followed by a sawmill in 1918 and a debarking factory in 1920. The depletion of timber led to the closure of the factory in 1955 but iron ore shipped from Fremont revitalized the town in 1958. Port-Cartier is now a thriving town of 6,500.



Map 4: The North Shore of St. Lawrence

Mary Ellen and I had lunch in a seafood brasserie in Port-Cartier before completing the final sixty kilometres of our journey. Just outside Sept-Îles, we passed through Clarke City on the Sainte-Marguerite River. It was the first industrial town on the North Shore and it inspired McCormick. The Clarke brothers established a paper mill here in 1903 to feed their publication house in Toronto. They built a hydroelectric plant in 1908 and Clarke City became one of the first cities in Quebec with electric lighting. The Clarke brothers built a "closed" city where

everything belonged to the company: the hospital, the school, the church and the houses. The economic and social life evolved entirely around the company. After Clarke City, we passed through Uashat, the First Nation reserve that, together with the more remote Maliotenam reserve, forms the Innu community of Uashat-Maliotenam.

The population of Sept-Îles grew rapidly after the Iron Ore Company of Canada built a railroad to the northern town of Schefferville in the 1950s. Mulroney was executive vice president of the Iron Ore Company prior to entering politics. Aluminerie Alouette came to Sept-Îles in the late 80s.

	French	English	Other Languages
1941	1,269 (97%)	42 3%)	- (-)
1971	21,525 (88%)	2,190 (9%)	605 (3%)
2021	22,591 (93%)	836 (3.5%)	783 (3.5%)

Table 23: Sept-Îles population, 1871 – 2021

NSCA's offices are located in a large commercial building on Boulevard Laure, the main road that runs through Sept-Îles. Jody and her team had prepared a buffet for the evening screening and a lively crowd gathered. I was happy to meet NSCA staff and board members, as well as other people from the community. More than half of them were seniors with their own memories of the events depicted.

The first man who spoke after the film said that he had studied French in high school and at university but did not learn to speak it. "I was one of those Anglo engineers who walked into a meeting and ten francophones had to speak English for my benefit. But things changed after the PQ and Bill 101. I learned to speak French and then the switch didn't happen anymore."

The second man to take the mic was a francophone who began speaking in English with obvious effort, so everyone in the room encouraged him to switch to French. He reminded us how different Quebec had been in the 1950s when francophones were controlled by the Church. « On nous a appris à prier. Dans le Canada, ils ont appris à compter! »[26]

[26] *"We were taught to pray. In Canada, they learned to count!"*

An older woman told us she was born on the remote Lower North Shore and did not speak a word of French when she arrived in Sept-Îles, but she married a francophone and they raised their children in French. She found the renewed language conflict disturbing and had recently been reproached for speaking English to one of her children in a public space. "Nobody's going to tell me I can't speak English to my kids!"

We heard many memories about schools, language, mixed marriages and concerns about proposed restrictions on access to health care in English. A young woman, born after the second referendum in 1995, told us she works in health care and makes a point of speaking to Anglos in English. "I will offer service in English, even if it is forbidden." Her comments earned a heart-felt round of applause. An older woman said, "Thank you. When you're sick, you want to make sure you understand exactly what you have and what you need to do about it."

A man reminded the group that when the Canadian government adopted its multiculturalism policy in the 1970s, Quebec adopted an alternative policy called interculturalism.[27] The difference, he explained, is that multiculturalism allegedly encourages immigrants to retain separate cultures while interculturalism is supposed to encourage immigrants to become part of a shared culture. The man was concerned that Bill 96's emphasis on defending the French language and culture is reducing the public space for other cultures and languages, particularly English. "Legault recently stated, 'There is only one culture in Quebec,' and whose culture do you suppose that is?"

An American immigrant who had lived in Sept-Îles for thirty-three years told us she studied French in high school and at university but never learned to speak it properly. She had visited many French-speaking parts of the world and her imperfect language skills had always been a barrier. "The only two places in the world where people made me feel accepted, despite my imperfect French, were la Louisiane et la Côte Nord!" She has found her true home in Sept-Îles but remembered stories about religious conflict in Boston in her grandparents' generation. "Sometimes it feels like history is repeating itself," she said, "as if we never learn…"

[27] *The word interculturalism didn't appear in public policies until the 2000s.*

My biggest regret while planning the film tour was not being able to visit the Lower North Shore, which begins at the Natashquan River and follows the Gulf of Saint Lawrence to the Labrador border at Blanc-Sablon. I had visited parts of it a decade earlier while researching a project. The road ended at Natashquan[28] and travel beyond that point was only possible by boat or aircraft. Louise and I sailed as far as Harrington Harbour, the picturesque locale with prettily painted houses and wooden boardwalks featured in the film *La Grande Seduction* (*Seducing Doctor Lewis*). The villagers in the film are francophone. In real life, the inhabitants of Harrington Harbour are English speakers with roots in Newfoundland, as witnessed by their accents.[29] The Lower North Shore is a fascinating mixture of languages and cultures. I explored the idea of an online presentation with the Coasters Association but bandwidth was insufficient to stream the film and conduct a multi-community conversation. Several of the people who participated in the conversations in Baie-Comeau and Sept-Îles were born on the Lower North Shore and some had Innu ancestors.

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Legault and his CAQ government have presented many studies to "prove" that Quebec's French language and culture were under attack but the data did not reflect the lived experiences of non-francophones. When I returned to Montreal, I had much to chew on. I was reading two books that analyzed the status of the French language in different ways. One of them suggested that the government of Quebec had selectively chosen data to make the problem appear worse than it is. The other book claimed that the situation is so bad that the battle was already lost.

Le Français en déclin ? Repenser la francophonie québécois[30] (Del Busso éditeur, 2023) is an anthology by a diverse group of authors, edited by Jean-Pierre Corbeil, Richard Marcoux and Victor Piché. The various contributors acknowledge that a small French-speaking community in North America will always feel vulnerable. However, the number

[28] *Since 2013, Route 138 ends at Kegaska.*

[29] *Twenty percent of Newfoundlanders claim Irish ancestry.*

[30] *French in Decline? Rethinking the Québécois Francophonie.*

of people speaking French has never been greater. The entire population of Nouvelle France was 90,000. Today, the population of Quebec is almost 9,000,000. The percentage of French speakers is also higher than it was in the 1960s, prior to Bill 101. Recent declines in French involve unilingual francophones. The alarming figures that Legault was circulating do not take into account significant increases in bilingualism among non-francophones, as well as increased numbers of bilingual francophones.

The other book shed a different light on Quebec's language fears. *Le naufrage du français, le triomphe de l'anglais*[31] (Presses de l'université Laval, 2024) by Lionel Meney provided some global perspective on the relative vitality of French and English. Which language is doing better or worse? Compared to what? And when? Meney is a French linguist, trained at la Sorbonne, who came to Quebec decades earlier to teach at Laval University. After a lifetime of studying languages in a global context, Meney concluded in the title of his book that the battle between French and English is over. *French has been shipwrecked and English has triumphed.* His assessment is bleak but he supports it with 250 exhaustively documented pages of examples and statistics.

Meney's data demonstrates that international use of French is declining relative to English. Meney's most vivid example is the working language(s) of the European Union (EU). The first six countries to form the EU were France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, which has three official languages (French, German, Dutch), and Luxembourg, which also has three official languages (French, German, Luxembourgish). The EU originally operated with four languages (French, German, Italian and Dutch). Things changed in 1973 when Great Britain joined the EU.

As the EU increased from six members to twenty-eight, the cost in time and money of translation rose exponentially. English became the convenient lingua franca until more than 70 percent of EU documents were written in English. No single fact demonstrates the irresistible power of the English language more clearly than the predominant role it continued to play in EU communications eight years after Brexit. England

[31] *The Shipwreck of French, the Triumph of English.*

left the EU but the EU continued to communicate in English, which has become the post-national working language of the global community.

Other international institutions are subject to the same reality. The United Nations (UN) has 193 member nations that speak hundreds of different languages but the UN recognizes only six official languages: English, French, Russian, Spanish, Arabic and Chinese. The languages are not equally utilized. English dominates more than 75 percent of UN communications.

Meney also documented the triumph of English in academic publications, second-language instruction, international commerce and the internet. To have a comfortable mastery of English is a distinct advantage while to be unilingual in any other language, including French, is a handicap. "Not long ago," he writes, "you could have a successful [international] career as a unilingual francophone. That is no longer possible… Failure to master this language [English] has become an insurmountable obstacle" (p. 242).

Meney's conclusion was pragmatic. "If the expansion of the domain of English seems inevitable, to save what can still be saved we must organize the cohabitation of the two languages on our territory" (p. 256). The future that Meney proposed is pragmatic bilingualism. Since the 1970s, every government in Quebec has disagreed, and none with more determination than the CAQ.

CHAPTER 4:

Montreal, First Visit

Anyone with a cursory knowledge of Montreal's history knows that Jacques Cartier visited the island in 1535 and discovered the Iroquois village of Hochelaga. A century later, the first French settlers arrived at what is now Old Montreal. The statue of Governor Paul de Chomedey, Sieur De Maisonneuve, stands opposite Notre-Dame Basilica, and Jeanne Mance is remembered in the structure of Montreal's first hospital — Hôtel-Dieu — that she founded in 1645. Now I am going to present three lesser-known moments in Montreal's history to show why post-Conquest immigrants understand Quebec differently than francophones, who trace their roots to pre-Conquest Nouvelle France.

After the battle of Quebec City in 1759, General James Murray marched south with an army of 3,500 soldiers. Another 3,000 soldiers sailed up the Richelieu River from Vermont and 10,000 came up the St. Lawrence from the New York shores of Lake Ontario. Montreal was a village with a population of 4,000 surrounded by 17,000 soldiers. No shots were fired. The outpost town capitulated.

Every visitor to Quebec City is impressed by the old-world charm of its architecture. What remains from the Nouvelle France era in Montreal? A few religious buildings (Hôtel-Dieu, 1645; Saint-Sulpice Seminary,1683; Hôpital général des frères Charon,1694), the governor's residence (Château Ramezay, 1756) and a few private buildings. Everything else in

Old Montreal was built in the post-capitulation period, including Notre-Dame Basilica (designed by James O'Donnell and built between 1824 and 1829). Immigrants who arrived after 1760 see Montreal as a city co-created by people of different cultures and languages.

Let us fast forward to 1833. Jacques Viger is the first mayor of Montreal, which is now a booming city with a population of 40,000: half have roots in France and the other half have roots in the British Isles. Viger commissions a coat of arms to represent the four major communities who inhabit his city. Quick quiz: Name the four communities and their emblems. The English were represented by a rose, the Irish by a shamrock and the Scottish by a thistle. French-speaking citizens were represented by the economic motor of the young colony: the beaver. A century later, Montreal's French-speaking community replaced the beaver with the fleur-de-lys, representing the Kingdom of France, which also featured on the new provincial flag adopted by Maurice Duplessis in 1948. The white pine in the centre, representing Quebec's Indigenous people, was added in 2017.

	French	English	Other Languages
1840	40,000 (ville) 43 %	53 %	4 %
1900	275,000 (ville) 60 %	34 %	6 %
1980	1,000,000 (ville) 1,600,000 (île) 68 %	13 %	19 %

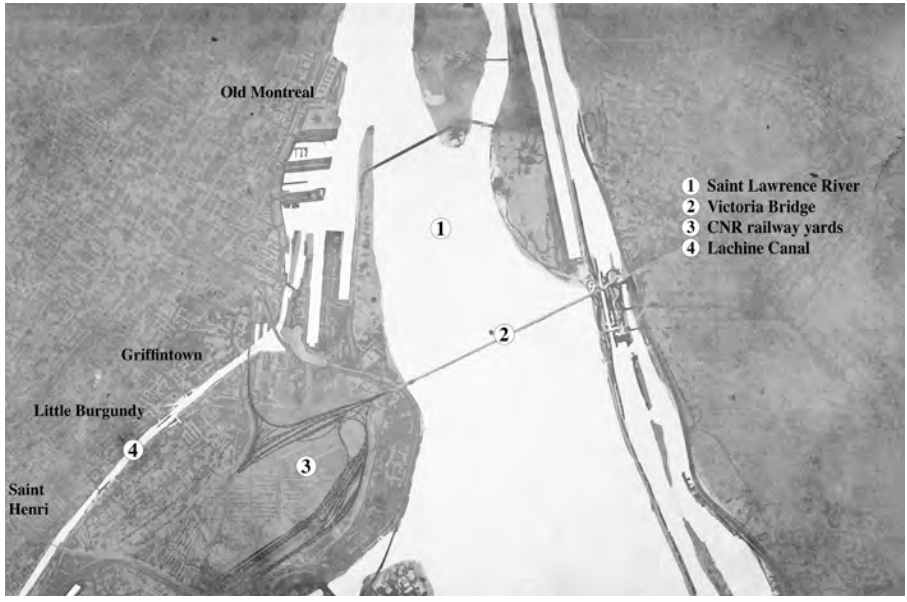
Table 24: Montreal population by language, 1840 – 1980

British influence and the English language dominated Montreal in the mid-nineteenth century. The English-speaking percentage of the population has steadily decreased for over 150 years. This is why English speakers see their community in decline, which accelerated after the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s. They see Quebec's language and culture steadily growing stronger. This perspective is difficult to reconcile with the fervent belief of French language defenders that extinction is imminent if drastic measures are not immediately implemented.

Now, consider Montreal in 1897. The city's population had exploded to 275,000 citizens and Montreal had become a centre of extreme wealth

— represented by the Golden Square Mile — and extreme poverty in the slums around the harbour and the Lachine Canal.

Herbert Brown Ames was born among Montreal's well-to-do. His family owned the successful Ames-Holden Limited shoe and boot factory. They lived in the comfortable city at the foot of the mountain that looked down onto the Lachine Canal, its smoky factories, church spires and crowded tenements. An early advocate of social reform, Ames urged wealthy entrepreneurs to provide their workers with decent living and working conditions.



Map 5: Victorian-era Industrial Montreal

In 1897, Ames published a book entitled *The City Below the Hill* (the Bishop Engraving and Printing Company) that presented a study of living conditions, employment and poverty in area that stretched from McGill Street (near modern Victoria Square) in Old Montreal westward through an industrial area that is now the Cité Multimedia, the Bonaventure Expressway and the Canadian National Railway tracks, then through Griffintown and across to Canning Street, which is near Georges-Vanier metro in the area known as Little Burgundy. It also included streets in

Pointe-Saint-Charles near the canal. Many factories and enterprises around the Lachine Canal provided employment for workers.

Ames chose this district because of its ethnic and religious diversity. His team surveyed 3218 French Canadian families, 2614 Irish Canadian families and 1596 British Canadian families, as well as 94 German and Dutch families, 70 Russian and Polish families (mostly Jewish), 24 Black families, 18 Chinese families, 17 Italian families, 17 Scandinavian and Danish families, one Spanish family and one Belgian family" (p. 88 and 89). Ames counted 37,652 people crowded into a square mile, which was anything but golden. Half of the dwellings still had outdoor toilets, where human waste was left untreated and spread disease. Most of the impoverished residents were English speakers: some were Irish Catholics and others were British Protestants.

A common source of grievance for English speakers in Quebec is the myth that all Anglos are descendants of the wealthy elite. The tenacity of this myth was made clear when I was hired to write a multimedia history of Montreal for the Pointe-à-Callière museum in 1999. A decade earlier, my friend Robert Awad had been hired to create the museum's inaugural history show. Robert had been developing an irreverent, Monty Pythonesque style since the 70s and his history of Montreal was highly entertaining. However, it was criticized as being too "francocentric," so when the museum commissioned a new history production a decade later, I was hired to script a diversity of stories and voices. One scene portrayed immigrants sending postcards to their relatives back home and the accompanying voices spoke in Yiddish, Greek, Italian and Spanish. The museum staff and the team of historians and content advisors were pleased with the result. However, they were not happy with my idea of portraying an Irish labourer.

For a scene set in the 1830s, I wanted to present the city's new coat of arms with the four emblems accompanied by a cameo appearance from four characters: John Molson the industrialist to represent England; entrepreneur John Young to represent Scotland; Mayor Viger's wife to represent the French-speaking community; and a poor labourer to represent Ireland. All the content experts around the table vetoed the character. They insisted I replace him with a bourgeois boarding-house proprietress

speaking to a group of invisible Irish labourers but her Victorian elegance and jovial manner obscured the grimness of the men's toil.

The dozen subject matter experts who vetoed the working-class character offered no explanation for their unanimous decision. They knew Irish labourers dug Montreal's first sewers, that many laboured on the Victoria Bridge and that some died in the work. In the absence of an explanation, I can only speculate about why the same people who hired me to portray Montreal's diversity were unanimous in refusing to show this particular form of diversity: The Irish labourer spoke English, which is the language of the conqueror. Therefore, he could not be portrayed as poor. We still hear frequent references to the powerful families of the glittering Golden Square Mile but the thousands of labourers in the slums below are almost always represented as a mass of oppressed francophones.

Montreal is more diverse now than it has ever been. Large waves of immigration in the twenty-first century have brought new languages, cultures and complexity. If you count only the people living on the island of Montreal, and classify them by mother tongue, the percentage of francophones falls below 50 percent, a situation the city has not seen since Viger was mayor two hundred years ago. This is the statistic most frequently cited by Legault and the CAQ to justify urgent new language laws.

	French Mother tongue	English Mother tongue	Other Languages
Montreal Island	47 %	17 %	36 %
Greater Montreal	63 %	11 %	24 %

Table 25: Montreal population by language, 2021

However, if you define Montreal to include bridge-connected, off-island suburbs and still segregate population by mother tongue, then the percentage of francophones rises to 63 percent. If you count all the immigrants who have been educated in French because of Bill 101, all the Anglos who have studied French and everyone else who can speak French, then the percentage of French speakers (the original meaning of the term *francophone*) rises to 90 percent.

Both the number and percentage of French speakers in Montreal have never been higher, but the CAQ legislated Bill 96 as an urgent response to a linguistic crisis. Many of the young people who worked on my film were foreign born but educated in French, which is their primary language of communication. Non-francophones are mystified — or infuriated — by the government's use of mother-tongue statistics to declare a state of linguistic emergency.

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Cast and crew at NFB screening in Alanis Obomsawin Theatre

The first Montreal screening of *What We Choose to Remember* was booked at the brand new NFB premises on Bleury Street, in the wonderfully well-equipped cinema named in honour of eminent Abenaki filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin. We decided to make it a private screening for the cast and crew of the film who had not been able to attend the Hudson premiere or any of the regional screenings during the covid pandemic. The film was produced by ELAN, so we also invited ELAN members. Because almost everyone who attended the NFB screening was a friend or colleague, many of them subsequently wrote to me to share their thoughts.

> Your film was a surprisingly emotional watch for me. I have all those markers — two-time immigrant, forty years in Quebec, trilingual, mostly Euro roots (German, Ukrainian and, according to 23&me, more, but all European). Two kids, both comfortably bilingual — one who works in English and has more of a European bent to his French, the other sounds completely Quebecois. Their roots add

Algerian and I'm not sure what else to the mix. Two grandkids, both bilingual. I have moved around a lot in my life and have never felt that I belonged anywhere — déracinée is probably the word that best describes it, a word that doesn't translate well into English. Hearing the stories in the film made me feel part of the Québec immigrant experience and gave me a perspective on what I have lived through here that I hadn't quite nailed down before.

What an articulate group of individuals that so well represented the breadth of anglophone society in Quebec. As a Jewish child of immigrants who spent his first twelve years living in a French neighbourhood in Trois-Rivières going to a Protestant school, there was an awful lot of resonance for me. My hope is that the doc will find a place on mainstream francophone media.

I love everything about this documentary. It is rich in history, balanced, intelligent and real. It mirrors the experience of so many Quebecers. Congratulations on casting such an articulate group and framing the issues so well.

I just wanted to thank you very much for inviting me and our new summer employee to the screening. The documentary gave her excellent context and background to her own experience of wanting to integrate into Montreal and Quebec society, as so many waves of immigrants have done before. She absolutely loved the film! You were right to limit the focus to varied waves of immigrants, as it gave a coherence and clarity to the doc that would not have been there had every and all issue of Anglos in QC been covered.

One thing that is sadly always apparent is the lack of historical knowledge, even about obvious things like Montreal's flag, among far too many people of all ages. Relying on what's offered in schools hardly contributes to this, especially now with the nationalist-tinged "history" being served to secondary students by the government curriculum that so hampers teachers.

The street interviews and the flag in the opening frames are very

> powerful, as are the graphics on demographic change in the province and your interviewees' stories about immigration. Thank you for this important film about identifying as an English speaker in Quebec today. It was a pleasure to watch and to listen to so many thoughtful and ultimately hopeful voices weighing in with their own experiences and stories. Heck, I like the film so much that I won't take offence at the comment — made in the rural-Anglo segment — that my country cousins are probably inbreds!

At this point in the tour, I had shown the film to more than a thousand people. It was a large enough sample size to confirm that the film resonated with people who self-identified as (post-Conquest) immigrants to Quebec. The structural device of "waves of immigration" gave viewers a direct connection to the people interviewed in the film. However, feedback had been limited in two ways. The screenings had all been private in the sense that the audience consisted of members and friends invited by the presenting organization. The invited audiences had a natural tendency to share a set of views and values. The written commentary I received was positive but it also came from friends. Would strangers be more critical?

The other limitation was the lack of francophone audiences and particularly the kind of nationalists who voted for the CAQ government and supported their policies to restrict the use of English. The film was available on YouTube in its original version and had recently become available in a subtitled French version, and I received some funding to hire a publicist to outreach to francophone journalists and opinion leaders. We invited them to watch the film on YouTube or attend one of the public screenings. There was no response to the first press release or the second. Nothing. Silence. This was puzzling but I have always avoided projecting meaning onto silence. I waited for more information.

In the meantime, I started to receive some feedback from nationalist francophones who watched the film online:

> As a strong Québécois sovereigntist, I have reservations about things said by some of the guests and by the host, but it was a way more accurate depiction of our history then I was first thinking

> it would be. I really hope we can find a way to bridge the gaps between our communities and break les Deux Solitudes. J'espère faire notre pays avec tout le monde qui l'habite, j'espère que nous pourrons faire une société meilleure ensemble tout en préservant notre culture et en lui permettant d'évoluer normalement.[32] I recognize it is not necessarily how everyone thinks about anglophones in Québec but I dream of a day we'll build a country together as friends and stop being foes.
>
> I was most touched by *What We Choose to Remember*. As a Quebecois "pure laine," daughter of a strong independentist, it is painful yet necessary to be made aware of my cultural bias. Your work illustrates quite powerfully the way history can be curated in order to fuel nationalist vigor. Your courageous perspective reminded me of Tzvetan Todorov *Les Abus de la memoire*. I especially appreciated the highlight on the Golden Square anglophone Mythology. It had never occurred to me to question the economic supremacy of the anglophone Montrealer. The worst thing is that I am guilty of having spread this stereotype myself. Your documentary has made me aware of my duty to contribute to the best of my abilities to building a society that is fair.

After months of technical complications, we finally had a subtitled copy of the film, so the next screening would be open to all: English, French, old-timers and new immigrants. I needed a producing partner and spoke to several community groups that were happy to help promote an event but did not have the capacity to act as lead partner. Finally, I spoke to Nicholas Salter and Chad Walcott at the Provincial Employment Round Table (PERT) and they agreed to sponsor a Montreal screening. PERT's mandate is to "address the employment and employability challenges facing Quebec's English-speaking community." Many of the people in the film spoke about challenges finding work because of a lack of Canadian experience or because foreign credentials are not recognized. Nick and

[32] *"I hope to build our country with all those who live here. I hope that we can build a better society together while preserving our culture and allowing it to evolve normally."*

Chad thought the film would stimulate a meaningful conversation about employment and employability. We booked the JA DeSève Cinema at Concordia University and then began to promote the public screening.

Word of mouth after the NFB screening was strong. Many community partners such as Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) and YES Montreal helped promote the screening, along with ELAN and Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN). Montreal radio and television helped spread the word and soon we had a full house booked.

Because Bill 96 was creating so much tension, we were concerned that the post-screening conversation could be dominated by people who wanted to vent their anger and derail a thoughtful discussion about the past, present and anticipated future. As the theatre filled, I was warned that a few well-known Angryphones were in the audience. I knew that there were also some community activists present who had been mobilized by Bill 96. Some were members of the Task Force on Linguistic Policy, a volunteer-run group formed in June 2021 to fight Bill 96. The task force's mission was to "restore language equality and protect linguistic rights." Other people in the audience were laying plans to create new political parties for the next provincial election because the existing parties did not represent their interests. During the screening, the crowd was particularly responsive, laughing at the humorous moments and nodding their heads vigorously at opinions they shared. When the lights came up at the end, I was more apprehensive than I had been at the Hudson premiere.

When the most radical Anglo activist in the room took the mic, she spoke of her family history, her love for Quebec and her frustration with current politics. It was a perfectly reasonable observation. Everyone who spoke at the Concordia screening felt part of Quebec, though Bill 96 was making them think the relationship was not reciprocated. Their comments followed familiar themes about immigration, education and complex roots. The anticipated fireworks did not erupt but the group expressed serious concerns about current language politics.

The group also wanted to know what kind of reaction my film was getting from francophones. I could separate the response from French speakers into three categories. The first group consisted of bilingual francophones who have Anglo friends and romantic partners and see the

value of Quebec being part of Canada. They already knew the immigrant story and were sympathetic to the film. Then there were French-speaking immigrants from elsewhere in Canada, as well as from Haiti, the Maghreb, Africa and Europe. They identified with the immigrant story because they had encountered problems with the frequently repeated nationalist affirmation that Quebec's problems will only be solved when everyone can speak French. Francophone immigrants know that mastering the French language does not solve problems with employment, housing and making a home in a new land.

JA DeSève Cinema, Concordia University.

The third francophone group consisted of nationalists. On the positive side, nationalists defend their nation's culture, history and interests but that is not a complete definition of nationalism, which also has a negative side. After nationalists define the culture, history and interests they defend — which is to say, once they define their *us* — everyone not included comes to embody "foreign" culture, history and interests that are deemed threatening. This is often referred to as ethno-nationalism. Every definition of *nationalism* is imperfect but my definition for Quebec nationalism is: 1) identifiying with pre-Conquest Nouvelle France; 2) prioritizing French as the language for public and private use; and 3) not identifying as Canadian. The corollary of these three propositions is that anyone who does not identify with pre-Conquest Nouvelle France and/or does not prioritize French as the language for public and private use and/

or also feels Canadian is regarded as a threat. Other languages, cultures and religions are acceptable in private spaces and out of the public eye, though the current government has added speaking other languages at home as a flashing red indicator of the decline of French. I encountered a handful of nationalists during the tour. They understood I was trying to examine past errors and their consequences, without assigning blame, and they were willing to admit that previous generations of nationalists had made unfortunate mistakes. But they were not interested in engaging in a public conversation.

The post-screening conversation at Concordia was not limited to issues of employability but host partner PERT was happy with the screening. Many people who attended the screening wrote to me in the following days to share their thoughts. Several urged me to continue pursuing dialogue with the francophone community:

> I really enjoyed the film, especially the historical sectioning of it, which adds another dimension to the debate that isn't often shown. I found the statistics toward the end on how much less allophone bilinguals are paid compared to French unilinguals to be truly shocking, and worthy of more debate.
>
> I want to let you know how close to home your movie hit a nerve with me. I am the grandson of a Dutch prisoner of war who came to Canada as part of the 2nd wave. I myself am a Bill 101 baby and grew into my political activism roles following the failed Charlottetown Accord. I left the country in 2000 to pursue my career in the USA but have since returned home. I am one of the fortunate few English speakers who is working in Quebec's civil service.[33]
>
> I'm the grandson of Scottish, English and Welsh immigrants who endured great hardships after settling in Pointe-Saint-Charles in the early 1900s. My grandfather was killed in a train accident when my dad was only eight years old and he had to leave school to

[33] *Only 1 percent of civil servants in Quebec are mother-tongue English speakers, though 7 – 10 percent of the workforce (depending on the definition used) identifies as mother-tongue English speakers. This lack of representation has long been a point of contention.*

join the workforce in order to support his mother and two siblings. That was the end of his education, and for almost six decades my family were residents of the Pointe, along with many first- and second-generation immigrants from Ukraine, Poland and Italy. All of this to say that many of the background stories of the men and women in your film stirred up a soup pot full of memories.

Your film captures the essence of the diverse English-speaking community as an intrinsic part of Quebec — in spite of what some try to tell us. A question: Has the Commissioner of Official Languages seen your film — as well as other political and bureaucratic decision makers in Ottawa who have significant impact on the well-being of our community? If not, it's something to think about.

Congratulations on the film and the Concordia screening. This begs for a breakout on French platforms. *Tout le monde en parle*???[34] That would be game changing! One should dream big, right?

I predict that your screenings with Quebecois audiences will be most interesting. In my conversations with Quebecois business people and politicians about how the linguistic situation in the province has affected and is affecting minorities and, as a consequence, its economy and reputation, their most common reaction is denial and defensiveness often to the point of questioning my honesty and objectivity.

Je l'avais vu ton film sur mon ordi. Il vit très bien en salle. C'était chouette d'avoir le feedback de la salle en temps réel. Longue vie à cette démarche et en espérant qu'elle conscientisera le gouvernement provincial et les Francos récalcitrants![35]

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[34] *A popular weekly talk show.*

[35] *"I previously saw your film on my computer. It plays very well in a theater. It was great to hear feedback from the room in real time. Long live this approach, and I hope that it will raise awareness among the provincial government and recalcitrant Francos!"*

While waiting to get a reaction from francophone media and opinion leaders, I sought screenings in English-speaking communities close to the downtown core. Little Burgundy is a historic Montreal neighbourhood north of the Lachine Canal, between Griffintown and Saint-Henri. Little Burgundy became home to a large English-speaking Black community when Montreal's emergence as a railway hub in the 1880s led to the migration of hundreds of Black workers from the USA, the Caribbean and the Maritimes. Sainte-Cunégonde, as the parish was then known, became home to a great many railway workers due to its location near Montreal's train stations.

	French	English	Other Languages
Number	3,700	3,465	2,665
Percentage	37 %	35 %	27 %

Table 26: Little Burgundy population, 2016 (total 9,860)

During the years of Prohibition in the USA (1919 – 1933), Little Burgundy's nightclubs were popular with American tourists. Internationally acclaimed jazz pianist Oscar Peterson (1925 – 2007) was born in Little Burgundy and began his career performing at local clubs: Rockhead's Paradise, Café St-Michel and the Alberta Lounge.

The Little Burgundy screening was organized by the Saint-Antoine 50+ Community Centre, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing a wide range of programs and services for older adults in the community. To combat isolation among its members during the pandemic, the centre adapted by offering online activities. During this time, Gerontology Consultant Judy Jarvis invited me to give a virtual presentation and later scheduled a live screening once it was safe for the group to gather in person.

The first man who spoke, in a plummy British accent, surprisingly declared himself to be francophone. He was educated at Collège Brébeuf and Université de Montréal before travelling to work at Oxford where he met and married his British wife. They eventually returned to Quebec. His wife never mastered French but their children are bilingual. Curious about this man's British accent, I discovered that during his education in

With Judy Jarvis at Saint-Antoine 50+ Community Centre

Quebec, he had learned to read English but had little occasion to speak it. When he moved to England and began speaking English, he acquired his British accent.

The second speaker was also francophone and had lived for decades in Western Canada. When he returned to Quebec, he had acquired a slight accent and Quebec francophones frequently asked, « Tu viens d'où, toi? »[36] The man from Oxford had the same experience and he added a scholarly perspective on accents, pointing out that the French spoken in Montreal when he was a child (1950s) was dramatically different in its accent and vocabulary from the language spoken today. "The working-class language of my youth was 'joual' filled with English words. Young people today are better educated and speak much better French than their grandparents." The man who had lived in Western Canada felt that the current language "crisis" was driven by politics and the impact of the intervention was the opposite of what was intended. Instead of making non-francophones want to embrace Quebec's French language and culture, it was making them feel rejected and causing them to wonder if they had a future in Quebec.

Audience members from Montreal's English-speaking Black communities spoke of the double barrier of language and race. A woman from

[36] *"Where are you from?"*

the Caribbean said, "This film was a true account of the experience many of us have had. Politics and false information have distorted what I am as an anglophone. What I have lost by not speaking the language of Quebec is enormous and I truly regret that. I am a foreigner who has lived here all my life. It frightens me." A man said, "It is surprising for me how many nationalities had the same problems as Blacks. This is an eye-opener."

A francophone woman who traced her roots back to the 1600s said, "It never crossed my mind that Anglos should leave Quebec." She was upset by the current language politics because she believed that Quebec is big enough to accommodate many languages, skin colours and accents. "I don't identify with language or race. I am a Montrealer!" The group applauded her sentiments.

Other members of the group shared their family stories. One was happy that the film mentioned the Hungarian wave of immigration in 1956 after the USSR crushed the student rebellion. "For many decades, Montreal had Hungarian restaurants and grocery stores but most of those immigrants eventually left. Now they're all over North America."

Another man spoke of being educated in Jewish schools and speaking Yiddish as a child while living within a cultural bubble. "I've worked in English and French and now I feel at home in every part of Montreal." He was not certain if he would feel at home in the rural regions of Quebec.

The group in Little Burgundy felt that the CAQ government has created hostilities and fear for purely political purposes and they felt relieved that support for the party had begun to plummet in the polls after confrontational contract negotiations with health care workers and educators. The current beneficiary of discontent was the PQ. Many of the people in Little Burgundy looked favourably upon the PQ's return to power. Many remembered Lévesque as a good premier. One man believed the current PQ leader, Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, would be less hostile to others because "he is fluently bilingual and educated at McGill and Oxford. He should have a less parochial view of the world and a greater respect for other languages and cultures."

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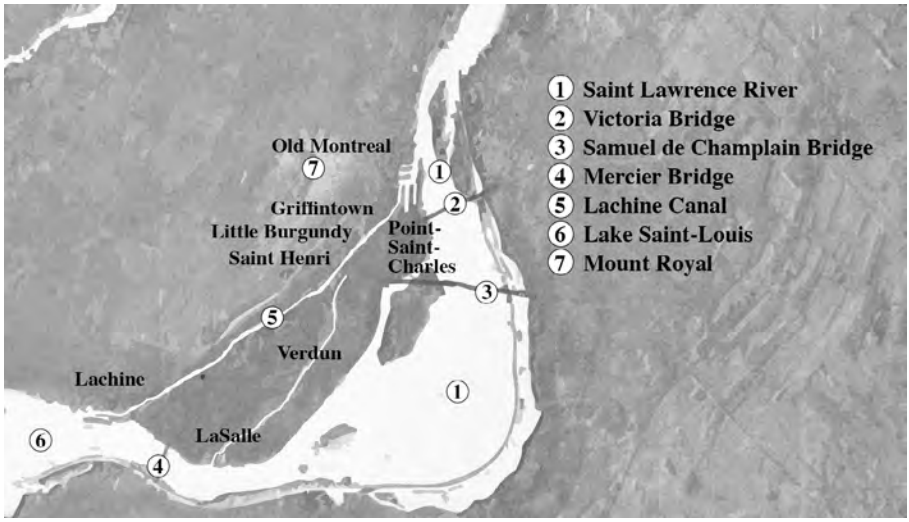

Map 6: Southwest Montreal

The next screening was in LaSalle, which was part of a seigneurie in the early days of Nouvelle France. A railroad bridge was built across the St. Lawrence to Kahnawake and Chateauguay in 1887. Modern history began in 1912 with the creation of the Ville LaSalle (population 500). Industries began to arrive in 1920, attracting workers and their families. The Honoré Mercier Bridge followed in 1932. By 1956, the population had grown to 19,000. Today, the population of LaSalle is 82,235: 62 percent of the borough's citizens are not mother-tongue francophones and 37 percent are visible minorities.

I was invited to LaSalle by the Council for the Black Aging Community of Montreal (CBAC). I travelled by metro to the western end of the green line at Angrignon Park and then walked along Newman Boulevard, a multi-lane highway lined with box stores and sprawling parking lots. Although close to downtown Montreal, this part of LaSalle feels like a suburban land of automobiles, reminiscent of Longueuil and Laval. CBAC's offices were located inside a strangely silent strip mall.

With exception of two staff members, the average age among audience members was about seventy. Most were born in Quebec or had arrived in their youth and most were women. The film reminded them how different Quebec was when they were young. They remembered the FLQ years.

"We had bomb threats at the hospital. The auxiliary staff were sent out into the parking lot where it was safe but nurses had to help search for the bombs! It was terrifying!" Another woman said, "That film reminded me how much we went through, but we survived!"

	French	English	Other Languages
Mother tongue	38 %	27 %	35 %
Language spoken at home	42 %	36 %	22 %

Table 27: LaSalle population, 2021 (total 82,235)

They also remembered working in hospitals and offices where everyone spoke English. "That started to change in the 70s when I was hiring people from Gaspé and Blanc-Sablon who couldn't speak English. By the time I retired, everything was in French." Another woman said, "Yes, French speakers used to have to learn English. I struggled to learn French. I moved to Ontario once but only stayed for a week. I prefer it here. I'm staying!"

Audience members had a variety of experiences learning French. Some had become fully bilingual, others functional, while some never got beyond the basics. "I found it hard to learn French, and every time I tried to speak it, they would switch to English." Another woman shared an emotional story about a conflict with a neighbour that went to small claims court. The trial was conducted entirely in French, leaving her defenceless and bewildered. "I made sure my kids learned French so that would never happen to them!"

At CBAC LaSalle with Mama Soumahoro and Hannah Kizito.

No one in the group disagreed it had been unfair that francophones had been forced to work in English back in the pre–Bill 101 years. That injustice needed to change but they felt the new language laws were punishing the wrong people. They shared recent stories about trying to get service in English, dialing 9 and then waiting a long time, only to have a clerk answer in French. "Did I use the wrong prompt?" Or they dialed 9 for English and waited and waited until the line went dead. They found it increasingly difficult to be served in English even though most qualified as historic Anglos and should receive services in English. "I've worked here all my life but I still struggle with French. Are we not going to get services or information anymore?" Another woman said, "We paid taxes and we need services. Do they want us to head down the 401?"[37]

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The third stop on this inner-city leg of the tour was Lachine. The borough has been historically important to Montreal because of the Lachine Rapids, which made the St. Lawrence River unnavigable for large European ships. René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, built a trading post on the west side of the rapids in 1667 to obtain access to the upper reaches of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes.

	French	English	Other Languages
Mother tongue	56 %	24 %	20 %
Language spoken at home	60 %	29 %	11 %

Table 28: Lachine population, 2021 (total 44,000)

In 1821, a consortium led by John Redpath began digging a canal across the fourteen kilometres from Montreal's Old Port to La Salle's trading post to bypass the rapids. The Lachine Canal gave Montreal access to trade with Canadian provinces and American states around the Great Lakes. Their rapidly growing industries made Montreal one of the busiest — and wealthiest — ports in the world. The Lachine Canal remained active until the much larger Saint-Lawrence Seaway superseded it in the 1950s.

[37] *The highway to Ontario.*

Lachine's community centre and marina on Lake Saint-Louis.

The waterfront park and marina at the western mouth of the Lachine Canal are built around LaSalle's historic trading post, now a museum. Although Lachine is further west than LaSalle and Little Burgundy, its population has always been predominantly French.

The Lachine screening was hosted by the Community Centre's 50+ club that met regularly for tea and conversation, arts and crafts. The centre was not equipped for a film screening but they played it on a computer monitor, which was fine for a small group. All the audience members were foreign born except for one francophone-de-souche woman. The post-screening conversation took place mostly in English.

I'm going to focus the following conversation on three principal voices that participated in the dialogue between a woman who had arrived in Quebec from Egypt in 1964 as a young bride, another who arrived in Quebec from Barbados in 1970 to work and a younger (late fifties) francophone-de-souche woman.

> *Egyptian woman:* We arrived in 1964. We already spoke French and English. My husband was an aeronautical engineer but he couldn't find a job. We went to Labrador City and he worked in a mine for nine years. We couldn't understand the Newfie English or the French joual. It was hard. Then we went to Sept-Îles for a long time. That's where my two sons were born. My kids and grandchildren are all bilingual. I have lived here in Quebec for sixty years but I am still a foreigner.
>
> *Bajan woman:* I arrived in Quebec in 1970 as a nurse and tried to learn French. I would have worked on a farm for free to be able to practice French. It was hard to get classes and French

people would always switch to English. There were problems but I wanted to get ahead in life and I did what I had to do. I had a good career in nursing. The problems in the past were caused by priests and politicians. Things are better now, except for the politicians!
Francophone woman: I'm French speaking, perfectly bilingual. All my life I've had English friends and people of different backgrounds and colours but I never heard complaining. All the people in this film complain that they do not belong in Quebec. They feel more Canadian. They do not like Quebec.
Egyptian woman: That's not what I heard.
Francophone woman: I'm in shock. These people don't like Quebec!
Egyptian woman: No, no, they didn't say that!
Francophone woman: They all said that!
Egyptian woman: They all stayed in Quebec.
Francophone woman: They'd rather live anywhere in the world but here! I'm really in shock!
Egyptian woman: You saw it in a different way.
Francophone woman: My blood pressure is 200!
Egyptian woman: I wish more French people were here to see the movie. They don't realize it's hard for immigrants.
Francophone woman: That's a hate film!
Egyptian woman: No, no, no, no. All immigrants had hard experiences but we all came through it and we thrived. Now we have politicians saying that immigrants are lazy and don't work. That's not true.
Francophone woman: Jean Boulet doesn't speak for all Quebecers.
Egyptian woman: We arrived here with $50 in our pocket. Both our sons went to university. We contributed. And we stayed!
Francophone woman: Yeah, but you're not a Quebecer. You say you don't feel like a Quebecer.
Egyptian woman: No, no, no, I do feel like a Quebecer!
Bajan woman: One of the people in the film distinctly said she voted for René Lévesque. I voted for René Lévesque.
Egyptian woman: I didn't vote for him but I liked him.

Bajan woman: He was a politician who spoke the truth. I didn't see anything in the film against Quebecers. They were talking about the politics and the effect it has on individuals.

Egyptian woman: It was very hard when my husband couldn't find a job because they were asking for Canadian experience. No one would give him a chance. He was an aeronautical engineer but he had to take unskilled work in a mine! My doctor had to wash floors in the hospital and sleep on a mattress for a year. Then he had to go to McGill to do the equivalent studies again because he had a foreign diploma.

Bajan woman: Many people have to go back to school. That's what happens when you go to a different country.

Francophone woman: If you immigrate to China, do you think they would do all the things we do here for immigrants?

Egyptian woman (laughing): That's why we didn't go to China!

Francophone woman: There were no people in that film happy to be here. It was all complaining!

Egyptian woman: It wasn't complaining. It was just saying what they felt.

Francophone woman: Nothing positive. It was awful!

Bajan woman: It was individuals saying how they felt about being accepted into society. Look at my colour. You hear people in the hospital say, "I don't want anyone Black looking after me." I never let it bother me.

Egyptian woman: You sacrifice and then your kids are 100 percent Quebecers. I wasn't born here and I hate it when I feel different. I sacrificed and I participated and I did a lot of volunteering and I belong here as much as anybody else!

I have shared a detailed transcription of this conversation for two reasons. The first is that it presents a difficult conversation that almost never occurs. Immigrants are reluctant to speak candidly about their experiences. They don't want to provoke animosity, which is a sensible survival strategy, but it prevents deep understanding between immigrants and members of the host society. The conversation at Lachine, in linguistically mixed company, triggered strong emotions. The immigrants

defended their right to authentic experiences that might be uncomfortable for the host society. However, they persisted in stating that they had chosen Quebec and invested in it because it has become their home and all they want is recognition of their sacrifices and contribution.

The francophone woman also shared stories about her struggles and oppression. She talked about her unilingual mother being humiliated at Eaton's department store by Anglo clerks. After a painful exchange of views, the women at the Lachine screening agreed the past was a harsh place — for everybody — and none of them wanted to return there. When I left the community centre after an hour of intense conversation, the three women who shared their stories had bonded in a new way. It is dangerous to unleash demons from the past but the only way to fully appreciate another human being is to know their story and recognize our shared — albeit different — suffering and humanity.

The second reason I share this detailed conversation is that it illustrates why therapeutic conversation is so difficult. The francophone woman had lived her entire life making friends with Anglos and immigrants of different backgrounds. She had made a space in her life for outsiders and had tried to be a good host and ally. Yet somehow she had never heard a single immigrant "complain" and she was absolutely shocked to be confronted with stories of struggles that all immigrants share with one another. How was that possible? Were her immigrant friends to blame for never taking her into their confidence, for never trusting her enough to speak the truth? Or had she surrounded herself with a wall of silence, creating a barrier to truth?

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My team continued trying outreach to francophone journalists and opinion makers. The response continued to be silence but it is never a good idea to infer intent from silence. Maybe journalists had not read the press releases or they were lost in spam? Maybe journalists did not have time to attend a screening or watch the film online? The publicist I hired to outreach to francophone journalists and opinion makers called people she knew personally to inquire why they had not responded. They declined to answer, which she found puzzling. Nobody wanted to talk about what they

didn't want to talk about. The publicist told me that in ten years of public relations, she had never hit a solid wall of silence.

When I first released the film, the only francophone journalist to respond was Josée Legault, who is a political commentator, not a film critic. I first met her in 1991 when she participated in a debate with Reed Scowen, who had recently published a book entitled *A Different Vision: The English in Quebec in the 1990s*. Scowen was a businessman from the Eastern Townships, elected as a Liberal member of Quebec's National Assembly for NDG during the politically charged years between 1978 and 1987. He served as Quebec's delegate to London until 1991, when he published *A Different Vision*, and then was chairman of Alliance Quebec. Scowen was respected by both the English- and French-speaking communities.[38] His book proposed an assertive vision for the decade ahead. He urged Anglos to be proud of their history and heritage.

David Homel reviewed *A Different Vision* for Books in Canada in 1991:

> If you're English speaking and liberal minded, Quebec is a difficult place to be these days. You're just not appreciated; the French insist on picturing you as a fallen master, whereas you see yourself as an innocent victim of a historical turnaround. That's Reed Scowen's problem in *A Different Vision*: *The English in Quebec in the 1990s*. He travels across Quebec's social landscape, stopping at all the major cultural and social institutions to explore the changing role of the English community, and urge it on to something better than mere survival. His conclusion? The English community has a historical right to exist and prosper, and there should be room for it in the new Quebec, whatever shape it takes.

Revisiting Scowen's book thirty years later, I was struck by three things. First, the majority of Anglos and allophones I know share his vision that Quebec's "English community has a historical right to exist and prosper." Secondly, Quebec was once again a difficult place to be if you speak English. And thirdly, the community was mobilizing in ways we had not seen for a generation.

[38] *Scowen became quite controversial in his later years.*

The same year that Scowen published *A Different Vision*, William Johnson, journalist and future president of Alliance Quebec, published *Anglophobie made in Québec* (Stanké, 1991). The child of an English-speaking father (who was first cousin to Daniel Johnson Senior) and a French-speaking mother, Johnson was educated at Collège Brébeuf, then earned a master's degree in literature at Université de Montréal. He had read his way through the literary classics of Quebec and on the journey had reached the conclusion that the stock villain speaks English and holds a position of authority. Johnson argued that this was part of an "Anglophobie" campaign to vilify English speakers. His methodology and conclusions were severely criticized.

I was sitting next to Johnson at a conference on language at Concordia in the 1990s and we chatted about our shared interest in Quebec literature. He pulled a copy of *Anglophobie* from his briefcase and handed it to me. Johnson supported his argument with more than four hundred pages of examples. When I finished reading the book, I discussed Johnson's theory with my wife, Louise. She gazed at me wryly, paused, and said, "What about all the bad things your writers said about us?!" She was quite right. Language phobia in Quebec is two-way love-hate relationship.

At the same time that Scowen and Johnson were publishing their books, Mordecai Richler wrote an infamous article in the *New Yorker* that would become his book *Oh Canada! Oh Quebec!* Richler revisited every myth and sacred cow in Quebec's pantheon and skewered them one by one. When the book was published, Radio Canada called me for an Anglo reaction. The host was scandalized that Mordecai referred to the women of Quebec as "breeding sows" and wanted me to share his outrage, which I could not do. What Richler actually said was that the Catholic Church had pressured the women of Quebec to bear as many children as possible. This is a fact, frequently criticized by francophones, particularly anti-religious secularists; however, coming from Richler, these plain facts constituted "Quebec bashing."

William Weintraub made his film *The Decline and Fall of English Montreal* in 1993 to document the depressed state of Quebec's Anglos exhausted by the linguistic friction and ready to leave. Many who stayed to fight supported the Equality Party (1989 – 2003), whose platform

called for "equality of both languages (French and English) in Quebec" and "opposing Bill 101, which makes French the sole official language of Quebec, imposes restrictions on the use of English on public signs and requires children to attend school in French unless one of their parents went to school in English in Canada."

This was the heated climate in which I first met journalist Josée Legault, when she published the book that established her credentials as a political commentator. In *L'invention d'une minorité : les Anglo-Québécois*[39] (Boréal, 1992), Legault devoted most of chapter four to Scowen. She had three major criticisms about his book. The first was that Scowen encouraged Anglos to stop being embarrassed to speak English in public, "and put an end to this suicidal behaviour."[40] Worse, Scowen did not believe that language — in Quebec's case, French — could be the factor that unifies a society. Legault accused Scowen of denying the reality that language had united Quebec for centuries. Thirdly, Legault disagreed with Scowen's Canadian belief in individual rights, which she argued could be used as a legal Trojan horse to attack the collective rights of Quebec's French-speaking minority.

As I revisited her book in preparation for our conversation, I was startled to see how the debates that were hot a generation earlier were heating up again. It was as if nothing had been learned and nothing had changed. Anglos were feeling threatened and preparing for fight or flight. Francophones had heard this lament before and were dismissing it as predictable rhetoric designed to make them back down from defending their own rights. They were not going to be intimidated this time.

Legault had been the only francophone journalist who wanted to talk about my film during the publicity blitz before the Hudson premiere. I dialed the number she had emailed me and she answered on the second ring. Her first question was, "Do you speak French?" She had seen my film and the street interviews are conducted in French but the stereotype of Anglos who can't speak French persisted. Then she asked, "Do you know who I am?", which reflected another stereotype that Anglos live in a cultural bubble and are oblivious to francophone culture and its

[39] *The Invention of a Minority: The Anglo Québécois.*

[40] *My translation, p. 151.*

vedettes. Legault used to write a column for *The Montreal Gazette*, so I would have had to be a particularly ignorant Anglo not to know who she is. What she was really asking was, "If you know I am a staunch nationalist, why are you not intimidated to speak to me?"

Then she grilled me on my motivations for making the film. I answered her questions en français and we had a lively conversation. Finally, she said, "I really like your film. When I work in English, I mostly see angry Anglos demanding their constitutional rights. On the French side, I see nationalists putting a negative spin on stories about Anglos. What I don't see is regular people speaking French and being proud to live in Quebec. I hope all the French TV stations show your film." Then she said she would write a column about it. But she didn't. Had she changed her mind? Did her editor veto the idea? Why? In the early days of Bill 96 it was taboo for francophones, particularly nationalists, to say anything positive about Anglos. A public — and positive — review of my film en français would have to wait until things cooled down.

A year later, the situation was worse. Bill 96 had been designed to detonate in multiple phases. One year after the law was adopted, a new set of applications came into effect. The first was that government services in English would no longer be available to everyone who needed or wanted them. Bill 96's French-only rules now included exemptions for only four groups: 1) those with acquired rights because they are eligible for English-language schooling; 2) members of First Nations and the Inuit; 3) new arrivals who have lived in Quebec for less than six months; and 4) people living outside Quebec.

Group 1 had historical rights because they are eligible for English-language schooling, which means they received their own primary education in Canada. Group 3's new immigrants had a six-month grace period in which to master French before being denied access to services in English. Group 4 could apply to foreign companies that wished to do business with Quebec, though the moment they establish a presence in Quebec, they must communicate with the government in French.

The minister in charge of language assured English speakers that everyone entitled to service would receive them based on an "honour system" requiring a simple affirmation of the right to receive services.

Similarly, the government would expect people who did not have the right to honour the restrictions. Minister of the French Language Jean-François Roberge said the government would rely on people's "good faith" when they self-identified as belonging to one of the four exempt groups: "Government officials will ask a few questions to establish that people are entitled to receive service in English but the government will not issue identity cards for rights holders." Eva Ludvig, president of the Quebec Community Groups Network, wrote, "The changes taking effect in June 2023 — and others to follow — will make life harder for English-speaking Quebecers. We are now seeing the impact of a bad bill, a draconian bill. We see what this really means and the impact it will have on the day-to-day lives of business people, of everyday workers, of students."

The law faced several legal challenges. One lawsuit, filed by the Task Force on Linguistic Policy, claimed that the new laws restricted the rights of English speakers "who already struggle to get government services in English and worry the situation will deteriorate as more elements of Bill 96 come into effect." Andrew Caddell, president of the Task Force, told reporters he worried the law's far-reaching impacts would make English-speaking Quebecers second-class citizens. "On the first of June 2023, a lot will change. … We can protect a language and community without eliminating the rights of another."[41]

Another new provision of Bill 96 that came into effect in June 2023 was that civil servants were required to use French "in an exemplary manner."[42] This meant that government employees "must speak and write exclusively in French, except in certain cases." Minister Roberge reassured Anglos that exceptions would leave access in English to health care and social services unaffected.

However, any system based on common sense and honour opens itself to multiple interpretations and abuses. It was not difficult to imagine an unentitled English speaker clicking yes to illegally obtain information or services in English. Then what? The government had not specified any

[41] *Roberge, Ludvig and Caddell quotes from Jacob Serebrin, "Bill 96: Here's What to Expect When Trying to Access English Services in Quebec," Global News, June 1, 2023.*

[42] *Bill 96, Clauses 13.1 and* 13.2.

consequences. And if there were no consequences, what would prevent anyone who wanted or needed service in English from taking it illegally?

The obligation for civil servants to speak and write exclusively in French, except for certain exceptions, was open to similar ambiguities. What if a civil servant suspected that a service demander was not entitled to receive services in English and demanded proof? What if the client could not provide proof? The government had issued no identity cards, so even legitimate rights holders had no way to prove their rights. How would conflicting interpretations be resolved?

Even an uncynical observer could predict problems when the rights of Anglos to receive service in their mother tongue conflicted with the rights of francophones to work in their mother tongue. An honour system for Anglos opposed to an obligation for francophones to use French "in an exemplary manner" compounded with two hundred and fifty years of mutual incomprehension and victimhood was an explosive cocktail. The only question was how and when it would explode.

CHAPTER 5:

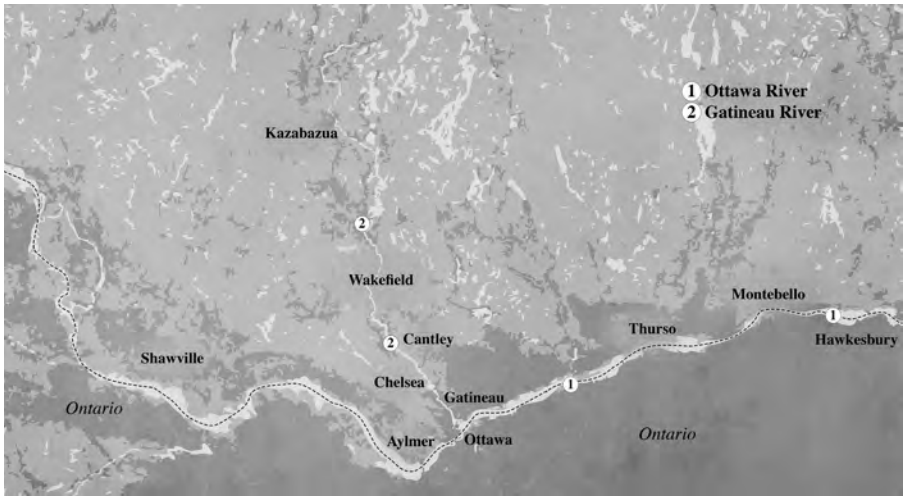
West Quebec and the Ottawa Valley

For the next leg of the tour, I travelled through West Quebec. I decided to take Route 148 because it follows the contours of the Ottawa River, connecting the old settlements built along the water. Autoroute 50 offers a quicker drive across the rugged Canadian Shield but it avoids human habitation and offers only occasional glimpses of the river.

I left Montreal via Autoroute 40, passing Hudson before crossing into Ontario and then I continued to Hawkesbury, which always makes me think of Jean Leloup and his song, "I Lost My Baby" about a screwed-up pop singer from Algeria who loses his mind over a girl from Ottawa and then starts a new life in Hawkesbury.

Louise and I went to see Leloup perform a solo show at Place des Arts in 2016. The Wolfman is an extraordinarily charismatic performer who has an actor's vocal range and an impressive array of guitar techniques. After the show, Leloup's fans descended en masse into the metro. The east-bound platform of Place des Arts was jam-packed while the west-bound platform was almost empty. There is some truth to the old east/west, English/French divide in Montreal.

At Hawkesbury I turned north on the 142, crossed the bridge over the Ottawa River back into Quebec, passed through Grenville and then turned west on the 148. It is a narrow, winding road built when motor vehicles were slower and fewer but I had given myself time to enjoy the trip.



Map 7: Ottawa River Valley: West Quebec

A few kilometres later I passed Montebello, famous for the Château Montebello, a rustic-style hotel with two hundred guest rooms; it is the world's largest structure built of logs. Joseph Papineau, a successful Montreal notary, politician and local lumber baron, purchased the Petite-Nation seigneurie from the Séminaire de Québec in 1801.

His first-born son, Louis-Joseph, became leader of the reformist Patriote movement during the Lower Canada Rebellion of 1837 – 1838. Papineau's fils built his stately manoir after his return from exile and named it in tribute to the Duke of Montebello, a French diplomat and foreign minister who befriended young Papineau during his exile in France from 1839 to 1845. The much larger Château Montebello was built in 1930 for Canadian Pacific Railway.

Next was Papineauville, founded by Louis-Joseph's brother, Denis-Benjamin. Louis-Joseph's grandson, Henri Bourassa (1868 – 1952), became mayor of Papineauville at the age of twenty-two, before turning to national politics and then founding *Le Devoir* newspaper in 1910. Bourassa used the newspaper to promote his ideas and fight his battles. A life-long champion of the French-speaking minority in Canada, he fought the government of Ontario over Regulation 17, which banned French in Ontario's schools and made English the official language of instruction.

In an April 9, 1915, edition of *Le Devoir*, Bourassa wrote:

> The enemies of the French language, of French civilization in Canada, are not the Boches on the shores of the Spree [Berlin]; but the English-Canadian anglicizers, the Orange intriguers and Irish priests. Above all, they are French Canadians weakened and degraded by the Conquest and three centuries of colonial servitude. Let no mistake be made: if we let the Ontario minority be crushed, it will soon be the turn of other French groups in English Canada.

The Papineau/Bourassa clan made an enormous imprint on Quebec history but the biggest hero the Ottawa Valley ever produced was Big Joe Montferrand, who assumed the mythical stature of a French-speaking Paul Bunyan.

Joseph Montferrand was born in Montreal in 1802. His grandfather came to Nouvelle France as a soldier and stayed to teach swordsmanship and hand-to-hand combat. Big Joe's father was leader of a coureurs de bois team and also taught fencing and boxing in the off season. By the 1820s, the continental Fur Trade was suffering declining animal populations and decreased prices. The adventurers of Big Joe's generation became lumberjacks who cut trees and drove logs down rivers. They were known in French as draveurs, a word that has the same roots as the English verb "to drive." The men who shepherded vast flocks of Australian sheep were, not coincidentally, called drovers.

Big Joe Montferrand measured six-foot-four in an age when the average male height was about five-foot-six. He was a giant in an age when le peuple Canadien français needed heroes. The English controlled the government and the Scots were the entrepreneurs. The Irish and French provided cheap labour, often fighting for second-last place on the ladder. In one epic battle, Big Joe defeated a gang of Irish lumberjacks, allegedly swinging one of them like a club. Generations of draveurs sang the praises of Big Joe Montferrand.

Benjamin Sulte and André-Napoléon Montpetit wrote stories about Big Joe. Louis Guyon wrote a play. La Bolduc, a.k.a. Mary Travers, sang about him and more recently so did Gilles Vigneault. In 1980, Jean Côté wrote a historical novel with the evocative title *Jos Montferrand,*

le magnifique. Paul Ohl revived the legend in two historical novels, *Montferrand: Le prix d'honneur* (2008) and *Un géant sur le pont* (2009), a reference to the legendary fight with an Irish mob on Ottawa's Union Bridge. English Canadians know Big Joe because of the song by Stompin' Tom Connors, "Big Joe Mufferaw" paddling all the way from Ottawa to the Mattawa River in a single day.

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The next town along the road is Thurso. In 1807 a group from Thurso, Scotland, founded a township here. By mid-century, the town was becoming an important centre of the wood industry. Eighty years later, logging companies built a local railroad to transport logs from the interior to the river. Local lad Bill Clement (b. 1950) became an NHL hockey player and then went on to become a well-known hockey commentator but his fame was eclipsed by Guy Lafleur (1951 – 2022).

Known to fans as "the Flower" in English and "le Démon blond" in French, Lafleur was the first player in NHL history to score fifty goals and one hundred points in six consecutive seasons. During an NHL career spanning seventeen seasons, he helped the Montréal Canadiens win five Stanley Cup championships (1973, 76, 77, 78 and 79). Lafleur was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1988, named to the Order of Hockey in Canada in 2022 and a year later the CAQ government named Autoroute 50 in his honour.

After Thurso, the scenery along Route 148 becomes rugged and sparsely populated until the outskirts of Gatineau, which becomes sprawlingly suburban. Gatineau has many layers. The modern tale begins with the confederation of a new country that built its capital on the western side of the Ottawa River. Ottawa and Gatineau would be a single city today, connected by a web of bridges — if they were not divided by a provincial border, competing languages and clashing ambitions. On the eastern side of the river rests the location of Wrightville, the first permanent settlement near Chaudière Falls, founded by Philemon Wright in 1800. Wright brought five other families and twenty-five labourers to establish an agricultural community but quickly recognized the value of the vast lumber stands. Europe had cut down its forests and not replanted them.

British North America offered seemingly unlimited old-growth forests to provide the lumber needed for Britain's Industrial Revolution and its navy: giant, straight trunks for masts.

By the 1850s, Wrightville was renamed Hull, after the Hull River in England, and was a booming lumber town. E.B. Eddy and the Hurdman Brothers established their lumber mills on the former Wright holdings during the 1870s. The log-filled Ottawa River viewed from Hull appeared on the back of the Canadian one-dollar bill, until they became a forgotten relic of the bygone past, like logjams and lumberjacks.

		French	English	Other Languages
Hull Town	1871	4,461 (53,6 %)	3,731 (44,8 %)	126 (0,6 %)
	1931	26,507 (90,0 %)	2,400 (9,5 %)	516 (0,5 %)
	1971	56 825 (89,3 %)	5,190 (8,2 %)	1,565 (2,5 %)
Merged City	2021	210,752 (73,4 %)	39,292 (13,7 %)	37,105 (12,9 %)

Table 29: Hull population, 1871 – 2021

My first West Quebec screening was in Gatineau, which was originally separate from the older town of Hull. Gatineau's first paper mill opened in 1927 to process logs floated down the Gatineau River. Adjacent communities Aylmer and Buckingham have deep English roots. In 2002, the government of Quebec imposed municipal mergers. Hull, Aylmer and Buckingham were absorbed into a single city, united under the French name Gatineau. Many Anglos believe that initiatives to rename and reclaim French heritage also serve to erase and replace Quebec's English history.

		French	English	Other Languages
Gatineau Town	1871	1,353 (92 %)	103 (8 %)	4 -
	1931	2,147 (94 %)	102 (4,5 %)	33 (1,5 %)
	1971	14,325 (92 %)	1 075 (6,5 %)	240 (1,5 %)
Merged City	2021	210,752 (73,4 %)	39,292 (13,7 %)	37,105 (12,9 %)

Table 30: Gatineau population, 1871 – 2021

Gatineau, as the audience at the screening confirmed, has become one of the most contentious linguistic battlefields in Quebec. One reason for this is that many workers from across the river in Ottawa prefer to rent apartments or buy houses on the Quebec side because it is cheaper. Many do not speak French and some behave as if Gatineau is part of English Canada. This can be bothersome or infuriating for local francophones. It is bothersome for local Anglos — most of whom do speak French and know perfectly well that Gatineau is part of Quebec — that some francophones appear incapable of distinguishing them from inter-provincial Canadians or cross-border Americans.

I was invited to show my film at CEGEP[43] Heritage College by Brian Rock, a community activist and retired school principal in Baie-Comeau, New Richmond and Gatineau. The screening was part of CEGEP Heritage College Foundation's tenth anniversary celebrations. The first person to speak after the film was an educator who said, "Our CEGEP here began as an off-shoot of Collège de l'Outaouais with an initial enrollment of just seven English-speaking students. This new campus opened in 1994 with a student population of nine hundred. Now our kids have a choice of staying here."

After CEGEP, students who seek higher education must cross the river to Ottawa, travel to Montreal or move farther away. However, unlike students in many regions of Quebec, they have abundant employment options close to home, in most fields, and on both sides of the river. The conditions would appear to be favourable for this community to thrive but language remains an issue.

A male educator added, "Gatineau is one of the few regions in Quebec that has a growing English-speaking population. That should be good news, but not to nationalists or the government in Quebec City." Nationalists in Gatineau feel invaded by the ever-growing number of "foreigners" from elsewhere in Canada who do not share Quebec's French language and culture. It is difficult to know how many of the commuting workers from

[43] *Created in 1967, CEGEPs (Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel) are public, post-secondary institutions unique to Quebec, acting as a two-year bridge between Grade 11 of high school and university.*

across the river are unilingual and insensitive to local concerns. But it is equally difficult to distinguish a bilingual local Anglo, choosing to speak English to a friend, from a unilingual commuter who cannot or will not speak French.

Gatineau is the home of the pro-French language group Impératif français. Founder Jean-Pierre Perreault ran the organization for forty years until he retired a few months after my Gatineau screening. I met Perreault fifteen years earlier at a Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) policy hearing in Gatineau where I was defending the interests of the English-speaking communities of Quebec and he was defending French rights. We chatted during a break in the proceedings and I was interested in his work, so I signed up for the Impératif français newsletter. I quickly discovered it was devoted to promoting everything French and denouncing everything English, from Canadians "invading" Gatineau to the encroachment of Ottawa in every conceivable way. A recent source of outrage was the plan to include Gatineau in the tourism plan of the National Capital Region, which Impératif français denounced as an insidious form of "annexation" that the "treasonous" mayor of Gatineau was encouraging.

The brief post-screening conversation at CÉGEP Heritage College oscillated between optimism for the future — more jobs, better youth retention — and the feeling that the current government of Quebec was unable to accommodate success stories involving the English-speaking community. The region is burdened with particular frictions because of its proximity to the capital of English Canada. On the ground, conflict is minimal. The problem exists at a higher, political level. There is also a fraught history that taints everything.

Lionel Groulx (1878 – 1967), a lightning rod for controversy, was one of the most prominent proponents of history as a political tool. Groulx was a great defender of Quebec for some and inexcusably xenophobic and antisemitic for others. I have many of Groulx's books in my library, including his 1950 three-volume *Histoire du Canada français*, which contains an elegantly penned dedication to Madame Ernestine Pinault: «

En souvenir des jours de Saint-Donat. Tous les hommages de l'auteur ».[44] I also have a much-read 1922 edition of Groulx's novel *L'appel de la race*.[45]

Groulx took up the torch from politician-journalist Bourassa as the literary and intellectual defender of French Canada. With his first book, Groulx polarized « ses détracteurs les plus coriaces et ses partisans les plus enthousiastes ».[46] The novel's action takes place in Ottawa in the wake of Regulation 17. The main character, Jules de Lantagnac, is a lawyer married to Maud Fletcher. She is English and was raised Anglican but converted to Catholicism to make their marriage acceptable in the eyes of the Church. Jules and Maud have four children: William, Virginia, Nellie and Wolfred-André. The battle over Ontario schools and language divides the couple. Jules decides that he must heed the call to fight the English-speaking Orangemen and defend his French-speaking Catholic "race." The marriage disintegrates. Two of the children side with their English mother. The other two side with their father, and Wolfred-André renounces the English half of his name to liberate his divided soul and become pure French André.

The book was controversial then, and still is now, for several reasons. It is a vision of extreme intolerance toward "impurity" and what we now call Otherness. Maud converted to Catholicism but that was not enough to compensate for the stain of her mother tongue corrupting the children. In Groulx's cautionary tale, the evil of divorce is preferable to miscegenation. More contentiously, it was not enough for Wolfred to fully embrace his father's French values; he had to obliterate every trace of his impure Englishness. It is no coincidence that the part of his name that the boy erased was shared with Patriote leader Wolfred Nelson. Groulx's version of history cannot tolerate impurities like Maud Fletcher, Wolfred-André de Lantagnac or the patriotic Nelson brothers. In a different version of history, Louis-Joseph Papineau, who remains a hero to nationalists, never renounced Wolfred Nelson or the other non-French Patriotes. These visions of inclusivity and exclusion are irreconcilable, forever battling.

44 *"In memory of the days in Saint-Donat. With the author's deepest respect." Groulx, Histoire du Canada français, Livres Numériques Divers, 1950.*

45 *The Call of the Race. La Bibliothèque électronique du Québec has an online PDF in their Littérature québécoise collection.*

46 *"his harshest critics and his most ardent fans."*

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		French		English		Other Languages	
Aylmer Town	1871	814	(49%)	801	(48.5%)	35	(2.5%)
	1931	1,854	(65%)	931	(33%)	50	(2%)
	1971	4,145	(58%)	2,895	(40%)	160	(2%)
Merged City	2021	210,752	(73,4 %)	39,292	(13,7 %)	37,105	(12,9 %)

Table 31: Aylmer population, 1871 – 2021

The next screening was in Old Aylmer. Named after Governor General Lord Aylmer, the town was founded by the pioneering Wright family. During most of the nineteenth century, Aylmer was an important centre for the wood industry and built steamboats at the Deschênes Rapids. Railroad construction began during the early Confederation years. Aylmer is also part of the rapidly growing agglomeration of the now rebranded Gatineau.

The Regional Association of West Quebecers (RAWQ) booked a room at le Centre culturel du Vieux-Aylmer. The audience was one of the most politically informed on the entire tour. Politics and history are intensely experienced in West Quebec.

Brian Rock, from the Gatineau screening, attended the Aylmer screening and opened the conversation by quoting a conversation with

Le Centre culturel du Vieux-Aylmer.

a Quebec politician who was unaware of the long and deep English-speaking tradition in West Quebec. Brian had asked the politician from the Liberal Party of Quebec if she knew that the regional community of Pontiac, immediately to the west of Gatineau, is two-thirds English. She did not know and the information mystified her. "Where did they all come from?"

They did not flood the region in recent years as bureaucrat commuters from Ottawa. They are rural families that have lived there for generations and some families were the original settlers. "Even the Quebec Liberal Party's knowledge of our region is rather limited," concluded Brian wryly, leaving unstated that similar ignorance about the English-speaking history of Quebec would not be surprising for a PQ or CAQ politician.

The next comment was about language skills, which opened a discussion about education. An older women spoke about her daughter's education in an immersion school in Gatineau where she learned to speak French very well. Now the daughter is a teacher and discovering that in other parts of Quebec, anglophones teach French, and not very successfully. "It would be better for francophones to teach French." Brian shared a story about a recent immersion experiment for elementary Grades 5 and 6. The plan had been for anglophone teachers to teach half the year in English and francophone teachers to teach half the year in French. However, English and French teachers belong to different unions and they could not reach a collaboration agreement. A woman said, "I graduated from high school in 1975 on the West Island of Montreal. My school taught Parisian French. I could communicate with a European but not with the kids down the street." Another woman spoke about the employment disadvantage of speaking French with an English accent and having an English name. "It's so much easier to find work on the other side of the border in Ontario where being bilingual is an advantage and having an English name is not a problem. And you can earn 20 percent more!" A younger woman spoke about her positive experience being educated in French schools in nearby Cantley: "I never got teased. Everybody was very accepting."

This intervention lead us into a discussion about changing attitudes toward bilingualism, particularly among young people. One man

felt that the political plan to make Quebec unilingually French "is a dead end." Another man commented, "Bilingualism is the real trend in Quebec, no matter what politicians say. Anglos are more bilingual than ever. Allophones learn French and English and they retain their mother tongues. Young francophones are constantly exposed to the internet and are more bilingual than ever." Audience members agreed that politicians can fear bilingualism and fight against it but fifty years of language laws have not reversed the rising tide of Quebecers choosing to be bilingual.

The conversation became increasingly political. A man said, "The Minister of Canadian Heritage[47] does not believe the English-speaking community in Quebec is a minority. He says we are a 'displaced fragment of the English-speaking majority in North America' but that doesn't reflect our history." Then the group talked about the federal government's Official Language Minority Communities Program and the budget attached to it. "There are about a million French speakers in Canada and a million English speakers in Quebec. We also need help from the federal government to survive." All the regional associations I visited receive a significant portion of their revenue from this federal program, which they use to provide support for youth, families and seniors. Changes to Canada's Official Languages Act, proposed in Bill C-13 currently under debate in Ottawa, placed essential support in jeopardy.

Then the conversation turned to Bill 96. "Finally," a man said, "the [provincial] government has realized that if they want immigrants to speak French, they have to provide training." Another person lamented that the language training courses were under staffed and underfunded: "If speaking French is so important to this government, why don't they help people learn it instead of punishing them because they can't?" This was a reference to a provision of Bill 96 that gives immigrants a six-month grace period to learn French before denying them information in other languages — particularly English. "They've created new programs to teach French but they don't provide adequate funding or infrastructure to facilitate it." "Ridiculous!" one audience member responded. "What planet do these people live on?" asked another.

[47] *At the time, Pablo Rodriguez, who would briefly become leader of the Quebec Liberal Party two years later.*

"There is a lot of double-talk going on right now," another man said. "For example, the provincial government's assertion that it will preserve English-language rights in health care but then they write a bill that makes hospital staff afraid to speak English."

"They've even removed signs in English in the hospital," replied a woman.

Another woman said, "I've always found it short-sighted to define culture by a language. Quebec has a massively rich culture but it encompasses other things than language."

"French language cultures in Europe and Africa have nothing to do with Quebec," a man added. "That should be obvious!"

The conversation dug deeper into Bill 96 and C-13 and their consequences: endless battles in parliamentary commissions and courts and abject capitulation for minorities or a new exodus.

A man who works in commercial real estate gave several examples of clients who had already left Quebec and others who were making plans to do so. Brian replied, "I don't foresee another exodus. But we need the [federal] justice minister[48] to bring Bill 96 and the other contested laws to the Supreme Court. He is sitting on his hands because he wants provincial courts to do the dirty work of declaring parts of the law unconstitutional." The man who feared an exodus agreed: "You're right. A solid Supreme Court intervention might stanch the bleeding."

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The final screening along the Ottawa River was in Shawville, in the adjacent Pontiac Region, which is two-thirds English speaking. From Aylmer I followed the 148 north through Breckenridge and Heyworth, then Eardley and Beech Grove, Wyman, Maryland, Maple Ridge and Caldwell until I finally reach Shawville. The highway follows the river closely and Ontario on the other side is a short swim away. Quebec City is a six-hour drive.

	French	English	Other Language
1871	27 (2%)	1,792 (98%)	8 -
1931	9 (1%)	2 755 (94%)	37 (5%)
1971	90 (5 %)	1,630 (93%)	25 (2%)

[48] *At the time, Quebec Liberal David Lametti.*

Pontiac Region and Ottawa River, with Ontario on the other side.

2021	256 (14%)	1,315 (75%)	200 (11%)

Table 32: Shawville population, 1871 – 2021

Paul Tonkin, executive director of RAWQ, and Hayley Campbell, community engagement officer, met me at Pontiac High School. Shawville's main street has been modified to Rue Main but not renamed Rue Principale. It is surrounded by streets named Victoria, Queen, King, Princess, Dufferin, Bristol, Centre, Railroad and Lake. Shawville has a strong English heritage and is fiercely proud of it.

The first woman who spoke during the post-screen conversation was adamantly opposed to bilingualism and opposed to English speakers being "forced" to learn French. At first, I thought she was objecting to new compulsory French classes in Quebec schools or requirements for vocational certification in Quebec. She was actually protesting the federal government promoting bilingualism under the auspices of the Official Languages Act, because it limits jobs for unilingual English speakers. That was a complaint about bilingualism frequently voiced back in the 1970s.

People in the room listened patiently but bilingualism is a reality for Anglos in Quebec. The woman's protests about the federal government "wasting taxpayer's money promoting bilingualism" would have resonated more strongly at a rally of the Bloc Québécois. If the federal government does not support organizations like RAWQ, the communities they support will be significantly diminished.

A man spoke about his career working internationally: "I've travelled

the world — seventy-two countries. I've lived in several. For any kind of international career, you need English. François Legault is a businessman and he is always saying he wants better paying jobs for Quebecers and that he wants Quebecers to have the same wealth as Ontarians. The high-paying jobs are in finance, technology and research and they require English. What's so hard to understand?"

A woman interjected, "The young people understand. With or without the government, they're going to learn English."

"My French is terrible," another man said. "I own a business. The new laws mean everything has to be in French. I was thinking about leaving for Ontario but that's a big move, so I hired a francophone government relations manager. He talks to the government in French and he's happy to be working in a bilingual environment, practicing his English. It's win-win."

A woman added, "It's the same for bilingual Anglos who can work on a French team and speak to clients outside Quebec in English. There's a future for bilingual people in Quebec."

After a few more interventions about the merits of bilingualism and international connections, a farmer had the last word. "I've been attending meetings of the Union des producteurs agricoles for years. Everything's in French but they're a good bunch, all farmers like me. It used to be that at the end of a day of meetings we'd all go to someone's room, drink beer and sing old French songs all night. The last few years, that doesn't happen anymore. The young farmers are all about business — no time for joie de vivre. If I was the premier of Quebec, I'd be concerned about losing that culture."

I had heard about Shawville for years but that was my first visit so deep into the Pontiac Region. When I left Shawville and headed south back toward Montreal, I wondered what I would have found farther north along the 148. The next day I perused a map. Just after Waltham, the highway crosses the Ottawa River to Pembroke, Ontario, and then continues north on the Ontario side of the water. The next town is Petawawa, settled in the nineteenth century by émigrés from Scotland, Ireland and Germany. The Canadian military acquired the land in 1905 for the 4th Canadian Division Support Base Petawawa, infamous in Canada's Italian

communities as the place where men were imprisoned during the Second World War for no offence other than being Italian.

If you were to continue following the river north, you would pass the mouth of the Mattawa River, perhaps catching a glimpse of the ghost of Big Joe Montferrand paddling his canoe, then through Lake Timiskaming where the river flows back into Quebec and on to Lac Simard. From there you could keep paddling until you reach the source of the rivière des Outaouais, a day's hike south of Rouyn-Noranda.

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To complete my West Quebec tour, I drove back to Gatineau, then travelled north alongside the Gatineau River. The new A5 was faster but I chose the meandering 105 to follow the water. A few minutes north of Gatineau, I reached my first stop, Chelsea. The town was named by its first settler, Thomas Brigham, who arrived from Vermont in 1819. Brigham was a son-in-law of Philemon Wright, so when the municipality was established in 1875, it took the name Hull West. Renamed Chelsea in 1990, it is a pretty village nestled between the river and Gatineau Park.

	French	English	Other Languages
1931	395 (33%)	771 (65%)	24 (2%)
2021	3,875 (49%)	3,626 (45%)	483 (6%)

Table 33: Chelsea population, 1931 – 2021

The under-renovation arts centre in Chelsea was giving new life to an abandoned church. I was happily surprised to see one of the participants of my film in the audience. Megan Mullins grew up in a unilingual Anglo family in Gaspésie and made serious efforts to acquire French-language skills in the workforce. Megan had been working in Montreal when I filmed her for the documentary. She liked Montreal's culture and bilingualism, but after growing up in a small community, a big city did not feel like home. A town the size of Chelsea has a more human scale and 70 percent of the households are bilingual. Megan was not sure if Chelsea, or any part of Quebec, would become her home.

Poster in a dépanneur.

Many of the people in Chelsea were imports. Kerstin Petersson, who organized the Gatineau River leg of the tour, came from Germany in the 1970s and operated a language school in Wakefield for many years but she still struggles with French. David Park, who managed the technical aspects of the tour, grew up in East Ottawa. At high school he was taught international French, which did not give him the skills to speak to francophone kids on the street. "When I moved to Montreal for a job, people asked if I was Acadian or from some part of France. My accent was foreign to them." A woman who came to Quebec from Holland remains much more comfortable in English than French, which leaves her feeling she does not belong in Quebec.

Several people mentioned that language learning has different levels. The armchair skill of reading requires far less effort than deciphering and understanding rapidly spoken language. Creating comprehensible sentences while instantly retrieving necessary words and spontaneously assembling them in correct spoken grammatical structures is an Olympian achievement. Several of the people in Chelsea were self-conscious about their minor-league French skills.

A woman who worked in education spoke about how the English schools have made significant advances in teaching French. She recently attended a meeting with Quebec's minister of education who was investigating why English schools are doing a better job of teaching second-language skills than French schools. A man in the audience said, "It's simple. Our kids need to learn French. The French are against bilingualism. They treat it like the plague!" Another man agreed that French skills have gotten better for Anglo students but noted that most still do not achieve full

proficiency: "Our kids don't come out of school able to function in French." A woman asked, "Why do we still have this problem?" The man replied, "A few years ago I asked a school commissioner and he told me, 'Our mandate is to provide an education in English.' Teaching French was not their priority. And then they wonder why 40 percent of English kids go to French schools!"

Under Bill 96, students have to pass a French exam to graduate. An older man gave the example of a university course where only eleven of the forty-two students passed the French test. "I find the new law bureaucratic and mean-spirited. I was hired by the public service here in Quebec back in the 70s. My French was not great but they were broad-minded and let me learn on the job. What happens to these young people today if the door is shut at the point of entry? They'll be welcome across the river in Ontario. Is that what Quebec wants?"

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Next stop along the Gatineau River was Wakefield. When I was executive director of ELAN, we co-produced annual arts festivals in several regions. Wakefield had a large group of committed volunteers and the Arts Alive! festival here was always a huge party with music, dance, theatre, crafts and local food. Kerstin, who organized the three screenings along the Gatineau River, has been an active member of Wakefield's artistic community for decades. When I first met the folks in Wakefield, they were raising money to build an arts centre, and after ten years of hard work they opened a large, multi-purpose building that would be the pride of a town with ten times the population.

		French	English	Other Language
Wakefield	1871	208 (15%)	1,111 (83%)	19 (2%)
	1931	29 (10%)	263 (89%)	4 (1%)
	1971	45 (14%)	270 (83%)	10 (3%)
Merged with La Pêche	2021	4,419 (58%)	2,819 (37%)	380 (5%)

Table 34: Wakefield population, 1871 – 2021

Kerstin booked the screening at Café Earle, which had a tiny stage for singers and poets. David set up the screen and speakers and the café became a perfect venue for a community conversation over drinks and snacks. The first man to speak after the screening said he had been in Quebec forty years and had learned French well enough after twenty to be elected mayor of Cantley,[49] on the other side of the Gatineau River. "There's a lot of emphasis in your film that if you don't have a Quebec accent, you're not accepted. That's never been a problem for anybody I know. Years ago, I checked into the issue of non-francophones not being able to get a job and there's never been a case that's gone to court to prove discrimination against non-francophones." A woman responded, "I'm French but I've been living in Nova Scotia for the last twenty-three years and people there can't always understand my accent. The same thing happens in Alberta. It's a normal issue everywhere. Not just Quebec."

Wakefield and the Gatineau River.

Many people in the audience had thoughts about communicating in their second language. "If they want us to speak French," said one individual, "they should encourage us. In Alberta, you can be damned sure nobody's going to switch to French when a francophone is having trouble speaking English! Here they switch to English all the time, which doesn't help us get better at French." A younger man said, "My identity has many layers. I am a bilingual francophone living in a mostly English village

[49] *Cantley: population 10,000, 83 percent francophone.*

within a French province within an English country." This comment got a laugh but I would have liked to hear the young man elaborate on his different experiences moving in and out of minority status. A woman spoke about growing up in Shawinigan, where the small English community "was all managers who literally lived up on the hill. They had their own curling club. It was like apartheid! There was definably English domination of the economic system."

I asked if there were English-speaking workers, as in Rouyn-Noranda and Baie-Comeau, which started a conversation about class. "No," the woman replied. "The bosses were all English and the blue-collar workers were all francophone." Then a man said, "I'm a sixth-generation Quebecer, Irish, and I found I needed to bring that up with the separatist family of my beautiful Québécoise wife. I have working-class Irish roots but I was being pegged as an English elite. Similarly, my wife has to remind Nova Scotians that her ancestors were driven out of Acadia in 1755." Another man said that his working-class father came from England. "Yes, there were wealthy English, but there was also a large working class of English speakers who were discriminated against on a regular basis."

The next speaker was a francophone woman from Kapuskasing, Ontario. "I came to Quebec in 1999 and felt like a fish out of water. The culture here is very different. My father is from France. He would not let us watch TV in English. I speak very good French. The cultural differences here are not just about language."

A man with a vestigial Scottish accent said, "The SNP[50] has a policy of welcoming immigrants from everywhere. They say, 'If you live and work in Scotland, you're Scottish.' The government of Quebec could learn something from that."

The conversation continued until long after scheduled closing time, when we finally had to leave so staff could clean up and get a few hours' sleep before the breakfast crowd arrived. The final part of the conversation was about the need for better dialogue between different linguistic communities. They wished me luck getting more francophones to see my film.

[50] *Scottish National Party.*

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I had never been farther north along the Gatineau River than Wakefield. My final West Quebec screening was an adventure. I drove through Lordsvale, Farrellton, Brennan's Hill, Low and Martindale until I reached Kazabazua. Kerstin and David were already setting up the screen and speakers at the community centre.

Kazabazua is an Algonquin word. The surrounding area is part of the Algonquin First Nation territory. Like many other First Nation names, Kazabazua has had many spellings in English, such as Kasubasua, Cazabasua, Cazibazouis, Cazebalzuac and Cajibajouis. This word comes from the Algonquin word *kachibadjiwan*, from *kach* ("hidden") and *djiwan* ("current"); hence it means "underground river," which seemed appropriate for this English-speaking part of Quebec.

	French	English	Other Languages
2021	570 (55%)	455 (44%)	20 (1%)

Table 35: Kazabazua, population 2021

The first time I visited the region, I thought Wakefield and Chelsea were little Anglo enclaves hidden from the surrounding francophone world. I had no idea of the age and depth of English roots in West Quebec. If you turn on CBC radio here, the signal comes from Ottawa and you get Ontario news. News from Quebec City and Montreal does not travel here directly. As in many European border regions, the ruling state is remote and feels almost foreign.

Only a handful of people came to the afternoon screening but they appreciated that I had travelled so far to show my film in their community. It stirred up memories. The first man who spoke recalled the tense mood at the time of the 1995 referendum. "There was a guy working right beside me and he's like, 'We're gonna win and you English are all gonna be gone!' and I said, 'Listen buddy, I've got news for you. My family's been here since 1795. If you wanna see who built this town, go down to the municipal office and start looking at the names of property owners. You're gonna find out something. We've been around longer than you!'"

His wife recalled the 1970 October Crisis from a child's perspective.

Kazabazua community centre.

"I remember the grown-ups talking and the news on the TV about Cross. We had a Cross family here." Her husband added, "We had soldiers on the streets because the minister of finance[51] lived in Wakefield."

Much of the conversation in Kazabazua was personal and pragmatic. Audience members had concerns about the way Bill 96 was being implemented. They agreed that young people need to learn French and they empathized with French parents who want their kids to learn English but receive minimal support from the education system. "It's all changed. The English are learning French but the French aren't being taught English. Our kids are bilingual. Their friends struggle with English."

Another woman said, "We should all know Cree. My aunt was Sixties Scoop Ojibwe. We should all learn Indigenous languages." Her husband told a story about a trial where the judge asked a witness if he was bilingual and the man replied that he was. The trial went on for hours and when the witness was called to testify, the judge discovered the man could not speak French and had understood none of the testimony or cross-examination. "Why did you tell me you're bilingual?" The witness replied, "I am bilingual: Ojibwe and English."

Another woman said:

> My kids went to French school because the Protestant school wouldn't teach French. That was in the 80s, after Bill 101. We weren't the only family that wanted their kids to learn French. Seventy-five percent of the students in the French school were

[51] *Edgar Benson.*

English. The school made a rule that the kids couldn't speak English in the playground. That was fine with the English parents. Our kids were there to learn French. But the French parents didn't like the rule because they wanted their kids to learn English with our kids.

An older man said, "I wanted my kids to be bilingual and I had to fight for it! That was before Bill 101. Me and my wife don't speak much French. Our French neighbours said, 'Your kid's not French.'" The man's wife interjected, "Because he didn't know what fourchette was. Now I know it's a fork." The husband continued, "The teacher said, 'He'll slow the other kids down.' So I said, 'If we was in Italy he would go to an Italian school. We're in Quebec and he should go to a French school!' We had to fight like hell but we got him in." The wife concluded, "He's real bilingual. He talks so much French he's losing his English!"

Winter lights projected onto the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa.

As I passed through Gatineau on my way back to Montreal, I could see the Parliament Buildings on the other side of the Ottawa River/rivière des Outaouais. I have many fond memories of Ottawa, particularly of writing multimedia shows projected onto the Parliament Buildings. It was an honour to present the history of Canada for the summer show and a pleasure to write winter fables for the Winter Lights Festival.

Meanwhile, members of parliament over in Ottawa were making final amendments to Canada's revised Official Languages Act in preparation for a vote. I don't know how many voters can name the politicians representing them federally, provincially and municipally. Fewer voters read the platforms of the parties that represent them or follow every vote of their elected representatives. Controversy will attract voters' attention. A small percentage of people in Quebec's English-speaking community understood provincial Bill 96 but everyone had heard about it — little of it good and from so many sources — that they felt threatened.

Federal Bill C-13 was far more remote. Few English speakers understood Canada's Official Languages Act or its impact on their daily lives. They did not grasp the implications of the first major revision in half a century but the politicking in Ottawa had got their attention. Anyone following the news was aware that MPs in Ottawa were battling over amendments that would affect language rights and several Liberals were threatening to vote against their own party. The dissidents were fearful that the rights of English speakers in Quebec were being accidentally forgotten, or deliberately sacrificed. They were prepared to defy their own party and risk being expelled from caucus.

In the end, 301 MPs voted for the bill and only one MP voted against. Bill C-13: An Act for the Substantive Equality of Canada's Official Languages received Royal assent on June 23, 2023, modernizing the Official Languages Act and enacting the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act. "Use of French in federally regulated private businesses" sounds bureaucratic and mostly irrelevant. So why had the vote been so acrimonious?

West Island Liberal MP Francis Scarpaleggia wrote an open letter in *The Montreal Gazette,* published May 25, 2023, to explain why he had voted for Bill C-13:

Since the adoption of Bill 96, frustration has grown in Quebec's anglophone community at the resurgence of language politics in the province after a long period of linguistic harmony. Unfortunately, this frustration has been projected onto Bill C-13, federal legislation to modernize the Official Languages Act. These two pieces of language legislation have been politically conflated, but Bill C-13 is not Bill 96.

Scarpaleggia reassured his readers (and voters) that "I could have done without the mention of the Charter of the French Language added to the preamble of the Official Languages Act. But this mention, included as part of a larger recognition of 'the diversity of the provincial and territorial language regimes,' does not in my view constitute a threat to anglophone rights in our province."

Also in *The Montreal Gazette*, Allison Hanes published an article titled, "Trudeau is throwing Quebec anglos under the bus with Bill C-13" on May 2, 2023:

Bill C-13 threatens to weaken the community's rights in many of the same ways the government of Premier François Legault has in recent years. Bill C-13 contains references to Quebec's Charte de la langue française. Not only is it unusual — if not unprecedented — for a federal law to be subjected to provincial legislation, Bill 101 is further reinforced by Bill 96, which establishes French as the only official language of Quebec, exempts the law from both (federal and provincial) human rights charters, and shields it from challenges by the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause.

David Johnston, former Quebec and Nunavut regional representative (2014 – 2022) for Canada's Commissioner of Official Languages, responded to Hanes in an op-ed, "Who Threw Quebec Anglos Under the Bus? Not Trudeau's Liberals," in *The Montreal Gazette*, published two weeks after Hanes's column. Johnston made the case that the Conservative Party of Canada, in association with the Bloc Québécois and the NDP, had decided to support the ambitions of Legault's CAQ in a zero-sum redistribution of rights. The united opposition had been in a position to table "a private member's bill and the minority Liberal government wouldn't have had enough votes to stop it." In Johnston's view, "The Liberals with C-13 have made some real gains for French in Quebec — and some real protections for English too. They deserve more credit than they are getting." Johnston concluded, "A closer examination, I would suggest, shows it was the Conservative Party of Canada that threw us [under the bus]. And that with C-13, the Liberals pulled us back out."

Other voices in the media were less reassuring. In "Fed Bill C-13 'Gives Up on English in Quebec'" published in *The Suburban* on April 5,

2023, Joel Goldenberg interviewed eminent constitutional rights lawyer Julius Grey about Bill C-13. Grey believed that the ultimate purpose of Bill 96 was to make Quebec unilingual, which was irreconcilable with Canada's official language policy of bilingualism: "Turning Montreal into a 100 percent French city is something that's totally outside the federal government's mandate. I am totally shocked at the Prime Minister, Mélanie Joly, and all the people who have participated in this. The Prime Minister's father would have been aghast."

Robert Libman, founder and leader of the Equality Party (1988 – 1994) and ex-mayor of Côte Saint-Luc, published a fiery op-ed, "These Liberal MPs Failed Their Anglo Constituents. Shame on Them," in *The Montreal Gazette* on May 19, 2023:

"Quebec's English-speaking community suffered one of its most humiliating political put-downs in its history this past week — not in the National Assembly, where you might expect, but in the House of Commons. Our federal Parliament blithely passed Bill C-13, the overhaul of Canada's Official Languages Act, which contains a dangerous flaw with potential long-term consequences for the rights of Quebec's anglophone minority. Where [the bill] goes too far is in unnecessarily incorporating into federal law Quebec's Charter of the French Language (Bill 101), as amended by Bill 96 (and shielded by the notwithstanding clause), allowing it to apply in Quebec. In doing so, anglo rights are being put at risk. This change goes against 50 years of equality before the law of Canada's two official-language communities."

The jury was divided about the negative impacts of federal Bill C-13 but the verdict was unanimous that provincial Bill 96, and the CAQ's muscular campaign to make Quebec an exemplary French-speaking society, were bad news for Quebec's non-francophone minorities.

CHAPTER 6:

St. Lawrence Valley, the Heartland of Nouvelle France

This chapter is what filmmakers call "high concept." It starts with the question, What if? A high concept can be speculative. What if you woke up one morning trapped in a time loop, doomed to relive the same day over and over? Or the concept can be silly. What if a cargo of deadly snakes got loose on an airplane?

The concept here is: What if francophones and anglophones in Quebec could speak to one another with mutual understanding and respect? Both communities feel mostly misunderstood and often disrespected. Both communities acknowledge that not everyone on the other side is the problem but troublemakers hold a disproportionate amount of power and the reasonable majority is silently complicit. In his 1912 poem "The Second Coming," Irishman W.B. Yeats prophetically articulated conditions that prepare the way for the nightmare: "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity." In Quebec's current political climate, both sides believe that the worst on the other side are full of passionate (malevolent) intensity, while the nice people, no matter how numerous, are irrelevant.

Quebec is not on the verge of a civil war or a new surge of urban terrorism but it is increasingly polarized and willing to make dangerous assumptions about the other side's beliefs and intentions. The St. Lawrence Valley is majority-francophone territory. This is the section of

the journey where the francophone story should be told by the descendants of Nouvelle France. Unfortunately, no one invited me to screen my film in this francophone heartland.

What We Choose to Remember was never intended to encompass the complete history of Quebec. It was an addendum to the official history for voices usually excluded. One reason that immigrants struggle to integrate in Quebec is that the host population is still uncertain about its own identity. It can be frustrating for new arrivals to be told, *You must understand our story before we listen to yours*.

Apparently, some nationalist francophones were giving my film the cold shoulder because it was all about waves of immigrants without fully representing the suffering of the host society. A larger irritant was that the post-Conquest immigrants in my film are bilingual and proud to speak more than one language. Nothing terrifies Quebec nationalists more than the spectre of a society that facilitates bilingualism and officially recognizes its value.

This book has a broader intent than the film. It is essential to include significant elements of francophone history. Unfortunately, no natural conversation was possible via public screenings; therefore, to break through this wall of silence, I am going high concept and calling witnesses from the public domain to examine the multiple traumas suffered in this region over many centuries.

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In 1984, sailing ships from around the world came to the St. Lawrence Valley to celebrate the 450th anniversary of Jacques Cartier's arrival in the New World. Between leaving Australia in 1980 and my arrival in Montreal, I worked for six weeks in Toronto on a lake boat, the *Empire Sandy*, that was being converted into a deep-sea sailing schooner and which became a popular party boat in Toronto Harbour. Captain Norm Rogers[52] sailed from Toronto across Lake Ontario then down the Saint-Lawrence to Quebec City in 1984 to join les grands voiliers. He picked me up in Montreal's east-end port and we set sail to join the festivities.

[52] *No relation. His family does not have the d-luxe version of Rodgers.*

Port of Montreal

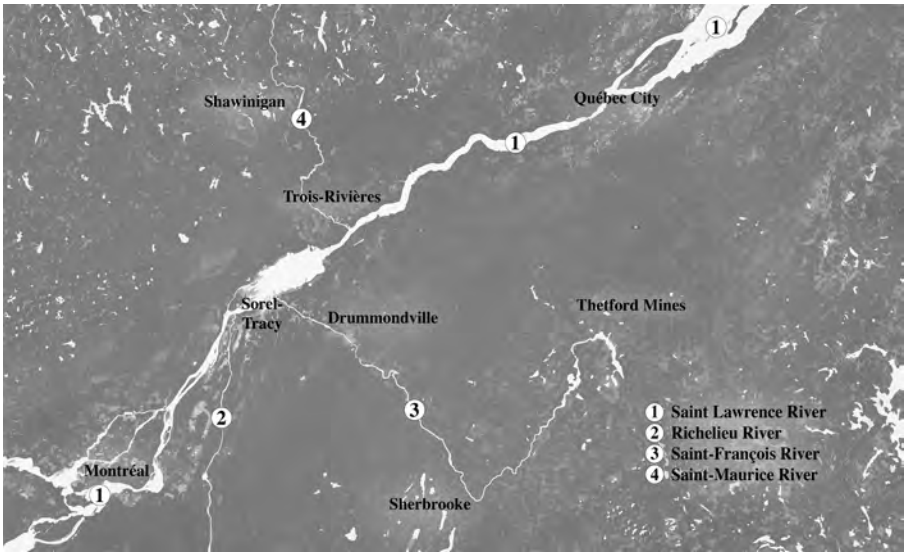
The first kilometres out of Montreal are lined with stacks of metal shipping containers and massive cranes, then the shores become industrial, decaying and rusted. Sorel, at the mouth of the Richelieu River, is a busy port that was once the heart of Quebec's steel industry but the first settlers here were farmers and fishers.

Germaine Guèvremont's 1945 novel *Le survenant* is set in Sorel. The title is an unusual word. The English translation uses *Outlander*, which is equally obscure. *Survenant* means "outsider from a foreign land" and the book is an intriguing study into the relationship between francophones-de-souche and a beguiling foreigner. Pre-modern Sorel, like most of rural Quebec, did not readily welcome outsiders. One day, a red-haired stranger appears. He will not say from whence he came, or even reveal his name, so the farmer who employs the outlander to do odd jobs calls him "le survenant."

Didace Beauchemin soon discovers that the stranger he hired is resourceful, intelligent and skilled at many crafts, from furniture repair to canoe building. He can hold his own in a fistfight with the biggest brawlers. The stranger also has a dark side; he has no religion, and from time to time, disappears on a drinking binge. At the end of the book, the outlander vanishes as suddenly as he appeared. Guèvremont wrote *Marie-Didace* (1947), a follow-up novel chronicling how the outlander's absence affects everyone who had met him and how their de-souche existence appears drab absent his exotic, foreign presence.

The final chapter of *Le survenant* presents an unresolved enigma. The parish priest receives notice that Malcolm McDowey, a rich Scottish merchant, has died and the estate is looking for McDowey's heir, a young man who had run off a few years earlier. The priest reads the fugitive's description to Beauchemin and says, "That young heir is your Outlander!" The description is a perfect match but old Beauchemin refuses to see any resemblance between the missing Scottish aristocrat and the happy-go-lucky drifter he had come to love more than his own son.

Le survenant presents the antithesis of Bill Johnson's theory that Quebec literature is a litany of anglophobia. The outlander is the hero of the novel and by far the most interesting character. Yet, for reasons the author leaves unexplained, the old farmer could not believe the loveable outlander was of foreign blood and mother tongue.



Map 8: St. Lawrence River: Montreal to Quebec City

Shortly after Sorel, the St. Lawrence meets the mouth of the Saint-François River. The city of Drummondville is located sixty kilometres upstream. Founded in 1815 under the orders of Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada George Drummond, Drummondville briefly provided a home for veterans of the War of 1812 and a defence against future

American attacks. Construction of the Hemmings Falls hydroelectric dam in 1920 launched the modern industrial era. The population of Drummondville grew from 1,725 in 1911 to 14,000 by 1951.

The town was the subject of *French Canada in Transition* (University of Chicago Press, 1943), a sociological study by Everett Cherrington Hughes that examines the impact of industrialization on small French Canadian communities such as Drummondville. Prior to the arrival of foreign capital and bosses, Drummondville's French Catholics and English Protestants enjoyed a cordial rapport. The first church, the English St. George's Anglican Church, was shared with French Catholics until the duelling bishops segregated their flocks. Hughes reports:

> "Both Protestant and Catholic graveyards give evidence of some intermarriage, as, for instance, on a large stone in the Protestant cemetery erected to 'Mary Harrington, wife of Joseph Marchand.' One prominent 'French' Catholic citizen had an English Protestant mother and two 'English' Protestant sisters. There were individuals of whom it was said, 'He was more English than French,' or the reverse. Occasionally the death of a prominent English Protestant drew a large crowd of French Catholics to the Anglican church in respectful mourning. There is good evidence that most of the older English families knew a good deal of French. Even today one may hear a conversation in which an old resident speaks English and is answered in French, both parties understanding each other perfectly well, 'kidding' each other, using first names and without the slightest feeling of being on the defensive." (p. 34)

Linguistic tension rapidly escalated with industrialization. During the period covered in Hughes's study, most of the new industries in Drummondville came from England and the managers, engineers and scientists were recruited from the British Empire. Their previous contract may have been in India and their next opportunity might be in Rhodesia. They were highly skilled professionals, part of an international elite, an early generation of globalists. Few stayed long enough to feel any attachment to their temporary home or to learn the local language. *French Canada in Transition* shows why these English bosses earned their deplorable reputation, treating local labour in Quebec the

way they would treat the unskilled native population in India or Africa. Yet Hughes also analyzed French-speaking society. They were engaged in traditional professions as priests, doctors, lawyers and notaries. They were not sending their children to study for modern professions in engineering, chemistry or finance.

Most of the blue-collar labourers had freshly arrived from farms, where they did not yet have electricity, telephones or radios. They knew nothing of modern technology and most were barely literate. The rural immigrants were as "backward" in the eyes of the foreign bosses as Irish immigrants in the previous century or the Italian working class after the Second World War. It was not surprising that barely literate farmhands earned less than engineers, but Hughes could see an explosive culture clash was brewing between English-speaking industrialists and their French-speaking workers.

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A little farther down the St. Lawrence on its north shore, we pass the mouth of the Saint-Maurice, which slices through Trois-Rivières. Trois-Rivières was a lumber town and then an industrial city, surrounded by a narrow strip of farmland. The Maurice region is the setting for one of the bleakest Québécois novels ever written: *Trente arpents* (1938) by Ringuet, the penname of Philippe Panneton. The 2012 Bibliothèque québécois edition has an introduction on its back cover by filmmaker Denys Arcand, who wrote and directed the film *Le declin de l'empire américain*[53]:

> Thirty Acres is pitiless work. All Quebec literature is a literature of sadness, renunciation, and sorrow. This is the story of a man born of the land, a prisoner of his language, his religion, his village, and his province, who will end up crushed by the American empire. The symbolism is almost too obvious. The subject matter is so unbearable that it probably explains the disaffection this book has suffered since its publication. Of all our best novels, it is the least read. Yet, one could easily say that it is the greatest. If one had to make a comparison, it would compare to Tolstoy's Master and Man and Kholstomer.

[53] *The Decline of the American Empire.*

Euchariste Moisan, the protagonist of the story, is a farmer who follows the rules of his ancestors, fathering thirteen children, making the land fruitful and prosperous. His life should be a success story, but the rules have changed during his lifetime, and the old values are no longer rewarded. His few surviving children abandon the farm, he is robbed of his savings and loses the ancestral land, then joins his son, now known as Jack, and his Irish wife, Betty, in New England, where the old farmer loses his faith and his language. *Trente arpents* is a heart-breaking tale of loss.

The most famous citizen of Trois-Rivières is Maurice Le Noblet Duplessis, former premier of Quebec and godfather of la grande noirceur[54] (1936 – 1939 and 1944 – 1959, the years Duplessis was in power). This period of anti-intellectual authoritarianism had deep roots in the Catholic nationalism promoted by Groulx, though Groulx became an adversary of Duplessis because he believed the compromising politician had sold the resources of his people to foreign interests. Groulx gave Duplessis no credit for attracting capital to develop Quebec's resources and create jobs at home to stop the flow of youth into the Protestant English-speaking world beyond the borders. Groulx became an ardent supporter of Jean Lesage's Quiet Revolution regime that replaced Duplessis and he inspired the Liberal's winning slogan, « Maîtres chez nous ».

The Duplessis years are also associated with antisemitism in Quebec. Esther Delisle studied the subject in *Le traître et le Juif: Lionel Groulx, le devoir et le délire du nationalisme d'extrême droite dans la province de Québec, 1929 – 1939*[55] (L'Étincelle, 1992). During the inter-war period, several nations embraced antisemitic nationalism: Spain with Franco, Italy with Mussolini and Germany with Hitler. Fascism was in part motivated by, and regularly justified as, the best way to defeat Godless communism. Delisle makes it clear that Quebec's period of authoritarian antisemitism was driven by a small group of intellectuals yet her critique generated sharp controversy. Critics claimed that her methodology was inaccurate and that her conclusions could not be supported.

[54] *The Great Darkness.*

[55] *The title of the English edition is The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-semitism and the Delirium of Extremist Right-wing Nationalism in French Canada from 1929 – 1939.*

In 2002, filmmaker Eric R. Scott made *Je me souviens*, a documentary about Delisle and her book. He contacted me after I wrote "The Lionel Groulx School of History," a column in *The Montrealer* magazine published June, 2024, about parallels between the CAQ's version of history and Groulx. In the cool of the deeply shaded courtyard behind his local coffee shop, Eric had a lot to say about Delisle. Her research faced stiff opposition even before she obtained her PhD. The normal time for approval at Université Laval was three months; the committee delayed a decision on Delisle's thesis for almost two years until articles about the delay and the controversy surrounding her work appeared in the French- and English-language press. Eric witnessed the hostility among nationalists to Delisle's work, which was received as an attack on Quebec. Delisle was never hired to teach at a French-language university. Eric's film was also greeted with hostility.

Antisemitism is a highly divisive issue in Quebec. During the battle over the Jewish School Question and school eligibility in 1930, the archbishop of Montreal, Georges Gauthier, hired an aggressive young journalist to help him fight the government's plan to grant Jewish students the right to their own school commission. The young journalist the archbishop hired was Adrien Arcand, who later became the leader of Quebec Nazi movement. In *Jews and French Quebecers: Two Hundred Years of Shared History* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1991), Jacques Langlais and David Rome offer some insight into this tension:

> Publicly, the clash between church and state was fought by intermediaries, especially in the columns of various clerical newspapers. They [the clerics] began by silencing Henri Bourassa, the longstanding champion of minority rights. He was removed from the editorial board of *Le Devoir* and a campaign was launched to discredit his grandfather, Louis-Joseph Papineau, who had long ago supported the Jews. (p. 81)

Trois-Rivières' first recorded encounter with antisemitism occurred in 1808 when Ezekiel Hart was elected to the legislative assembly of Lower Canada. Joseph Papineau (who was becoming a lumber baron in the Ottawa Valley) protested that Hart was a Jew who could not take the oath on the Christian Bible and therefore could not sit as a member of

the assembly. The speaker agreed and expelled Hart. Papineau's son, Louis-Joseph (who later led the Patriotes rebellion), became speaker of the assembly in 1832 and oversaw the proclamation of the Emancipation Act, which extended full and equal civil rights to the province's Jews. Britain did not provide its Jewish citizens equal rights until 1858. The Emancipation Act was a landmark event thanks to Papineau and Hart in Quebec's first battle over Jewish rights in Trois-Rivières.

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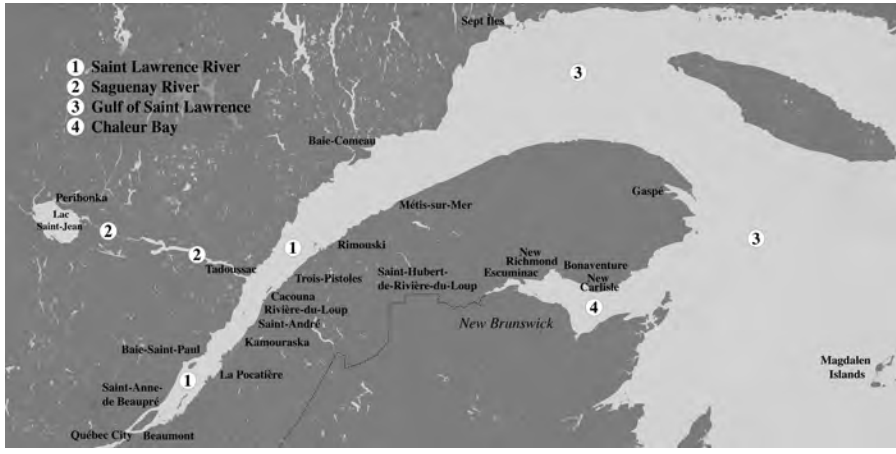
From Trois-Rivières to Quebec City is a little over an hour by road, half a day by water. I vividly remember sailing here aboard Captain Norm's three-masted schooner. The south shore dotted with white clapboard houses capped with blue-tiled roofs. Breakwaters of massive stones sheltering sandy lawns from high tide. Flocks of seabirds diving for scraps from fleets of passing ocean vessels. Salt-water gulf tide battling with the vast quantities of fresh water rushing from the Great Lakes. Sandstone bluffs rising high above the water. Splendor unimaginable to motorists speeding along the drab but efficient highways above.

When you reach the soaring heights of Cape Diamond, it is easy to understand why the narrow stretch of water below was as strategic as Gibraltar: Whoever controlled the cannons above these cliffs controlled the wealth generated by sea traffic to the St. Lawrence Valley and the



Map 9: Lower St. Lawrence River and Gulf

Great Lakes of the continent's interior. It is hard to imagine now, but for most of the nineteenth century, logs were shipped down tributary rivers to the St. Lawrence and then tied together in huge rafts and driven all the way to Quebec City, where they were sawed into lumber and shipped to Europe.

	French		English		Other Languages	
1871	40,890	(69%)	18,120	(30%)	689	(1%)
1931	119,262	(91%)	9,677	(7%)	1,655	(1%)
1996	178,290	(97%)	3,660	(2%)	1,465	(1%)
2021	496,096	(92%)	10,275	(2%)	35,740	(6%)

Table 36: Quebec City population, 1871 – 2021

Tourists visiting Quebec's capital city today might be surprised to encounter large English churches in the old city. Why would a tiny English-speaking community build so many big churches? Quebec City's population was 40 percent English in the 1850s and many of the residents were prosperous merchants. Now the English presence is almost invisible but the architecture remains impressive.

The English history of Quebec City was strictly divided by religion: Catholics and Protestants as well as Christians and non-Christians. Jewish and Chinese communities existed in separate solitudes. One of the people in my film, Walter Chiyan Tom, grew up in the city's Chinese community that operated small businesses, like laundries and the restaurant owned by Walter's parents. The Chinese were isolated.

Barry McCullough invited me to present my film at the Morrin Centre, a pillar of the local English-speaking community. Barry is the centre's executive director and I had worked with him before when ELAN co-produced summer arts festivals. The Morrin Centre opened as a prison in 1812. Fifty-six years later, after the prison closed, the Literary and Historical Society of Quebec frequented various homes before settling in this building. The museum on the first floor includes authentic prison cells. The gallows stood out in the courtyard. The library is of another era, its ornate wooden bookcases rising nine metres, accessible by ladders and catwalks.

The Morrin Centre and its library

The Morrin Centre's location in the heart of Old Quebec is priceless but also far removed from the city's English speakers, now dispersed across the large, modern city. Like many Anglo institutions in Quebec, the historic building that houses the Morin Centre is an anomaly, created for a different time and place, by a community that is greatly diminished.

The audience for the screening consisted of recent immigrants, some tourists and a contingent of bureaucrats from the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise, which had funded my film. I had hoped the screening in Quebec City would attract members of the old Protestant and Catholic families, and maybe some remnants of the Jewish and Chinese communities, who could share stories about how language politics and declining numbers had caused change, for better and worse.

Fortunately, Quebec City's English speakers, present and past, have a Facebook group that sent its members the YouTube link to see my film online, which hundreds did. Some wrote to comment and share their own experiences, confirming that the Catholic and Protestant communities did not fraternize unnecessarily back in the days when religion was the dominant identifier. "We pretty much lived in parallel worlds," wrote one person, "with our own schools, churches and community organizations." The Jewish and Chinese communities had little social contact with the sectarian Christians. "We were ignored by both solitudes!" That insularity changed as the English-speaking population shrank. English-speaking youth began to attend the same schools and play sports together. It is now almost impossible to imagine the old tribal boundaries.

Levels of French skills in Quebec City are quite high and bilingualism is valued. "It is easy to find work in the tourist industry and in other sectors that communicate with the English-speaking world," wrote another member of the Facebook group. "It is also possible for English speakers to find many types of well-paying work in Quebec City but young people continue to leave."

Quebec City has an old and proud Anglo history, but even if it is deeply inscribed in their DNA, most Anglos in Quebec City live in the present. It is difficult for them to understand why so many francophones speak about the Conquest of 1759 as if it is a personal trauma. Gaston Deschênes presented the battles that took place around Quebec City in his richly illustrated book *L'année des Anglais*[56] (Septentrion, 2009). General James Wolfe, commander of the British forces, wrote a proclamation on June 30, 1759, and had it nailed to all the church doors:

> The King of Great Britain does not bring war to industrious farmers, to religious orders, to women or defenceless children. To the above mentioned, in their difficult situation, his merciful Majesty offers protection. The people will not be troubled on their farms; they can inhabit their houses and practice their religion in safety. For these inestimable benefits, I hope the *Canadiens* will take no part in this great conflict between two Kingdoms. However, if they take up arms, in futile obstinacy or misguided courage, they must expect the most deadly consequences. (p. 52)

British forces landed with a massive fleet of 150 ships and 18,000 men. The British had also recruited six brigades of Rangers from New England. Malcolm Fraser was the first to report that New England Rangers were disobeying Wolfe's orders: "Sent to capture a fugitive, Rangers captured his two children and killed them in the most inhuman way possible" (p. 55).

On July 23, Wolfe made a new proclamation to the Canadiens: "Return to your homes by August 10 and you will receive all the favours accorded to British subjects. But if you persist in taking up arms, we will totally destroy your farms" (p. 57). On September 3, about a week before the

[56] *The Year of the English.*

battle of the Plains of Abraham, British soldiers began burning houses and barns of Canadiens who remained hiding in the woods instead of returning to their homesteads. This destruction was mostly inflicted between the towns of Beaumont and Kamouraska.

The entire civilian population along this 140-kilometre strip numbered 1,500 families, or 10,000 men, women and children. The British destroyed about 800 buildings, including houses, barns and outhouses. This was part of a general strategy of intimidation, which was also employed on the opposite shore of the St. Lawrence at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré. In one particularly horrifying story, troops searched a house for food and then burned the building to the ground, only hearing too late the dying screams of woman and children hiding in the cellar. Hundreds of soldiers were killed or wounded in both armies (including Generals Wolfe and Montcalm). Civilians also lost their lives during the Conquest and many suffered starvation and the loss of houses at the onset of a brutal winter.

The horror of war should not be dismissed lightly. However, the profound and enduring trauma attributed to the Conquest by many francophones-de-souche demands contextualization. How many homes were burned? How many livestock were stolen? How much grain was destroyed? How many civilians were killed?

The number of civilian deaths in the Conquest often mentioned on social media is 10,000. One of the sources is filmmaker, pamphleteer and *indépendantiste* Pierre Falardeau. « La Conquête a fait 10,000 morts, un septième de la population, et brûlé les deux rives du Saint-Laurent, sacrament! »[57] One of Falardeau's incendiary anti-Conquest, pro-separation tirades has become a frequently viewed social media meme.

The civilian population killed in Britain during the Second World War, including six months of intense bombing, was about 60,000 from a population of 50 million, which represents 0.01 percent. The civilian population killed in Germany during the Second World War, after Allied bombing reduced many major cities to rubble, was about 500,000 from a population of 70 million, which represents 0.07 percent.

[57] *The Conquest caused 10,000 deaths, one-seventh of the population, and burned both banks of the St. Lawrence, damn it!*

In this context, 10,000 deaths in Nouvelle France from a population of 70,000 — 14 percent — would make the Conquest one of the bloodiest massacres in the history of warfare. However, Deschênes mentions only a few civilian deaths: two boys killed by Rangers (p. 55), women and children killed in the cellar of a burned house (p. 51), « cinq Canadiens en train de casser du blé d'Inde »[58] who were "killed and scalped" (p. 61) and the seigneur de la rivière du Sud, Jean-Baptiste Couillard, plus perhaps three comrades (p. 77).

The *Nos origines* website has a page titled « Commémorons les victimes de 1759 » that attempts to substantiate the 10,000 deaths. It argues that the absence of evidence can be attributed to loss or destruction. The site mentions Couillard and his brother, Joseph, but laments that « huit victimes ont trouvées un nom, mais il reste encore 9 992 autres à identifier ».[59] It is not impossible that the British eradicated all the evidence of genocide. However, it is more likely that thousands of unidentified victims never died but remain living spectres in the trauma of the Conquest.

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My next screening was at Rivière-du-Loup, but first I would spend the night in Kamouraska, which is the northern limit of the heartland traumatized by Wolfe and his army. As I travelled past Beaumont, Saint-Vallier, Montmagny, L'Anse-à-Gilles, La Pocatière and Rivière-Ouelle, I thought about the stories in Deschênes's book. Were the British soldiers and American Rangers more savage than armies in other wars? A few of the leaders were responsible for most of the violence. Others, such as Murray and Fraser, behaved with decency. Deschênes reports that when the war ended, many Canadiens rejoiced at the regime change and readily submitted to the new Empire, remembering Intendant François Bigot as an exceptionally corrupt administrator who was tried and convicted for his crimes in France, though some contemporary skeptics claim that France used Bigot as a scapegoat to divert attention from its own responsibility in the colonial debacle.

[58] *"Five Canadians cracking corn."*

[59] *"Eight victims have been named, but 9,992 others remain to be identified."*

The Conquest is the most important event in Quebec's history from the perspective of descendants of Nouvelle France, whose identity is inextricably linked to that loss and the ensuing afflictions. Political scientist Christian Dufour wrote the insightful book *Le défi québécois* (Presses de l'université Laval, 1990) after the exhilarating first referendum and the initially popular but ultimately defeated Meech Lake Accord.[60] *Le défi québécois* has become a political science classic. It demonstrates that the driving force of Quebec nationalism is to reverse the trauma of the Conquest. The most complete solution is independence, which would restore Nouvelle France to its pre-Conquest state, removing the conqueror. A weaker solution is to make Quebec a unilingual French-speaking society, silencing and disempowering the conqueror. The PQ has twice attempted to remove Québec from Canada. The CAQ's strategy is to push Canada out of Québec.

Dufour acknowledged that the Conquest also had positive benefits. Post-Conquest immigrants contributed to building modern Quebec and the English language has become part of Quebec's post-Conquest culture. Dufour concluded that:

> Non sans raison, les Québécois francophones sont inquiets quant à leur avenir collectif. Cependant, ils ont beaucoup appris depuis 1960. Ils ont été confrontés à tant de nouveautés, ils se sont débattus dans tellement de contradictions que de bon nombre d'entre eux aspirent maintenant à une synthèse.[61]

What would this new synthesis look like? Dufour left the question open. The future offered a series of possible solutions in rapid succession. In 1992, the federal and provincial governments proposed a package of amendments to the constitution of Canada in the Charlestown Accord. Initially supported by all three federal parties, all ten premiers, most of Canada's media and many First Nations groups, the Charlestown Accord became steadily less popular as the campaign progressed. The electorate found at least some aspect of the lengthy accord with which

[60] *In 1990, the bitter failures of the Charlottetown Accord and the second referendum were still in the future.*

[61] *"Not without reason, French-speaking Quebecers are worried about their collective future. Yet, they have learned a great deal since 1960. They have been confronted with so many new developments, they have been debated amid so many contradictions that many of them now yearn for a synthesis" (p. 168).*

they disagreed, and then–Prime Minister Mulroney became extremely unpopular.[62] The Charlestown Accord was submitted to a public referendum in October 26, 1992, and 54.3 percent of voters were opposed. The second possible solution was Quebec's 1995 referendum on independence, which 50.58 percent of voters opposed.

In the postface to the 2000 reprint of his book, Dufour assessed the ongoing relevance of his analysis:

> Le caractère autodestructeur de l'action politique des Québécois, l'interpénétration des identités québécoise et canadienne, de même que l'existence d'une dynamique antagoniste entre elles, sont plus évidentes qu'il y a dix ans. Enfin, la dépendance structurelle du pays à l'égard de la Conquête — et l'armature intellectuelle de l'ouvrage — est apparue plus clairement que jamais dans la foulée du référendum de 1995.[63]

The only thing that remains unchanged from generation to generation, from crisis to crisis, is the foundational trauma of the Conquest.

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My host in Kamouraska was Andrew Caddell. I had first heard of him during the pandemic. He was an Anglo who had recently taken up residence in the village, after his retirement from Global Affairs Canada in 2017, and was elected to the town council in 2021. Kamouraska seemed like an unlikely place for an Anglo to reside or to play an active role in local government. Then I heard about Andrew as a member of the Task Force on Linguistic Policy that was fighting Bill 96 in the courts. By the time my film was screened at Concordia, Andrew was leading the Task Force and the executive committee was talking about hosting a screening of my film in Montreal for its members. Because of his

[62] *In the October 25, 1993, election, the Progressive Conservative Party was reduced from 156 seats to 2 seats in the worst defeat ever suffered at the federal level in Canada.*

[63] *"The self-destructive nature of Quebecers' political action, the interpenetration of Quebec and Canadian identities, and the existence of an antagonistic dynamic between them are more evident now than they were ten years ago. Finally, the country's structural dependence on the Conquest — and the intellectual framework of my thesis — became more evident than ever following the 1995 referendum."*

residence in Kamouraska, Andrew encouraged the Heritage Lower Saint Lawrence (HLSL) regional association to host screenings in Rivière-du-Loup and Métis-sur-mer.

After a five-hour drive from Montreal, I easily located Andrew's house on Morel Avenue, the main road through Kamouraska. I was curious about why he had chosen to live in the heart of Nouvelle France. Andrew's answer surprised me. His great-great-grandfather, John LeMesurier, had been a mayor of Quebec City and married a francophone, Marie Sylvain, from Saint-Vallier. Their son, William John LeMesurier, and Andrew's great-grandmother, Emily Andrews, who was educated in French at the Ursuline convent in Quebec, bought the house on Morel Avenue in 1884. It has been in the family ever since, mostly often used as a summer residence.

Andrew took me for a walking tour of the neighbourhood. We descended a sharp slope to LeBlanc Avenue that runs along the waterfront. A few hundred metres away we entered a property with several houses belonging to his cousins. Great-uncle Dr. Stuart Ramsey and his wife, Juliette Pelletier, who had deep roots in the region, bought the piece of land in 1948 and built a house on it. Their descendants later built a tennis court where Andrew played with his cousins during their summers here.

We continued walking along the lane beside the tidal flatlands of the St. Lawrence and then back up to the main street to a house that once belonged to Jacques-Vinceslas Taché, the seigneur of Saint-Paschal-de-Kamouraska. It now belongs to the Forbes family, who are old friends of Andrew's. Now I understood why the local folk elected him to the town council. He is not a recently transplanted Anglo but rather a man with dual heritage and deep roots in the region. We then continued along Morel Avenue, greeting neighbours in French, until Andrew asked if I had ever seen the film *Kamouraska*. Yes, I had. And I'd read the novel, several times.

Kamouraska is a revered Québécois film, adapted from an award-winning novel by Anne Hebert (1970). The story is based on events surrounding the 1838 murder of Pascal-Achille Taché, seigneur of Kamouraska, by George Holmes, who was said to be in love with Taché's wife, Joséphine-Eléonore

d'Estimauville. In the fictionalized story, the lusty seigneur of Kamouraska marries an innocent young woman from upriver Sorel. After the marriage, Elisabeth D'Aulnières discovers that dashing Antoine Tassy is a debauched barbarian. An old-school chum arrives for a visit. George Nelson attended the seigneur's elite school even though he was poor, Protestant and English. In contrast to the hedonistic seigneur, George became a devoted country doctor who never turned away a patient in need. Unlike the happy-go-lucky outlander in *Le survenant*, who is embraced as one of the clan in Sorel, George's foreignness cannot be ignored and he is excluded from most aspects of rural Catholic society. George Nelson is the hero of Hebert's novel, risking his own life to free Elizabeth from her cruel, half-crazed husband by killing him. William Johnson does not include Kamouraska in his *Anglophobie made in Québec* study.

Elisabeth lives the rest of her days under the cloud of scandal but marries a wealthy Quebec City notary and regains a place in polite society, leaving George to bear full responsibility for the murder and flee Quebec, never to return. George's role in the story is comparable to foreign capitalists who helped free Quebec from its agrarian poverty. But even the best of them, like Colonel McCormick in Baie-Comeau, were aliens whose helpful role was quickly forgotten after they were driven into exile.

Andrew and I soon found ourselves standing in front of Taché's home. The house seemed smaller and more modest than I would have expected. I had the same feeling visiting Elvis's Graceland in Memphis, surprised at the modesty of the real estate yet struck by the history surrounding it.

Seigneurial manor of Kamouraska.

Returning to Andrew's house, we sat on the broad balcony and watched the crimson sun sink beneath the broad waters of the St. Lawrence. The feeling was timeless and the view magnificent. Andrew and I discussed history and politics until late. He is one of the few people I know who is familiar with Horace Miner's book, *St. Denis, a French-Canadian Parish* (University of Chicago Press, 1939). It is perhaps not surprising that Andrew would know the book; Saint-Denis parish is just five kilometres south-west of Kamouraska.

Miner began his research project with some preliminary work at McGill University and then undertook a prolonged residency in St. Denis from July 1936 to June 1937. Collaborators on the research included Everett Cherrington Hughes, who returned to Quebec a few years later to study the emerging industrial society in Drummondville.

St. Denis, a French-Canadian Parish portrays a world so primitive that the reader feels uncomfortable observing the clinical evaluation. Miner came to rural Quebec to conduct field studies on an "isolated peasant group comparable with American Indian or native African societies" (p. xiv). Why were rural Quebecers an "isolated peasant group" more worthy of field study for an anthropologist from the University of Chicago than the backwoods of Appalachia, the Mississippi bayous or the Yucatan peninsula? Robert Redfield, in his introduction to Miner's published study, sheds some light:

> In the case of the French-Canadian rural communities Dr. Miner's account makes plain some of the special circumstances in Quebec that have tended to preserve the local and traditional organization and some other factors that are tending to disrupt it. Like the members of other societies on the periphery of expanding civilization, the Habitant has been exposed to the existing and disorganizing of the outsider and more citified person. There has been the usual tendency to modify old local ways and take over customs and points of view of the outsider. But here the Catholic church has acted as a regulator upon this tendency. She has stood between the changing world and the habitant, preventing the admission of elements, which she condemns, and interpreting admitted elements in accordance with the faith and with the local culture.

> The reader of this book cannot fail to be impressed with the completeness with which this local folk culture is articulated with the doctrines and practices of the church. The church provides sacred justifications and explanations for the necessary toil of the native, offers rituals to carry the individual from birth to death, and supports and sanctifies the large-family system. In its local institutions and in the parish priest, it provides the framework for community government and the moral leader of the community. And when local ways are threatened by a danger such as the example of a summer colony,[64] the church is there, in the sermons of the priest, to minimize the danger of contagion. The church has gradually eliminated from the magic of the people those forms which are not consistent with Catholic Christianity, while allowing the society to accept certain approved novelties, such as scientific agriculture. One might think that under this tutelage the traditional culture of the French Canadian, preserving its essentials, might continue substantially intact for centuries. (p. xvii)

Miner's work is important because it presents a "primitive" society about to be hurled into the modern world, where displaced farmers would become the factory workers that Hughes studied in Drummondville. Miner's pre-modern medieval civilization that "might continue substantially intact for centuries" suddenly collapsed, as described in the tragic novel *Trente arpents*.

This is not ancient history. The "primitive" habitants that Miner studied are the parents of baby boomers. The proximity of the story makes it difficult to grasp the accelerated transformation from their world into ours, as TV suddenly exposed isolated farmers to the outside world battling for colonial liberation, women's rights, gay rights and civil rights in the USA.

In the 1950s, the entire Québécois nation demanded to know how it had been oppressed for centuries. By the 60s, the mood was rage, demanding that francophones become « Maîtres chez nous » as the FLQ terrorized foreign oppressors. By the 70s, the battle cry was

[64] *E.g., partying Protestant pleasure seekers.*

self-affirmation. The 60s and 70s were turbulent years of protest and liberation from colonial, patriarchal, ecclesiastical and capitalist domination in most regions of the world. The temper of the times was well-documented by television news cameras. The documentary series *La révolution tranquille au Québec* vividly captures the mood in four episodes: « L'effervescence » (1960 – 1966), « L'impatience » (1966 – 1970), « La violence » (1970 – 1976) and « L'ambivalence » (1976 – 1980). Several lengthy stages of social development were compressed into a single generation and experienced by baby boomers. These are the stories outlanders must know before they can begin to penetrate the mysteries of Quebec.

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The next day I drove fifty kilometres north from Kamouraska to the screening in Rivière-du-Loup along the old 132, which offers better views of the St. Lawrence than the new highway 20. The high concept of the conquered hinterland and its traumatic history began to fade as the real-world tour resumed.

	French		English		Other Languages	
1871	1,377	(89%)	162*	(11%)	62	-
1931	8,284	(98%)	164*	(2%)	51	-
1996	12,615	(99%)	105*	(1%)	40	-
2021	19,262	(98%)	160*	(0.5%)	307	(1.5%)

Table 37: Rivière-du-Loup population, 1871 – 2021
**census numbers are based on permanent residence and do not count summer resident*

Susan Woodfine, executive director of HLSL, booked Rivière-du-Loup's maison de la culture for the screening. Her colleague Alexandra Rao had prepared some data about English speakers in the region to establish a profile of the community and its needs. One of the association's challenges is that many English speakers do not have a strong sense of identity based on the language they speak. Francophones have appropriated language as the official signifier of identity but English is used throughout the world, so English speakers — and particularly

allophone immigrants — regard the language as a means of communication, not a unifying trait or an important aspect of their identity.

The maison de la culture and municipal library in Rivière-du-Loup are located in the old part of the city, in a beautifully repurposed stone monastery built in 1886. The media room is on the third floor. A couple dozen people took their seats. It was clear from the chatter that they were mostly English speakers. Before screening the film, Alexandra shared a presentation that blended anecdotes, theories of social interaction and local data. HLSL later published a more detailed version.[65]

	English	French
Knowledge of both Official Languages (bilingual)	85%	21%
Percentage of speakers for whom the language is mother tongue	71%	99%
Visible Minorities	19%	1%
Indigenous Identity	7%	2%
Mobility – have moved to the region during the past 5 years	47%	23%
Immigrants & Non-permanent Residents	25%	1%

Table 38: Heritage Lower Saint-Lawrence community profile, 2025

The bottom figure combines recent immigrants who are now permanent residents and non-permanent residents who return every summer. Alexandra concluded her presentation by asking the people in the room to indicate how strongly they felt they belong in Quebec with a show of fingers. The percentage of people with all ten fingers up was high.

The first woman to speak said, "That question of belonging in Quebec is problematic for me. My mother is an Anglo from Quebec and her roots here are deep. My father is francophone but not from Quebec. I was born here but grew up all over the place and only moved back as an adult at the time of the second referendum. I felt like I was coming home, where my ancestors are buried, but as I was walking around Montreal in 1995, I saw graffiti saying, 'Anglos go home.' I'm an Anglo. Do I belong here? Historically, yes, but my contemporary sense of belonging is not straightforward."

[65] *A Portrait of the English-speaking Communities of the Lower Saint-Lawrence Region, "Part 1: A Demolinguistic and Socioeconomic Profile Based on the 2021 Census."*

Andrew spoke next:

> I've lived all around the world: India, Bangladesh, Macedonia and Switzerland. I've also lived in Montreal, Quebec City, Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, Banff National Park and St. John's, Newfoundland. Compared to all the other places I've lived, Kamouraska is where I feel most at home. My father was born in Canada but was effectively an immigrant from Scotland. My mother's roots in Quebec go back to 1640. She also has Indigenous ancestors. I'm half immigrant and half de souche. A few years ago, I left Ottawa and now I live in Kamouraska.

Then Susan shared her story:

> We've been in Rimouski twenty-two years. My husband is an English speaker from Saint-Lambert on the South Shore of Montreal. I'm from Nova Scotia. We both found good jobs here. The question of belonging is problematic. I came to Quebec to study at the Université de Montréal, then worked for years in Quebec City. My experience has always been that French and English speakers get along very well. The narrative right now about English being a threat to Quebec, particularly in Montreal, is unsettling.

Rachel McCrum, the most recent member of HLSL's team, spoke next:

> I grew up in Northern Ireland until age eighteen. My family is Protestant, if you want to talk about conflicted identity! Then I was in Scotland for six years during their independence referendum. Then I moved to Quebec, so I don't know what it would be like to live in a place with a settled national identity! These complicated questions of identity feel normal for me. My partner is Québécois, so I have been embraced by francophone culture despite having horrible French! I love Quebec's rich and diverse culture. Belonging is a process, a fragile process.

A recently established permanent resident said:

> Belonging and home are linked. The poet Robert Frost said, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." Last week I was over in the Laurentians and driving home on the strip between Quebec City and Rivière-du-Loup, which is

> some of the most glorious scenery in the world. I thought, "I'm almost home!" I was so happy to be back. I feel part of this place even though I'm an Anglo who lived in Ottawa for forty years. I'm proud to say I'm from Rivière-du-Loup!

Another woman said:

> It upsets me that our politicians are trying to break us apart. I love Quebec and I've never felt quite so separated from it. When I speak French, people ask, "Where are you from?" I don't have a typical Anglo accent. I say, "I'm Québécoise," and they say, "Oh no…" They don't think I'm Québécoise, although all my life has been here.

Alexandra then asked the group how the current sense of divisiveness in the rest of Quebec compared to the Lower St. Lawrence. A woman from Ontario replied, "I try my best to speak French but they answer me in English. The friendliness here is unbelievable. I come back each year and I haven't found any animosity. But I'm not living here full time to be affected by the change in the law. I read about it from Ontario. I have the joy of being here in the summer without the worry."

"I don't live here full time either," a woman from Montreal said. "I live in Montreal and work in French. Here I live mostly in English. Like many of the people in this room, my family has been coming here for generations. The generational relationships between English speakers and French speakers here are pretty strong. My interactions are positive. People are surprised that I speak French so well. I have no sense of rejection."

"There is a very positive vibe in Rimouski," Alexandra added, "but the percentage of Anglos in the region is less than 1 percent, so English speakers are more of a novelty than a threat."

The man from Ottawa said, "On a personal level I've experienced nothing but friendliness and kindness all the time! I really believe the divisiveness is caused by political machinations. It annoys the hell out of me — the demonization of people who speak English."

Andrew spoke again:

> When I ran for election in Kamouraska, Bill 96 was in the news. I was invited on the local radio program to talk about it a week

before the election. The host said, "If you're a man of conviction, you should talk about Bill 96." So I went on and laid out my point of view about how there are serious problems with Bill 96. Most anglophones speak French, so there is no need to supress anglophone rights, and there are credible indications that French is not in decline. About two-thirds of the way through the interview, the radio host said, "I notice you never use anglicisms." I laughed and said, "I always told my kids, 'You either speak French or you speak English.' So I don't use anglicisms." At the end of the interview the host said, "That's Andrew Caddell. You may not agree with him but he's an interesting guy who lives in Kamouraska full time now." When election day came, I won by the largest majority of anyone on the town council.

The audience applauded and Andrew concluded with a memory. "When the Parti Québécois won their first majority back in 1976, I was in Montreal with my parents. My father gathered us together and said, 'If it really gets tough here in Montreal, we'll just move to Kamouraska. Nobody would ever give us any problems there.'" The audience chuckled in appreciation. Many Montrealers are hesitant to venture out into the heartland of Nouvelle France where the Conquest took place but hostility decreases in intensity away from the metropolis.

"We are still dealing with many myths about Anglos," Susan then said. "Sometimes when people hear us speaking English they think we can't speak French but most of us are quite comfortable in French."

A francophone man who has an Anglo partner said, "There is an obsession now about mother tongue and the languages you speak at home. I don't know what language we speak at home! We have our own language. One of my friends is a French teacher from Argentina but she speaks Spanish at home, so she would be in the bad category for mother tongue and language spoken at home according to the CAQ."

A woman whose home is in the Eastern Townships said, "Health care professionals in the Townships are wearing sunflowers pinned to their uniforms to signal that they will speak English with anyone who wants it. The health system is one of the places where service in your own language is most important. You don't want to die in a language you're not comfortable in!"

Alexandra had heard that this trend of signalling service in English started in the Gaspé region. Andrew had heard it started in the Pontiac Region in West Quebec. The reaction in the room was mixed: pleased that health care workers in many parts of the province were circumventing the new anti-English law but indignant that it was necessary.

An older woman said, "I used to avoid Angryphones and all of that but I've found increasingly that Bill 96 makes me angry! You call the Quebec government now and you have to listen to a long recording listing the people allowed to access services in English and they ask you to hang up if you're not on that list. I feel like I've become a non-citizen. I've never been angry before in such a visceral way!"

"My father and son were born here," Andrew replied, "but educated outside Canada. Were they alive, neither would qualify as a historic Anglo with rights to service in English. There are many English speakers who arrived here after their primary school education. Although they may have lived here for many years and contributed to Quebec in many ways, … they cannot legally dial 9 and receive service in English. Bill 96 eliminates language rights for half a million English speakers!"

The people at the screening agreed that the new language laws were divisive, placing the right for francophones to work in French in direct opposition to the need of anglophones to be served in English. The minister of health had just released a thirty-one-page directive that was so bureaucratically convoluted nobody could be sure who it excluded from services in English. After a storm of protest, it was replaced by a simpler eight-page directive but it was still not clear if the right to work in French trumped the patient's need to receive health care in English.

A friend in Montreal with deep roots in the region sent me a scanned copy of *Canadian Geographic* from 1987 when she heard I would be visiting the Lower St. Lawrence region. Inside, an article by Dane Lanken was about the glory days of summer tourism along this Lower St. Lawrence coast, which began when John Molson established the first steamship service in 1809. Wealthy families from eastern Canada and northern USA sailed down the St. Lawrence to spend their summers in Cacouna, Murray Bay, Rivière-du-Loup and Métis-sur-mer.

Lighthouse near Jardins de Métis / Reford Gardens

This Montreal friend, Helen Meredith, happened to be vacationing at Rivière-du-Loup and she attended the screening. I had a free day before the next screening, so I met Helen at Saint-Patrice, a few kilometres south of Rivière-du-Loup. Helen's paternal ancestors spent summers in this region for over one hundred years. Her mother embraced the tradition of spending summers here, saying, « Qui prend mari, prend pays ».[66] Helen still visits the region every summer.

No one driving through this narrow, leafy strip of the 132 near the intersection with Autoroute 20 would suspect it was once a village that buzzed with activity during the summer months. They would never suspect how much history is crammed into the village formerly known as Saint Patrick, or just St. Pat's.

Helen and I walked along the 132, known locally as Rue Fraser, and our first stop was number 336. In 1870, Sir John A. Macdonald was advised by his physician, Dr. Charles Tupper, to take a vacation by the sea for his health, so the prime minister began travelling from Ottawa to spend summers at Saint Patrick with his family. In 1873, they acquired les Rochers and returned to the villa regularly until 1890. The house has belonged to Canadian Heritage of Quebec since 1981 and was designated a National Historic Site in 2014. Helen and I wandered the broad verandas and peeked through dusty windows into empty rooms.

66 *"She who takes a husband, takes a country."*

Macdonald has been figuratively and literally knocked off his pedestal as a Canadian hero. In 2020, protesters across Canada targeted monuments to Canada's first prime minister because of his instrumental role in creating Canada's residential school system. After his statue in Montreal's Dorchester Square was splattered with red paint and beheaded, the city of Montreal decided not to repair it.

Macdonald's spacious summer home has the silence of a ghost house but it is still easy to imagine it as the centre of a lively social crowd. In August 1885, Macdonald convened his cabinet to meet at les Rochers. Most cabinet members travelled by white boat or train but some, such as Joseph-Philippe-René-Adolphe Caron and Sir Hector-Louis Langevin, were already summering at St. Patrick.

After leaving the grounds of number 336, Helen and I visited other notable houses along Rue Fraser. Railroad developer Thomas Reynolds built the Regency-style house at 304 Rue Fraser in 1868, and Governor General Lord Dufferin and Lady Dufferin were among the first to stay there for a summer. Governor General Lord Charles Monck and Lady Frances Monck enjoyed spending their Canadian summers in Saint Patrick during the 1860s, renting a farmhouse at 308 Rue Fraser. In 1955, then–Prime Minister Louis St.-Laurent, maintaining a century-old tradition, purchased the venerable house at 342 Rue Fraser. He and his family spent their summers there until 1971.

After we leave St. Pat's, Meredith takes me on a tour of Rivière-du-Loup. The first European settlement was established here in 1673 as the seigneurie of Charles Aubert de la Chesnaye. A hundred years later, it was a tiny settlement consisting of fifteen buildings. After the Conquest, the seigneurie was acquired by General James Murray, the first British governor of Quebec, and was then owned by Henry Caldwell, before being acquired in 1802 by Alexandre Fraser, son of Malcolm Fraser, who fought alongside Murray in 1759. Caldwell built a sawmill here in 1829 that launched industrialization. Then the Grand Trunk Railway reached Fraserville in 1860, making the city accessible during the five months when the river was frozen. Fraserville was a boomtown from 1860 – 1919, when most of the municipal buildings were erected. The city was named Rivière-du-Loup after the First World War.

After thanking Helen for the guided tour, I had some time to fill before sunset, so I seized the opportunity to drive forty-five kilometres inland to a village now known as Saint-Hubert-de-Rivière-du-Loup. This was the homeland of Jack Kerouac's paternal ancestors, up in logging country. Kerouac's mother was a Lévesque from Saint-Pacôme, near Kamouraska.

I visited the cemetery behind the big church in Saint-Hubert and saw the graves of many of Kerouac's ancestors, who spelled their name Kirouac. Kerouac's parents were part of the exodus of French Canadians who left their small farms between 1850 and 1930, the national tragedy portrayed in the novel *Trente arpents*. Curé Labelle offered an alternative to exile and assimilation by opening up new colonies in the Laurentians. Duplessis offered an alternative by attracting foreign capitalists to invest in industrial developments such as Drummondville so workers could stay in Quebec and retain their language.

Montreal was always an option for regional migrants but the city was notorious for pitiful wages and miserable working conditions. Ambitious people like Kerouac's father — Leo — bypassed Montreal to earn better money in New England. He became an entrepreneur who operated his own printing business. By most standards, Leo Kerouac's American experience was a success story.

Jack Kerouac presents a remarkable immigrant success story by becoming an influential author in his adopted land. In modern Quebec, we have a writer like Kim Thúy, child of 1970s "boat people" immigrants, who has achieved extraordinary literary success but Thúy writes about the immigrant experience and her gratitude for the warm welcome Quebec and its people have given her.[67] Kerouac gave voice to the emerging generation of de souche Americans, though he was an immigrant among them writing in his second language. It was an extraordinary accomplishment.

[67] *By September 2025, Thúy was so disturbed with the constant anti-immigrant scapegoating of the CAQ government that she "did not recognize Quebec" and was thinking of leaving, as reported by Rima Elkouri in « La peine d'amour de Kim Thúy », La Presse, September 18, 2025. The nationalist backlash at her "ingratitude" was predictable yet ugly, particularly the scathing online commentary.*

Quebec has complicated feelings about Kerouac: pride that a French Canadian descendant became one of the greatest writers of his generation but discomfort that he wrote in English and ultimately assimilated into a foreign language. No one has expressed this ambivalence toward Kerouac more vividly than the prolific Victor-Lévy Beaulieu (VLB), who built a literary empire just a few kilometres north of Rivière-du-Loup at Trois-Pistoles. In his biography of Kerouac, VLB wrote:

> Jack was nothing but a clown… a self-obsessed French Canadian buffoon… sold-out, dispossessed, and small as only French Canadians are capable… The problem with Jack is that he did not believe in humanity, neither his own nor anyone else's. There was too much Saint Paul in him. Stick on a pair of wings, bleach his hair with peroxide, and fly him over Lowell proclaiming the Good News: *You're all going to die and if you do not know how to do it properly, the gates of Hell are waiting for you!*
>
> I want to twist the ears of this beat(en) ass who called himself Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac: Breton descendant, French Canadian reject, American Royal Florida coconut, Sunkist orange novelist ripened by ultraviolet radiation from Banana Split laboratories, beach writer for the Pepsi generation… His writing is a cesspool of our French Canadian afflictions… our failures… our alienation… and our colonization.[68]

When Kerouac spoke about the beat generation he was looking back to the down-and-out working men of the Depression years. He was not looking ahead to the space-age beatniks reciting poetry in their black turtleneck sweaters, horn-rimmed glasses and neatly trimmed goatees. Kerouac is a tragic character, never comfortable with fame or the literati of his day. Closer to a gruff, tormented Van Gogh than a media manipulator like Picasso, Kerouac had the soul of a lumberjack exiled to deforested suburbia. His interjections on *Firing Line with William F. Buckley Jr.*'s program about hippies were the incoherent, inebriated ramblings of an old man, forty-five years of age, a conservative Catholic out of sync with a progressive Protestant land and free-spirited youth culture of the 60s.

[68] *My translation. Beaulieu, Jack Kérouac : essai-poulet, Typo, 2004, p. 231.*

Kerouac was always proud of his ancestors in French Canada and Breton. Petit Jean, his childhood nickname, was raised in a French-speaking New England community and only began to learn English at school. His ancestors from Saint-Hubert-de-Témiscouata,[69] a pioneer town on the slopes of the northern Appalachians, had an affinity with American hillbillies: rural, rugged and rough-hewn. It is an unlikely environment to produce a world-famous poet. Would Kerouac have become a writer if his parents had remained in the hill country of his ancestors? What fate would have awaited him if his family had relocated to Montreal? Or Baie-Comeau? Or Drummondville? Would he have retained the French language of his ancestors and not have assimilated into American culture like so many from the French Canadian diaspora?

The only known television appearance of Kerouac in French was recorded in Montreal, the year of Expo 67. Montreal was rapidly embracing progressive modernity and rejecting conservative Catholicism. Kerouac was as out of place in Expo Montreal as a hillbilly at a Manhattan cocktail party. Audience members were so surprised at the great author's simplistic French that they tittered. In my hotel room in Rivière-du-Loup later that night, I revisited the 1967 interview where Kerouac fidgeted uncomfortably and struggled to find French words to express his thoughts. The disconnect between his ancestral rural roots and the emerging urbanity of his Expo 67 cousins is painful to watch.

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I left Rivière-du-Loup after breakfast the morning after my tour with Helen Meredith and continued driving farther north, passing through Cacouna, one of the prettiest and best-preserved towns from the "white boat" years of summer resorts. The St. Lawrence River here is twenty-kilometres wide as it opens into the gulf. I remember years ago taking the ferry from Rivière-du-Loup to Tadoussac with Louise and our children. The ferry service did not promise whale sightings but we stood by the rail and watched the water all the way across to Tadoussac, which sits at the mouth of the Saguenay fjord. The area inland around Lac Saint-Jean is mixture of farming, fishing and the densely populated agglomeration

[69] *Now Saint-Hubert-de-Rivière-du-Loup.*

of Saguenay, which contains the older industrial cities Chicoutimi, Jonquière and Arvida.

On the north shore of Lac Saint-Jean sits Péribonka. This was pioneer territory when French author Louis Hémon visited the region in 1912. The first strategy to combat the exodus of Québécois from over-crowded farms to industries outside Quebec was a provincial program of internal colonization that began in the 1840s in the Laurentians. Other colonies were established in the Gaspésie and the Lac Saint-Jean regions. The Duplessis government lost faith in establishing unprofitable farms in the wilderness and for that he was severally condemned by Groulx and the fervent Action Catholique group. Lesage and Lévesque fully abandoned the belief that Quebec's future depended on farming, religion and docility. Their dream for the future was based on industry, secularism and education.

No book captures the complex psyche of Quebec better than Hémon's beautiful novel *Maria Chapdelaine* (1916), set in the pioneer colony of Péribonka. The story has been filmed four times: in 1934 by Julien Duvivier, 1950 by Marc Allégret, 1984 by Gilles Carle and in 2021 by Sébastien Pilote. Three men pursue Maria, each representing different archetypes of Québécois manhood. François Paradis is the free-spirited adventurer at home in the wild woods, a lumberjack like Big Joe Montferrand. Lorenzo Surprenant is a different kind of adventurer, one who had traded his culture and language for wealth and comfort in the USA, like Kerouac's father. Eutrope Gagnon is the eternal son of the soil, whose roots go back to the St. Lawrence Valley and the pre-Conquest colonists of Nouvelle France.

Maria is attracted to François but the young adventurer dies tragically in a blizzard, leaving Maria two choices: Lorenzo or Eutrope. The young woman cannot imagine leaving her family, faith and language to live among foreigners, so the only choice remaining is her rustic neighbour, despite the hard life she knows will be her fate in this rough-hewn colony in the wilderness. Maria struggles with doubt about her duty as well as the temptation to flee. Hémon clearly felt pity for the girl. Like Euchariste Moisan in *Trente arpents*, she was "born of the land, a

prisoner of her language, her religion, her village and her province."[70]

Hémon ended his tale with an intriguing, lyrical monologue in "the voice of the land of Quebec": "We came here 300 years ago and stayed. It is true that we may not have learned much, but we have forgotten nothing" (Bibliothèque québécois, 2012, p. 193 – 94). That passage is richly ironic on many levels, anticipating « Je me souviens » and elevating Maria's dismal solitary option to a noble choice. The "voice of Quebec" sang the praises of the rough land where Maria's ancestors brought "their prayers and songs" in their hearts, "the most human of all hearts," for whom all traditions are sacred and must remain unchanged.

Maria's people were surrounded by strangers who treated them like barbarians and so the people of Nouvelle France must forever bear witness to their culture, history and language. This is why Maria cannot leave the land. "We are a race that will not die. We must remain witnesses in the land of our ancestors. In the land of Quebec, nothing must die and nothing must change" (p. 194).

Hémon, a free spirit untethered by tradition, gave his heroine a mystical "voice of Quebec" to lend dignity to her tragic lack of agency. Hémon had escaped his native France to become a journalist in London before briefly visiting Quebec and then heading west with an Australian friend when he was struck by a train crossing Ontario. Hémon was pure François Paradis.

Hémon's book inspired another novel, *Menaud, maître-draveur* (1937), written by Félix-Antoine Savard, a priest and contemporary of Lionel Groulx. Savard begins his story with the final passage in *Maria Chapdelaine* — "We came here 300 years ago and stayed. It is true that we may not have learned much, but we have forgotten nothing" — and Savard reinterprets Hémon's original quote to make farmer Eutrope Gagnon the hero and a role model for Quebec youth.

William Johnson quoted extensively from Savard's book in *Anglophobie made in Québec*: « Un long cri de rage. Voilà comment décrire *Menaud, maître-draveur*, de Félix-Antoine Savard. C'est un cri de rage contre les Anglais. De rage parce que les Anglais sont plus riches, parce qu'ils

[70] *Taken from Denys Arcand's quotation on the back cover of the 2012 edition of Trente arpents, published by Bibliothèque québécoise.*

semblent être plus puissants. Parce qu'ils sont dans le même pays ».[71]

Johnston placed the story of Menaud in his historic and economic context, quoting a 1926 paper by priest Georges-Marie Bilodeau titled *Pour rester au pays: Études sur l'émigration des Canadiens français aux États-Unis – Causes et remèdes*. According to Bilodeau, as quoted in Johnson's *Anglophobie*, "French-Canadians are an agrarian people with no natural inclination for industrialization."[72] Bilodeau insisted that Quebec's problem was not that the land had failed to support too many large families but that too many large families had failed to trust the land. This was the same world Horace Miner studied in the rural parish of St. Denis.

As I continued driving north, I thought about Maria Chapdelaine, Louis Hémon, Louis-Joseph Papineau, Lionel Groulx and old Jack Kerouac, who named the hero of *On the Road* Sal Paradise, a direct reference to Hémon's romantic adventurer François Paradis. I can easily imagine Kerouac and Hémon on the road together, madly racing through their days and nights, hitching rides, hopping trains, stealing cars, going, going, going somewhere, anywhere, desperate to live, to see, to be free.

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On previous trips through the Lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé Peninsula region, I had visited the Reford Gardens, or Jardins Métis, at Métis River. I knew Elsie Reford began converting a summer fishing camp on the Métis River into gardens back in the 1920s. Only a woman with extraordinary vision (and a certain amount of wealth and whimsy) would have attempted to turn a scrubby pine forest into an enchanted garden this far north. Regional colonizers tried to turn this same harsh land into wheat fields, with less success.

I had previously driven along the 132 without noticing a side road fifty kilometres above Rimouski that leads to Métis-sur-mer. The moment I turned off the coastal highway onto Beach Road, I was in a new world.

[71] *"A long cry of rage is how to describe Menaud, maître-draveur, by Félix-Antoine Savard. It is a cry of rage against the English. Rage because the English are richer, because they seem more powerful. Because they're in the same land."*

[72] *Staying in the Country: Studies on the Emigration of French Canadians to the United States – Causes and Remedies. Quoted from Johnson, Anglophobie, p. 127.*

Known to English-speaking summer residents as Metis Beach, this was one of the most popular summer resorts on the Lower St. Lawrence at the turn of the previous century. In the height of the summer season of 1928, it welcomed a population of over 1,500 — though the permanent residents numbered only 200.

	French		English		Other Languages	
1871	86	(30%)	205*	(70%)	0	-
1931	90	(30%)	201*	(70%)	0	-
1996	80	(46%)	105*	(51%)	5	(3%)
2021 Merged with Les Boules	505	(89%)	60*	(11%)	5	-

Table 39: Métis-sur-mer population, 1871 – 2021
**census numbers are based on permanent residence and do not count summer residents.*

Beach Road is a couple of kilometres long: beautiful houses, trimmed hedges, stone fences, spectacular water views, tennis courts, parks, restaurants and a large public beach at the village, where Beach Road becomes Rue Principale. The adjacent community, Les Boules, merged with Metis Beach in 2002 to become Métis-sur-mer.

I was lucky to be working with Susan and Alexandra once again for the Métis-sur-mer screening. Susan's team at HLSL booked the town hall for our screening. A lively crowd turned out, almost all of them summer residents. Alexandra led the post-screening conversation, reassuring summer residents that their opinions were important. She asked them to indicate their sense of belonging in Quebec with a display of fingers. The average was high, though many of the summer visitors have not lived in Quebec for decades.

Métis-sur-mer was the first screening of my film at which many members of the audience were part of the historic — and reviled — Anglo elite. The first woman to speak confronted the issue head-on. "I rated my sense of belonging as 10/10, although a lot of people look at me as an elite and say, 'You are one of the most entitled communities!' But I reply, 'We're here and we do a lot of good!'"

Métis-sur-mer town hall

The people in the room applauded her self-assurance. Old Catholic Quebec saw little virtue in industry or wealth but today's citizens take pride in Québec Inc. and the francophone business leaders who create jobs and donate to charity. Quebec is not ready to see former Anglo business leaders and benefactors through the same lens.

Another woman said:

> I am very much part of the summer community. My family has been coming here since the 1800s. The film talks about how the English used to rule Quebec. This summer community was part of that group. My family had a business very well known in Montreal. Then along came the FLQ crisis. My sister graduated from McGill and went to Toronto. Our father said, 'That's good. The future's there,' which was sad. But that's what happened among a lot of people I grew up with. Now I live in the United States but I love to come back to Quebec.

An older woman said:

> My family's been coming here for generations and I feel like I belong to Métis and the Lower St. Lawrence. I grew up in Montreal, went to a convent school and learned French, but when the Quiet Revolution happened, I couldn't get a job, although I'm fully bilingual. So I went to Toronto along with many other people. I love Quebec and I come back every summer. I love it here and I love speaking French but I had to leave the province. So I rate my sense of belonging as 3/10.

A man said:

> I am a product of the 1960s. Canada only repatriated the constitution and acquired a Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. Quebec refused to sign the Canadian constitution and created its own Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is a better document. My father tacked that thing to the wall and said, "That's all you have to know. The rest is just noise." My father was a politician in Montreal. A mailbox blew up fifty yards from our house. I've been subjected to violence because of my identity. I saw my father dragged out of his car and pummelled in front of our house here in Metis because he was Anglo. Do I hold a grudge? Damn right I do! But do I think we've come a distance? Absolutely. We need to do better. I live in the US now and we don't want Quebec to end up like that!

Another woman said:

> I grew up in Quebec as well and we moved to Ontario in the 70s. I didn't realize how many francophones also moved to Ontario. We lived northwest of Toronto. They had a French school and I wanted to enroll my child there but there was no room. It was full of Francos who had left QC. I come back here every summer. I love it.

Susan then said, "The film addresses myth busting. In the political narrative right now, there's always this discussion about the French language being under threat and it comes with an anti-English component. In our community, people get on well personally. In the Lower St. Lawrence we are the most bilingual and well-integrated Anglo community in Quebec, although we have a tiny population."

"There is a direct correlation between numbers and friction," one man replied. "Smaller numbers are less threatening."

Then a younger woman spoke:

> I'm francophone. My parents both supported the FLQ. Now they realize it was a huge mistake in the sense that we were stuck in French. When I wanted to go to university, the only place I could go outside Quebec was Moncton, New Brunswick. My friends went to Alberta to learn English but they were stuck working at

> McDonalds. I passed all my youth in Baie-Comeau and we wanted to be friends with the kids at Baie-Comeau High School so we could practice English!

Another francophone woman said:

> The problems in Quebec are much bigger than the language issue. Communication between people is bad and not just here. Is it a generational thing? Is it because of digital technology? We need to break out of our bubbles and cross over into other perspectives and other worlds to meet people who think differently and are not all reading the same books.

Rachel McCrum had the final word: "We've been talking about the need for myth busting. We can't let the government control the narrative and create new myths that don't reflect the reality we experience. We need new stories that reflect the reality we're living now!"

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The next port in the wide mouth of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence was the Magdalen Islands, a place I had long wanted to visit, so I leapt at the opportunity to show my film there in collaboration with the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN) and the Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders (CAMI). The islands can be reached by ferry from Prince Edward Island but I made the seven-hour drive back to Montreal and then took a flight to the airport in the centre of the Magdalen Islands.

Flights are determined by winds and fog. Just a few years earlier, Jean Lapierre, federal MP and popular pundit, was killed in a crash landing along with numerous members of his family. My departure from Montreal was rescheduled three times in three days for unexplained reasons involving weather and unions. The third rescheduling had me arriving *after* the screening of my film, so the team at CAMI hustled to find a seat with the only competing airline. I arrived a few hours before the screening and CAMI executive director Mike Vigneault picked me up at the airport.

	French		English		Other Languages	
1871	2,833	(89%)	323	(11%)	16	-
1931	7,148	(90%)	570	(7%)	224	(3%)
1996	12,450	(94%)	845	(6%)	10	-
2021	11,755	(97%)	280	(3%)	35	-

Table 40: Magdalen Islands population, 1871 – 2021

We drove north along an extended sand dune. The land is so low and flat it feels like a big wave could wipe out all human constructions. Half an hour later we reached Grosse Isle, where the island's English-speaking community has been concentrated for generations. English speakers now constitute only 3 percent of the Magdalen Islands's population but on Grosse Isle they form a 95 percent majority. Mike left me at CAMI's new community centre, which is equipped with a meeting room, a kitchen and several bedrooms. It was cozy.

Glenn Patterson and his colleague Paul Ballerini were already setting up the cameras and mics for the evening presentation. They were testing a new technology to create hybrid live and online events. We were going to screen the film for an audience in the community centre's recreation room and share it live with an online audience, then engage in a post-screening conversation with both audiences simultaneously. The evening event would be broadcast via Facebook and recorded for future visitors online.

Only a handful of people attended the in-person screening, mostly CAMI staff plus a film crew from Montreal that was making a promo video about CAMI and its services. The online option seemed unnecessary for the Magdalen Islands, where the entire English-speaking population is clustered within a few minutes of the community centre, but the hybrid presentation was designed to connect with a large expat population. A larger group joined us online.

The first speaker in the regional section of the film is Charles Taker, a well-known Magdalen Islander now living in Montreal. His great-great grandfather was born in Finland, in a place that was occupied by Russia

at the time, and he was working on a British ship that was off the coast of the Magdalen Islands in 1855 when the ship ran aground in a December gale. He came ashore hanging onto a lifeboat. The local museum features a display, which is used in my film, of subsequent generations of Takers who became Magdalen mariners.

After the screening, former CAMI executive director Helena Burke shared her experiences:

> I grew up here, in a community that was 95 percent English. Both my parents are unilingual anglophones. We had a bigger population when I was at school, so I had a lot of friends. We didn't really have to leave the community for anything, so we didn't see the importance of needing to speak French. We were only exposed to French when we went down to Entrée Island to buy groceries or to go to the hospital. But when I got older I wanted to learn French to be part of the workforce. I picked up some comprehension studying French at school, then working with CAMI I had meetings where everything was in French. I consider myself fluently bilingual now because I can understand everything and converse. It's hard to write in French but I use software to help! I felt a strong sense of belonging to the Magdalen Island community and never really to the province of Quebec, but through the work I've done over the past twenty years, I really do have a strong connection now. I worry about the future of English-speaking Quebec given the political climate right now. We all need to work together because we Anglos have something to contribute.

One of the visiting filmmakers spoke next. "I come from the Beauce region. My grandmother was Irish but my family is separatist. A lot of people in the Beauce have Irish names like O'Donnell but we have totally lost our [English-speaking] background and it is crazy not to preserve it."

Mike Vigneault shared his story as a francophone who is now executive director of CAMI after retiring as a command chief in the Royal Canadian Navy:

> I left the Magdalen Islands in 1984 to join the navy and returned in 2019. When I was young, we were aware that there was an

> anglophone community somewhere on the islands but we rarely mixed together. When I came back, I saw a totally different dynamic with the anglophone community here. I like that. It's what drew me to CAMI because of the work it has done over the years to improve the relationship between the two communities. My fear is that Bill 96 is not as clear as it should be and can be misinterpreted to bomb bridges that took years to build.

Mike told me later that his father and Gilles Vigneault are cousins who grew up living next door to each other in Natashquan. Mike's father relocated to the Magdalen Islands. Uncle Gilles Vigneault became a superstar among francophones. Mike loves his uncle's music and is proud he gave Quebec an anthem, but "we don't always share the same political views."

I understood what he meant. When my kids were small, I used to sing them a cute bilingual tune, "I Went to the Market,"[73] without understanding that Gilles Vigneault had made it a cautionary tale against the dangers of bilingualism. The song ends with the French father fetching a gun to blast one of his offspring (« un canard à l'orange ») who "flies too high" and speaks only English. The song is not so cute in its entirety.

I answered questions from the online audience and after the broadcast, we continued discussing social and political conditions unique to the Magdalen Islands. Glenn, Paul and I were supposed to travel to New Carlisle in the Gaspé region at 10:30 a.m. the next morning but our flight was rescheduled to 5:30 p.m. — and then again to 10:30 p.m. That gave us a full day to visit the islands and the weather cooperated by being warm and sunny.

Glenn had a rental car, so we drove to Old Harry Beach and he played with QAHN's new toy, a camera-carrying drone. The beach was broad, with fine ochre sand like the Sahara Desert, and the surf was impressive. The Magdalen Islands have some of the best windsurfing in the world but the water is Atlantic cold and requires a good wetsuit. We visited CAMI's offices and the history museum before driving to a house where I

[73] *"I went to the market, mon p'tit panier sous mon bras. The first girl I met, c'est la fille d'un avocat."*

could buy a copy of *Gleanings on the Magdalen Islands* by local historian Byron Clark.

Then we drove to fishing village Grande-Entrée for lunch. Mid-September is the end of the season and the village was quiet. The northern tip of the Magdalen Islands can feel lost in a lonely sea: remote in summer, terribly isolated in winter.

Sandy bluffs at Old Harry Beach, and Grande-Entrée village

It is difficult to imagine that the Saint Lawrence Gulf was once a bustling centre of maritime resources. Thousands of ships from Canada, New England and Europe sailed to the gulf seeking whales, cod and salmon in summer, herring in autumn and seals in winter. Seasonal fishermen developed sidelines trapping crabs, lobsters and shrimp in the bays along the Lower North Shore. Fishermen traded for beaver furs, processed whale blubber into lamp oil and harvested wild eggs. Entire species of seabirds were driven to the brink of extinction by eggers who collected their wild eggs as urban delicacies. The gulf became a lawless pirates' paradise until the cod, salmon, seals, whales, birds and beavers were made so scarce that the foreigners sailed away, leaving locals barely able to feed themselves.

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Our flight landed late that evening in Bonaventure. Glenn picked up a rental car and left with Paul and their crates of equipment for the New Carlisle presentation. I rented my own car because I would be staying on for a couple of days to give a series of workshops about making podcasts. I drove to the hotel through pelting rain.

The next morning I woke up early, admiring a spectacular, cloudless sunrise across the Baie-des-Chaleurs, then had breakfast at the hotel before setting off for a social media workshop with high school students at Escuminac. Driving south on the 132, I passed through New Richmond and Carleton-sur-mer. As I neared Escuminac, I checked the time and instead of being a few minutes early, I was almost an hour late! It made no sense. When I left the hotel, I had plenty of time for the drive. The trip was quick and easy. How could I possibly arrive an hour late!

		French		English		Other Languages	
Gaspé South	1871	See table 42		See table 42		See table 42	
New Carlisle	1931	216	(16%)	1,024	(78%)	76	(6%)
	1996	640	(35%)	1,205	(65%)	10	-
	2021	530	(41%)	755	(59%)	5	-

Table 41: New Carlisle population, 1871 – 2021

The Gaspé Peninsula sets its clocks to eastern standard time. New Brunswick, on the other side of Baie-des-Chaleurs, sets its clocks to Atlantic time, which is an hour later. The "other side" is five kilometres across a bay from Escuminac. Several times over the next two days, my phone would randomly pick up the New Brunswick signal. The Magdalen Islands also use Atlantic time and are an hour out of sync with the rest of Quebec.

The road along the south Gaspé coast rises to magnificent heights then plunges back to sea level, constantly winding and revealing new vistas. I had all day to enjoy the scenery and visit the bigger towns and villages before returning to my hotel in Bonaventure and then continuing on to New Carlisle for the screening at the Legion sponsored by the Community for Anglophone Social Action (CASA). A small group attended the presentation while several hundred watched online.

New Carlisle still has a large English-speaking population. The town was traditionally divided into a poor French side and a well-to-do

New Carlisle, live and online.

English side, which created classic tensions that persist. Many people before and after the screening told me about underlying frictions in the community that sounded like Montreal, where Anglos and Francos enjoy friendly relationships but a history of conflict always lurks in the background.

The oldest census numbers divide the Gaspé Peninsula into three regions. The central section around Percé and Gaspé town, which I had visited the year before, had the highest concentration of historic Anglos. New Carlisle was the largest English-speaking settlement in the southern section.

René Lévesque (1922 – 1987) was raised in New Carlisle, which may explain how he became so fluently bilingual before becoming a war correspondent, journalist and then politician. He was initially part of Lesage's équipe du tonnerre during the Quiet Revolution, then he became the founder of the Parti Québécois.

	French		English		Other Languages	
Gaspé West	2,830	(95%)	127	(5%)	26	-
Gaspé Centre	2,396	(45%)	2,675	(51%)	1207	(4%)
Gaspé South	4,897	(67%)	2,324	(32%)	75	(1%)

Table 42: Historical Gaspésie population 1871

The day after the screening in New Carlisle, I visited the new René Lévesque museum. Oddly, it was not created by the government of

Quebec but by a local couple. After visiting the museum, I parked outside Lévesque's boyhood home, which has been acquired by the government of Quebec but left to fall into disrepair. This seems odd in a province that proclaims the importance of remembering. Unlike John A. Macdonald, who is now reviled by many, Lévesque remains more popular than any other politician in the history of Quebec.

Any other society blessed with such a leader would create a pilgrimage destination. Nearly forty years after Lévesque's death, the National Assembly is still assigning budgets for his museum and making promises. If the house ever opens to public visits, we'll see if it celebrates Lévesque's principles and values that can unite Quebecers — or if he is appropriated by a narrower vision.

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A few months later, the town of Gaspé, which I had visited a year earlier, was in the news, and not in a good way. The problem was Bill 96. Quebec's older language law, Bill 101, had recognized the historical rights of bilingual communities (villages, towns, municipalities and townships) and institutions (schools and hospitals) under Article 29.1 of the law. Article 29.2 provided for the removal of bilingual status if a community's English-speaking population falls below 50 percent.

In December 2022, the government of Quebec notified 48 communities that their bilingual status would be withdrawn after 120 days unless the town council voted a special motion to maintain their bilingual status. Policymakers gambled that the French-speaking majority's commitment to Quebec's French language would prevail over empathy for Anglo neighbours whose numbers have fallen below 50 percent. The technocrats miscalculated. Within the 120-day deadline, all 48 municipalities passed special motions to retain bilingual status.

Bill 96 removed the option to preserve rights by voting special motions locally. Municipalities in which languages other than French dropped below 50 percent automatically lost their bilingual status. In June 2023, the 48 communities that had ceased to qualify as bilingual contested this aspect of Bill 96 in Quebec's Superior Court. In October, they learned that they had lost their case.

The mayor of the town of Gaspé protested that a one-size-fits-all law did not respect local realities: "During all our history, we always talk to our citizens in English," said Mayor Daniel Côté. "Now we must apply the law even though we don't agree with that. If we don't apply the law, the penalty is that the Quebec government will stop all our subsidies. That could potentially mean millions of dollars in lost support from the province."

When the CAQ government sought support for Bill 96, they ran ads that showed Simon Jolin-Barrette declaring, "We have to protect French in Québec," and Legault claiming, "It is reasonable and necessary." The French-speaking majority population of Gaspé did not think this new provision of the law was reasonable or necessary and they did not think it protected French. Nonetheless, bureaucrats and politicians in Quebec City were determined to impose what they claimed to be the best policy for Quebec, even if both the minority and majority populations disagreed locally.

This new application of Bill 96 was such a violation of the principles championed by Lévesque that I wrote an essay for *The Montrealer* called "Cold Blooded Social Engineering," published December 7, 2024, comparing the application to the Milgram experiments, where subjects were induced to follow orders and inflict harm on innocent victims. To its credit, the town of Gaspé publicly expressed its opposition to the law in a November 8, 2024, post on its Facebook page, Ville de Gaspé, apologizing for complying and explaining why they could no longer resist. I share it here in full:

> IMPORTANT NOTICE TO THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING COMMUNITY
>
> To whom it may concern:
>
> Since the adoption of Bill 96, now known as the Loi sur la langue officielle et commune du Québec (Act Respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Quebec) (hereinafter "the Act"), Quebec municipalities have lost the right to communicate with their English-speaking residents in English. Only municipalities with "official bilingual status" have retained this right. Despite its strong English-speaking heritage, Gaspe has never been granted "bilingual municipality" status under Quebec law.

As a result, the Town of Gaspé must comply with the Act by discontinuing bilingual oral and written communications, except in limited situations. Official communications in English will only occur in cases involving public safety, health, natural justice, disclosure of financial information, welcoming new residents, or in matters of international and tourism relations.

The Mayor of Gaspe, while serving as Chair of the "Union des Municipalités du Québec," defended the situation in Gaspé before a parliamentary committee at the National Assembly on September 22, 2021, advocating for municipal autonomy in communications with residents. Although we support the preservation of the French language in Quebec, we believe the historical, social, cultural, and economic significance of Gaspé's English-speaking and Mi'gmaq communities warrants acknowledgment. While French may be in decline across Quebec, it is English that faces decline here in Gaspé. Our town was built on linguistic and cultural diversity we strive to preserve. We believe the founding communities of our town, the Birthplace of Canada, deserve this recognition. However, this recommendation was rejected by the National Assembly, meaning Gaspé must comply with the Act as all other municipalities.

It is important to note that if Gaspé were to disregard the Act, the main penalty could be the loss of access to all government grants or financial assistance. This could amount to millions of dollars annually, significantly impacting property taxes for residents. The Town could also face lawsuits and major constraints. Consequently, we must adhere to the Act's conditions.

CHAPTER 7:

Voice of Youth at Bishop's, McGill and Concordia Universities

The summer before launching *What We Choose to Remember*, I was standing on Ste-Catherine Street shooting narrations, in English, for a CBC documentary. Three teenagers stopped to watch, and when I finished the take, they asked, in English, what I was filming. When I told them, "I'm making a film about Anglos in Quebec," their eyes immediately lit up, then quickly dimmed. I wondered what had caused the whiplash change of emotions until one asked timidly, "In a good way?" These kids could scarcely believe anyone would make a film with something good to say about their world.

By spring 2024, I had been touring *What We Choose to Remember* for two years and had shown the film to thousands of people. Most of them were old enough to have personally experienced the previous half century and they wanted their children and grandchildren to know the stories. I applied for some funding from le Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise and they agreed to provide support so I could make the film available to schools.

I knew that despite interest in my film, teachers would face obstacles in incorporating new material in their classrooms. I also knew it would be a major challenge simply to inform busy educators and administrators of the film's existence. I needed help. The first person I reached out to was Jennifer Crane, a public affairs professional with extensive experience in

advocacy and media. An old-stock Quebecer who strongly identified with the film, Jennifer mapped out the school boards, commissioners, education consultants and educators we needed to contact. She also helped form an advisory group of experts to provide background knowledge on Quebec's complex education system.

The second person I reached out to was Chantal Clabrough, a history teacher who had just received the Governor General's Award for excellence in history teaching. As a child of immigrants, Chantal fully related to the film's depiction of waves of immigration and was happy to help connect the film with students whose stories were not part of Quebec's official history. We spent the next six months creating teacher's guides to support the curriculum, enhance the classroom experience and, as a bonus, provide students with a positive vision of their community.

The first high school that invited me for a screening was in Thetford Mines. In the boom years, Thetford's seven asbestos mines employed four thousand workers. It was the City of White Gold, along with the adjacent town Asbestos, renamed Val-des-Sources in 2021 to divert attention from the many diseases caused by inhaling "white gold" fibres. Since Thetford's last mine closed in 2012, the town has been working hard to develop new industries.

I left Montreal on Autoroute 20, travelling along the south side of the St. Lawrence, and shortly after passing through Drummondville, turned inland on the 165. As I drove through New Ireland, Irlande, Cranberry and Black Lake, the hills rose higher and the Appalachian views became increasingly dramatic. When I reached Thetford Mines, I parked outside the offices of the Megantic English-speaking Community Development Corporation (MCDC). Executive director Brian Gignac showed me around the offices and introduced me to his team, then we walked across the street to the AS Johnson Memorial High School to meet teacher Shirley Anto. After making sure everything was ready for the next day's presentation, Brian gave me a tour of the town and we then had dinner at a bustling restaurant on the old main street.

Brian has the perfect backstory for his job. His father arrived in Thetford not speaking a word of French and fell in love with a francophone girl who did not speak English. That didn't prevent them

from falling in love and starting a family. Brian's story puzzled me. I would have expected his francophone mother to have a French name like Gignac, not his father. The only other explanation I could think of was that Brian's parents were extremely progressive and gave their son his mother's family name. I asked. The answer was more circuitous than anything I could have imagined.

In the seventeenth century, some members of the Gignac family emigrated from France to Québec. Generations later, part of the family moved to the USA. Brian's Franco-American grandfather returned to Québec City, where Brian's father was born. Brian's grandmother was also American, with French Canadian roots preserved in her name, Veillette. When Brian's American grandparents came to Quebec, they lived entirely in English, which was still common in the mid-twentieth century. Brian's father only began to live in French after arriving in Thetford to work in the mines. Brian spoke French at home with his mother and while playing with neighbours but attended English schools until he switched to the French system for CÉGEP. Most members of Thetford's historic English-speaking community are fully bilingual but they number only 300 of the town's 26,000 residents.

I met Brian the next morning at the school. After our conversation about his parents the previous evening, he called his mother to be sure he had the details right. He had some updates for me:

> It turns out my mom was actually born in the Mitchell neighbourhood of Thetford — what people used to call "le quartier des anglais." She was born on the corner of Mitchell and Mooney but her family left that neighbourhood when she was nine years old. Isn't that quite the coincidence? My francophone mother, born in an anglophone neighbourhood and not speaking a word of English, later fell in love with an anglophone. My parents then sent me to an English school in that same neighbourhood and today I find myself working for the English-speaking community right in the same place.

Brian wasn't sure if his intricately threaded family history was coincidence or fate but it certainly felt meaningful. It also struck me as the perfect example of complex identities so often reduced to binary adversaries of Catholic vs. Protestant or French vs. English.

When Brian and I entered the auditorium, Shirley was testing the projector and the film was ready to roll. Young people started to fill the auditorium. All students from Sec. III, IV and V (Grades 9 – 11) came to watch the film. They sat attentively, not distracted by cell phones, and applauded at the end but they were reluctant to speak. Shirley facilitated the conversation, using her knowledge of family histories to solicit responses. She asked, "How many of you know when your ancestors came to Quebec?" Most of the students appeared uncertain. The recent immigrants remembered exactly when they arrived. Two girls knew they had Irish ancestors. One of the girls had "always known" the family's Irish immigration story, which happened during the potato famine; the other had only learned about her Irish ancestors recently when discussing history class with her mother.

Shirley told me after the group had left that most of the students were francophone and their ancestors had been in Quebec so long that the young people had no idea when they had arrived. The identity of children who are bilingual and bicultural is complex. Within a single family, some children can feel more English or more French but many of the students in Thetford were clearly more comfortable speaking French than English and would identify without reservation as francophones attending an English school.

Since Bill 101 became law in 1976, it has been illegal for francophones to attend a public English school. These children were an exception because at least one of their parents was educated in English prior to Bill 101, which qualified the former students, and their children, as historic Anglos. The acquired right to education in English can be transmitted in perpetuity to future generations as long as it is exercised. I asked the students why their parents had chosen to send them to the English school. A boy replied, "I have trouble writing French," and a girl said, "Because we're lucky," referring to their exemption from Bill 101.

A few of the students were at the school because of a different exemption. Quebec's current language laws permit English-speaking workers with temporary permits to enroll their children at an English school for short durations. Thetford had a contingent of unilingual temporary students who knew exactly when their temporary status would expire.

AS Johnson Memorial High School, Grades 9 – 11

Shirley asked the foreign students if they had expected Thetford to be almost entirely French. One boy said, "We had no idea, because the name of the city sounded English." Many immigrants arrive in Quebec unprepared for its linguistic and political reality. The temporary students admitted they found it difficult to navigate life outside the school. Shirley asked if workers in stores and bus drivers switched to English when the students were struggling with French. The answer was, "Sometimes." The temporary students did not want to complain but their lack of French skills made their lives in Quebec difficult and the short duration of their stay made it hard to master French.

The screening in Thetford underlined the historical complexity of education in Quebec. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 ceded most French possessions in North America to Great Britain. The former colony of Nouvelle France, now part of the British Empire, created separate education systems for Catholics and Protestants. The majority of Catholics spoke French and the majority of Protestants spoke English but religious segregation was imperfect from the beginning, leaving French-speaking Protestants (Huguenots) and English-speaking Catholics in limbo.

Segregation by language would have been more practical and a few eighteenth-century idealists advocated for a single school system that would educate all students to become comfortably bilingual in French and English. However, religion was the great uniter and divider of the era, so the confessional school model reigned supreme for more than two

centuries, keeping French Catholics and English Protestants as far apart as possible.

When large numbers of Irish Catholics arrived in the mid-1800s, they joined the French Catholic system. Montreal already had bilingual schools because even in the early years after the Conquest, the English language was both desirable and necessary for urbanites. A bigger test for Quebec's confessional model came in the late 1800s with the arrival of a wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe who were neither Catholic nor Protestant. Yiddish-speaking Jewish students considered three options: Catholic schools, Protestant schools or independent Jewish schools. By the 1930s, Jewish students decided to enroll in Protestant schools, establishing the precedent that Catholic schools served Catholics while all students who were non-Catholic (Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Pentecostal, Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu et al.) would be considered "Protestant" and enroll in Protestant schools. French Protestant schools were few and private until the mid-twentieth century, when Protestant school commissions added French schools for non-Catholic francophone immigrants from North Africa and Haiti.

Irish Catholics were not segregated as strictly British Protestants. Irish and francophones-de-souche frequently shared churches and schools, especially in the nineteenth century, but a distinct English sector emerged in Catholic school commissions. Prior to the Second World War, Catholic immigrants who spoke French or a romance language (notably Italians) mostly enrolled in French Catholic schools (63 percent in 1931), but after the war, the percentage of Catholic immigrants enrolling in French Catholic schools declined precipitously. The reasons for this are still disputed.[74] Did immigrants increasingly reject French Catholic schools or did French Catholic schools increasingly reject immigrants?

By 1970, most immigrants were being educated in the three alternative options: English Protestant, English Catholic, French Protestant or

[74] *During 2025 – 2026, I was conducting a major research project investigating school enrollments between the Second World War and Bill 101. The reports were published as Freedom of Choice and Exclusion in Quebec's Education System, During the Years 1945 – 1977.*

private schools (e.g., Jewish or Greek Orthodox). Few immigrants were being educated in the same schools as Quebec's Catholic francophone-de-souche majority. The baby boom was over and Quebec had one of the lowest birth rates in the world. The workforce and economy depended on immigrants. The intended or unintended mass segregation of immigrant students had created a demographic time bomb. If most immigrants were being educated in English, Quebec's French language and culture were doomed.

Linguistic nationalism emerged during the FLQ years (1963 – 1970) and exploded during the Saint-Léonard School Crisis of 1968. Three political parties in rapid succession passed increasingly strict language laws. (Chapter nine will look closely at this pivotal period.) In 1977, Bill 101 restricted access to English schools (Protestant or Catholic) to historic rights holders, defined as, according to the English Montreal School Board, "someone educated in an English elementary school in Quebec or Canada prior to 1977, and their direct descendants." Because of Quebec's historically Byzantine education system, many ancestors of historic English rights holders had spoken languages other than English, notably French, Yiddish or Italian. It had been complicated and it guaranteed future confusion.

In 1997, Quebec abolished denominational school boards and replaced them with linguistic school boards. English Protestants and English Catholics merged, as did French Catholics and French Protestants. Former religious rivals became linguistic partners, at least in theory. The new alignments necessitated major transfers of real estate and relocation of students. It was a traumatic leap toward a model recommended more than two hundred years earlier. A few idealists still advocate for a single school system to teach all of Quebec's students the same history and ensure that they graduate comfortably bilingual. Nothing in contemporary politics suggests this is likely to happen in the next two hundred years.

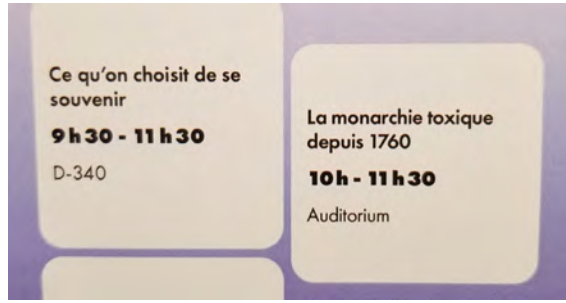
Most of the students featured in this chapter are too young to remember confessional schools before 1997 let alone the other multiple options prior to 1977. They know their parents fought battles over education and language but they thought these issues were settled long ago. Students

are perplexed by the current government's hostility toward English education and the English language.

One of my wife's brothers invited me to speak to CÉGEP students in Saint-Jérôme during the school's intercultural week, featuring activities intended to promote dialogue between students of diverse origins. In Saint-Jérôme, French speakers form the unthreatened majority. Although only forty-five kilometres north of Montreal, Saint-Jérôme (population 79,000) has demographics similar to rural communities. The amalgamated city is 94 percent francophone, 4.2 percent allophone and just 1.8 percent anglophone. Saint-Jérôme owes its existence to the railroad that Curé Labelle established here in 1876, so it was appropriate that I travelled to the screening on a rapid, comfortable commuter train.

My presentation for intercultural week was booked in a classroom, while the CÉGEP's large auditorium was filled with a provocative conference on la monarchie toxique depuis 1760.[75] I had two hours to present excerpts from my film and talk to the students about their sense of history and identity.

After explaining the concept of waves of immigration, I asked the thirty-five students present about their own immigration experience. Only three identified as immigrants. I asked the francophones-de-souche if their ancestors came to Nouvelle France with Champlain in 1608, with Maisonneuve and Jeanne Mance in 1642, or later. They did not know. A couple thought they had ancestors among les Filles du Roi (1663 – 1673). A few thought their ancestors came from the north of France



Semaine interculturelle schedule

[75] *The toxic monarchy since 1760.*

— Bretagne — like the ancestors of Kerouac. Several thought they had an Irish ancestor somewhere in the family tree. The recent immigrants were from French-speaking Maghreb countries Morocco and Algeria. They were enjoying their new lives in Quebec "but still adjusting." They chose not to elaborate on what that adjustment entailed.

I showed the students an excerpt from my film about immigrants who had been turned away from French Catholic schools prior to Bill 101. The students were too young to remember that Quebec's schools had once been divided by religion instead of language and they were surprised that immigrants claimed to have been turned away from French schools. This is precisely the opposite of the system since Bill 101, which obliges all immigrants to enroll in French public schools. One student said, "It's only normal that immigrants are educated in French." Another student added, "If you emigrate to Italy, you go to an Italian school." They were defending Quebec's language laws but not addressing the system of institutional segregation that had created the need for language laws.

I asked the students if they felt that Quebec's French language and culture are threatened. They all nodded, so I asked, "What is the threat?" The question was too large and the answer too self-evident for a response. My question sounded to their ears like, "Why is climate change a threat?" They did not have access to source data but trusted their elders — parents and teachers — who firmly believe that Quebec's French language and culture are endangered.

I asked how many of them spoke languages other than French. More than half the francophone-de-souche students raised their hands, plus all three immigrants. I asked if they thought that speaking languages other than French is a problem for Quebec. They did not see this as a problem. I asked if they knew that the current language crisis is largely based on a decline in unilingual francophones. They looked at me with a mixture of puzzlement and skepticism.

After showing another excerpt from the film featuring the most recent wave of immigrants, I asked about the process of becoming Québécois, transitioning from outsider to insider: "How do you define who is Québécois?" The students agreed about language: "Immigrants have to speak French." I asked if a unilingual Anglo would qualify as

Québécois. The verdict was clearly no but the students were uncomfortable expressing their intuitive belief as a judgement. One student suggested that being born in Quebec should be a criterion but others, sensitive to their foreign-born immigrant comrades, thought a broader definition was required. Many thought that sharing Quebec's culture is important, so I asked how they define *culture*. "Does that mean knowing music and literature? Or history and laws? Who would define what is included in culture? And how would you test for that kind of knowledge?"

These are difficult questions but important for a generation that will increasingly live side by side with immigrants. I left Saint-Jérôme feeling hopeful. The students at the CÉGEP were sensitive, thoughtful and had a natural inclination to be inclusive. They wanted to protect their language and culture but were fully open to sharing it with newcomers.

As the train carried me back to Montreal, I thought about how the language debate was so much more passionate in the days when the students' parents and grandparents were their age, fighting against economic, religious and social oppression. Francophone youth are in the front line for the best jobs in Quebec and they receive the highest salaries. Unilingual francophones now earn more than bilingual allophones and anglophones. Political independence remains an important issue for at least a third of Quebecers but the goal of independence is now to take full control of the state and its destiny.

This changed environment was reflected in a book written in 2007 by Jean-François Lisée, political analyst and journalist who was special advisor to both Jacques Parizeau and Lucien Bouchard before he became leader of the PQ from 2016 to 2018. Lisée's book was entitled *Nous*,[76] which I had thought at the time of its publication referenced Parizeau's infamous speech the night of the 1995 referendum: « Mes amis, c'est raté mais pas de beaucoup. Pis c'est réussi sur un plan. Si vous voulez, on va cesser de parler des francophones du Québec, voulez-vous. On va parler de Nous! À 60 percent on a voté pour! »[77] In 2007, I had the impres-

[76] *Us.*

[77] *"Friends, we have missed but not by much. In a way we have succeeded. Look, let's stop speaking of Quebec francophones. Let's talk about us. We voted 60 per-*

sion that Lisée was trying to legitimize Parizeau's appallingly divisive rhetoric. I did not buy his book.

Almost twenty years later, I read *Nous* and was stunned by how wrong my presumptions had been. Lisée's book was not a defence of ethnic nationalism. It presented a brashly modern vision of how to integrate immigrants into a society like Quebec, where the de souche birth rate is far below replacement levels.

During the tour of my film, people asked if I thought there was any solution to Quebec's language conflict. My usual response was that we need credible politicians who can defend Quebec's French language and culture while also valuing the contribution made by immigrants and even historic Anglos. As I flipped through Lisée's book I thought, "This is the guy, a credible politician with a modern, inclusive vision!" Take, for example, this excerpt, which I have translated:

> The real-life linguistic situation experienced in Quebec and Montreal is judged positively by most Quebecers, from all linguistic and political backgrounds. On the major issues, what disturbs Quebecers is not today's linguistic reality, but scenarios of possible future realities. Insecurities about the future disturb all of us: francophones, anglophones and allophones.
>
> The French-speaking majority is insecure because of its status as a minority in Canada and on the continent, fueled by globalization on one hand and fear of becoming a minority in Montreal on the other, and therefore of losing ground that has been hard won during the past fifty years.
>
> Then the English-speaking minority is insecure because it has experienced a significant exodus since 1960 and continues to see many of its members leave, especially youth, therefore it fears for the long-term vitality of its community and presumes that its rights will be restricted by each new linguistic initiative.
>
> And finally, communities other than francophones and anglophones are insecure because they are doubly minoritized, torn between their complex identities and expectations of the host

cent in favour."

> societies of Quebec and Canada, maneuvering in a political and linguistic context that is unique — not to say confusing — and feeling targeted by all the debates on linguistic transfers that they make or do not make in the direction desired by some and by others.
>
> These insecurities, although real, have the unfortunate effect of obscuring the remarkable contemporary reality of Quebec. The current equilibrium — in all regions of Quebec, in Greater Montreal and on the Island of Montreal itself — allows Quebecers to live a unique, fruitful, creative and generally harmonious linguistic experience. (pp. 34 – 35)

In these paragraphs, Lisée encapsulated the insecurities that francophones, anglophones and allophones feel, while affirming that the linguistic situation was far better in 2007 than when he was a teenager in the turbulent 1970s. Many francophones acknowledged the improvement in private conversations but it was extremely unusual for an indépendantiste and a leading member of the PQ to state these things publicly.

Lisée also celebrated Québec's high numbers of bilingual and trilingual citizens, as well as the remarkable number of mixed marriages: "More than a third of Anglo-Quebecers now form mixed couples with francophones or allophones." (p. 36) "Preoccupied by our linguistic future, fears of decline or ostracism," he writes, "we do not celebrate the collective accomplishment of the equilibrium that WE [all the linguistic 'nous' in Quebec] have achieved" (p. 37).

Yes and yes. This collective accomplishment should certainly be celebrated. Lisée's vision included having all CÉGEP students be bilingual when they graduate (p. 54). I had to read that sentence three times to believe my eyes. Most Anglos, allophones and young francophones agree that bilingualism is important and desirable but francophone politicians and bureaucrats are opposed to the slightest suggestion of institutional bilingualism.

When Legault was launching his new CAQ party, he published a book that was part memoir, part policy vision. I bought a copy to see if it shed any light on his thinking. Legault's book, *Cap sur un Québec gagnant : Le*

projet Saint-Laurent (Boréal, 2013), was almost as surprising as Lisée's. It presented a modern and pragmatic vision for Quebec that broke with the separatist-federalist stalemate of the previous half century. Legault promoted « une troisieme voie »[78] and envisioned a modern, productive and prosperous Quebec. He valued higher education, technology, innovation and collaboration. For Legault, Quebec's universities held the key to future success. He listed promising examples such as the « quartier de l'innovation » being pioneered by «McGill et l'ETS », which emulated successes in Barcelona (p. 89), and then praised tech clusters like Stanford and Silicon Valley, and Harvard and MIT in Boston. "We have world class universities, with McGill at the top of the list, and the University of Montreal" (p. 103); "*The Metropolis* numbers seven schools of higher learning: McGill classed 34th in the world, and the University of Montreal, which has leapt from 134th place to 84th" (p. 130).

Legault wanted to see international collaborations (though he did not discuss the language in which those international collaborations would take place) and he advocated for higher government investment in education, universities and research. Nothing in Legault's book hinted at hostility toward Quebec's English-language educational institutions.

In March 2023, rumblings began in the media, stimulated by the PQ provincially and the Bloc Québécois federally, denouncing a shocking scandal in education. On March 20, 2023, *Le journal de Québec* reported, in « Universités anglophones: la ministre Déry veut y remédier », that Quebec was handing over $200 million to three English universities to subsidise 16,368 Canadian and foreign students:

> En collaboration avec *Le journal de Québec*, Martin Maltais a décortiqué les données du ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur qui permettent d'en arriver à la conclusion que Québec a consacré cette année près de 200 millions $ pour payer une partie des coûts reliés à la formation de 16 368 étudiants canadiens ou étrangers inscrits dans les universités McGill, Concordia et Bishop's.[79]

[78] "A third way," i.e., neither indépendantiste nor status quo federalists.

[79] *"In collaboration with Le journal de Québec, Martin Maltais analyzed data from the Ministry of Higher Education, which led to the conclusion that Quebec spent*

Also on March 20, 2023, the more strident *Journal de Montréal* upped the ante and reported, in « Québec paiera 1 G$ d'ici cinq ans pour angliciser Montréal », that Quebec was devoting a billion dollars (the *Journal de Québec* number x 5) "to anglicize Montreal": « Au cours des cinq prochaines années, on peut estimer que Québec consacrera près d'un milliard de dollars à l'anglicisation de Montréal ».[80]

Then, economist Pierre Fortin wrote an article in the news magazine *L'actualité* headlined « Riches universités anglophones », published April 5, 2023. Fortin urged that this "disparity" be "corrected" because "the health of French depends on it." Fortin's article was accompanied by a graph showing English universities having higher than average operating budgets while four French universities were being "underfunded." Fortin called for action to correct the "unequal distribution" of funds between Quebec's universities. Back in 2013, Legault had lauded the importance of universities (frequently citing McGill), international networking and partnerships, but in the wake of Bill 96, English-language universities and CÉGEPs were taking in too much money and had too many students.

Back in 1969, the McGill français protests called for urgent and decisive action to correct the "unequal distribution" of funds and opportunities. Until the 1960s, Quebec's education system was shockingly substandard,[81] which the Quiet Revolution attributed to the misguided priorities of the Catholic Church. The Parent Commission revealed that, "63% of French-speaking students had stopped their education at Grade 7."[82] In 1964, Lesage's Liberals created a Ministry of Education to begin the process of "secularizing" education by putting it under the

nearly $200 million this year to cover part of the costs related to the training of 16,368 Canadian and foreign students enrolled at McGill, Concordia and Bishop's universities."

[80] *"Over the next five years, it is estimated that Quebec will devote nearly a billion dollars to the anglicization of Montreal."*

[81] *Lower than all other Canadians provinces and all American states, according to the Parent Commission.*

[82] *"The Royal Commission of Inquiry on Education in the Province of Quebec (Parent Commission),"* *McCord Museum* / *Education in Québec, before and after the Parent reform* *by Mathieu Pigeon.*

control of government rather than the Church. In 1967, Quebec created the CEGEP system (Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel) as record numbers of baby boomers continued to pursue education beyond high school.

By 1969, the demand for university enrollment among Quebec's francophone population exceeded the available places by 20,000 students, who took to the streets to protest. *What do we want?* Education! *When do we want it?* Now! The obvious solution to the shortage, the students believed, was a hostile takeover of McGill University. If Lévesque had nationalized "foreign-owned" power companies to create Hydro Québec, why could the government not nationalize the "foreign" university in the heart of Montreal? Instead, the government sensibly created the Université du Québec network, including Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM), which began operating in 1969.

Fortin's research showed that the unequal source of university revenue mostly came from foreign students paying elevated tuition. Fortin conceded that the Anglo universities were playing by the rules and simply benefitting from higher demand for their services. Astronomical fees in the USA made foreign student tuition in Canada a bargain. Nonetheless, Fortin urged the ministries of Immigration and Enseignement supérieur et de la langue française to have a conversation about the political consequences of two serious problems: 1) the disparity of economic resources between English and French universities; and 2) the number of non-francophone graduates staying in Quebec.

Politicians used the economic data, as they had language data, to draw conclusions that supported their politics. Premier Legault declared that too many English-speaking students were bad for Quebec and that hearing too much English on the streets of Montreal was bad for Quebec, so it logically followed that large amounts of university fees from foreign students were bad for Quebec. Skeptics asked if this was a general principle or only a problem in the realm of education. No one was complaining that major tourism events like the Grand Prix or Montreal's International Jazz Festival were bringing in too many foreigners and their foreign money.

Politicians were alarmed that large numbers of foreign students might choose to live in Quebec after graduation. Did the fear-mongers presume

foreign students do not speak French or will never make the effort to learn it? Or did they believe foreign students will not learn to speak French with the same fluency and accent as the de souche majority? I was about to meet students at all three of Quebec's English-language universities and was curious to hear their plans for the future, and if those plans were changing as Bill 96 portrayed English-speaking students as a problem for Quebec.

▼▼▼

I was invited to present my film at the Bishop's Forum, a civic leadership institute for English-speaking youth. Since 2016, young leaders gathered each summer on the campus of Bishop's University for a five-day career and skills conference. In recent years, language had become an insignificant issue for Quebec's highly bilingual Anglo youth. I was curious to discover if these young leaders would view my film as a quaint historical artifact of no direct relevance to their world.

Bishop's University campus

Bishop's University is located in Lennoxville, a town first settled in 1819. The college was founded in 1843, under the sponsorship of George Jehoshaphat Mountain, third Anglican bishop of Quebec, to provide a liberal education for English-speaking Lower Canada and to train Anglican clergy. The contemporary university has a small student population and is located in a bucolic setting. Bishop's is particularly popular with students from regional Quebec who do not want the stress of living in big Montreal.

I drove to Lennoxville with Jennifer Crane. We were warmly welcomed by Elysia Bryan-Baynes, Bishop's Forum director, and Sonia Patenaude, communications manager. Then we had lunch with student delegates in a large tent on the lawn before weaving our way across the verdant campus to the auditorium. The youth in the audience were aged eighteen to twenty-six.

The first to speak after the screening was a student from Saskatchewan who arrived in Quebec eager to learn French but discovered "people were mad at me because I didn't already speak French. I didn't expect that at all." She now realizes that before arriving, she knew little about the realities of Quebec and most of the Québécois she encounters have no idea about Saskatchewan or why she would not need to speak French there. "It can feel like anger but it is really lack of knowledge. I think there would be less friction if we understood each other better."

Then a young man from the USA said he came to Bishop's because he "wanted to live somewhere that spoke another language" than English but he was now finding the Bishop's community disconnected from the French-speaking world around it. "At some point I want to go somewhere else to work in French. I've been here five years and I need to get out in Quebec so I can reach my full potential in French."

The next person who spoke was a young woman from Montreal whose ancestors go back many generations. She said, "I have as much a right to call myself a Quebecer or Québécoise as francophones but I'm always told I don't belong. And it hurts! People talk in political and cultural terms but emotionally — on a deep, deep level — it's a great pain and it's something you don't understand growing up. You know something is wrong, that you don't feel like part of the in-group, but you don't understand why."

I did not notice at the time, but Jennifer, who is also an old-stock Quebecer, was so moved by the young woman's sorrow that she had to exit the theatre until she could collect her emotions. Jennifer was a vulnerable teenager during the turbulent 80s and 90s, when it felt like the world of her ancestors was being erased. It was traumatic for her to hear this younger woman also feeling like the scapegoat for the past crimes of historic Anglos.

The young woman concluded by saying, "I never thought I would

consider leaving Quebec but as I've got older that has become a reality, which is sad. And it makes me very angry. I'm sure there's a lot of other young Anglos like me out there but you don't hear about it very often. I think it should be discussed more."

It was almost time for the next session of the forum but Sonia handed the mic to one last speaker, a young man who had attended his first Bishop's conference six years earlier, when he was becoming conscious of politics. He had made a speech about looking for a political party that would "send a strong signal that Anglo youth are welcome in Quebec even if they speak French with an accent."

Then-Premier of Quebec Philippe Couillard was present at the conference and spoke directly to the young man's concerns. "It is true that francophones suffered in the past but that is no reason to inflict the same on others. This is your home. You are welcome here. We want you to stay in Quebec and we want people who left to come back."

The words of the leader of Quebec's government resonated with authority, making the young man feel secure about his future in Quebec and inspired him to work hard to perfect his French. But as a political neophyte, he had not realized that the premier does not speak for the entire society. A different government will speak for different people. Legault's CAQ government has different ideas about who is welcome in Quebec.

In October 2023, Legault announced that the number of English students in Quebec threatened the survival of French. Fees for Canadian and foreign students at English universities would be drastically increased immediately and the increased revenues would be given to francophone universities. Administrators at McGill, Concordia and Bishop's were totally blindsided. Opposition parties criticized the sudden and seemingly improvised policy, as did the business community. The solution proposed did not match the problem identified but the CAQ obstinately forged ahead in an authoritarian style that would become their trademark, alienating educators, health care workers and trade unions.

The English-speaking community and its institutions protested that sharp tuition hikes would have devastating impacts on enrollment and revenues. In « Le mépris anglophone, encore et toujours, pour toujours » published October 21, 2023, *Le journal de Montréal* called the Anglo

reaction "completely irrational" and a new demonstration of English Canadian "contempt" and "condescension toward 'frogs.'"[83] Thomas Mulcair, ex-leader of the federal NDP, declared in "The CAQ's Busy Year Attacking Anglophones" for *The Montreal Gazette* on December 13, 2023, that the CAQ was making a show of refusing to bow to Anglo pressure and was prepared to destroy English institutions to distract from their plummeting political fortunes. In "Behind the Scenes," also for *The Montreal Gazette*, Andy Riga laid out the timeline of how McGill and Concordia were blindsided by the tuition hike. And the title of former Commissioner of Official Languages Graham Fraser's October 24, 2023, piece for *The Montreal Gazette* rang a clear warning: "Quebec Tuition Plan More Evidence of Legault's Fear of Anglos." The tuition increases impacted English universities much harder than their francophone counterparts because of the greater number of Canadian and international students that attend McGill, Concordia and Bishop's.

	Total Students	Quebec Students	Rest of Canada Students	International Students
McGill	39,500	50%	20%	30%
Concordia	46,000	69%	9%	22%
Bishop's	2,650	55%	30%	15%
Université de Montréal	41,180	84%	2%	14%
UQÀM	35,100	85%	1%	14%

Table 43: Québécois, Canadian and international students at five universities

Students from the three English-language universities organized a protest march in Dorchester Square on a cold, drizzly October afternoon. It had been rumoured that students from the French universities would join them to show solidarity. No francophone contingent appeared.

[83] *My translation.*

That same October, I was invited to moderate a Bill 96 panel discussion organized by the Quebec Writers' Federation (QWF). The new attacks on education ensured that a crowd of concerned writers and citizens gathered at the Atwater Library. The discussion was simultaneously broadcast online and a recording of the full two-hour discussion, "Writers Out Loud: Navigating the Impacts of Bill 96," is available on YouTube, so I will paraphrase the conversation and indicate time codes if you wish to view the full discussion.

The three panelists were Christopher Neal, Shailee and Vanessa R. Sasson. Chris is a journalist and communications professional who has held senior communications positions in Canada's federal development aid agency and at the World Bank. Shailee is a graduate student originally from India who recently completed her master's thesis in the department of English at McGill University. Vanessa is professor of religious studies in the liberal arts department of Marianopolis College, where she has been teaching since 1999. Her revelations about new government policy regulating CÉGEP enrollment stunned the audience.

Chris spoke first (21:40) because he co-wrote QWF's Bill 96 brief for the minister of culture. Most of the francophones who testified at the hearings supported Bill 96 or protested that it did not go far enough. Most English speakers had serious reservations about Bill 96. QWF was not invited to present a dissenting view at the public hearings. Chris shared the five points of the brief with us:

1. QWF noted that Bill 96's preamble states that French is the "official and common" language of Quebec, without acknowledging the place of other languages,
2. QWF questioned the evidence for the "decline of French,"
3. QWF criticized use of the notwithstanding clause to override charter rights,
4. QWF noted that Bill 96 promotes homogeneity over diversity and uses legal coercion rather than incentives,
5. QWF asked if funding for English-speaking writers and artists could be cut in the future without notice or explanation.

Shailee (28:14) gave her perspective as a recent immigrant to Quebec and student at McGill. She challenged the government's assumption that

immigrants do not learn French and that they are a threat to Quebec.

Vanessa (35:30) began her presentation by saying, "My college [Marianopolis, in Westmount] came out of covid and walked right into Bill 96." The troubles began in early 2021. While the CAQ government was preparing its revision of Bill 101, the Liberal Party of Dominique Anglade proposed its own twenty-seven-point language plan in April. One point suggested that students should be encouraged to take courses in French. The CAQ seized on the idea and added it to their revision of Bill 101 but made three language courses obligatory for all students, regardless of their origins. Without forewarning, consultation or any understanding of the complexity of the task, this major change was presented to CÉGEPs as a fait accompli. All students at English-language CÉGEPs would now have to take elective courses, like geography or history, in French. This appears straightforward but students arrive at CÉGEP with widely differing language skills. Francophone students have a higher level of French than most Anglos, who need a different level of French than Indigenous students, for example Mohawks, who only begin French in Grade 10. The new requirement was a programming nightmare.

All students in English CÉGEPS already had to take two French language courses, so Bill 96 added three more — which was logistically impossible, given that CÉGEPs only have four semesters and students couldn't take two French-level courses at the same time because the language courses were supposed to provide the students with progressively increasing proficiency in French. In addition, how many different geography courses would need to be offered and how would they be scheduled? How many bilingual teachers would need to be hired and how many unilingual teachers would not have their contracts renewed?

Vanessa wrote op-eds for *The Montreal Gazette* and *Globe and Mail*. CÉGEP administrators tried to speak to the minister of education and bureaucrats, whose doors were closed. The entire process made Vanessa's colleagues feel isolated and betrayed. Francophone CÉGEPs, which had always been allies and friends, did not join their voices in protest. Francophone CÉGEPs would benefit by receiving more students and funding.

The CAQ government placed a collective cap on the number of students that English CÉGEPs could enroll. The maximum was 17.5 percent of all CÉGEP students, which represented a significant drop in numbers. A cap was also imposed on the number of students per CÉGEP. In the case of Marianopolis, the cap was set at 2,003 students.

Vanessa explained that CÉGEPs make offers to many students, who also apply to other CÉGEPs. The final number of students accepted in a given year can vary considerably. "Under the new law," she asked rhetorically, "what would happen if an English CÉGEP enrolled more students than its limit? The CÉGEP would be penalized $15,000 per student. Errors quickly become costly." (The first school to be hit with multi-million-dollar fines was LaSalle College in 2025.)

What was the alternative? The CÉGEP could deliberately undershoot its limit but the new law reserved the right for the Ministry of Education to lower the cap the following year if the limit was not fully utilized. The new law would make it almost impossible for the English CÉGEPs to succeed, no matter how they managed the new obligations, because they would be penalized whether the number of students enrolled was higher or lower than the limit. "We are being set up to fail," Vanessa concluded. "How does this help French? CÉGEPs were the canary in the coalmine. Now they're going after the universities."

The audience at the Atwater Library had many questions. Each answer deepened the sense that educational institutions were under attack for reasons that were unclear and with brutality that was inexplicable.

A week later, I was scheduled to make a presentation about my film and the new teacher's guides at the annual Quebec Professional Association of Teachers conference at a hotel in downtown Montreal. As I walked toward Outremont metro, a man on a bicycle veered toward the sidewalk and slammed to a halt. He looked vaguely familiar.

"Are you the guy who makes those documentaries about Anglos?"

I nodded.

"I've been watching them on TV. They're great." Then he thrust out his hand and said, "Hi! I'm Paul Piché."

That explained why he looked familiar. I first encountered Paul Piché in the 80s, not long after arriving in Quebec. He was one of Quebec's

most popular singer-songwriters at the time. I learned French by reading Michel Tremblay and listening to Beau Dommage and Paul Piché. I thought they all spoke joual — *cré-moé, cré-moé pas* — which I started to imitate, until I met them and discovered they all spoke perfectly conventional French.

My wife Louise was working for l'Équipe Spectra, which operated the jazz festival and les Francofolies, and she was often invited to parties with her bosses Alain Simard and André Ménard. I would tag along. Mostly I watched and listened. Like all beginners learning a language, I could read and write French competently before I could speak it fluently. I practiced by translating songs. Louise liked my version of « La complainte du phoque en Alaska » and passed it on to Rivard, who had written the song:

> The story is told around the North Pole
> About a seal going out of his mind.
> His girl has left town with some jugglers and clowns
> In a Big Top, looking for the Big Time.

Rivard also liked it but it would have made no sense for him to sing it in English, so he offered it to Acadian singer Edith Butler and she performed it. Unfortunately, English audiences tittered salaciously at the line about 'spinning balls' on her nose, so Butler never added the song to her English repertoire.

During those years, I met many musicians and singers. One person who seemed to be present at every party was Paul Piché. In 1993, la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste named him Patriot of the Year and Paul Piché was spokesman for des artistes québécois pour la souveraineté, as well as one of the vedettes at the sovereignty rally at the Forum a few weeks before the 1995 referendum. Paul Piché was the most prominent artist on the yes side. I assumed such a fervent separatist must also be ferociously anti-Anglo, so I always stayed away from him.

Now here he was, shaking my hand, smiling and congratulating me on my documentaries about Anglos. It was totally disorienting and then I realized he was speaking to me in English, without a trace of accent. "My mom's English. It's great somebody's making films about people like us!"

People like us? What did that mean? Bilingual? Bicultural? It was impossible to process all the thoughts racing through my head. I felt

profoundly ashamed that I had categorized Paul Piché as a narrow-minded nationalist and hostile to Anglos simply because he was a passionate champion of Quebec's French language and culture. There is no logical reason why love must be counterbalanced by hate. Lévesque had understood this. So had Lisée, at one point, and even Legault had recognized the value of collaboration across languages and cultures, until he got back into politics. The encounter with Paul Piché was a valuable reminder about the danger of narrow, negative presumptions.

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Next I was invited to McGill University to speak to Paul Zanazanian's students training to become teachers. The Department of Integrated Studies in Education is located high above the main campus, which spreads from the Roddick Gates on downtown Sherbrooke Street to the slopes of Mount Royal. McGill's campus is idyllic in all seasons. The university is almost as closely associated with Montreal's Anglo elite as Westmount.

Founded in 1821, the university bears the name of James McGill, a successful merchant whose bequest was influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment. The Scotland of McGill's youth did not have the wealth of England but it had five universities, compared with England's two, making his native land a powerhouse of learning. McGill wanted his adopted land to share the power of education and his bequest created one of the world's leading universities. From the early days, McGill

McGill University campus above Dr. Penfield

University prioritized science, research and innovation. As of December 2025, McGill alumni, faculty and affiliates include 12 Nobel laureates, 149 Rhodes Scholars, 3 Canadian prime ministers and 2 governors general. McGill alumni also include 9 Academy Award winners, 13 Grammy Award winners, 15 Emmy Award winners, 4 Pulitzer Prize winners and 121 Olympians with over 35 Olympic medals.

I first met Paul Zanazanian a decade earlier when I participated in his study on how Quebec's English-speaking leadership understand their history. Respondents were unanimous that the story of English-speaking Quebec starts with the Conquest in 1759, though very few English speakers feel any personal identification with the event.

The major turning point in the Anglo narrative was the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, the beginning of a counter-conquest, followed by the election of the first PQ government in 1976. Those events marked a difficult period of adjustment for anglophones, who moved away from Quebec in droves. Mother-tongue Anglos dropped from 13 percent of the population in 1971 to 8 percent in 2001.

Thanks to Paul, I discovered a fascinating research project by Université Laval historian Jocelyn Létourneau. In 2014, he published a ten-year study on perceptions of history among high school, CÉGEP and university students. « Je me souviens? Le passé du Québec dans la conscience de sa jeunesse »[84] showed that young francophones have been taught to see the past as a litany of defeats and humiliations, beginning with the Conquest. For young anglophones, their history is about being excluded by francophones and blamed for historical defeats and humiliations, regardless of their family's personal involvement. Létourneau demonstrated that these impressions are wide-spread and deeply imbedded. The CAQ's new attacks on "over-funded" Anglo educational institutions and "unwelcome" hordes of English-speaking students reinforced old prejudices about the Conquest and its Anglo perpetrators.

One piece of good news was that Bishop's University was spared the worst of the CAQ cuts. The mayor of Sherbrooke, Évelyn Beaudin, protested the tuition hike that threatened the university's survival. In Nathan M. Greenfield's "Shock Over Québec's Fee Raise for Anglophone

[84] *"Do I Remember? Quebec's Past in the Consciousness of Its Youth."*

Universities," published in *University World News* on October 24, 2023, Beaudin claims that "Bishop's has historically played an essential role in the academic, cultural and economic outreach of Sherbrooke. This hike's negative impact jeopardises the vibrancy and diversity of our student community, while compromising the intercultural exchanges that contribute to the richness of our city." Jean Charest, former premier of Québec, is also quoted in the article: "Is there anyone, honestly, who thinks that the future of the French language is threatened in the streets of Sherbrooke by the presence of Bishop's University students?"

The CAQ reversed course for Bishop's but McGill remained the prime target for new measures. Paul's students wanted to talk about language politics. Half of them were directly hit by the new tuition increases.

	Total Students	Quebec Students	Rest of Canada Students	International Students
McGill	39,500	50%	20%	30%

Table 44: Québécois, Canadian and international students at McGill University

The first student to speak was from Ontario. "As soon as I started to think about university I wanted to come to McGill. Montreal is the coolest place in Canada. I thought after university, I would stick around and become a teacher. I did a stage [internship] and the vibe I got in the school was that Quebec is becoming an unwelcoming place. I did French immersion so I speak French fine but could I have a future here? It is disappointing because of how cool I thought Montreal was."

The second speaker was an international student from China. "This is my second year in Canada and I also feel Quebec is becoming unwelcoming. When I was finishing high school, Bill 96 was just coming out but it didn't seem to have any impact on education. I applied to a lot of schools but when the offer came from McGill I did some research and thought I would be okay here. I did not expect the tuition increases and the obligation to take French courses. This will filter out many people who intended to apply."

The third speaker was also from Ontario but with Quebec roots. "My grandmother is francophone and my grandfather is Anglo. They had a Romeo and Juliet romance back in the 60s. My mother was born here in the 70s. Then the family got transferred to Toronto with the big exodus. I'm the first in my family to come back. I've been here seven years now and I love it. I feel at home here and I'm stubborn."

The fourth speaker was born and raised in Montreal. During CÉGEP, he started to be aware of politics and the divisions in Quebec. "One of the factors that is making me think about moving away is the language divide."

The McGill students understood that a small population of French speakers — surrounded by multiple millions of English speakers whose language dominates international business, politics, education, entertainment and tourism — will naturally feel vulnerable. They also understood that Quebec's economy is dependent on immigrants, so it is important to ensure that they learn French. The students who were planning to stay in Quebec already spoke French or were committed to acquiring the language as soon as possible. The situation felt like a lose-lose situation for them. They were regarded as a problem if they didn't learn French but were still a problem if they did because then they were contributing to bilingualism.

"The fear," explained a francophone Québécois student, "is that bilingualism will lead to assimilation."

One of the foreign students challenged this explanation. "Why is bilingualism not a problem for European countries, even small countries like Sweden or Denmark?"

Paul offered a different perspective: "One of my Swedish colleagues is concerned that her students write English better than Swedish. Quebec is not the only place worried about the negative impact of bilingualism."

A francophone student in the group admitted that she enrolled at McGill "because my written French is weaker than my written English," though she believed her skills for reading and speaking both languages were equal.

Linguists acknowledge that it is difficult for bilinguals to maintain two languages at mother-tongue level, especially if one language is higher

status (dominant) or easier to use. A language like English, which is both dominant and easy, has a distinct competitive advantage.

One strategy to preserve Quebec's French language and culture is to maintain a critical mass of unilinguals. Cynics believe that Quebec's bilingual elite have been imposing unilingualism on the lesser educated for centuries. In the internet age, the government no longer has the power to control who will be bilingual and francophone youth have seized the opportunity to acquire language skills denied to them institutionally. It is true that an increasingly bilingual society faces real challenges but the problem demands real solutions, not populist distractions.

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The final stop on the education leg of tour was Concordia University. Its community roots go back to 1851, when the first YMCA in North America was established in Old Montreal and a few years later began to offer evening classes to allow working people to pursue their education after a day of toil. In 1926, the education program at the YMCA was reorganized uptown on Stanley Street and the college was renamed in honour of Sir George Williams, founder of the original London YMCA. In

Concordia University campus, Henry F. Hall Building on De Maisonneuve Boulevard

1934, the college offered Canada's first undergraduate credit course in adult education. Loyola College was established in 1896 in what is now the residential district of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (NDG). The two colleges merged in 1974 to create Concordia University. The campuses are seven kilometres apart.

	Total Students	Quebec Students	Rest of Canada Students	International Students
Concordia	46,000	69%	9%	22%

Table 45: Québécois, Canadian and international students at Concordia University

Concordia University gained international attention in 1969 for what is known as the Computer Centre Incident. The previous spring, six West Indian students accused a biology lecturer of racism. Dissatisfied with how the administration was handling the complaint, more than four hundred students occupied the ninth-floor computer lounge. After weeks of negotiation failed, the university called the police to remove protesters, who damaged computers and threw files out of the window of the computer lab, where a fire broke out. Concordia students have a long history of political and social activism. The university is also home to a significant number of international students directly affected by the tuition increases.

I was invited to Concordia by Raymond Jess, who teaches in the School of Irish Studies. His class is in the Hall building, where the 1969 computer riots took place. The building sits across the street from the McConnell Building and JA DeSève Cinema, where we had screened *What We Choose to Remember* a year earlier.

Raymond's students asked astute questions about politics. A young man asked, "Did you get any funding from Quebec? Or was it all federal funding?" He was surprised when I answered that the film had been entirely funded by the provincial Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise, which was, at the time, administered within Premier Legault's office.

A young woman asked another very good question. "What kind of response have you had from French media?" The answer was none, though we had received significant response to a press release sent to all Quebec politicians at the National Assembly and in Ottawa. The software we used was able to track when the email was opened and shared. Some politicians, or their staff, had opened the press release and shared it with numerous colleagues. The only parties that actually contacted me were the Quebec Liberals and Québec solidaire, a progressive party popular with a young demographic, mostly in Montreal. Some CAQ and PQ members opened the email and shared it many times but they did not contact me.

A young man from Ontario said, "I've had conversations with a lot of Québécois people and there is the prevailing sentiment that it was anglophones who colonized French Quebec. That is true but it was a recolonization. I feel like a lot of Québécois people, even my own age, don't understand that they were colonizers first. I had an interesting conversation with a friend, who said, sort of joking, 'Ben, là, you Anglos colonized us.' And I said, 'Wait a minute. My family is Indigenous. You colonized us!' She laughed and said, 'Eh oui, I never thought about that.'"

A young man with deep Montreal roots, though he was born and raised in the USA, said:

> My mother's family goes way, way back with the habitants. One of my grandfathers was Jewish. So my family is very multicultural. That is pretty typical for Montreal. It has always upset me that nationalism forces us into narrow silos. I see even young people my age pretending there isn't an anglophone element to Montreal's history and culture. And to challenge that pretense is viewed as somehow reactionary. But it isn't. There are other stories here.

A young Haitian man said, "Since you made the movie, a lot of things have changed. The CAQ passed laws to control how universities accept applicants. They made an updated version of Loi 101. They are pushing students and immigrants out of Quebec. Would you make a different film now?"

I answered, "Yes. My film looked back at the previous half century and presented a success story. Legault's CAQ interprets that period as

a total failure that has pushed Quebec to the brink of Louisianization and linguistic extinction. I don't know what kind of film somebody could make right now about these irreconcilable perceptions of reality. Maybe in a few years things will calm down and we can reach some agreement about where Quebec is vulnerable and what we should do about it."

A young man from Ontario said:

> I'm fully bilingual. I was planning on doing my master's here when I finish my undergrad. Now I have a choice of paying really high Canadian student fees or taking a year off my studies so I can establish myself as a resident of Quebec to pay the Quebec tuition rate. For people like me, the fees are prohibitive. A lot of my French Québécois friends have no idea that we're paying so much more than them. International students get screwed over even worse. I don't really understand what the end goal is here, politically. If Quebec wants educated workers who speak French to come here, why are they driving us away?

This comment led to a rant session about Bill 96. Some of the worst fears were largely based on rumours. For example, it is not true that Bill 96 obliges all communication with foreign companies to be in French but the law is so unclear that no one is sure what it does prohibit, which breeds a climate of anticipatory self-censorship.

The young man with deep Montreal roots who had grown up in the USA was now eagerly learning French. "There are a lot of people at Concordia who are bilingual," he said. "Many grew up in a francophone environment. Concordia has a highly diverse student body and I'm proud of that. There are a lot of people here who did not follow the traditional path to university. I came in as a mature student. It just sucks to me that there is an anti-urban, anti-youth thing from the CAQ. Concordia educates so many people. It just seems ridiculous that the government would try to destroy that."

The Concordia students were questioning their future in Quebec. Foreign students were feeling particularly unwelcome. The CAQ was reducing the numbers of all foreign students, not just English speakers. The policy was both unpopular and at odds with the needs of Quebec's workforce, particularly in areas like research and innovation, once a

priority for Legault's dream economy. Nonetheless, the government, and most French-language media, were also telling students from Canada that their welcome was conditional, at best.

During the quarter century that followed the 1995 referendum, language conflicts did not dominate the news or the mood. It began to feel like a sensible linguistic equilibrium had been achieved (Lisée) and that prosperity for Quebec would be attained by increased education, innovation and international collaboration (Legault). Many of us also believed that large numbers of bilingual and multilingual citizens were an asset for Quebec. We did not realize that influential francophones were feeling that languages other than French, and particularly English, were a serious threat to them.

Some older Anglos, who had adapted to previous social contracts, were feeling that no amount of change would ever be enough. Ronald G. Macfarlane, a retired school administrator, sent an op-ed to *The Montreal Gazette* entitled "Young Anglophones Would Be Better Off Leaving Quebec," published August 22, 2024:

> Every reader of this article has probably heard a parent proudly proclaim how fluent their child is in French, usually as a result of either immersion or attending a French school. But the level playing field has been tilted in recent years. Many children speak English at the kitchen table, don't recognize Quebec TV stars and might even speak English on Ste-Catherine Street, and it often seems as if these are considered to be limiting factors on their future in this province. The "tilt" bell is ringing loudly, and that may signal the end of the game.

Robert Libman, former Equality Party leader and mayor of Côte Saint-Luc, also wrote an op-ed for *The Montreal Gazette*, "Stay or Leave Quebec? My Thinking Has Changed," published September 7, 2024:

> While those who left, including two of my younger brothers, might have no regrets — and shudder at the thought of anyone having to endure our exhausting political distractions — I felt that bilingual anglophones, able to speak both the language of the majority in Quebec and the majority in North America, could derive a major advantage here. That's how I felt then. Looking forward, however,

> in the context of what we're going through now, I feel it would be wrong today to encourage young anglophones to stay.

Young Anglos, however, were feeling defiant. Taylor C. Noakes wrote a column in *Cult MTL* magazine, titled "Should I Stay or Should I Go?" published August 24, 2024:

> It's disheartening — frankly, incomprehensible — that a Montreal newspaper on life support [*The Montreal Gazette*] would tacitly approve Ronald Macfarlane's recommendation that young anglophones leave Quebec. Like most Québécois — irrespective of mother tongue — I am unhappy with the direction in which "Generalissimo Franco" Legault has taken this province. But, as with all politicians, his days in office are numbered. With approval ratings as low as his are right now, his political career likely won't survive the next election.

Noakes concluded that "Saying François Legault's policy decisions represent the will and aspirations of the people of Quebec is like saying Netanyahu's war on Gaza represents the interests of the global population of Jews. It's completely absurd and certainly not sufficient grounds to advocate for another mass anglo exodus."

A quartet of young Anglos (Chad Bean, Jordan Black, Chelsea Craig and Maria Kyres) also wrote an op-ed for *The Montreal Gazette*. "Leave? No, We Young Anglos Belong in Quebec," published September 9, 2024, was firm: "Nous sommes Québécois, aussi!"[85]:

> We are young Quebecers whose mother tongue is English and who belong to a community whose members also speak French in overwhelming numbers. We are building homes, families, careers here. We are making contributions, in countless ways, to Quebec's economy, society and culture. We know in our hearts the vast majority of Quebecers want us to stay, even if the government sends increasing signals it would prefer we didn't. We are part of a community where linguistic duality is part of everyday life. Where anglophones, francophones and allophones coexist and do it well.

I also believed that the vast majority of Quebecers do not want to push away non-francophones, though they want to protect Quebec's French

[85] *"We are Quebecers too!"*

language and culture. As recently as 2018, the leaders of Quebec's three major parties were promoting a vision that appeared inclusive and optimistic. Couillard explicitly included Anglos in the Liberal Party vision, as he had done at the young leaders' conference at Bishop's University. Lisée was leading the PQ toward the vision he had outlined in his book *Nous*, which was in line with inclusive policies of former PQ leaders Lévesque and Lucien Bouchard. Legault was assuring voters that his CAQ party would dispense with sterile debates about separation and focus on the important issues of health care, education, job creation and prosperity.

Couillard's Liberals lost the election and have been in disarray ever since, rejected by most French speakers as the party of Anglos. Lisée led the PQ to the worst election defeat in fifty years and did not even win his own seat, losing party status for the PQ. Pundits at the time speculated that the PQ might never recover. Legault and the CAQ were the big winners in 2018 with a message of unity, pragmatism and prosperity. They won an even larger majority in 2022, promising stronger language laws and severely restricted immigration.

Two years later, the CAQ was nosediving in the polls, the Liberals were struggling to find support among the French-speaking majority and the PQ was looking like a sure bet to form the next government. Emboldened by the polls, the PQ's zealous young leader, Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, was promising to hold a third referendum on independence if his party won, though a majority of Quebecers did not want it and party elders were cautioning against a kamikaze race to a disastrous third defeat. It was hard to imagine any scenario in which a referendum campaign would not be a brutally divisive battle. If the nationalists failed again, who would be blamed?

CHAPTER 8:

Waves of Immigration: Irish, Jewish and Others

The two final chapters will explore Montreal through the experiences of immigrants who made the city their home. During the first decades after the Conquest, immigration from France almost ceased and immigration from Great Britain and USA was slow. That changed in the mid-nineteenth century when a large wave of immigrants arrived from Ireland. During the Victorian era, more than half of Quebec's English speakers were Irish. The highest percentage lived in Quebec City (69 percent), the Ottawa Valley (62 percent) and Montreal (50 percent). Montreal's two-hundred-year-old Saint Patrick's Day parade is the city's most venerable ethnic festival.

Quebec's early religious and ethnic history is usually summarized along the following lines: Quebec was divided between two populations, French Catholics descended from pre-Conquest French colonists and English Protestants who controlled much of the economy and natural resources. It is true that an elite group controlled the wealth in Quebec, but where is that not true? Most of the elite were English speakers but only a minority of English speakers were elite. England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales had different histories, languages, religions and classes. The reality was far complex than the binary story presented in high school history books.

	Irish origin	English origin	Scottish origin	Regional % of English speakers
Montreal	50%	25%	25%	27% (66,062)
EasternTownships	38%	43%	19%	32% (77,789)
Ottawa Valley	62%	12%	26%	15% (35,669)
Quebec City	69%	21%	10%	9% (22,730)
Gaspé	32%	33%	34%	5% (11,487)
Other regions:	not available	not available	not available	12% (29,360)
TOTAL	51%	29%	20%	100% (243,097)

Table 46: Quebec regional population distribution by UK origin in 1871[86]

Large numbers of Irish came to Quebec because of the potato famine of 1845 – 1852. The largest wave fled Ireland in the summer of 1847. Twenty percent of the refugees died crossing the Atlantic before the ships landed in Boston, New York, Saint John and Halifax, and 90,000 sailed down the St. Lawrence River, where they were quarantined at Grosse-Île. More than 5,000 are buried there.

Some Irish remained in Quebec City but 75,000 continued up the river to Montreal. The city's population at the time was just 50,000. Municipal authorities built sheds on the western edge of the city to shelter the flood of refugees who had little to offer but poverty and pestilence. Montrealers dug graves for the 6,000 Irish immigrants who died that summer and they adopted so many orphans that an estimated 40 percent of the city's francophones share Irish blood. Many of the Irish continued moving on to the Eastern Townships, the Ottawa Valley and Upper Canada (Ontario) but thousands made their new homes in Montreal.

[86] *I have taken data from two tables in Ronald Rudin, The Forgotten Quebecers: A History of English-Speaking Quebec, 1759 – 1980 (PUL Diffusion, 1985), one on p. 116 and another on p. 99.*

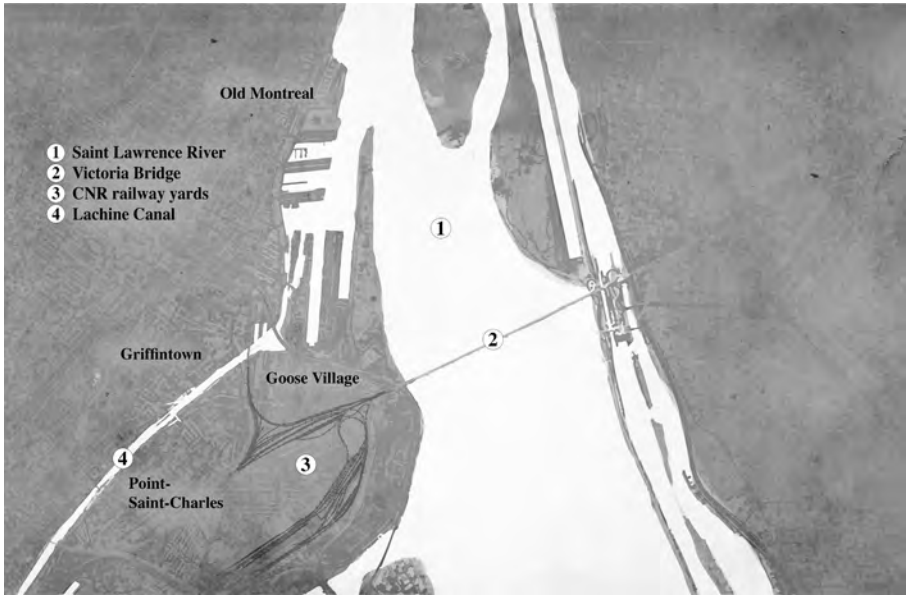
A decade later, Irish labourers working on the Victoria Bridge dredged a huge black rock from the St. Lawrence River and set it up in the middle of the mass grave as a memorial to the dead. The black rock monument still stands near the entrance of the Victoria Bridge but the graveyard was abandoned and then paved over with two lanes of highway, surrounded by a bleak industrial wasteland. The tragedy of the mass grave and the extraordinary story of how Montrealers welcomed the survivors deserves a more fitting monument.

After years of advocacy, the Irish community finally reached an agreement with the city of Montreal to create a memorial park, mostly funded by Hydro Quebec. In fall 2024, I was invited to a press conference where the project was formally announced. Artists' renderings of the installations showed how the project would transform a bleak strip of urban wasteland into a sacred lieu of remembrance. Many leaders of the Irish community attended — a few I already knew and others I met for the first time.

My father's ancestors were Irish, of a sort. They were Ulster Scots who seized the opportunity to obtain cheap land in Canada and emigrated in 1885. Two parents with six boys and six girls travelled from quarantine on Grosse-Île to Montreal and then by train to Winnipeg, where they claimed a farm, settling in the south of the province and naming the local creek after the Boyne River, where Protestant William of Orange defeated Catholic King James II. They brought their anti-Catholic prejudices with them.

My mother's ancestors were persecuted French Huguenots who fled to Scotland and later immigrated to New England. During the American Revolution, they joined Loyalists who farmed in Upper Canada until better land became available on the prairies. My mother's eldest sister scandalized her entire clan by marrying a Catholic French Canadian who spoke little English. A generation later, my wife Louise scandalized her family by marrying a Protestant Anglo immigrant who spoke little French. Religion has a long history of dividing people.

The southwest of Montreal was home to three Irish inner-city settlements separated by canals, railway tracks and later by urban expressways. Irish immigrants built modest houses on land that originally housed the



Map 10: Irish Montreal, early twentieth century

fever sheds. One of those villages, Victoriatown, surrounded by smelly, dirty, noisy industries, was home to about 1,500 people until the entire settlement was razed in 1964. I first heard of Victoriatown, a.k.a. Goose Village, in 2011 when I visited the *Quartiers disparus* exposition at the Centre d'histoire de Montréal (now Mémoire des Montréalais, or le MEM), then located in the fire station at Place d'Youville in Old Montreal. Mayor Jean Drapeau had used the pretext of inviting visitors from around the world to Expo 67 to "clean up" his city. After his administration designated several sections of the inner city as slums, it evicted thousands of the city's poorest citizens and demolished their homes.

Goose Village was the smallest but the most controversial demolition. It had the misfortune to be the perfect size and location for an important Expo installation: the Autostade. Homes in Goose Village were expropriated and demolished to build a revolutionary modular, 25,000-seat sporting and entertainment facility, abandoned a decade later when the larger Olympic Stadium opened in 1976. For half a century, the vacant strip of land that was once Goose Village became a weed-infested wasteland. Construction on the memorial park will begin in 2027 once the

city of Montreal redirects Rue Bridge and repurposes Rue des Irlandais. The new Black Rock memorial park will restore some of the site's lost memories and dignity.

The second inner-city Irish settlement was Griffintown, located west of Old Montreal and north of the Lachine Canal. This was part of the "city below the hill" that Herbert Brown Ames studied in 1897, when its population numbered in the thousands. St. Ann's Church was demolished in 1970, and by 1974, the population of Griffintown had shrunk to 546. The National Film Board (NFB) made a film called "Griffintown" in the period when the few remaining inhabitants, too poor to pay rent in any other part of the city, struggled to survive.

Frank Hanley, one of Montreal's most colourful politicians, represented Griffintown in the National Assembly and as a city councillor. Locals claim that Mayor Drapeau condemned the Griffintown district to annihilation to punish Hanley and the people who voted from him. The neighbourhood continued to deteriorate long after Drapeau departed the political scene. During the past decade, the Victorian industrial ghost town has undergone a remarkable renaissance, reminiscent of Dubai at the turn of the century. The rapid gentrification of Griffintown has included almost entirely high-rise residential buildings and it's controversial for its lack of a community vision to include schools and local services.

Railyards viewed from Point St. Charles.

Point St. Charles,[87] the largest of the three Irish neighbourhoods, is located south of the Lachine Canal spreading west from the Grand Trunk Railway west to Verdun. The Point St. Charles district provides a bridge between Victorian-era Montreal and the present. Industrial architecture has been preserved, though the former working-class neighbourhood has been gentrified.

Industrial development and residential occupation began here in 1825, when the fourteen-kilometre-long Lachine Canal was completed. Development redoubled when the Victoria Bridge opened in 1860. The Sulpician order, which owned the land that is now Point St. Charles, divided the area into lots and auctioned them off. The Grand Trunk Railway purchased land for its railyards, which still occupy a vast territory at the entrance to the Victoria Bridge.

The Point was the industrial heartland of Montreal for several generations. The francophone population mostly lived on the canal side of the railway tracks that run through the centre of Point St Charles. They attended the St. Charles school and church. The English-speaking population lived on the other side of the tracks, near the vast Grand Trunk stockyards. Anglo Catholics and Protestants had their own schools (Saint Gabriel's and Lorne) and churches. They pronounced French street names à l'anglaise: Charon was Sharon; Madeleine was Magdalen (like the islands); and Bourgeoys was Burgess.

Language spoken at home	Population	%
French	7,220	54.5
English	4,025	30.4
Both French and English	245	1.8
Other languages	1,365	10.3
French, English and other language(s)	380	2.8

Table 47: Languages spoken in Point St. Charles, 2021

[87] *Traditionally written* Point St. Charles *in English and Pointe-Saint-Charles in French.*

Point St. Charles declined rapidly in the 1960s when the much larger Saint-Lawrence Seaway made the Lachine Canal redundant. Industry and jobs vanished. Last to leave were the poorest families who could ill afford higher rents in better neighbourhoods. In 1978, the NFB made "The Point," a film that portrayed the neighbourhood in its bleakest hours.

A year later, Centaur Theatre produced David Fennario's play *Balconville*, which was revolutionary for portraying Montreal as a bilingual city where Anglos and Francos of many ethnic backgrounds lived together in Point St. Charles, struggling to make ends meet and to make sense of Quebec's rapidly evolving political environment: FLQ bombings, election of the PQ and Bill 101. *Balconville* was thrilling because it presented a new voice — of working-class Anglos — who had never been seen on stage and who rarely participated in public debates. The title of the play refers to a joke about non–jet set Montrealers who spend their vacations sitting on their balconies. *Balconville* played an extended run at Centaur Theatre for its English-speaking audience and then played at Place des Arts for a mixed-language audience, an unheard of breach of the two solitudes. Fennario's play toured Canada, was produced in London's Old Vic Theatre, had a run in Belfast and was broadcast on CBC Television in 1985.

Because the Irish played such a major role in Quebec's history, I wanted to show my film to their community and hear their stories. Jennifer Crane sent a request to Point St. Charles's Library housed in an old fire station.

Point St. Charles Library in the old fire station. The English community was formerly concentrated on the other side of the railroad overpass seen in the distance.

Point St. Charles was infamous for its Victoria Day scrap-timber and community-junk bonfires, which were huge, exhilarating and dangerous, sometimes engulfing adjacent (usually abandoned) buildings in flames. That tradition has died out, so the fire station has been safely repurposed for culture.

The library was happy to show my film and we agreed to a screening date in November. I soon discovered, however, that all their social media was in French because of Bill 96. They even insisted on using the film's French title: "We can't do any promotion in English. It's the law." As far as I knew, both Bill 101 and Bill 96 made exceptions for bilingual promotion of cultural events. However, nothing in the library's promotion suggested my film was about Quebec history from an anglophone perspective. I was happy to have a diverse audience at the screening but I wanted a sizeable contingent from the Irish community. I wanted to hear their stories. I decided to pay the library a pre-screening visit to ask about their language policy.

The librarian on duty conceded that bilingual promotional material was not illegal and that the library could share bilingual promotion, if I produced it. To be safe I also shared it on my own social media and asked Irish friends to help promote the screening. After leaving the library, I visited the Point's local community centres and asked them to display posters and flyers. The oldest community organization in Point St. Charles is Maison Saint Columba House, the roots of which go back to the first Irish settlement on la rivière du Nord in the 1820s.

Raymond Jess, who teaches in Concordia's Irish studies program, came to the screening and so did Fergus Keyes, who has raised funds for Concordia's Irish studies program, the largest in the world outside Ireland. Fergus has led many community organizations, was chairman of the board for Centaur Theatre and was also spearheading the Black Rock memorial project. Fergus Keyes is a pillar of the Irish community.

I began the post-screening conversation by asking questions about local history. Fergus was the first to speak: "Over the years I have worked with politicians from all the parties, at all levels of government, and 95 percent of the francophone politicians I meet tell me they have an Irish ancestor!" Then he told a story about meeting the mayor of Granby and

mentioning that the city was founded by Irish settlers. When the major appeared skeptical, Fergus challenged him to "look up the names of the first mayors of Granby and you'll see for yourself!"

Fergus and Raymond shared many stories about Irish history. Fergus said, "The first census in Nouvelle France contained Irish names." Then the two men talked about the Patriotes. Everyone in the room knew the alternative history in which many of the Patriotes were non-francophones, including leaders in the Richelieu Valley rebellion: Thomas Storrow Brown and the Nelson brothers, Wolfred and Robert. Fergus said, "Brown had such a thick Scottish brogue that no one ever knew what language he was speaking and no one could understand a damned word he said!"

A man in the audience with Scottish ancestors remarked that Scots fought with both the French and the British on the Plains of Abraham. Fergus gave examples of Irish also fighting with both the British and French. "Sometimes, brothers and cousins fought on opposing sides."

The group discussed the potato famine and the resulting tidal wave of refugees that landed in Montreal. The story of mass adoptions is gloriously inspirational as a demonstration of the best of human nature. I have seen people donate time and money to refugees, and foreign orphans are still adopted, but not on a mass scale. This story clashes with the current rise in anti-immigrant sentiment. It is almost unbelievable that Montrealers adopted thousands of foreign orphans. Fergus shed some light with an anecdote that just might be true: "The bishop had the church doors locked after Mass and told parishioners, 'No one is leaving until every single family adopts at least one of these orphans!'"

Raymond then shared some historical context: "Irish and Catholic are synonymous but there were many more Protestant Irish than most people realize. At the time of Confederation, the split was 50/50 in Atlantic Canada and two-to-one Protestant west of Ottawa. Quebec was the only region that had a majority of Catholics."

Fergus added, "They followed work. After building the Lachine Canal, many went to build the Welland Canal and the Erie Canal and they never returned."

Raymond replied, "Two governors general, Lord Dufferin and Lord Monck, were Anglo-Irish." He continued:

> In fact, four of Canada's first five governors general were Irish. It can be confusing for Québécois, Canadians and even the Irish themselves to identify who is and isn't Irish. The Irish famine generation defines 'Irishness' in North America, partly because they were economic refugees ill-suited to adapting to life in North America, but the Irish were not monolithic in the religion, education or class.

I was curious about relations between Protestants and Catholics, particularly how they initially shared a single Saint Patrick's Society. Fergus offered an explanation:

> At first they were just desperate to survive. The Irish were regarded as the most inferior immigrants, so they all banded together. But the Protestants were closer to England, so they took offence at Catholics drinking a toast to the pope. As good citizens of the British Empire, they thought they should toast the queen. That's why the Saint Patrick's Society broke up.

Sectarianism increased after the famine. Raymond mentioned that the annual Orange parade turned violent in the 1870s when a Catholic shot and killed an Orangeman. That was not long after Thomas D'Arcy McGee, journalist, poet, Catholic politician and Father of Confederation, was shot and killed by a member of the Fenian Brotherhood. After those violent episodes, Montreal banned the Orange parade. Not coincidentally, the Saint Patrick's Day parade was banned in Protestant Toronto at the same time. One man at the Point St. Charles screening was living in Toronto in 1987 and participated in the revived Saint Patrick's Day parade.

Fergus pointed out that the Saint Patrick's Basilica, on Boulevard René-Lévesque, was the church of the well-to-do Irish. The working-class churches were Saint Gabriel's in Point St. Charles and St. Ann's in Griffintown. "Even the working-class Irish had their differences," Fergus said. "Folk from Kilkenny didn't have the same traditions as those from Galway."

Fergus's wife, Peggy, moved to Point St. Charles in the 80s from Chateauguay, a reversal of former migration patterns away from the Point. One of her neighbours also moved to the Point in the 80s and said,

« Ça fait quarante ans que je suis considérée comme une étrangère à Pointe-Saint-Charles! »[88] Peggy had the same experience. It is common in isolated rural communities to keep outlanders at arms-length for a generation or two but rare for a neighbourhood in a large city to rigidly distinguish insiders from outsiders. This reveals a great deal about the self-image of long-time Point residents.

The conversation in Point St. Charles was mostly a celebration of immigrant courage, persistence and success but it ended on a bleak note. The Irish community in Montreal has become part of the middle-class mainstream and has dispersed all around the city. Much of its unique identity has been diluted. The Irish in Quebec are still a favourite immigrant group, historically, but the living, breathing Irish descendants have become English-speaking aliens.

The youngest man at the screening said:

> Growing up here in the 80s and 90s, I always felt like an outsider, being told « Ici on parle français! »[89] There was a lot of anger among the francophones in the neighbourhood and I was blamed for it but I didn't know why. I understand that francophones feel threatened in North America and I understand that recent immigrants are struggling to get a foot on the ladder. But it seems shitty that the only people who don't have any rights here are anglophones. I need a job too!

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Côte Saint-Luc has become the neighbourhood most strongly associated with Montreal's Jewish community. My screening there was initiated by Mike Cohen, who had written the first review of my film for *The Suburban*, a weekly paper. He is also a city councillor in Côte Saint-Luc. I was grateful to Mike for asking the Côte Saint-Luc Library to screen my film because the Jewish community is a vital part of Montreal's history.

Quebec already had a small Jewish community when Ezekiel Hart was elected to the legislative assembly for Trois-Rivières in 1807. Most of his coreligionists arrived from England. In the census of 1832, the

88 *"I've been considered an outsider in Point St. Charles for forty years!"*

89 *"We speak French here!"*

year Louis-Joseph Papineau introduced the Act to Grant Equal Rights and Privileges to Persons of the Jewish Religion, the few Jews in Lower Canada self-identified as physician, advocate, teacher, merchant, furrier, minister (rabbi) and, in two cases, gentleman. The population of Jewish immigrants from England grew steadily from 154 in 1841 to 989 in 1881.

Between 1880 and 1917, two million Jews fled the Russian Empire. By 1920, Montreal's Jewish population had exploded to 48,000. Few of the new arrivals spoke English or French and even fewer claimed to be gentlemen. They were farmers, tailors, shopkeepers and teachers who spoke Yiddish. They were also highly literate and recorded their lives in rich detail.

The earliest Jewish Yiddish-speaking community in Montreal was located near Old Montreal, when it was still the centre of economic activity. Here is a quick quiz, one point awarded for each street you can correctly associate with its modern name: Montreal's Yiddish-speaking community in the early 1900s was located between Dorchester Boulevard to the north and Craig Street to the south. The main perpendicular streets were Cadieux, Saint-Charles-Borromée and St. George. Dufferin Square, at the southeast corner of Dorchester and St. George, "was the very heart of the Jewish neighbourhood, where Jewish immigrants went to breathe the fresh air, meet the landslayt[90], hear the latest news, look for work, and read the newspapers."

Let's see how you did in the quiz. Here is the contemporary version: Montreal's Yiddish-speaking community in the early 1900s was located between Boulevard René-Lévesque to the north and Saint-Antoine to the south. The main perpendicular streets were De Bullion, Clark and Jeanne-Mance. Dufferin Square, at the southeast corner of René-Lévesque and Jeanne-Mance, is now buried beneath Complexe Guy Favreau.

The residential neighbourhood of that era is now almost unimaginable. Dig a little deeper and Dufferin Square had been a Scottish burial ground where James McGill was laid to rest. Shift the focus a few blocks south and you will discover the history of Chinatown, which began as a community of men due to restrictive immigration policies that favoured

[90] *Landslayt is Yiddish for "neighbours from the old country." Quote from Israel Medres, Montreal of Yesterday: Jewish Life in Montreal, 1900-1920 (Véhicule Press, 1998), p. 21.*

male labourers and discouraged the immigration of women and families. Consequently, many Chinese men found themselves in a bachelor society.

The wave of Jewish immigrants between 1888 and 1900 was also mostly men, unmarried or who had left their wives and children in Europe until they could find work and save money to purchase steamship tickets to bring their families across the ocean. The immigrants created several Yiddish newspapers (notably *Der Keneder Adler*, or *The Canadian Eagle*, 1907 – 1977) and magazines. Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a German philanthropist, donated money to create an institute that became the cultural hub of the community. The Baron de Hirsch Institute stood at the corner of De Maisonneuve and Bleury, now the western entrance to Place-des-Arts metro.

Once children began to arrive, the community built schools: Peretz (a.k.a. National Radical School) in 1911 and the Yidische Folk schule in 1913. The first Jewish Public Library followed in 1914. The rapidly growing Jewish population built several synagogues in the downtown area. One of the largest and most elaborate was Chevra Kadisha at the corner of Ste-Catherine and St-Urbain. Built in 1901, it was destroyed by fire in 1920. Dov Okouneff created several priceless oral history videos about Jewish Montreal between the 1920s and 1950s.

By the 1930s, the Jewish community had moved farther up Saint-Lawrence Boulevard from Duluth to Bernard and into residential side streets like St-Urbain. Most of the students attended Baron Byng High School. Montreal's Jewish population in the 1930s reached 60,000, of which 56 percent was foreign born and 95 percent still had Yiddish as their mother tongue.

This is the Montreal of Mordecai Richler (1931 – 2001), born during the zenith of Jewish culture in Quebec. Richler recorded the hardscrabble life of his parents and the unbridled ambitions of his own generation, which included William Shatner (b. 1931) and Leonard Cohen (1934 – 2016). Joe King, in his book *Baron Byng to Bagels: Tales of Jewish Montreal* (2006), devoted 130 pages to profiles of notable Jewish Quebec politicians, scientists, entrepreneurs, artists, innovators and philanthropists.

In 1985, journalist Nathalie Petrowski wrote an article in *Le Devoir* retracing the steps of Richler's best-known protagonist, Duddy Kravitz.

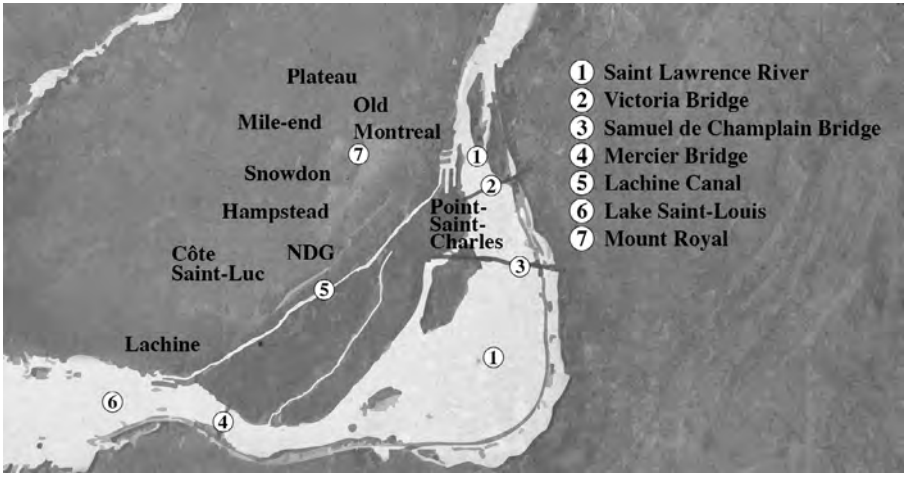
In 1985, Richler was still making Quebec proud as a world-famous novelist and had not yet made himself infamous with critical journalism about Quebec's nationalist politics. Petrowski marvelled that she could still visit the venerable bagel shops on Saint-Viateur and Fairmount that Richler knew forty years earlier, as well as Wilensky's diner, Beauty's luncheonette and Schwartz's smoked meat deli on the Main. All these institutions still exist forty years later in 2025.

During my first year at the National Theatre School in 1980, Richler accepted an invitation to speak to the three playwriting students. He was not interested in theatre. "I have never written for the stage. It doesn't interest me." He was not interested in talking about the craft of writing. "If I opened up the black box and started poking inside, I might never be able to put it back together." Richler was, however, happy to talk about his youth. I had never heard of him in Australia and had never read any of his books. It was a revelation to discover an entire exotic world a few blocks east of the National Theatre School and I was as amazed as Petrowski to discover how much of it still existed.

The anthology *An Everyday Miracle: Yiddish Culture in Montreal*, edited by Ira Robinson, Pierre Anctil and Mervin Butovsky (Véhicule Press, 1990), lists key events in the Yiddish life of the city. One of them was the creation of "the Yiddish drama group under the Folk Schul auspices by Dora Wasserman in 1956" (p. 34). When my daughter was born thirty years later, I needed a steady job, so I became general manager of the Saidye Bronfman Centre. Now rebranded as the Segal Centre, it was originally named after the wife of Samuel Bronfman, founder of Seagram's Distillery. Mme Bronfman is reported to have said patronizingly to Richler, by then an internationally renowned man of letters, "You've come a long way for a boy from St. Urbain Street." Richler famously fired back: "And you've come a long way for a bootlegger's wife!"

The Saidye Bronfman Centre became home to Montreal's Yiddish Theatre. In 1986 it was still run by its founder, Dora Wasserman. And some of its clients still spoke mostly Yiddish, which many of the Centre's young staff only had only learned in fragments. On one occasion I was summoned by box office staff to appease indignant Yiddish-speaking customers by communicating with them in my rudimentary German.

The two most difficult types of people to work with are volunteers, because they can walk away at any time for any reason, and prima donnas, because they are high-strung and high maintenance. Dora spent her entire life working with both. On the surface, Dora was sweet, caring



Map 11: Jewish Montreal

and infinitely patient — the perfect grandmother. One day a red pen exploded in the breast pocket of my white shirt and Dora, even though she had an opening that evening, rushed home with my shirt and brought it back spotless and freshly pressed.

Dora was also a shrewd psychologist and exceptional motivational speaker. I will never forget overhearing a telephone call with the star of the current show who announced she was quitting, just days before the opening. It was too late to recast and rehearse anyone else, and anyway, "No one else has your talent, darling. You're made for this part! You're going to be brilliant!" After half an hour of pleading, cajoling, coaxing and begging, Dora convinced the volunteer prima donna to relent and perform as planned. Then she slammed down the receiver and exploded in a blue fury in at least four different languages.

In 1952, Montreal's Jewish population had reached 85,000 but only 34 Jews lived way out in suburban Côte Saint-Luc. Today, Côte Saint-Luc's population of 34,500 is 69 percent Jewish, just slightly behind

Côte Saint-Luc Library

adjacent Hampstead, of which the Jewish population is 74 percent. Côte Saint-Luc is also very English: 39 percent mother tongue and 60 percent language most commonly spoken at home. I hoped the screening at the Côte Saint-Luc Library would provide insights into the current reality of the Jewish community. All but two of the people who spoke after the screening self-identified as Jewish.

The first woman to speak enjoyed the film "as an expression of a vibrant community" but she felt it was "created to show how Anglos are successfully fitting into French-dominant culture" and that the film "does not place enough emphasis on the contributions of Anglos. Some of us have been here for centuries, so why is only the dominant culture now acceptable?" She concluded that the provincial government had funded the film as "an apology for assimilation."

The next few speakers pursued the theme of history and institutions. "I hear people say, 'Why is there a Jewish General Hospital? Why do the Jews have a big, fancy schmancy hospital?' They think it was a gift from the government. We built it with our own donations because Jewish doctors couldn't find work in Christian hospitals! Legault and his fans need to understand this."

A man added, "We always hear, 'The English are so spoilt. They are the best-treated minority in the world. Look at all their schools and

hospitals and newspapers and radio stations, while the francophones outside Quebec have nothing.'" No one in the room appeared unsympathetic to the plight of francophones in small communities across Canada, but as one man added, "That argument is a distraction. Sure, minority francophones in the rest of Canada need help building institutions. But Anglos in Quebec need protection from our own government that wants to destroy the institutions we've built for centuries!"

There were several comments about xenophobia. One woman said, "I came here from France after the war but because I'm Jewish I had to go to an English school. People don't know that. They disbelieve it when you tell them!" A man mentioned the frequently voiced theory that the francophone elite has always ensured bilingual education for its own children while preventing the masses from achieving bilingualism so they can be more easily controlled. A woman added, "Legault is all about fear. We're not afraid of him in Montreal, so we don't vote for him. The people who do vote for him live in the rest of the province, where there is no threat to their language. Fear really works."

An older man said, "The PQ were fantastic marketers. They used the threat of separation to squeeze a lot of money out of Canada. Maybe it's time for us to use the same strategy. The regions don't like Montreal. So let them go their separate way! Their problem would be solved. They can live in French out there. And Montreal can be bilingual!"

"Yes!" replied a woman. "We should be proud of being bilingual. It's our biggest international advantage!"

The audience in Côte Saint-Luc was disturbed by the government's divisive language policies but they had seen worse, many times and in many places. Hamas's savage attack on October 7, 2023, and Israel's relentless military response would trigger a global rise in antisemitism that made Quebec's language politics appear picayune.

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The next screening was in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce – Côte-des-Neiges (NDG-CDN) and it was a wild card. An NDG community activist who saw my film online took it upon himself to present it. Alex Montagano is an entrepreneur and provocateur with an active online presence where

he's known as the Trainman. Alex wears a vintage Canadian National Railway conductor's uniform for his activist work. He is also perpetually building an elaborate miniature train circuit featuring Montreal and NDG landmarks in his basement. Alex is a character. Together we handed out flyers on the streets of NDG and made promo videos and Alex promoted the screening vigorously everywhere he went for months.

I was happy to show my film in NDG. The area has an old Anglo tradition. Roderick MacLeod, who appears in the film, speaks of his Scottish ancestors farming in NDG in the early nineteenth century. NDG is now in the same census district as CDN and together they have the highest proportion of immigrants in Montreal; almost half the residents are visible minorities (46.8 percent). NDG-CDN is full of anglophones, allophones and bilingual francophones, though the district experienced a population decline between 1966 (183,288) and 1986 (151,729) because of the Anglo exodus. The population has risen to 170,583 but has not regained the pre-FLQ level. For many Montrealers, and visitors to Montreal, NDG-CDN is an appealing mix of diverse cultures collaborating creatively. For a certain type of Quebec nationalist, NDG-CDN embodies the doomsday scenario of Quebec overrun by bilingual foreigners.

	French	English	Other Languages
Mother Tongue	51,175 (30%)	46,057 (27%)	73,351 (43%)
Language spoken at home	51,175 (30%)	66,527 (39%)	52,881 (31%)

Table 48: Languages spoken in NDG-CDN, 2021

Alex's social media circle includes many activists and I started seeing negative commentary about my film. Some were in French, accusing me of being anti-Quebec: « Quel ramassis de propagande! Faire des francophones les responsables de ces frictions démontre la médiocrité des faits racontés ».[91] When I questioned his criticism, the critic went silent.

Other comments in English accused me of being a foreigner and a

[91] *"What a load of propaganda! Blaming French speakers for these tensions*

separatist sympathizer. I recognized the name of the most acerbic critic, a legendary Angryphone, and sent him a private Facebook message asking if he had seen my film and if he knew anything about me. He wrote back to say we had met at a conference at Concordia University in 2009 and "spoke for about 10 minutes about language laws, the atacks [sic] on the English community, and impacts of bill 101. During that discussion, you made it very clear that yu support bill 101 and language laws and the goals of french canadian nationalism, and that you believed that french in quebec was threatened and endangered." I could not remember meeting him but I did recall the conference, where Bill Johnson gave me a copy of *Anglophobie made in Québec*.

It is true I came to Montreal as a student knowing almost nothing about Quebec. One reason for my ignorance was that fourteen years earlier my family had relocated from Vancouver to Australia, where news about Canada was rare and Quebec was invisible. One of the few times we heard about Quebec was the 1976 Montreal Olympics at which Australia performed atrociously, scoring one silver and four bronze medals, finishing a miserable 32nd. At the previous Summer Olympics in Munich, tiny Australia had racked up eight golds, seven silvers and several bronzes — more medals than every country except giant China, the USA and Japan. The land Downunder did not have fond memories of the Montreal Olympics.

When I left Australia in 1980, recently graduated and divorced, I was heading for freedom in West Berlin, but shortly after landing in Vancouver, I saw an ad for a brand new playwriting program at the National Theatre School of Canada, located in Montreal. While travelling across the frozen land visiting relatives, I bought a portable typewriter, wrote a play and then deposited the script in Montreal when I passed through. The bemused receptionist said, "You could have mailed it. They're not going to interview everybody who applies."

I had never studied theatre and had only ever seen a couple of plays, thanks to a thespian girlfriend. I didn't expect to be interviewed, let alone chosen. Nonetheless, in June I phoned Montreal from Dublin and

shows how weak the facts are."

the receptionist said, "Mr. Rodgers, we didn't know how to contact you. Congratulations. Classes start September 1." It was an extraordinary surprise, and an enormous relief. I had begun to realize how difficult it would be to start a new life in Berlin, where I knew no one, and the minimal German I was struggling to acquire offered no obvious path to employment.

From Dublin, I flew to Toronto, where I hoped to find work in English while beginning to acquire a new language: French. Acquaintances in Toronto gave me a crash course on Canadian politics. No one could explain why Quebec wanted a divorce and few had anything good to say about separatists. Six weeks later, I took a train to Montreal and immediately found its revolutionary spirit fascinating. Every evening, downtown streets filled with revellers who embodied the term *joie de vivre*: street cafés, musicians, scruffy poets, pretty girls. Montreal was exotically French, yet a few metro stops to the west, it was comfortably English. Unlike Berlin at the time, there was no wall. Montreal instantly felt like home.

The email replies from my Anglo critic, hereafter AC, were long, hastily typed and not spellchecked:

> I'm not sure if you told me that you were from western Canada originally or I found out via Google searches to learn more about you. The point being is that it is bad enough that we have far too many people from our own comunity who support bill 101 and language laws, and the failed policy of trading away rights and freedoms for language and social peace. As noted, we have quislings within our own ranks, but I find it worse when you have francophiles from other parts of Canada who come here, find work in the English community, and also embrace language laws, quebec nationalism, and attacks on the English and cultural communities and their institutions. alex montagano claims that you are standing up for our community and condemned me for attacking you and your film on a post he put up today. You have never been and never will be a chmpion of the English community based on your support of bill 101, need to take action to protect french, and support of french canadian nationalist goals and atack on our community. All that being said, what's up with you?

AC was surprisingly affable. We exchanged dozens of emails in the following days and he even proposed that we write a book together, though it soon became clear that his role was the truth teller, denouncing the racist policies of French Quebec, while I would represent the gullible, capitulating, compromising, quisling lamb lobby that has always betrayed English Quebec. In each email, AC added names to his list of traitors who merited public pillorying. They were all friends or people I admire.

The email exchange with AC provided a stark reminder of the relativity of perception. Soon after arriving in Quebec, I had formed opinions based on available information. When people arrive in a new world, like the waves of refugees from Ireland and Russia, they are mostly surrounded by other immigrants. They do not establish close connections with locals for many years, and by then they have already formed an opinion about local history and politics.

My wave of immigrants, at least the friends I made in those years, were sympathetic to the struggles of the French-speaking majority. I bought into the argument that the English in Westmount and the West Island — places I had never visited — were an oppressive elite. Evidence supported this belief. Many native-born Montreal Anglos spoke little or no French; ergo, they must have rejected Quebec's language and culture. It never occurred to me that bomb threats, anti-Anglo graffiti and taunts to "Go back to Ontario!" had not been conducive to learning French.

I remember a conversation with a Quebec-born theatre administrator when I was executive director of the Quebec Drama Federation in the early 90s. We started talking about language and politics and he shared thoughts about the ongoing assault on Anglo rights. I replied, "The only problem in Quebec is old-guard Anglos. They need to learn French and deal with the new reality or get the hell out of Quebec so the rest of us can live in peace!" I will never forget the look on his face — shock, pain, rage — and I would only come to understand years later what an arrogant, ignorant, know-it-all I had been.

As the NDG screening date approached, I was warned there would be fireworks. The billboards Alex erected to promote the film screening were knocked down and defaced with graffiti. Security guards at the Legion Hall prepared for gate crashers; however, it was much more

Alex "Trainman" Montagano and Fidel Fuentes at the NDG Legion

likely that the fireworks would come from Angryphones than Franco nationalists.

The room was packed by the time Alex greeted the crowd. They listened to him, then I said a few words about the film before we dimmed the lights. No heckling or boos during the film. There was laughter and applause, particularly at the end. No fireworks. NDG was the only audience at which every person who spoke gave their name and said a few words about their family history before asking a question or sharing a story. Social media can be extremely toxic because of anonymity. The NDG screening felt personal, like a true community meeting, despite taking place in the most populated borough of Quebec's metropolis. Everyone in the room was linked to Alex in some way.

The first person to speak was a woman who campaigned to change written French tests for nurses. She had failed the test twice, by one mark, and then publicly challenged the Office québécois de la langue française, which had earned her a lot of media coverage and instigated a modification of the marking system. Despite a severe nursing shortage, Quebec has repeatedly made it difficult for nurses, particularly English-speaking nurses, to receive their accreditation.

The second woman who spoke was a well-known community activist who added that French tests are an even bigger problem for students with learning difficulties and that Quebec was not providing special assistance or making exceptions. "Some people are just not capable of learning a second language. How are they going to fit in?"

Alex commented, "That's an excellent point! There's a big difference

between an inability to learn French and not wanting to learn. I struggle with French even though my mother is French Canadian Irish. I'm still working on it. I do my best."

A woman said, "My family has been here for five generations. They came from France but they were Protestants, so they had to go to the English school. I'm one of those bilingual Anglos who earns 10 percent less than unilingual francophones."

A man said:

> My family was pure laine français until my grandfather married an Anglo in the Gaspé. Then my father reoffended by marrying an Anglo, so I'm about 1/8 French and fully bilingual. I've lived in the Gaspé, Montreal and the suburbs of Toronto. In Scarborough I'm the "Good Frog." In Montreal I get called « traitre et vendu ».[92] I don't base my identity on language or race or gender. I'm just me!

The audience applauded appreciatively. Many of them juggled complex identities. Another man made a statement I heard at other screenings whenever the conversation was making the audience feel angry. "We all have French friends and neighbours. A lot of us have francophone relatives and spouses. We can't lose sight of the bigger picture — which is positive — because of what the current government is doing."

The next man to speak told us:

> I grew up in Montreal North, a short distance from where James Cross was held by his kidnappers, and I attended Rosemount High School, which was a few blocks from the Paul Sauvé Arena, where they held the big love-in for the FLQ in the middle of the October Crisis. The history of Quebec is being re-written! It is a myth that everything east of Saint-Laurent Boulevard was French. There were 100,000 English speakers in Rosemount when I was a kid. There were a lot of working-class Anglos in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve and farther east near the oil refineries. We have a history here, too, and we have a right to be proud of it!

After an hour of post-screening conversation, Alex took the mic to announce some community events. He was looking for volunteers for a

[92] *"Traitor and sell-out."*

series of activities to protest Bill 96 over the summer. Alex had political ambitions and ran in the 2025 federal election in his local riding, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce–Westmount. Alex would also run in the 2025 municipal election to continue fighting party politics that represent vested interests and not the people. A maverick like Alex makes professional politicians accountable every day between elections.

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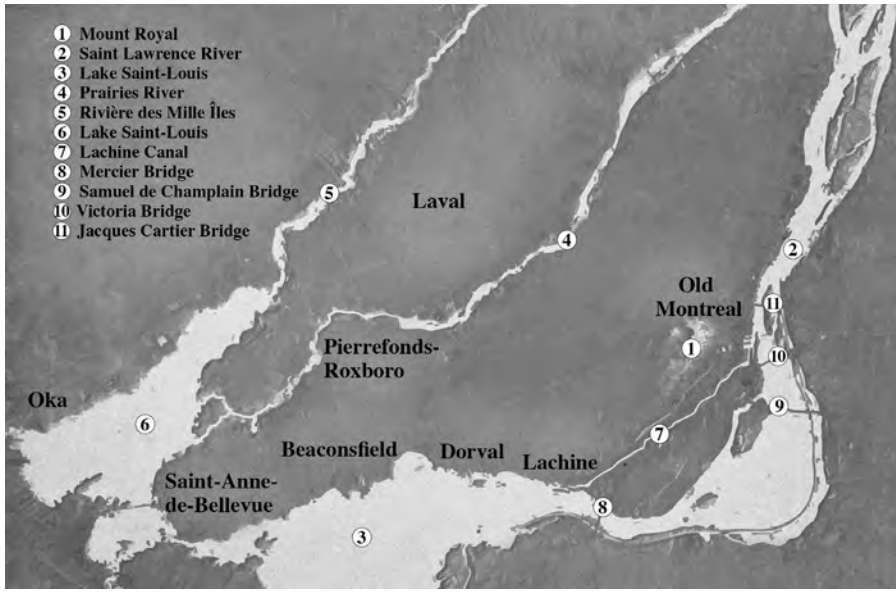
The next screening took me into the heart of Montreal's West Island, a region I had only begun to explore a decade earlier. While executive director of ELAN, I had a project idea to connect English-speaking artists with audiences. An initial project identified five regional communities with artistic infrastructure: Quebec City, Wakefield, Hudson, Huntingdon and Knowlton in the Townships. The Arts Alive! Québec project would stage summer festivals and attract audiences. Simple. The largest pool of audience members was Montreal's West Island, so we would produce some events in the West Island and cross-promote the regional festivals. Hudson, Huntingdon and Knowlton are a short drive



Map 12: West Island, Montreal

away. Wakefield and Quebec City make a pleasant day trip. The regional events were huge successes and grew their audiences over four years. The West Island events attracted only hyper-local audiences and if a West Islander travelled to a regional festival, I am not aware of it.

Montreal's West Island is a microcosm of Anglo Quebec. It is not a homogenous mass that identifies as Anglo and can be easily mobilized. Each community is different, as is each neighbourhood, every school and every church. It is far easier to misinterpret the West Island than to understand it.

The first West Island screening was in Beaconsfield, which is located between Dorval to the east and Sainte-Anne-de Bellevue to the west. It was farming country until the Grand Trunk Railway arrived in 1855, followed by Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s. The railways brought summer residents from Montreal and the pioneer farming settlement began to transform to a summer cottage resort on the shores of Lake Saint-Louis. Incorporated in 1910, the city of Beaconsfield transformed from a cottage community for affluent Montrealers to a suburb for year-round residents.

	French	English	Other Languages
Mother Tongue	4,445 (24%)	10,150 (55%)	3,790 (21%)
Language spoken at home	3,585 (20%)	13,035 (71%)	1,600 (9%)

Table 49: Languages spoken in Beaconsfield, 2021

Beaconsfield Public Library is located in a leafy campus of well-equipped recreation buildings adjacent to Centennial Park and Beaconsfield Beach. Compared to the inner city, Beaconsfield still has the feeling of a vacation community. Library staff greeted me and took me to the screening room. We did a quick technical check and then were ready for the audience. Ten people were registered. I must have silently expressed disappointment. The librarian said, "There could be drop-ins. Sometimes people don't bother to register." I looked out the window. It was a beautiful, sunny and unseasonably warm autumn afternoon. I didn't

expect any walk-ins and not everyone who registered chose to spend the last beautiful afternoon of the year in a library watching a film. However, a small crowd can go deep.

Experiences in the room were varied, but none of the people at the screening was born in Beaconsfield. A man had come to Quebec in 1978 to work for the Macdonald campus of McGill University. "I think I got the job because there was little competition at the time. So many people were leaving Quebec." After a conversation about the exodus years, the man said:

> The story of the so-called exodus always sounds like thousands of people got fed up with Quebec and decided to leave. The fact is that companies left and employees followed their jobs. A lot of them didn't want to leave. If McGill pulls up stumps tomorrow and leaves Montreal, you can be sure most of the professors and support staff would follow. They wouldn't have much choice.

The group talked about West Island myths. Francophone journalists regularly report that you can't get served in French here. "Nonsense. This is one of the most bilingual places in Quebec." The man who worked at McGill said, "Many of our students are francophone. They can write their papers in French, so all the professors have to at least read French."

A woman who had only been in Beaconsfield for a decade said that her parents recently retired and moved from Ontario to Quebec. "They don't speak French, which is not a big problem in the West Island, but now they're reading in the newspaper that they won't get health care in English." I assured her that the National Assembly had just passed a unanimous resolution guaranteeing the English-language health care services would not be compromised. A man said, "What if no one on staff can speak English? Or doesn't want to? What are our rights worth then?" The group in Beaconsfield agreed that the new language laws have poisoned the climate.

A woman said, "I went to a restaurant last week and the new menu was in French only. I asked the manager why. He said, 'It's the law.'" There is no law in Quebec forbidding bilingual menus. However, one provision of Bill 96 encourages anonymous complaints about perceived language infractions. In a climate of fear, it is easier, and less expensive, to play safe and avoid complaints. Merchants know that most Anglos

and allophones in Quebec can read French. The few who can't will bring a friend to translate or take their business elsewhere. Even if Anglos wanted to complain, they have no options, officially or anonymously. By combining a confusing law with a program of anonymous vigilantism, the CAQ government succeeded in generating an explosion of complaints to justify its language law. This creates a climate of fear and self-censorship among merchants. A unilingual menu is the safest bet.

Has the tough new law pleased Quebecers who lodge complaints because they believe their language is on the brink of extinction? Inexplicably, for them, the perpetrators of these crimes against the French language have not faced the consequences. In the current year, out of 9,125 complaints, only four companies have been punished by la Cour du Québec. It is hard to remember another situation in which expectations were manipulated so deliberately yet managed so badly. Much of the frustration at the failure to punish these crimes has turned back on the CAQ government.

The mood in Beaconsfield was cautiously optimistic. The audience believed that the CAQ had alienated so much of the electorate, including the majority of francophones, that they would be gone in two years. But which party would replace them? And would any party in Quebec have the courage to undo the worst aspects of Bill 96?

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Jennifer Crane also arranged a screening in Pierrefonds-Roxboro after setting up a meeting with its mayor, Dimitrios Jim Beis. He is a trilingual Montrealer of Greek heritage who thought his community's diverse population would appreciate my film. The politics were favourable because Pierrefonds-Roxboro is the only officially bilingual borough in the city of Montreal (which does not encompass independent cities like Westmount, Côte Saint-Luc and most West Island communities).

The borough came into existence as the result of the 2004 merger of Roxboro, a town with three elementary schools (one English, one French and one Greek), and Pierrefonds, a larger town with a mix of English and French elementary schools. Almost half the residents of Pierrefonds-Roxboro (43 percent) identify as visible minorities.

	French	English	Other Languages
Mother Tongue	17,765 (28%)	19,995 (31%)	26,875 (42%)
Language spoken at home	18,140 (30%)	27,580 (45%)	15,225 (25%)

Table 50: Languages spoken in Pierrefonds-Roxboro, 2021

A few weeks before the screening, I received an email from the library: "I am contacting you today to let you know that we have decided not to include *What We Choose to Remember* in our cultural programming." I arranged to speak to the librarian to ask why. She replied, « Notre comité d'évaluation a jugé que votre film est trop politique ».[93] I was puzzled. Normally evaluation committees render judgement before booking cultural programming and spending months promoting it. I asked how a film about history that shares the stories of waves of immigrants could be too political. The librarian was an immigrant who was apologetic but could provide no explanation of the evaluation committee's process or reasoning. Their decision was final.

Jennifer and I considered our options. We could make a public protest but did not want to embarrass Beis and stir up linguistic tensions in his community. He was fighting his own linguistic battles. Beis had asked the mayor of Montreal a question at a council meeting, in English, and she replied, "I find it peculiar that the mayor of Pierrefonds-Roxboro addresses this assembly only in English." Given the rising linguistic tensions, both Beis's question and the mayor's response triggered a polarized uproar in the media and on social media: one side shocked to hear English spoken in public and the other side shocked that a few words in English were considered offensive.

Pierrefonds-Roxboro is a bilingual city that has a diverse population but its civil servants work for the city of Montreal. The majority are francophone and have their own ideas about language and politics. It can be difficult to distinguish whether a civil servant is following the (confusing) law in good faith or is using it to impose a French-first view of politics.

93 *"Our evaluation committee has decided your film is too political."*

A few months later (January 2025), author Chris DiRaddo tried to rent a room at his local library for his book club but was "not allowed to hold his monthly book club there because it would violate Quebec's new language law," as reported by Cassandra Yanez-Leyton for the CBC. DiRaddo posted his surprise and disappointment on Facebook and the story immediately blew up in the media. A few days later, the mayor of Montreal said it had been a mistake. The city apologized and reversed its decision but only because DiRaddo fought back. His final comments, included in Erika Morris's article "Montreal Author Relieved After City Apologies for Book Club Rejection" for *CTV News*, sounded prophetic: "I think that ambiguity still exists in the law [Bill 96] and that if something as big as the city of Montreal has trouble interpreting the law in regards to me and my little book club, I wonder what's going to happen on another level." Four months later, despite all the publicity and revised guidelines, another author was refused access to a city library because the book she wanted to read was in English. Again, it was a "mistake." Nine months after the initial incident, the city of Montreal was still struggling to apply the new law consistently.

Something was changing in the political climate of Quebec because of Bill 96. A few years earlier, Jean-François Lisée could acknowledge that Quebec was close to achieving linguistic equilibrium. Now the mayor of Montreal was taking exception to a single question asked in English, though she acknowledged that, "here [in council], we can speak in both languages."[94] But the anti-English mood created by Bill 96 was becoming stronger than centuries of traditions. The Point St. Charles library had created unilingual posters and a West Island restaurant created unilingual menus "because it's the law," though both were misinterpreting a law that is particularly ambiguous in its language but not its intent.

This new era of tension started with the CAQ's revision of Bill 101. Legault and the CAQ had found "deeply disturbing" indicators of Quebec's language crisis and thrust themselves forward as bold defenders of Quebec's language and culture. In response to the question, "Monsieur Premier Ministre, how far are you prepared to go to defend

[94] *Plante quoted in Andy Riga, "Valérie Plante Criticizes Borough Mayor's Use of English at Council Meeting," The Gazette, August 22, 2024.*

French?" Legault channelled his FLQ crisis–era Pierre Trudeau and said, "Just watch me!" Trudeau had suspended civil rights to defend Canada's law-abiding majority from a violent urban terrorist attack; Legault suspended Anglo civil rights to defend the language and culture of Quebec's majority. But from what? What was the urgent and violent threat that justified denial of minority rights guaranteed by both Québécois and Canadian charters?

It could be argued that Bill 96 was a brilliant political manoeuvre that placed the CAQ squarely at the centre of Quebec politics, pushing the Liberals and the PQ to the fringes and threatening their survival. It could also be argued that Bill 96 was a populist bait-and-switch scam that promised to defend the language and culture of Quebec's majority but was really designed to politicize fears and frustrations against Anglos, allophones and immigrants.

But why? On the surface the question is naive. That is how politics works. Quebec is not alone in feeling threatened by record numbers of immigrants and experiencing a sharp urban/rural divide. However, the question needled me every time I saw new examples of the damage being done by Bill 96. *Why?* A smoking gun lay at the feet of Premier Legault, who was born and raised at the farthest extremity of the West Island, in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue.

In 2018, Graham Fraser, respected journalist and former Commissioner of Official Languages, wrote an article titled "The Quebec Election: A Primer" for *Policy* magazine:

> Despite his business background, there has always been a harsh nationalist streak to Legault's politics. At his very first political speech, when he was nominated as a star PQ candidate in 1998, he told his riding association members that he had been raised in Montreal's West Island among the English, "and I hate them as much as you do." It was an ugly revelation that I have never forgotten."

On September 18, 2028, Andy Riga in *The Montreal Gazette* cautiously quoted Fraser quoting Legault, with the equivocating headline, "Did François Legault Say It or Didn't He?" Legault denied it. Fraser continued to claim he had heard it. "That's my recollection of what [Legault] said. It's not the kind of thing that one forgets." Legault appeared to be a

pragmatic businessman who wanted to free Quebec from the nationalist threat of separation. Perhaps his words had been a slip of the tongue or an error of youth? Perhaps Fraser had misunderstood? It seemed prudent to give Legault the benefit of the doubt.

The quote resurfaced five years later, on November 28, 2023, when Thomas Mulcair berated Legault's attack on the Anglo universities in "Legault Adamant He Won't Be 'Out-Angloed,'" published by *The Montreal Gazette*. "It seems clear Legault is trying to make sure he'll never be out-angloed again by coming up with increasingly reprehensible moves he hopes will placate ethno-nationalists who are rallying back to the PQ in droves." Mulcair added, "Legault has been quoted by no less a source than former official languages commissioner Graham Fraser as saying he hates les anglais."

The premier of Quebec hates Anglos? Why would Quebecers twice elect a premier who hates Anglos? That is the wrong question. Legault was never accused of saying he hates Anglos. He stands accused of saying he hates les anglais. If you understand that distinction, you understand Quebec politics. If you don't, I will try to explain it to you.

Les anglais is a political construct that embodies everything evil in the universe: empires, capitalists, colonizers, oppressors, billionaires, globalists and the putrid elite, the 1 percent. Who doesn't hate some of them? Most francophones in Quebec feel a strong animosity toward the powerful foreigners who oppressed them for centuries. The single image that encapsulates the capital-O Oppressor is les anglais. It is perfectly normal to hate les anglais and it is even laudable for a politician to courageously stand up against the omnipotent anglais bogeymen to defend the people of (French) Quebec.

Two common expressions in Québec during the era of two solitudes featured les anglais. It was still common in the 1980s for francophones to say, « On va les avoir les Anglais![95] » in a situation where effort was required to overcome an obstacle. It meant, "We will win/triumph/conquer in the end." In mixed (linguistic) company, the expression might be followed by a little chuckle at this idiomatic vestige of ancient racial conflicts. Another popular expression was, « Encore une que

[95] *Literally, "We're going to beat the English!"*

les anglais auront pas! » This line is used in one of the early scenes of Claude Jutra's grand 1971 film *Mon oncle Antoine* as the anglais-oppressed Jos Poulin drains a beer. The expression could also be uttered after finishing a meal. It means, "That's something the English can't take from us."

A politician saying, "I hate les anglais" is no more shocking than a college radical shouting, "I hate the rich." Many passersby would agree, at least to some extent, and the wise plutocrat in the crowd would take comfort in knowing, "Someday the loudmouth will need a job, or grow up, or both."

On many occasions, I have experienced a Franco venting session about les maudits anglais[96]. Whenever I asked, "Are you including me?" friends would reply, "Of course not." Les anglais is not synonymous with les Anglos. One can be Anglo without being part of les anglais. However, in the case of Legault and the CAQ, the distinction was as murky as Bill 96, which was framed as self-defence against the ravages of les anglais but was used to attack les Anglos.

Why? To find out, I read Legault's memoir, *Cap sur un Québec gagnant*, but it offered no clues. He had some snowball fights with Anglo kids. Big deal. Nothing traumatic there. Legault also resented the wealth and privilege of some of his schoolmates but they were Francos. Nothing in the book suggested a cause for Legault's animus toward Anglos. Then I read the caption beneath the marriage photo of Legault's parents and the priest who officiated at their wedding. The priest was Legault's mother's great-uncle. My jaw dropped when I read his name. And yet, nothing could have made more sense. Education can transmit information but culture is transmitted through proximity and blood. « Mes parents, Lucien Legault de Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue et Pauline Schetagne de Pointe-Claire, se sont mariés le 11 aout 1956. Le mariage fut célébré par le chanoine Lionel Groulx, le grand-oncle de ma mère. »[97]

[96] *'the damned English'*

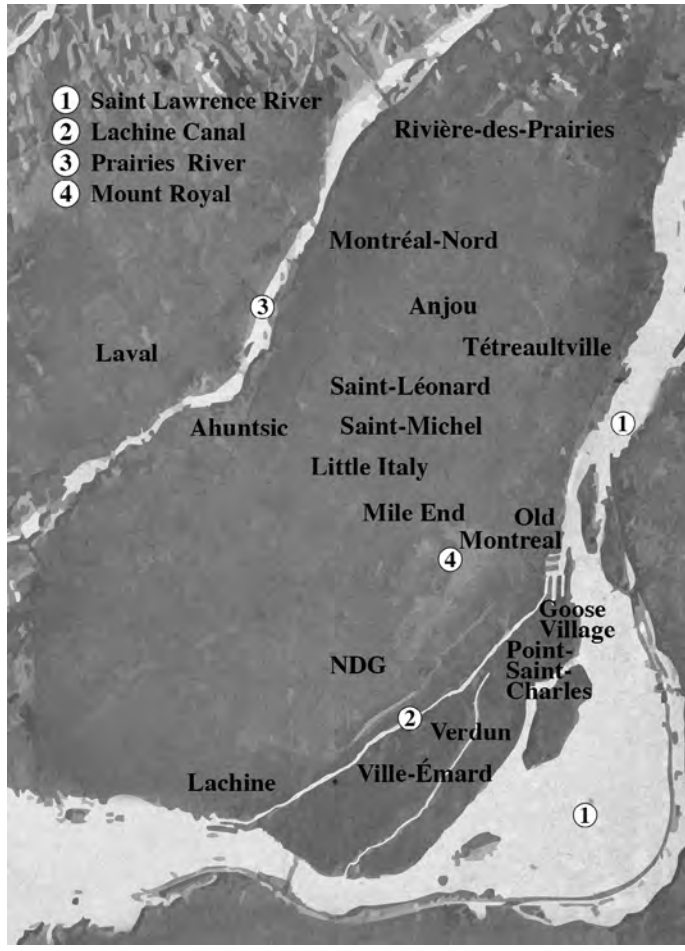
[97] *"My parents, Lucien Legault of Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue and Pauline Schetagne of Pointe-Claire, were married on August 11, 1956. The marriage of my parents was officiated by the Abbé Lionel Groulx, my mother's great-uncle."*

CHAPTER 9:

Italians, the Saint-Léonard Schools Crisis and Conflicting Lessons Learned

By autumn 2024, I had been touring *What We Choose to Remember* for thirty months to more than fifty communities and the final screening of the year would take place in December at Casa d'Italia in Montreal's Little Italy. Quebec's Italian community has struggled for generations to make a place for itself in the no-man's-land between the battling French and English communities. The attitude of the founding peoples toward Italians has often been paternalistic. "Wait until you've been here for a while. Then you'll understand your place."

Italians replied that Giovanni Caboto visited North America before Jacques Cartier, who learned to navigate as a subordinate on the New World voyages of Giovanni da Verrazzano, whose brother, Girolamo, originated the term *Nova Gallia* (Nouvelle France). The chief aide-de-camp of René-Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, was Enrico Tonti, whose brother Alfonso was commander of Fort Detroit. Many Italians served in the Carignan-Salières Regiment to help defend the fledgling French colony. Il Regimento Carignano was organized by the Prince of Carignano of the House of Savoy. Another wave of Italians arrived during the early British regime, and Italian names appeared among Patriote forces in 1837, but most of the early immigrants assimilated into the host society. In 1860, just sixty families in Lower Canada still identified as Italian.



Map 13: Italian Montreal

The first Italian diaspora began around 1880, two decades after the Unification of Italy. Poverty was the main reason for emigration, especially in the south. The 1901 Canadian census recorded 2,102 Montrealers of Italian descent. Many came to Canada as contract labourers and seasonal workers. They lived near the Old Port, around Viger and Windsor train stations, and in the area that is now Chinatown. Italian men often arrived alone to find work and save enough money to bring their wives and children to join them, sometimes years later. By 1911, Montreal's Italian population had risen to 7,460.

During the early 1900s, Italian immigrants began to relocate up in the Mile End area because it offered plots of land large enough to grow vegetable gardens and because electric streetcars made the remote district accessible. The area around what is now Jean-Talon Market (formerly the Irish Shamrocks' lacrosse ground) had become the heart of Montreal's Little Italy by 1941, when Montreal's Italian population had grown to 25,281.

Throughout the depressed 1930s and the war years, immigration reduced to a trickle. The second Italian diaspora that began after the Second World War triggered a massive wave of immigration for Canada and Quebec. During the postwar decades, an estimated twenty-five million Italians sailed away from their homeland. Montreal's Italian population exploded during these years, reaching 148,725 by 1971, the largest ethnic wave Montreal had ever seen.

	1901	%	1941	%	1971	%
French	230,067	(63.9)	699,517	(62.2)	1,115,625	(59.0)
British	113,999	(31.6)	273,370	(24.5)	333,340	(17.0)
Jewish	6,962	(1.9)	63,898	(5.7)	101,390	(5.2)
Italian	2,102	(0.6)	25,281	(2.3)	148,725	(7.6)
Other	7,201	(2.0)	59,605	(5.3)	219,372	(11.2)

Table 51: Montreal population by ethnic groups, 1901 – 1971[98]

Italian families moved west of the old industrial area into Ville-Émard and LaSalle, as well as the Saint-Raymond district of lower NDG. Other Italians began to move from Little Italy to adjacent Saint-Michel, as well as Tétreaultville and Anjou, and then continued up to Ahuntsic and Montreal North and eastward to Rivière-des-Prairies. Immigrant children playing on the streets in the southwest were more inclined to speak English together, while in the north and east, the common language

[98] *From Michael D Behiels Quebec and the Question of Immigration: From ethnocentrism to ethno-pluralism 1900-1985 (p 4) Canadian Historical Association, 1991*

was more likely to be French. The linguistic map was complex, however, and the language children used when playing with neighbours varied from block to block within mixed districts.

By 2001, Montreal's Italian population had reached 250,000. Italian had supplanted Yiddish as the city's third most frequently spoken language and 50 percent of Quebec-born Italian children still spoke the ancestral language with their grandparents.

	Jean-Talon (Little Italy)	St-Michel	Montréal Nord	Saint-Léonard	Older Italian Areas in the Southwest
1951	5,872	459	240	925	19,836
1961	33,356	8,599	1,873	4,893	35,120

Table 52: Italian population increases by district between 1951 and 1961[99]

The district most strongly identified with Montreal's Italian community is Saint-Léonard. During the 1960s, fields were transformed into urban neighbourhoods by entrepreneurs like Mario Barone, who was a protagonist in the Saint-Léonard Schools Crisis. While researching and writing my film, I consulted with Domenic Cusmano, who appears in the film, and with his wife, Licia Canton, about Montreal's Italian history. They are both active in the Italian community as publishers, writers and translators.

The Saint-Léonard Schools Crisis, Bill 63 and Bill 22 appeared to me, initially, as interesting but marginally significant footnotes to Quebec's language battles. It was only as I toured my film and spoke to many eyewitnesses of the events that I understood the crisis is as important to Quebec history as the Patriotes rebellion and the Quiet Revolution. It was the pivot point between Catholic Quebec and French Quebec. Saint-Léonard is ground zero in the contemporary battle to preserve Quebec's French language and culture.

[99] *From Giuliano D Andreas When Nationalisms Collide: Montreal's Italian community and the St. Leonard crisis 1967-69 (p 126-127) Master's Thesis McGill, 1989*

Ralph Mastromonaco — criminal lawyer, second-generation Italian and social media activist — contacted me after seeing *What We Choose to Remember* online. He was particularly interested in second-wave immigrants turned away from French Catholic schools after the Second World War, which had been his experience. After seeing my film, Ralph made it his mission to bring the story of rejected Italians into the light.

Most of the second-wave immigrants in my film who had experienced rejection were Jewish, with the exception of Domenic, who said that many Italians were also turned away from French schools but that "Quebec is still in denial about this." Ralph Mastromonaco and his brother were also turned away from the local French Catholic school and sent to a more distant English Catholic school. When they talk about this experience that had deeply impacted their lives, they frequently encountered disbelief and even denial by francophone colleagues.

On the surface, it is not illogical that Catholic schools would turn away non-Catholics, particularly non-Christians such as Jewish students, though that does not explain why Protestant schools would be more inclined to accept non-Christians. It is not clear why Catholic schools would reject Greek Orthodox students, whose theology and traditions are far closer to Catholicism than to any Protestant denomination. But there was no obvious way to explain why Catholic schools turned away Catholic students, particularly Italians, who spoke a romance language far closer to French than English.

Until the Quiet Revolution, religion, as the embodiment of culture and identity, was more important than language in Quebec, where the francophone majority was predominantly Catholic. Quebec had two school systems until 1998: Catholic and Protestant. By natural selection or social engineering, non-Catholics attended Protestant schools and English-speaking Catholics, along with immigrant Catholics, attended English Catholic schools, leaving Quebec's francophone-de-souche Catholics in full control of French Catholic schools. This system of segregation by religion, language and ethnicity exposed Quebec to linguistic suicide. In the 1960s, nationalists realized that Quebec's segregated education system had created a linguistic time bomb, educating large waves of postwar immigrants in a foreign language: English.

According to Ralph, francophone nationalists did not recognize the systemic nature of postwar segregation. They disbelieved or denied that immigrants had been rejected by French Catholic schools and accused immigrants of rejecting Quebec's French language and culture. These clashing versions of history were irreconcilable but the majority population controls the narrative and writes the history books. The injustice of the untruths in the official story was galling to the Italian ex-students who had been rejected and then officially vilified as traitors for attending English schools.

Ralph was planning to write a petition to demand that the government of Quebec recognize its responsibility for denying immigrant students the education of their choice and to apologize for the damage done. It was a bold strategy but the counterargument was, *Why is this alleged "mass exclusion" only being mentioned now, half a century after it allegedly took place?*

In 1970, immediately after the Saint-Léonard Schools Crisis of 1969, Jeremy Boissevain, professor of social anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, published *The Italians of Montreal: Social Adjustment in a Plural Society*. Boissevain's research shows that Montreal's Italians were more closely associated with the French community than with the English community. Recent immigrants from Italy were more inclined to marry French speakers than English speakers. Among Canadian-born Italians, marriages to French speakers grew from 40 percent to 52 percent, while marriages to English speakers only increased from 14 percent to 18 percent.

	1951	1951	1961	1961
	English	French	English	French
Marriages of Canadian-born Italians to non-Italians	14%	40%	18%	52%

Table 53: Italian relations with francophones and anglophones, changes from 1951 to 1961 (Boissevain, p. 55)

Boissevain found similar trends for language used at work. Exclusive use of French increased among Canadian-born Italians while use of

English decreased. During the period Boissevain examined, Italians had more francophone friends than anglophone friends and Italians associated more with francophone community organizations and consumed more French radio and newspapers.

	French for Immigrants	French for Canadian-born Italians	English for Immigrants	English for Canadian-born Italians
Exclusively	15%	21%	11%	5%
Some	47%	74%	36%	63%
None	38%	5%	53%	32%

Table 54: Language used at work, 1961 (Boissevain, p. 59)

Boissevain investigated why the language of schools was the only metric decreasing. The reasons offered by Italian parents for choosing schools — proximity to home, economic mobility, friends — did not explain what had changed between 1951 and 1971 to cause more Italians to attend English schools.

Boissevain reported:

> Roman Catholic School Board officials interviewed during the course of the present study denied that the Board had ever directed the choice of any immigrant group. According to officials of both English and French sections, there had always been a free choice. One official of the English section suggested that if pressure had in fact been applied on new immigrants to send their children to French schools, it had been applied by their own priests. He pointed out that Italian parishes, especially in the prewar period, were linked even more closely with the French Roman Catholic hierarchy than they are today (p. 39 – 40).

Boissevain concluded that greater freedom of choice was the most likely explanation for increasing enrollment by Italian students in English schools.

In *The Forgotten Quebecers*, published in 1985, Ronald Rudin offered a different explanation:

> That the Italians and other newcomers might pose a threat appeared clear to certain clerics from the fact that *63% of all Italian-origin students attended French schools* in 1931. Rather than have to deal with such students in the French schools, these French Catholic leaders encouraged the establishment of a semi-autonomous English Catholic sector that would be provided with the means to *educate all Catholics whose mother tongue was not French.* … By 1977 nearly half of all students in the English sector of the MCSC [Montreal Catholic School Commission] were of Italian origin. This was a reflection of the *steady routing* of Italian students into the English stream, particularly in the post-World War II era. (p. 232 – 33, emphasis added)

Political scientist Henry Milner, one of Rudin's sources, wrote in *The Long Road to Reform: Restructuring Public Education in Quebec* (1984):

> The francophone Catholics were quite content to let the non-Catholics find their way into the Protestant system. The logic was the same that fostered the creation of the autonomous English Catholic sector to serve not only the Irish but, later, a good many children of *other non-francophone origins* who might otherwise have attended French schools. Direct descendants of nineteenth-century ultramontane Catholicism, the elites of the *early twentieth century*, espoused a conservative nationalism. Central to it was the conviction that the *French-Canadian nation's survival* — its essence — *lay in its language and religion and the institutions that maintained them*. What mattered, thus, was the strength and security of its families, schools and parishes. A vital mainstay of the world it sought was the *local French-Catholic school, to be kept as free as possible of any and all outside influences.* (p. 16, emphasis added)

If Rudin and Milner were correct, the marked shift toward higher enrollment in English schools after the Second World War was largely an institutional decision imposed on immigrant students by the Catholic Church. Therefore, we would expect to hear reports of Italian students

rejected by French Catholic schools, which was precisely what Ralph Mastromonaco was hearing in conversations on his social media.

We would also expect to find reports of exclusion dating back to the 1960s and 70s but it is almost impossible to find testimonials on the public record. This historical silence supported accusations by francophone nationalists of revisionism. Former students were confirming to Ralph that they had rarely talked about their rejection experience publicly. Why? Fear of provoking additional hostility. The humiliation of having been rejected. Desire to simply get on with their lives.

I found it puzzling that francophone nationalists would dismiss rejection testimonials as insignificant anecdotes, isolated incidents or deliberate lies. The same francophone nationalists had rejected the Catholic Church a generation earlier, so why would they find it difficult to believe that the Church had prioritized its religious interests over Quebec's linguistic agenda?

One of the rejection deniers on Ralph's social media posted a paper by a prominent francophone historian to prove that Ralph and his friends were either confused or lying. In 1997, historian Robert Gagnon wrote an influential paper entitled, « Pour en finir avec un mythe : le refus des écoles catholiques d'accepter les immigrants ».[100] Gagnon had just finished researching and writing *Histoire de la Commission des écoles catholiques de Montréal*[101] (Boréal, 1996) and was considered the leading authority on the history of Catholic education in Montreal. Gagnon's "myth-busting" paper is regularly produced as evidence that no immigrants were ever turned away from French Catholic schools; therefore, those who make this claim must be lying. Gagnon writes:

> Cette idée que les communautés immigrantes ont choisi l'école anglaise parce que les écoles catholiques les refusaient est l'un des stéréotypes les plus persistants des *20 dernières années*. C'est là un bel exemple de ces incantations qui, à force d'être *répétées ad nauseam,* acquièrent la force de la vérité à tel point qu'il ne

[100] *"Busting a Myth: That Catholic Schools Refused to Accept Immigrants." Published in Bulletin d'histoire politique*, vol. 5, no. 2, Winter 1997.

[101] *History of the Montreal Catholic School Commission.*

> vient plus à l'idée de s'interroger sur leur bien fondé.[102] (p. 121, emphasis added)

Gagnon claimed that no immigrant students were refused admission to French Catholic schools, that not one immigrant was rejected. Ever.

> L'étude sérieuse des archives nous révèle des relations beaucoup plus complexes entre les écoles publiques catholiques et les communautés culturelles et, surtout, cette étude infirme totalement l'idée que les écoles *catholiques* ou *francophones* ont refusé les enfants des immigrants *catholiques* ou *non*.[103] (p. 121, emphasis added)

Gagnon did not simply claim that no Catholic immigrants were rejected. He claimed that non-Catholic students were never turned away from Catholic schools. Not a single Jewish student? Ever? This is an extraordinarily strange claim. Prior to Bill 101, Protestant students, other non-Catholics (Greek Orthodox) and non-Christians (Jewish) were supposed to attend Protestant schools. Catholic schools were for Catholics. That was how the system was designed. That was common knowledge. The controversy around Italians was that they were Catholic and many spoke French, yet former students claimed to have been turned away from French Catholic schools. Had a few isolated incidents created an urban legend? Or had the alleged rejection been larger and systemic?

Ralph Mastromonaco believed the time had come to set the record straight. He convened a town hall meeting at Casa d'Italia, in the heart of Little Italy, and about sixty Italians, mostly seniors, came out to share their experiences.

The evening began with the presentation of a short video I made for Ralph to share on social media, explaining the need for a public

[102] *"The idea that immigrant communities chose English schools because Catholic schools refused them is one of the most persistent stereotypes of the last twenty years. It is a fine example of those incantations which, by dint of being repeated ad nauseam, acquire the force of truth to such an extent that it no longer occurs to anyone to question their validity."*

[103] *"A thorough examination of the archives reveals far more complex relationships between Catholic public schools and cultural communities, and, most importantly, this study completely refutes the notion that Catholic or Francophone schools refused the children of immigrants, whether Catholic or not."*

Town hall meeting at Casa d'Italia

conversation about French Catholic school policy between the Second World War and Bill 101. Then Ralph gave a stage-setting speech about the Italian immigrant experience from 1900 to today: struggles, obstacles, humiliations and accomplishments.

Celina Toia, a lawyer and third-generation immigrant in her thirties, co-hosted the town hall. She said a few words about how silence, no matter how well intentioned, has negative effects. "I understand that it is difficult to recall events that were hurtful but it is important to make these stories public for your children and grandchildren. We need to know what happened."

The first man to speak said, « J'avais la bonne fortune d'aller à l'école française parce que ma mère a combattu le système. »[104] According to Boissevain's research, between 25 and 50 percent of Italian students attended French schools during the period after the Second World War and into the late 60s. At the town hall meeting, about 25 percent of the people who spoke had been accepted into French Catholic elementary schools, though some later switched to English high school and/or university, which had been a strategy to achieve a high level of bilingualism. Neither English nor French schools offered good second-language instruction in the 50s. The first speaker was happy to have been educated in French but he was also proud of being fluent in Italian and English and that his children are fully bilingual. Several speakers

104 *"I was lucky to get into French school because my mother fought the system."*

insisted that they had not rejected Quebec's French language. They wanted to learn French and English and retain their mother tongue.

The second speaker was a man whose family arrived in Quebec in 1965, at the peak of the baby boom and, though his family spoke French, he was sent to the English Catholic school "with the other immigrants." A woman who arrived in Quebec in the late 50s said her parents were shocked to find the French Catholic schools entirely run by nuns and priests. In the 50s, Catholic schools in Italy were already operated by lay teachers and only a few nuns remained as support staff.

As other speakers shared their stories, it was clear they valued Quebec's French language but they also valued Canada's English language. Most of the men and women who had been denied education in French talked about the minimal or terrible French instruction they had received at English schools. As adults, they made concerted efforts to learn French but most still speak it with an accent. Therefore, many took advantage of the post–Bill 101 education regime, which opened the doors to French Catholic schools, and had their children educated in French so they would acquire strong language skills. A young woman said, "For my generation, we heard the message that we needed to acquire excellent skills in French and English. So, we did. But we lost a lot of our Italian along the way and now we feel guilty about that."

After several older men and women shared stories about their childhoods, struggles with education and personal stories of rejection, a young woman took the mic:

> Things have changed. I was selected to speak at my graduation at Université de Montréal. It was a great honour but the professor who was supposed to introduce me kept mispronouncing my name. I asked him to make an effort, because it was important to me and, frankly, my name is not very hard to pronounce. He said, in front of the whole class, « Je vais pas déformer ma bouche pour ça! » and my twenty fellow students — almost all québécois-de-souche — told him, « Monsieur, ça n'a pas de bon sens que vous n'êtes pas capable de dire son nom comme il faut. C'mon! »[105]

[105] *"I'm not going to twist my mouth out of shape for that!" and, "It's ridiculous that you can't pronounce her name properly. C'mon!"*

The town hall conversation frequently drifted into politics, about which parties and politicians, particularly Italian politicians, had defended or betrayed the interests of their voters. Federal and provincial Liberals received the harshest criticism because the Italian community had invested politically and financially in Liberals, who had failed to protect the community from Bill 96 and C-13. Ralph and Celina tactfully steered the conversation back to the subject of education.

A young woman said she had never heard of schools rejecting immigrants before seeing my film. She came to the town hall because she felt history was repeating itself with Bill 96. "We need to remember how it felt to be [badly] treated as immigrants so we can stand up for today's immigrants. Do unto others…"

A man said, "How many people marched to protest Bill 96? Maybe 5,000? When Greta Thunberg came to town to protest climate change, half a million people hit the streets! We need to make more noise!"

"This is not just an Italian issue," another man said. "Lots of Jews, Greeks and Portuguese were rejected from French schools. We need to join our voices with theirs to be heard!"

Ralph articulated the sentiment that others were struggling to express. "We are tired of being accused of selling out to the Anglos so we could make more money. And we're tired of being accused of somehow being against Quebec — the 'treasonous ethnic vote'! We have worked hard to make a positive contribution here and it should be recognized!"

Another man said, "When I pick up out-of-town friends at the airport and drive them downtown, I say, 'See those skyscrapers? Italian labourers built them. Now Italians own them!'"

The audience chuckled. Few of them owned skyscrapers but they had come a long way from the hardscrabble days, fresh off the boat.

Ralph ended the town hall by inviting the audience to join his grassroots movement. "It is important to collect our stories. We need to share this history." He announced that he was drafting a petition about Italian children rejected by French Catholic schools and present it to Quebec's National Assembly.

As I was leaving Casa d'Italia, Ralph said to Giovanna Giordona, the centre's executive director, "You should have a screening of Guy's film here. I think the Italian community would really appreciate it." Giovanna handed me her business card and said, "Call me."

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A few weeks later, I saw an event notice on Facebook. Two elements caught my attention. It was a presentation about the history of Goose Village, originally an Irish community built on the burial grounds of their ancestors who died in the 1840s. And the event was taking place at Casa d'Italia. I pulled out my copy of *Quartiers disparus* and turned to the section on Goose Village. Previously, I had only noticed references to Irish residents. Now I read, « De nouveaux immigrants arrivent dans le secteur, venant de l'Europe de l'est et surtout de l'Italie ».[106] A convenience store in a photograph was identified as Épicerie J. Diorio. One of the women speaking about Goose Village at Casa d'Italia was Hope Diorio.

The evening was organized by Marisa Portolese, who had just published a book about Goose Village, where her parents lived until the 1964 demolition. Marisa was accompanied on stage by Hope, who grew up in Goose Village, and novelist Chris DiRaddo, who was writing a novel set there.

Hope presented slides of her family and friends, black-and-white snapshots, often in direct sunlight with squinting eyes, photos that every family took in the 50s and 60s and pasted into bulky photo albums. She accompanied the images with family stories familiar among the migration generation: young men setting off alone, usually sponsored by a relative, finding work, renting a room, saving money, renting an apartment, arranging a marriage, working long hours, raising children, buying a house. Goose Village — an enclave just three streets wide and five streets deep — was an isolated microcosm where parents knew all the children and everyone looked out for one another. It is remembered as idyllic but was demolished as a slum.

Stalin apocryphally said, "The death of one man is a tragedy. A million deaths is a statistic." The scale of large cities breeds anonymity and

[106] *"New immigrants arrived [after the Second World War] from Eastern Europe and particularly from Italy."*

indifference, reducing us to our superficial identifiers: language, profession, pigmentation, ethnicity. It is easy to form a superficial and false opinion of our little-known neighbours. A blessing for independent souls who cherish personal freedom, a big city can be a soul-sucking ordeal for those seeking meaningful relationships. The stories Hope presented, of ordinary people living ordinary lives in a tight-knit community, revealed far more about Montreal's Italian immigrant experience than data tables about their 250,000 compatriots.

The next presenter was Chris DiRaddo— the writer who would receive a lot of media attention a month later when he tried to rent a room for his book club at the local municipal library and was refused because of a misinterpretation of Bill 96. Chris, like many of his generation, never spoke Italian at home as a child and only began learning the ancestral language in his 40s. He decided to set his third novel in Goose Village, where his father grew up, after reading Dave J. Flavell's *Community and the Human Spirit: Oral Histories from Montreal's Point St. Charles, Griffintown and Goose Village* (2014). Chris read part of a chapter that combined details from Flavell's richly evocative oral histories with his own skills as a storyteller to bring the people of Goose Village to life, immersed in sounds, flavours and odors both fragrant and putrid.

The stage had been set for Marisa Portolese to present her multi-dimensional Goose Village project. Marisa is a visual artist and second-generation Italian who graduated with a master's degree from Concordia University's fine arts program in the late 90s. She had considered doing her thesis on Goose Village because Sylvain L'Espérance's 1992 film, *Les printemps incertains*, affected her deeply but information about the vanished community was scarce at the time.

Marisa's interest was revived in 2007 when Marion Scott in *The Montreal Gazette* wrote "V for Vanished: Not a Trace Survives of Glorious Goose Village." Then in 2014, the Centre d'histoire de Montréal presented the exhibition *Quartiers disparus*, curated by Catherine Charlebois and Paul-André Linteau, and Marisa discovered that the city of Montreal had taken thousands of photos of "slums" that were about to be demolished, including Goose Village. The photos provided a wealth of information, so in 2018, Marisa plunged into her own Goose Village project.

It would occupy her for the next four years in a detective adventure to unscramble a mass of randomly filed photos and create a complex, detailed portrait of a community that had been almost entirely forgotten by everyone except its final inhabitants. Marisa produced a beautifully illustrated book, videos, art works and a website, aptly titled *The Goose Village*. Her passion for Goose Village, its people and their stories was contagious. I spoke to Marisa after the presentation and bought a copy of her book, which she dedicated with a flamboyant signature.

I also spoke to Hope Diorio and we exchanged emails. A few days later, she sent me a review of a new film about the Saint-Léonard Schools Crisis and asked if I had seen it. Everybody I knew who was interested in Quebec's Italian community or the language debate had seen the film. I had first heard about *La bataille de Saint-Léonard* in a Radio Canada interview, « *La bataille de Saint-Léonard* : la lutte oubliée à l'origine de la loi 101 » published October 11, 2024, with its director, Félix Rose. The filmmaker explained that the Saint-Léonard riots were the trigger for all the language legislation, from Bill 63 in 1969 to Bill 96 in 2022, that shaped modern Quebec. Rose's stated intention was to inform and educate, "because we need to understand the past in order to avoid making the same mistakes in the future": « Je voulais éclairer le passé pour mieux comprendre le présent. On vit encore les mêmes débats aux niveaux de la langue, de l'immigration. J'espère que ça va inviter au dialogue et montrer aussi jusqu'où ça peut aller si on ne fait pas attention ».[107]

Listening to Rose's interview, I felt the same feeling of exhilaration I did when reading Jean-François Lisée's book *Nous*. I'd heard English speakers and allophones speak exactly the same words. Yes, we need a dialogue between Quebec's French-speaking majority and multiple waves of immigrants. Yes, we need to learn from the past. Yes, we want to avoid future conflicts.

I saw *La bataille de Saint-Léonard* a week later at Cinéma Beaubien. Rose succeeded in vividly bringing to life a little-remembered conflict

[107] *"I wanted to shed light on the past to better understand the present. We're still experiencing the same debates about language and immigration. I hope it will encourage dialogue and also show how far things can go if we're not careful."*

and situating it at a pivotal point in Quebec history. He constructed the narrative around two compelling protagonists, real estate developer Mario Barone and language zealot Raymond Lemieux. During the battles, these two strong-willed men suffered immensely, along with their wives and children. The crisis in Saint-Léonard was big news in the golden days of television, so every aspect of the drama was captured by multiple cameras. Rose deftly incorporated fascinating archival footage.

As I wrote in "Learning (Or Not) From History," published November 2024, for *The Montrealer*, "The film works hard to recreate the passions of the era. This makes for a rip-roaring film experience." However, passion and reason activate different parts of the brain and passion is invariably stronger, though rarely smarter. Part of me wondered if Rose was demonstrating the role emotions played in escalating a conflict that could have been resolved rationally. More likely, he simply wanted to make a film that would provoke a strong reaction, and he succeeded; the film left no one indifferent.

My film *What We Choose to Remember* screened at Casa d'Italia in the large community hall on the main floor on December 9, in collaboration with Ralph Mastromonaco, who was launching his petition to the government of Quebec. Coincidentally, Cinéma Public presented Félix Rose's film the same evening in the small theatre in the basement of Casa d'Italia. The audience for both films was almost entirely Italian. Everyone at my screening had heard about Rose's film and many had seen it during its run at the Cinéma Beaubien.

The first man who spoke after the screening made a comparison between *What We Choose to Remember*, which shows immigrants learning French but being proud of speaking other languages, and *La bataille de Saint-Léonard*, which is framed as a conflict between Italian immigrants learning only English and Lemieux, determined to impose French-only education on them. "The kids they interviewed in Rose's film all spoke French. We were never against learning French!"

Another man said:

> I've heard a lot of criticism about *La bataille de Saint-Léonard* but the film I saw was very interesting. The Italians wanted to

> give the best tools to their kids so they could move forward in this land. They needed to know French and English. The francophones wanted to protect the French-speaking collectivity. As a spectator I reflected on what's more important, individual rights or collective rights.

With Ralph Mastromonaco at Casa d'Italia

The first man disagreed: "The film was about whether it's smarter to speak many languages or only one. Francophones can have the right to speak only French but they can't impose it on everybody else!"

"I'm the first generation in my family born in Quebec," a woman said. She felt many facts were left out of the film:

> Most people my age don't know the origins of Bill 101. They never heard of the Saint-Léonard riots. My father was with the Saint-Léonard parents' association and he always says that French was easier for Italians to learn, and they wanted to, but so many weren't allowed to go to French schools. That's such a big missing piece of the whole story. Here we are fifty years later, still arguing about it.

The next woman to speak was a filmmaker who has researched and documented the Italian experience in Quebec for twenty-five years. I first heard of Anita Aloisio when she made *Les enfants de la loi 101*[108] on the thirtieth anniversary of the milestone language law. Her documentary portrayed the painful effects of cold-blooded politics on human beings, including children of her generation. When the PQ created Bill 101 in

[108] *Children of Bill 101.*

1977, it implemented its education provisions immediately. Educators, who had only been trained to teach francophone children, suddenly found their classes filling with students they could not understand and who could not understand them. One of the former students in Anita's film says, "They didn't teach us French. They taught us math *in* French and we couldn't understand anything!" It was brutal, like emergency surgery without anesthetic. Many of the guinea pig children of Bill 101 still bear the scars.

Anita then praised Ralph for bringing public attention to the education question with his petition project. She said:

> We share the responsibility for this silence. No one has wanted to talk about it. There are facts that need to be clear. Here in Montreal, we are 300,000 people of Italian descent. Not everyone had the same experience. Yes, there were pockets where Italians were not declined education in French. But in other places they were. We need to look at why. What happened?

Ralph confirmed that he was hearing the same thing. "Some Italians were accepted in French schools. Some made the choice to attend English schools. There were others, like me, who were turned away from a French school but we have never made a big deal about it. It's time to set the record straight."

Anita added, "I interviewed Guy Rocher. When I made my film in 2007, he was the last living father of Bill 101. We talked about the Saint-Léonard crisis and he admitted, 'On avait nos torts. On a refusé plusieurs communautés immigrantes.'[109] I have him saying it on film."

The conversation at Casa d'Italia revisited many of the themes I had heard throughout the tour, about language vs. languages, individual vs. collective rights, and the role that different schools played in rejecting or welcoming students.

The facts concerning the battles that took place in Saint-Léonard are relatively straightforward. In 1951, *Le Devoir* reported that Saint-Léonard was a remote interior region on the island of Montreal inhabited by farmers who did not have running water, sewers or schools: « Un grand

[109] *"We made mistakes. We refused to admit several immigrant communities."*

nombre vivent dans les cabanes et la misère règnent en maître ».[110] A decade later, Saint-Léonard was becoming a residential development. In 1968, the population was 55 percent francophone, 40 percent Italian and 5 percent anglophone.[111] The school board was French Catholic but bilingual schools were created to help integrate allophone immigrants. From 1962 to 1967, many Italian students enrolled in officially authorized bilingual classes where children studied in French half the day and in English the other half.

Saint-Léonard's linguistic conflict began in 1968 when the school board was taken over by a group of language activists that voted to abolish bilingual classes and replace them with French-only education. The newly created MIS (Mouvement pour l'intégration scolaire), led by Raymond Lemieux, would spearhead the conflict in Saint-Léonard for the next two years. Italian parents objected to the arbitrary and unilateral removal of a right to bilingual schools available to other immigrants in other school districts. It was a problem that should have been addressed by thoughtful deliberation, not street battles.

A second source of conflict flared up when the school board allocated an existing French school (Aimé-Renaud) to the English-speaking Catholics of Saint-Léonard. It was standard practice for Catholic school boards to allocate resources for students in the English sector. Francophone students occupied the building, encouraged by the MIS and a broad coalition of nationalists who gathered 3,500 protesters outside the school. The school board backed down, retaining the Aimé-Renaud school for francophone students.

Former Minister of Education Jean-Guy Cardinal intervened and proposed a shared use of the Aimé-Renaud building between English and French speakers, another practice common for Catholic schools. Lemieux and the MIS refused to compromise, so Saint-Léonard's small number of English-speaking Catholics had to travel to English Catholic schools outside Saint-Léonard. The MIS had successfully imposed French-only instruction within their school board and had driven (or more accurately,

110 *"Many of them live in shacks where misery reigns supreme."*

111 *Christophe Chikli, La crise de Saint-Léonard dans la presse montréalaise, 1968 – 1969, master's thesis, Université de Sherbrooke, 2009.*

bussed) English-speaking students out of town. Lemieux is immortalized in a photo where he is shouting into a bullhorn beside a sign that reads, « Tu veux une école anglaise? Ben calisse ton camp en Ontario ».[112]

English Catholic parents and Italian parents requested a court injunction to restore bilingual schools and they marched in Ottawa pleading for the federal government to intervene but were told that education is a provincial jurisdiction. In September 1968, feeling bullied and abandoned, Italian parents took action into their own hands and opened an underground school to provide instruction in English. The debate raged in the media, on the streets and in disrupted public meetings, where chairs and punches were thrown. The mood turned increasingly ugly.

The conflict exploded on September 10, 1969, when Lemieux marched with 2,500 protesters along Rue Jean-Talon in an unauthorized protest. The police employed force to control the unruly mob: hundreds were injured, 118 windows (mostly of Italian businesses) were smashed and dozens were arrested, including Lemieux, who was charged with sedition.

The simple facts about immigrant students do not account for the fury in Saint-Léonard. During the 1960s, Quebec was in the throes of the Quiet Revolution, while the unquiet revolutionaries of the FLQ had been using violence to promote their liberation agenda since 1963, the year that John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Liberation armies were employing urban terrorism and guerilla warfare techniques in Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia. Black Panthers and the Weather Underground were folk-hero outlaws in the USA. Martin Luther King was assassinated in April 1968 and Robert F. Kennedy that June and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago turned into a battleground. In Quebec, FLQ bombings increased in intensity and frequency in the months leading up to the October Crisis in 1970. Violence had become a tool of political expression. John Parisella, who would later become a prominent political figure with the Quebec Liberal Party, wrote a master's thesis in 1971 titled *Pressure Group Politics: Saint-Léonard Schools Crisis*.

112 *"You want an English school? Go to *%$* Ontario!"*

The Saint-Léonard Schools Crisis was the beginning of mass mobilization to reclaim the French homeland conquered by the les anglais. Quebec's French-speaking youth were enraged to realize that for two centuries their ancestors had been oppressed by foreigners, dominated by the Church and manipulated by their own elites. Worse, their grandparents had been complicit in their pitiful servitude, kneeling in prayer, comforting themselves with the suffering of martyrs and the promise of paradise… beyond the grave. Two hundred years of humiliation exploded in Saint-Léonard. Lemieux had tapped into the dark forces of retribution. *We want what is ours, what has been stolen from us by les anglais, and we want it now!*

Jean-Jacques Bertrand, who became premier after Daniel Johnson's sudden death in September 1968, was not the man of the situation. In Rose's film, Antonio Flamand, a member of the Union Nationale government, claims former-Premier Bertrand said to him, « Il faut que tu acceptes que c'est des anglais qui ont gagné la bataille des plaines d'Abraham! »[113] This previously unreported fragment of history would have been an incendiary declaration of capitulation, then and now.

Bertrand established a Commission of Inquiry on the Position of the French Language and on Language Rights in Québec. The Gendron Commission took four years (1969 – 1973) to produce its report: 1,423 pages and 179 recommendations. The Gendron Commission never addressed access to English-language schools but it suggested that the province intervene, sometimes through persuasion and other times by coercion, to reverse the tendency among immigrant parents to enroll their children in English-language schools, especially in Montreal.

The Saint-Léonard riot in 1969, demanded an immediate response. Bertrand needed to satisfy the language demands of the majority while protecting the rights of the minority. Tradition and precedent butted heads with urgency and reality. The Union Nationale government attempted to restore peace by passing Quebec's first language law. Bill 63 obliged English schools to teach French and encouraged immigrants to enrol in French schools but left parents with the province's traditional "freedom

[113] *"You have to accept that it was the English who won the Battle of the Plains of Abraham!"*

of choice." Bill 63 infuriated Lemieux and his supporters. The law was so unpopular that the Union Nationale was voted out of power and would never return.

Robert Bourassa's Liberals attempted to restore order by passing a muscular language law. Bill 22 made French the only official language of Quebec, which enraged anglophones and allophones, who considered Quebec bilingual, but the law did not go far enough to satisfy francophone nationalists. Anger at the Liberals set the stage for Lévesque's Parti Québécois to be elected in 1976. A year later, the PQ passed Bill 101, which established the Charter of the French Language — the foundational law governing linguistic policy in Quebec.

Firebrand Lemieux had a favourite metaphor for the linguistic battle he was fighting that was recorded for TV news in the 60s and re-used in Rose's film:

> If I were a cartoonist, I would draw a big figure (un gros bonhomme) representing 80 percent of Quebec's population. Then there would be a much smaller character representing the Neo-Québécois element, about 11 percent of the population. Beside these two is tiny figure (un bonhomme tout petit) representing 8 percent of the population, the Anglo-Saxon element, that climbs on the back of the medium character, to bash le gros bonhomme.[114]

Lemieux's preposterous metaphor made no sense other than to portray the francophone majority, despite its size, as the perennial helpless victim, while the tiny "Anglo-Saxon element" was able to manipulate simple-minded immigrants to join the fight against Quebec's French language and culture.

For Lemieux and his supporters, the battle in Saint-Léonard was a zero-sum battle between French and English. Survival of the nation depended on destroying the enemy: les anglais and their allies. The nationalist narrative continues to portray Quebec's francophone majority as the eternally oppressed underdog. The Italian version is different. The community did not reject the French or side with the English and it was nobody's pawn.

[114] *My translation.*

I began to dig deeply into this controversial and puzzling subject and received a two-year research grant to investigate the thorny subject of education prior to Bill 101[115]. Most of the former students, and some of their teachers, were still alive and retained vivid memories. I also obtained access to several unpublished master's theses, which had investigated the conflict from multiple angles. Christophe Chikli, for instance, reviewed media coverage of the Saint-Léonard crisis from 1968 to 1970. His thesis presented an unfiltered view of what politicians were saying and thinking as they struggled to formulate language laws: Union Nationale's Bill 63 in 1969, the Liberal's Bill 22 in 1974 and PQ's Bill 101 in 1977.[116]

In *Le Devoir* on September 10, 1968, Lévesque made it clear he never supported unilingualism or violence-prone advocates who stirred up trouble in Saint-Léonard:

> Pour sa part, René Levesque dénonça la LIS [la Ligue d'intégration, formerly the MIS] au cours de la crise de Saint-Léonard. Effectivement, il dénonça *l'imposition forcée de l'unilinguisme français* à Saint-Léonard. Pourtant souverainiste reconnu, il alla à l'encontre de bon nombre de ses collègues et de ses partisans proclamant des 1968 l'inefficacité de la LIS et la dangerosité de son action pouvant conduire à des dérives.[117] (emphasis added)

Jean Lesage, who led the Liberal government during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, accused the Union Nationale government of inaction regarding immigration and education and stated that the francophone majority's attitude toward immigrants was part of the problem: « Si les immigrants choisissent de s'intégrer à la minorité anglophone

[115] *The reports were published as Freedom of Choice and Exclusion in Quebec's Education System, During the Years 1945 – 1977.*

[116] *Chikli, La crise de Saint-Léonard dans la presse montréalaise, 1968 – 1969, Université de Sherbrooke, 2009.*

[117] *"René Levesque denounced the L.I.S. during the Saint-Léonard crisis. Indeed, he denounced the forced imposition of French unilingualism in Saint-Léonard. Although a recognized sovereigntist, he went against many of his colleagues and supporters who, since 1968, proclaimed the ineffectiveness of the L.I.S. and the danger that its actions could lead to violence."*

du Québec, a expliqué M. Lesage, cela est dû d'un part à l'inaction du gouvernement et aussi à cause de *l'attitude des Québécois à leur égard* »[118] (emphasis added).

Paul Gerin-Lajoie, minister of education in Lesage's Liberal government, supported the traditional right of parents to choose the school — Catholic or Protestant, French or English — that would provide their children with the best education. "I favour the freedom of choice of the language of instruction by the parents," he is cited saying in *The Montreal Gazette*, September 28, 1968. "If a family wishes to choose a French language school or an English language school that liberty must be respected."

Daniel Johnson, whose Union Nationale government was the first to wrestle with an equitable solution for conflicting positions on immigration, education and language, expressed his views in *La Presse* on June 13, 1968, as the Saint-Léonard conflict began veering out of control, shortly before his untimely death:

> M Johnson a ensuite critiqué sévèrement une fois de plus, ce qui s'est fait jusqu'ici pour l'intégration des immigrants, particulièrement au niveau de la CÉCM. « Contrairement à ce qui s'est fait jusqu'ici, » a dit le premier ministre, « il faudra fournir aux immigrants l'occasion de s'intégrer au milieu français *volontairement*. Ils n'ont jamais eu cette chance. Bien au contraire, la CÉCM [Catholic Schools Commission of Montreal] et d'autres organismes ont *automatiquement rejeté tout ce qui n'était pas Canadien français catholiques* vers les écoles ou la langue d'instruction est l'anglais ».[119] (emphasis added)

[118] *"If immigrants choose to integrate into Quebec's English-speaking minority, Mr. Lesage explained, this is due in part to the government's inaction and also because of the attitude of Quebecers towards them." La Presse, September 9, 1968.*

[119] *"Mr. Johnson once again severely criticized what has been done so far regarding the integration of immigrants, particularly at the CECM level. 'Contrary to what has been done so far,' said the prime minister, 'immigrants must be given the opportunity to integrate into the French environment voluntarily. They have never had this chance. On the contrary, the CECM and other organizations have automatically rejected everyone who was not Catholic French Canadian into schools where the language of instruction is English."*

This "automatic rejection" is precisely what immigrants had been saying for fifty years and dozens of interviews with ex-students and administrators confirmed that it had been common knowledge in the 1950s and 60s. Yet in 1997, historian Gagnon insisted that their stories were nothing but a myth.

It is important to remember the context of Gagnon's indignation about the affirmations of rejection by immigrants made "ad nauseam for the past twenty years." Gagnon wrote his paper in 1997. Bill 101, which became law twenty years before Gagnon wrote his paper, was based on the belief that immigrants had rejected Quebec's French language and culture. It is not surprising that immigrants who had experienced rejection from French Catholic schools would want the truth to be known. And if they were still repeating this claim ad nauseam decades later, it was because their story was still being dismissed as a myth in 1997 — and continues to be disputed today.

It is also noteworthy that Gagnon wrote his paper immediately after the 1995 referendum, one of the most polarizing political events in Quebec history. The second referendum will be forever associated with then-Premier Jacques Parizeau's emotional outburst as he conceded that the majority of voters had not supported his dream of an independent Quebec: « C'est vrai qu'on a été battu. Au fond, par quoi? Par l'argent et des votes ethniques, essentiellement ».[120] Parizeau's targeting of ethnic votes was interpreted as blaming immigrants for crushing the nationalist dream. That was the heated, and highly political context, in which Gagnon wrote his myth-busting paper.

Gagnon claimed that no Catholic schools, neither French nor English, rejected any immigrants, neither Catholic nor non-Catholic. How was it possible for a serious historian to make a claim so clearly unhistorical? In 1999, Gagnon published two op-eds about his research in *Le Devoir*, « Pour en finir avec le mythe » on May 1 and « L'école anglaise: le choix des immigrants »[121] on May 3. Pierre Anctil, leading authority on

[120] *"It's true we have been beaten, but by what? Essentially by money and the ethnic vote!"*

[121] "To Put an End to the Myth" and *"The English School: The Choice of Immigrants."*

Jewish history in Quebec, wrote a rebuttal to Gagnon on May 6:

> Loin de moi l'idée de lancer une nouvelle polémique dans une domaine d'études qui a beaucoup souffert, au cours des derniers années, de virulents confrontation d'idées et de stériles discussions. Je m'en serais toutefois voulu ne pas avoir réagi au texte publié par Robert Gagnon dans l'édition du 1er mai du Devoir, qui, malheureusement, par son propos, jette de la confusion dans un secteur clé de l'histoire québécoise, soit l'intégration scolaire.[122]

After outlining the history of education in Quebec for Jewish students, Anctil concluded: « Contrairement à Robert Gagnon, je ne crois pas que les archives de la seule CÉCM suffisent à éclairer notre lanterne pour ce qui a trait à l'accueil que les juifs en reçu à l'école catholique montréalaise ».[123] The Jewish community knew that Catholic schools were reserved to Catholics and that to dispute this reality was highly problematic.

Daniel Racine, a Protestant francophone, then wrote a letter to *Le Devoir*, published May 13:

> Déjà, le samedi 1er mai, le sang me brouillait en lisant l'article d'un certain Robert Gagnon, auteur de l'Histoire de la CÉCM. Je me demandais comment la direction du Devoir avait pu laisser passer des mots tels que « mythes » en parlant des difficultés des immigrants non catholiques à s'intégrer au système scolaire catholique québécoise. En lisant la deuxième livraison de ce professeur du département d'histoire de l'UQAM, je m'interroge sérieusement sur la valeur des diplômes que peut émettre une institution qui permet à de tels trafiquants de faits de sévir auprès des étudiants. La réalité — pour tous ceux qui la vécurent, comme

[122] *"Far be it from me to stir up a new controversy in a field of study that has suffered greatly in recent years from virulent clashes of ideas and sterile discussions. However, I would have regretted not responding to the article published by Robert Gagnon in the May 1st edition of Le Devoir, which, unfortunately, sows confusion in a key area of Quebec history, namely school integration."*

[123] *"Unlike Robert Gagnon, I do not believe that the archives of the CÉCM alone are sufficient to shed light on the reception that Jews received at Montreal Catholic schools."*

> moi, franco-protestant, et tous mes amis immigrants, francophones ou non, francophile pour la plupart, mais non catholiques — fut tout autre.[124]

The lived reality of non-Christians and non-Catholics in Quebec schools was a story of systemic rejection, precisely as then-Premier Johnson had stated. The story of immigrant and non-francophone Catholics was considerably more complex and easily misunderstood then — and still today. As recently as November 2025, Pauline Marois, former premier of Quebec and, more importantly, minister of education in 1998, when Quebec's confessional school system was transformed into a linguistic system, admitted during an interview on Radio Canada: "Catholic school boards refused children who *practiced a religion other than Catholicism*"[125] (emphasis added). Marois did not concede that Catholics were rejected.

During the course of my education research project, I interviewed hundreds of ex-students — Catholics from many countries, non-Catholic Christians (Protestants, Greek and Russian Orthodox) and non-Christians (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist) — who had all experienced rejection by French Catholic schools. I also interviewed francophone Catholics who remembered schools filled with other francophone Catholics and small samplings of recent immigrants. Yet the nationalist response to this non-controversial reality was indignation. *Here it comes — Quebec bashing! Against the most generous and welcoming society in the world.*

This response was a tragic misunderstanding of the story these immigrants were trying to tell. They liked Quebec. They wanted (then and now) to speak French and to integrate. They sent their kids to

[124] *"Already, on Saturday, May 1, my blood boiled as I read the article by Robert Gagnon, author of L'Histoire de la CÉCM. I wondered how the editors of Le Devoir could have allowed words like 'myth' to be used when discussing the difficulties that non-Catholic immigrants faced integrating into the Quebec Catholic school system. Reading the second installment by this professor from the UQAM history department, I seriously question the value of diplomas awarded by an institution that allows such purveyors of misinformation to operate with impunity among students. The reality — for all those who experienced it, like myself, a French Protestant, and all my immigrant friends, Francophone or not, most of them Francophiles, but not Catholic — was very different."*

[125] Pauline Marois interviewed by Marie-Louise Arsenault on « *Tout peut arriver* », *November 22, 2025.*

immersion classes or French schools, after Bill 101. They did not want more confrontation; they just wanted their efforts to be recognized. It didn't seem like a lot to ask.

Rose's film had the effect of provoking an important public conversation about Saint-Léonard, though it was not a debate. There was no dialogue, no conversation between francophones and non-francophones. Nonetheless, we can examine independent reviews and newspaper columns in parallel to create a rough approximation of a debate.

Let us begin with the francophone debating team. In 1968, Gilles Proulx was a twenty-eight-year-old reporter who put aside his journalistic impartiality to join the demonstration for compulsory French schools. Writing in *Le Journal de Montréal*, Proulx praised the "unjustly forgotten" Lemieux who "led the battle to force immigrants to be educated in French." Proulx concluded his argument with a critical comparison between the valiant youth of his boomer generation, who demanded the nationalization of McGill University, and the youth of today who protest violence in Gaza by chanting slogans in English.

Mathieu Bock-Coté, a younger nationalist who defends conservative values, wrote about Rose's film in *Le journal de Montréal*, in an October 17, 2024, piece called « *La bataille de Saint-Léonard* : il était une fois le réveil québécois! », comparing the current immigrant crisis with the 1960s when large numbers of Italians settled in Quebec but "did not want to integrate with French Canadians."[126] Bock-Coté accused Italians of preferring English schools. Both of these highly controversial allegations were presented as truisms, though Italians have refuted both half-truths for half a century.

Then Bock-Coté complained about double standards that make it politically incorrect to describe immigrants as racist while permitting them to label their Québécois hosts as racist for chanting, « Le Québec aux québécois ». Bock-Coté posed the loaded rhetorical question, "Would it be a scandal to chant, 'Italy for Italians'?" His question is a litmus test of nationalism. Bock-Coté may sincerely believe that *Québécois* includes all citizens living in Québec, in which case the slogan is clearly not racist,

126 *My translation, here and in the next paragraph.*

but then why would flag-waving crowds of de souche chant these words with such passion? Implicit tribalism is no less disturbing when a gang of white dudes parades through multiracial London chanting, "England for the English." Bock-Coté praised Lemieux as a "true leader" for being "courageous, intransigent and standing strong against intimidation." Like Proulx, he longed for a reawakening of the nationalist fervour that had created modern Quebec.

Josée Legault, in the October 18, 2024, article « Il faut courir voir *La bataille de Saint-Léonard* » for *Le journal de Montréal*, sympathized with postwar Italian immigrants who wanted bilingual schools to secure a better life for their children. English was the key to success and social mobility, while the French language was "reserved for French Canadians; the discredited language of paupers, labourers and renters."[127] Mme Legault, who grew up among Italians in Saint-Michel, did not blame immigrants for wanting to climb the economic ladder but she agreed with Lemieux that the real enemy was Montreal's Anglo elite: "Their real struggle was aimed at preserving the domination of English in the metropolis of Quebec and the corollary subordination of French."

Now let's hear from the immigrants. In "Félix Rose's *The Battle of Saint-Léonard: A Problematic Portrayal of Montreal's Italian Community*" for *Accenti* magazine, published February 14, 2025, Anthony Portulese appreciated the attention that Rose's film drew to an important historical event that is still central to Quebec's language conflicts and he commended Rose's effort to give both sides equal screen time. However, "the film distorts certain historical facts and inaccurately frames the Italian immigrant community not as defenders of bilingual education but as naive pawns in a larger political crusade against the MIS and their ethno-nationalist ambitions." Portulese also took exception to Lemieux's metaphor of the immigrant "bonhomme" joining with the "Anglo-Saxon element" to attack the French majority. Portulese observed that portraying Italians as pawns in the language issue deprived them of any agency because "we were too stupid to make decisions about language choices or not intelligent enough to know we

[127] *My translation, here and throughout this paragraph.*

were being manipulated." He also noted that the film disproportionately showed violence committed by Italians and injuries suffered by francophones.

Portulese then quoted an editorial published in *La Presse* after the big street battle in 1969. Lemieux and the MIS "were part of a larger ethno-nationalist project… [that] would 'shout [at Italian immigrant parents] "Le Québec aux Québécois!" But which Québécois? Are those who've legally settled in Quebec not themselves also Québécois?' The irony here," Portulese continued, "is that Raymond Lemieux was himself the son of immigrants to Quebec: his Franco-American father was born in New York state and his Irish-American mother was born in Chicago. English was the first language he learned at home, and he did his six years of elementary school in English."

Portulese concluded his critique with an astute observation: "Though some audiences may indeed interpret *La bataille de Saint-Léonard* as documenting a proxy war between English and French Canada, the case can be made that the film more accurately depicts the conflict as a battle between a unilingual and a bilingual Quebec: two opposing visions for the future of the province."

Ralph Mastromonaco, writing in *The Suburban* on November 20, 2024, encapsulated his opinion in the title of his review, "'La Bataille de St. Léonard': An Insult to Italian-Canadians." The narrative "that Italians rejected the French language and enrolled their children in English schools to foster their 'upward social mobility,'" Ralph claims:

> is both false and insulting to Quebec's Italian community. Italian immigrants wanted their children to learn the French and English languages. Lemieux wanted to ban bilingual education. For this he is being hailed as a language hero. Lemieux championed the belief that bilingualism threatens the French language. An absurd idea unsupported by science or common sense, but one that continues to be promoted by separatists and nationalists, and their many bilingual politicians and pundits.

Toula Drimonis is not Italian. Her heritage is Greek but she has written extensively about the immigration experience, notably in her 2022 book, *We, the Others: Allophones, Immigrants and Belonging in Canada*. She

wrote about Rose's film in "St-Léonard School Crisis Set the Stage for Bill 101," published in *The Montreal Gazette* December 13, 2024, and appreciated his effort to be sympathetic to both sides of the linguistic fence:

> However, while I respect Lemieux's desire for French Quebecers "to be able to live and die here without ever knowing a word of English," his assertion that "no one can say whether English will be a useful language in the future" was frustratingly naive. Deliberately limiting yourself linguistically shouldn't be something to aspire to, and today's Quebec has proved [Mario] Barone right.

Now that you've heard both sides of the debate, which argument, in your estimation, is stronger? I am willing to bet that your opinion has not budged, no matter whether you believe Quebec is best served by a strategy of unilingualism and muscular enforcement of language laws or if you believe Quebec would be best served by encouraging immigrants to use French because it adds value and quality to their life rather than creating resentment by imposing it upon them.

A stalemate would not be an unnatural or inappropriate place to end this debate but I am going to call in a tie-breaking seventh debater who is the daughter of an Italian father and a French Canadian mother. Marie-France Bazzo trained as a sociologist before becoming a popular Radio Canada host and then a producer. She was eight years old during the Saint-Léonard crisis. In « Saint-Léonard et moi », Bazzo's review of Rose's film published in *La Presse* November 11, 2024, she reveals that, "My family is bicultural. My father was Italian, my mother was French Canadian. Against all odds, she, who was wary of foreigners, married an Italian, but she certainly didn't want us to look like 'wops' from Saint-Léonard!"[128]

The family lived in a francophone neighbourhood and both of Bazzo's parents became early supporters of the PQ. Bazzo's best childhood friend was her cousin, the son of her Italian uncle and his francophone wife. The aunt decided to send Bazzo's cousin to an English high school. The betrayal, by a francophone, of Quebec's French language and culture was unforgiveable for Bazzo's mother, who severed all ties with her husband's

[128] *My translation, here and in the following paragraphs.*

brother and family. For reasons left unexplained, Bazzo's father was "never able to share [with Bazzo and her sister] the richness of his culture." Bazzo was also denied contact with her beloved cousin.

This is a personal drama but one that mirrors the highly polarized politics of the era. As Bazzo watched Rose's film, she wept in the darkness of the cinema. She sympathized with the suffering of the Barone family, because "their house was set on fire several times by Molotov cocktails," and with the Lemieux family, because "their father's ideas, actions and intransigence drove away their loved ones and they found themselves isolated. The Lemieux couple broke up, at a time when people didn't separate."

Bazzo was finally reunited with her Italian cousin after her mother was lost to Alzheimer's. "My cousin and I went to Venice together in the footsteps of our fathers for a moving pilgrimage." Had Bazzo's cousin rejected Quebec's French language and culture after attending English high school? Is he now living in Toronto or New York? « Son parcours scolaire anglophone n'aura pas fait de mon cousin un moins bon Québécois. Il est parfaitement francophone, investi dans son milieu, et plus riche d'expériences contrastées ».[129]

I was so intrigued that Rose's film had produced such contrasting responses in different audiences that I ordered a copy of the film to examine it frame by frame. Film is an excellent medium to stimulate emotion but a poor way to convey complex information. Rose's film contains a multitude of references that only a serious student of history could decipher as they flash by. Most audience members only saw a battle between Barone and Lemieux, which they interpreted through a personal lens in which one is the hero and the other the villain. Given the polarized interpretations of history in Quebec, it is not surprising that francophones would see Lemieux as their hero and that Italians would cheer for Barone.

A close reading of the film revealed how Rose created two different audiences for his film. In the first minute, a journalist's voice from 1968 frames the conflict in Saint-Léonard, asking whether immigrants should

[129] *"His English-speaking education choice did not make my cousin a lesser Québécois. He is perfectly francophone, invested in his community and richer in contrasting experiences."*

be allowed to send their children to English school. This was how the conflict was understood by francophones at the time: English vs. French and immigrants vs. the host society. We know now that there were no English schools in Saint-Léonard. There were bilingual schools, which were common at the time, completely legal and operated by the French Catholic school board. Within the first two minutes of the film, francophones are thinking, *This film is going to be about a fight for our language and culture*, while Italians are thinking, *Bilingual schools made sense then and they still make sense now*.

Then Rose introduces viewers to Lemieux, a man raised and educated in English, who became a born-again defender of Quebec's French language and culture. In a 1960s interview, Lemieux admits he speaks English better than French: « Ça m'aide à attaquer mes adversaires dans leur langue — ça fais encore plus mal ».[130] For the French-speaking audience, Lemieux is a courageous freedom fighter uniquely equipped to stick it to the hated anglais. For the Italian audience, a watershed event in their history has been reframed as just another episode in Franco-Anglo rivalry. The valiant effort by Italians to learn French and English has, once again, been (mis)interpreted as rejection and betrayal. Rose, despite half a century of hindsight, presents nothing but the passions and perspectives of the 1960s, as if nothing has been learned.

Rose's film is not about Italians or Saint-Léonard. It presents two battling visions of language politics. Early in the film, archival footage shows Lemieux presenting a justification for teaching children only French: "The future tends to be French. Nobody can say that in fifteen years English will still be a useful language in Quebec. The opposite is true. Nobody has explained that to the immigrants." This has to be the worst prediction since an official in the USA patent office circa 1830 allegedly declared, "We'll be shutting down the patent office soon because everything that can be invented has been invented." Lemieux's prediction is not charming in its naivety but rather disturbing in its wrongheadedness, then and now. English has never been more popular, or useful, despite the CAQ's attempt to resurrect Lemieux's vision of a unilingual

[130] *"It helps me attack my opponents in their own language — which hurts them even more."*

French society via Bill 96. Neither Rose nor any of the francophones who wrote reviews of the film acknowledge this fundamental clash between ideology and reality.

Lemieux is quoted in the film, "The real pedagogical experts will tell you bilingual education is a monstrosity. Trying to force two languages into a child's head will create mental confusion." Lemieux knew from his own experience that children can quite easily acquire more than one language. It was not a problem for him or his siblings. It is a standing joke in Quebec that most of the nationalist leaders are bilingual and many have attended elite English-language schools such as Harvard and Oxford. Jacques Parizeau, the PQ leader who instigated the second referendum, was educated at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, the current PQ leader, was educated at McGill and Oxford.

Bilingualism is not new. It is not an untested and dangerously risky experiment. The national languages of Europe only gradually, and surprisingly recently, replaced a multitude of regional languages and dialects. Inter-regional communication always required bilinguals. The current estimate of the global population is 43 percent bilingual and 17 percent multilinguals. These numbers are echoed in Quebec: 46 percent bilingual, and Montreal has the highest proportion of multilinguals among Canada's big cities.

What lessons are we to learn from Saint-Léonard and the violent struggles of those bygone days? Francophone media and opinion makers have discovered a forgotten hero in Lemieux. They have united to sing the praises of the man who is now credited with courageously, obstinately and single-handedly saving Quebec from its enemies. Anyone old enough to remember la fête de Dollard, and its origins, will detect a familiar narrative.

In 1845, Canada was a proud British colony and it proclaimed an annual commemoration of the queen's birthday as Victoria Day. After the queen died in 1901, other colonies renamed the holiday Empire Day but Canada retained Victoria Day. Popular in Point St. Charles for huge bonfire parties, the holiday was never popular in French Quebec, and by the First World War, francophone nationalists were calling it "the

long weekend in May" and suggesting it be renamed in honour of Adam Dollard, Sieur des Ormeaux, or Jean-Olivier Chénier, a Patriote who died at the Battle of Saint-Eustache.

Groulx's most positive contribution to the history of Quebec was to promote heroes. Groulx believed, quite sensibly, that the youth of Quebec would be inspired to greater accomplishments with tales of heroes and victory rather than with lamentations about losers and humiliation. The USA provided a role model for creating role models. Their history books were full of larger-than-life figures, from George Washington and Benjamin Franklin to Daniel Boone and Davey Crockett, who both became stars in children's television programs, propelled by ear-worm theme songs. In 1960, Groulx wrote *Dollard est-il un mythe?*[131] in which the historian presented a rock-solid case for the consecration of Dollard as a frontier hero for Quebec. In 1963, on the 125th anniversary of the Patriote rebellion, Victoria Day in Quebec was renamed la fête de Dollard et Chenier.

After his death in 1967, Groulx's influence began to wane. Many historians in Quebec now believe Dollard was a bandit who tried to steal a load of furs from Iroquois trappers on their way to Montreal but unexpectedly ran into a war party. The history is not clear but Dollard became a tainted hero and some young people referred to the holiday as la fête du dollar, perhaps believing it a celebration of Québec Inc. In 2002, Quebec's national holiday was renamed la fête des Patriotes.

Many Anglos still refer to the May holiday as Victoria Day but la fête des Patriotes is a sensible compromise. Nationalists can celebrate their battles against les anglais while the English, Irish and Italians can believe that red and green bands in the Partriote flag commemorate their role in the battle for democracy.

Lemieux has certain merits as a hero for Quebec. He fought for the French language, though his mother tongue was English and his mother was Irish. Lemieux could be seen as mediator between diverse communities, though the facts do not readily support that reading of history. French and English editorialists writing during the Saint-Léonard Schools Crisis viewed Lemieux as an intransigent hot head pushing ideas that were

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unconstitutional (abolishing English schools in Quebec) and out of sync with the majority (making Quebec a unilingual French society). René Lévesque did not support Lemieux's extreme views and they were not incorporated in Bill 101. After a brief moment of glory in 1969, Lemieux was spurned and completely forgotten.

Félix Rose and many nationalists want to rehabilitate Lemieux and celebrate him as a hero. Are we to admire Lemieux for his intransigence and for preferring mob violence to dialogue? Are we to celebrate Lemieux because his extreme views alienated so many moderate francophones and ethnic voters that the no side prevailed in both referendums on separation? Ironically, a statue of Lemieux might unify all Quebecers in the same manner as La fête des Patriotes. Nationalists could celebrate Lemieux's battles against les anglais and the immigrant pawns who support them while federalists could celebrate Lemieux as the man who inspired a multitude of no voters to reject narrow nationalism.

During the film tour, many people asked me if there is any hope that the conflict will end. It depends on what they mean by *conflict* and *end*. Is the conflict in Quebec about language? Colonialism? Capitalism? Federalism? Multiculturalism? Democracy? Would a majority vote for independence unite all Quebecers? Would a unilingual society put an end to all conflict?

Rational people can share information, make compromises and reach a mutually acceptable accommodation. If that is what you mean by *end the conflict*, it could happen. During the past one hundred years, Quebec has transformed at an unnaturally rapid pace. It is not surprising that historical information has not adjusted to contemporary realities.

In *Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World* (Flatiron Books, 2018), Hans Rosling demonstrates how he spent decades proving that highly educated people were wrong about half the things they believed, partly because what they had been taught was false to begin with but mostly because the information they were taught had become obsolete during their lifetime. Rosling would argue, and I would agree, that change is possible with a little more information, time and effort.

Most of the voices I have presented in this book belonged to Anglos, allophones and immigrants. I made this choice because the "official"

history' in Quebec is dominated by the francophone narrative. However, the majority of voters in Quebec are francophone, so I want to them to have the last word.

While writing this book, I attended a ceremony where my friend and production manager Betty Esperanza was awarded the King Charles III's Coronation Medal for her charitable work with youth and skateboards. Another of the recipients was Antoine Dionne Charest, whose proud mother and father were in the audience. During the reception after the awards ceremony, Jean Charest, Antoine's father and the former premier of Quebec (2003 – 2012), approached me and asked if I was the director who had made the film about immigrants in Quebec. He had seen the documentary and enjoyed it.

With Betty Esperanza and Jean Charest.

Charest's long political career has often clashed with Quebec's nationalists. While leader of the federal Conservative Party during the 1995 referendum campaign, Charest was one of the strongest champions for Quebec remaining in Canada. In 1998, he left federal politics and became leader of the Quebec Liberal Party. Nationalists discovered that the name on Charest's birth certificate was not Jean but John James. The Lionel Groulx school of exclusionary nationalism concluded that someone named John James could not be a true Québécois and must be impure, tainted and duplicitous, in the same way the Pierre "Elliott"

Trudeau was never acknowledged as a true Quebecer by many nationalists back in the 60s — or, more recently, his son, Justin, whose spoken French was mercilessly ridiculed as the bastard child of bilingualism, stringing together familiar words in a grotesquely foreign syntax.

Charest asked me, "What kind of response is your film getting among francophones?" When I told him that the film had met with a wall of silence, he replied, "I'm not surprised. The story you told does not fit with the current political climate. But it is important and needs to be discussed publicly. Stick with it."

Charest knew from his own hard-won experience that the current political climate always changes, then new narratives can emerge.

▾▾▾

Denys Arcand is one of Quebec's most celebrated filmmakers, as well as being a satirist and provocateur. I met Arcand in the early 90s after a Centaur Theatre production of Brad Frazer's play *Love and Human Remains* that Arcand subsequently made into a film, in English. In 2015, Arcand and I chatted briefly during a reception when we were both appointed compagnons dans l'Ordre des arts et des lettres du Québec.[132] He is an amusing raconteur, equally at home on both sides of the camera.

Arcand had been in my thoughts for some time. When I began touring my film in the Lower Laurentians, I revisited John Walker's 2016 documentary *Quebec, My Country, Mon Pays*. Walker had interviewed Arcand, a filmmaker he admired, to talk about his theme of the Quiet Revolution. Arcand chose to represent the views of Quebec nationalists with a couple of highly provocative quotes, which I pondered as I toured my film. I ended up thinking of Arcand's quotes as koans that offered enlightenment to the truth seeker who has the wisdom to see beyond mere reason.

Denys Arcand quote #1: "You have to understand there's absolutely no relationship between French Canadians and English Canada… to this day. So, it's a community they don't know, and they don't care about them. The fact that 500,000 young English Canadians — Jewish and other immigrants — left Quebec in those years from 70 to 90 is irrelevant

[132] *Companions in the Order of Arts and Letters of Quebec. In the Conseil des arts et des lettres Quebec (better known as CALQ) group photo on their website listing the appointments, I am standing, beardless, between Denys Arcand and Luc Plamondon.*

to French Canadians, except for the fact that they might have bought a house in Westmount that was cheaper because some people left."

Denys Arcand quote #2: "If you are an English speaker in Quebec, you belong to the immense majority of English speakers in North America. To Quebecers, the others are all speaking English, from Texas to BC to New Mexico. It's all a vast bunch of people out to get our skin. So we're reacting and we don't make any differences. I mean, of course, in reality if you are from a Scottish family living in Quebec you don't consider yourself belonging to the same community as people living in Washington State. They're totally different from you. We don't see it that way. You all speak English, so what do we care? You want to get us!"

In the mouth of a nationalist politician, these words would be disturbing for their stunning ignorance. As trash-talk banter in a pub, they could be amusing because they are such an absurd caricature of know-nothing nationalism. But why did Arcand choose these words to explain Quebec nationalism in a film that would be seen around the world? Was he lambasting imperialist anglais who are the objects of Quebec nationalism? Or was he sticking it to nationalists eternally oppressed by the Conquest, anglais bosses and other foreign enemies who conspire in a Quebec-bashing cabal?

At one level, ranting about the omnipotent, omnimalevolent anglais is crazy talk but the image of a united global adversary "out to get Quebec" also conveys a profoundly real and ever-present fear. I came to believe that Arcand had expressed the deepest dread of Québécois nationalism in a brilliant koan that conveys a higher truth. Unfortunately for me, that higher truth remained impenetrable. I needed some help to interpret it, so I tracked down filmmaker John Walker.

John retained vivid memories of filming the interview with Arcand. He and I spoke about Quebec's history and politics, the alienation John felt as a young man that drove him out of Quebec and the sense of loss he has never been able to shake.

"What do you think Denys Arcand was saying? Was he being serious or pulling your leg?"

"I don't think he was joking," John replied. "He was being brutally honest. At the time, it was somewhat painful to hear; however, it was

a generalization. But let's face it, people are generally motived by self-interest."

I told John that Arcand's quotes had been haunting me because it mirrored anti-anglais commentary surging in the French-language media since the CAQ began re-litigating Quebec's language battles. The new nationalist rhetoric is not overtly hostile. It is subtle and almost playful, mocking the predictable lamentations of the "best-treated minority in the world" as Bill 96 incrementally curtails their privileges. Germans call this emotion schadenfreude. In Quebec it could be described as smirking indifference. This was the quality Arcand exuded in John's documentary while glibly dismissing the departure of Anglos as irrelevant to francophones-de-souche.

I said to John, "Arcand appears to be saying, 'We don't hate you but we don't give a damn what happens to you either!' What I see is smirking indifference. He is taunting Anglos but there is a serious edge."

"Denys's films are about the foibles of the human condition. He's not afraid to be critical of Quebecois society and has annoyed some of Quebec's critics when he does. So I see his comments in my film as a double-edged sword."

Walker did not want to criticize Arcand, who said what he said, and it meant what it meant. Like a koan. Only the enlightened can grasp the higher truths it conveys, and conceals.

During this journey, I have glimpsed a couple of lower truths that encapsulate life in Quebec for outlanders: If you have to ask if you belong here, you don't. And if you pack your bags and bid adieu to la belle province, you will not be missed.

Epilogue:

Old Fears, New Leaders and the Trauma of Conquest

If we cannot agree on what happened in the past, it would be foolish to make predictions about the future. Nonetheless, I propose a thought experiment that takes us back to the summer of 1759. The British Empire is preparing to drive the French Empire out of the St. Lawrence Valley. They have brutally deported the French colonists from Acadia. British naval superiority makes the conquest of Quebec City inevitable, until a messenger arrives from London to announce that Scots are invading England from the north, Irish from the west, a Spanish Armada from the south and Vikings from the east. King George orders Wolfe to return immediately to defend the homeland.

Voilà the thought experiment: The British Army decamps without conquering Nouvelle France. The 70,000 settlers living along the banks of the St. Lawrence are spared the ravages of war and the trauma of the Conquest.

What happens next in Nouvelle France? Nothing significant until the New England colonies to the south prepare to declare their independence from Great Britain. Benjamin Franklin travels north to invite the French colony to join the American experiment in democracy. Is there any reason to imagine that independent Nouvelle France would risk assimilation in the New England alliance to become one of the united states in this altered scenario? It seems unlikely.

All continues peacefully in Nouvelle France until peasants in the mother country decide to throw out the ancien régime, including the oppressive priesthood. *Men will not be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest! Vivre la France libre! Vive la laïcité!* Is there any reason to imagine that Nouvelle France would turn against its own brothers and sisters in the Church to join the bloody European revolution? It seems unlikely.

Things remain quiet along the St. Lawrence. Very quiet. Greater numbers of colonists leave than arrive in the colony that is still a feudal society. The seigneurs have little capital or ambition. Seasons pass, crops are sown and harvests reaped. The inhabitants remain faithful to their

creed. *We are a race that will not die. We must remain witnesses in the land of our ancestors. In the land of Nouvelle France, nothing must die and nothing must change.*

The rapidly growing American colonies to the south look to the unfarmed lands of the eastern hill country of Nouvelle France and begin to take possession. Who is going to stop them? By the 1820s, Americans look to the vast uncut forests in the Ottawa Valley and drive millions of logs down the rivers. Sons of the St. Lawrence Valley seek employment as lumberjacks. They battle with the Irish over worst and second-worst wages.

Meanwhile farms in Nouvelle France are becoming overpopulated. By the 1850s, young nouveaux français who are ambitious, or desperately poor, flood across the southern border to New England textile mills. Some save their money and return. Most don't.

In the 1900s, foreign capitalists begin to invest in Nouvelle France's natural resources: copper and gold mines, pulp and paper, iron and steel smelting, aluminum refining. The economy booms. The youth of Nouvelle France can work in their homeland but the capitalists speak foreign languages — mostly English — and reap most of the profits.

Two hundred years after the non-conquest, Nouvelle France becomes angry about foreign exploitation. It is time to become *Maîtres chez nous*. Mobs march through the streets chanting, « La Nouvelle France aux Nouveaux Français! »[133] The plucky underdogs begin to nationalize foreign investments and create their own financial institutions to lay the foundation for Nouvelle France Inc. Many foreign capitalists leave and legions of foreign workers pack their bags and follow. They will not be missed. Les nouveaux français can snap up abandoned cottages in Ouest-Montagne for a chanson.

Nouvelle France abandons religion two centuries after the secularization of Old France and becomes a born-again société laïque, where few mother-tongue munchkins are born. This is a serious problem. The economy needs workers. Most foreign workers speak foreign languages, particularly English, which has become the global lingua

133 *"New France for the New French!"*

franca. Immigrants insist on speaking two or three languages. La toile mondiale[134] seduces the mother-tongue munchkins of Nouvelle France and they want to learn English to participate in the global conversation. This is a problem. A very serious problem.

This thought experiment suggests that an unconquered Nouvelle France would not differ significantly from the Quebec we know today because external forces would not have changed. It also suggests that a future independent Quebec will not differ in any extraordinary way, because the surrounding world will remain unchanged. The only way for Quebec to be free of these powerful, foreign influences would be to expel foreigners, close the borders and switch off the internet. This is an improbable scenario. Are Quebec's frustrations eternal and inescapable? Eternal, yes. Inescapable? Before attempting to predict the future, let us consider some recent historical milestones.

The Pierre-Joseph-Olivier Chauveau government (1867 – 1873) established the pattern of elite accommodation between anglophones and francophones in Quebec politics that lasted, despite some periods of difficulty, for a hundred years. In 1897, *The Montreal Star* alleged that the office of provincial treasurer belonged "by right" to an English-speaking Protestant (Garth Stevenson, Community Besieged: The Anglophone Minority and the Politics of Quebec (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999) p. 38).

Quebec's francophone majority in the 1930s was chronically undereducated, impoverished and extremely religious. American anthropologists came to study the "primitive" culture. People still alive can remember rural communities and urban slums unimaginable to youth born in the twenty-first century. Religion and isolation lay at the heart of deep divisions in the 1930s, in addition to the trauma of the Conquest and the dominance of English speakers.

As late as 1930, then-Premier Louis-Alexandre Taschereau referred to the Quebec tradition of confiding the treasury portfolio to an anglophone.[135] In 1936, Martin Fisher of Huntingdon was treasurer for Maurice

[134] *The World Wide Web.*

[135] *Jean Hamelin and Louise Beaudoin, « Les cabinets provinciaux, 1867 – 1967 », Recherches sociographiques, vol. 8, no. 3, 1967, pp. 299 – 317.*

Duplessis, who had particularly close relationships with Quebec's Anglo elite during his second period in office (1945 – 1959).

Duplessis's two greatest allies among the English elite were John Bassett, president of *The Montreal Gazette*, and John Wilson McConnell, the wealthiest and most influential industrialist in Canada and proprietor of the *Montreal Star* and the *Montreal Herald*. In *Render Unto Caesar: The Life and Legacy of Maurice Duplessis* (1998), Conrad Black writes, "With McConnell and Bassett running interference for him, Duplessis enjoyed good relations with the most influential elements of the English business community" (p. 427). Black claims further that:

> Often he [Duplessis] would say, reassuringly, when asked about a political question by an anglophone businessman, "I'll take care of that. Don't worry about it." In this way, the English community felt that they need not concern themselves with the 80 per cent French majority around them. Duplessis, as always, would settle everything. (p. 427)

It didn't matter that most of Duplessis's voters distrusted foreign capitalists or that most English speakers distrusted Duplessis's nationalism; Quebec's ruling elites enjoyed warm personal friendships and co-managed their respective spheres of influence.

Lesage's Liberal government was progressive but more actively nationalist than Duplessis's regime. The Quiet Revolution redefined the role of English speakers and foreigners in Quebec. In 1963, Lesage told Eric Kierans, "All my minsters are French. It means they are all spenders. I need someone to collect money!" Lesage appointed Kierans as minister of revenue (Stevenson, p. 77). In 1963, English speakers still had access to bankers, banks and money unavailable to francophones. Economic partnership with Anglo elites enabled the government to finance capital investments.

Lesage, Lévesque and their *équipe du tonnerre* dared to do something truly revolutionary: nationalize electricity. In his autobiography, Lévesque describes a scene that took place in a West Island home where he explained his electricity nationalization plans to a group of powerful Anglo businessmen. One man, "whose voice betrayed several whiskies," dismissed the plan as naive: "But Lévesque, how can people like you

imagine you can run Shawinigan Water and Power?" Lévesque was outraged but emboldened to pursue the nationalization scheme. [136]

Jean Lesage and the Quiet Revolution (MacMillan of Canada, 1984), Dale Thompson's biography of Lesage, provides additional perspective on the Shawinigan Water and Power adventure and the battle with Montreal's Anglo elite:

> Lévesque spoke before the Canadian Club of Montreal. The time of the "Negro kings" was over, he told a mostly English-speaking audience. … In *Le Devoir*, Gérard Filion observed later that "it took courage to tell the cream of Anglo-Saxon businessmen in Montreal that French Canadians are fed up with their economic inferiority, and that they are counting on the government of Quebec to correct the situation." Lévesque, like David challenging Goliath, continued to grow more popular. (p. 304)

The bios of Lesage and Lévesque portray the multi-fronted battle they fought against Anglo financiers and the timidity of their own backbenchers, who retained the old belief that increased regulation was wiser, and safer, than nationalization. Lesage's Liberals also had to win over the Church and la Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste, which did not want French Catholics getting involved in business and feared that nationalization of hydroelectricity was a first step toward communism.

A well-connected Westmount capitalist in 1960 could raise $100 million for a new business venture more easily than the government of Quebec. If we understand the multiple obstacles that prevented Quebec governments from taking control of their finances, we can appreciate the ruthlessness with which Lévesque raised the money to nationalize electricity. Thompson writes that "Lévesque ordered his staff not to use the usual financial syndicates based in Montreal, mainly of the Bank of Montreal and A.A. Ames & Company, but to raise the necessary $200 million through a New York group including Halsey Stuart and Chase Manhattan" (p. 306). Money and the struggle for power lay at the heart of Quebec's deep divisions in 1960s.

By the 1990s, national affirmation for Quebec had been centre stage

[136] *Lévesque, Lévesque: attendez que je me rappelle…, Quebec/Amerique, 1986, p. 245.*

from the failed first referendum (1980) through the failed Meech Lake Accord (1987) to the failed Charlottetown Accord (1992). The 1995 referendum was the culmination of a generation's work to educate and motivate voters to support independence. Conditions appeared optimal for the yes vote to prevail. The razor-thin decision on the night of the referendum was heart-breaking for indépendantistes.

The 2020s are very different from the affirmative 1990s, the tentative 1960s and the parochial 1930s. This is particularly true for Quebec's English-speaking minority. In the 1930s, English speakers benefitted from powerful elites. Anglos were more likely than francophones to be owners and leaders of corporations and most middle managers were English speakers. Even the larger number of English-speaking toilers benefitted by working, mostly, in their mother tongue.

By the 1960s, Quebec was undergoing a revolution that profoundly impacted English speakers at every social level, from the captains of industry to blue-collar labourers. In *The English Fact* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1980), Sheila McLeod Arnopoulos and Dominique Clift documented the power shift among the Anglo elite that had controlled the economy and exerted strong influence on governments:

> The social planning and centralized control which became part of the norm of French society after the Quiet Revolution were so alien to the English community that it saw these developments as basically hostile to its way of life and its business-oriented culture. Understandably, the condescension that was formerly displayed towards the French gave way to distrust and fear. (p. 105)

The Anglo elite had managed its affairs discreetly, in private clubs and private enclaves, behind closed doors. They applied the same management style to community matters:

> A very secretive atmosphere prevailed in the administration of many public institutions such as McGill, the PSBGM [Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal] and the City of Westmount. The elites that had taken charge of them resorted to the same practices that prevailed in the business world. The services provided were efficient and enlightened, so much so that the English hospitals and universities attracted a substantial number

> of French-speaking people. But the management of these institutions was resolutely authoritarian; it excluded taxpayers-at-large and service-users, as well as staff, from any say in policy. (p. 105 – 106)

In the 1990s, the English-speaking community was discouraged or departing, as portrayed in William Weintraub's 1993 film *The Rise and Fall of English Montreal*. William Johnson wrote *Anglophobie made in Quebec* in 1991 and became the Angryphone president of Alliance Quebec in 1998. Reed Scowen was feeling feisty when he published *A Different Vision* in 1991 but defeated when he published *Time to Say Goodbye* in 1999.

I remember the 1990s as a period of post-referendum pragmatism, when Quebecers worked together across linguistic and ethnic lines to recover from decades of economic stagnation and tribal antagonism. I was not yet living in Quebec in the 1960s but the world recorded in history books is almost irreconcilable with the world I encountered twenty years later.

Arnopoulos and Clift state repeatedly that the English are "heavily concentrated in occupations associated with business" (p. 85). In a brief presented to the Gendron Commission in 1969, the English elite of Montreal expressed their strong attachment to the idea of the well-defined English and French domains: "The French Canadian heritage will continue to find expression through the arts, through literature, through theatre and mores of the people" while the anglophone minority will "assure that Quebec… will be part of the economic, industrial and cultural life of North America" (p. 86).

Many of my friends work in the arts, literature and theatre. In 2011, the Department of Canadian Heritage analyzed the census data and discovered a higher percentage of artists among English speakers in Quebec than among French speakers in Quebec or English speakers in the rest of Canada. My non-artist friends were teachers, journalists, lawyers, historians, health care workers, engineers and entrepreneurs. However, as I read about the old elite, I became aware that several people I knew who grew up in Quebec were children of executives in major corporations but they had not followed in their ancestors' footsteps. Something had changed.

Arnopoulos and Clift provided a clue. At the end of their book, they describe the emergence of a new form of Anglo leadership in the 1980s with the creation of Alliance Quebec. Eric Maldoff, the founding president, was still alive and well, so I decided to contact him and ask for his thoughts about the Anglo community's remarkable, albeit mysterious, transformation from the Quiet Revolution until today.

As I composed the email for Eric, I wondered if he would reply. A few years earlier we were both board members of the Quebec Community Groups Network, the organization that took the place of Alliance Quebec. QCGN had been in the throes of a bitter dispute over leadership and representation, and Eric and I found ourselves on opposite sides of the conflict, which culminated in half of QCGN's board leaving, along with a third of its members.

Eric Maldoff replied rapidly and said he would be happy to speak to me. There were no hard feelings about the QCGN uprising. We had both been fighting for what we believed were the best interests of the community. He told me he subsequently enjoyed my documentaries about Quebec's Anglo communities that played on the gym TV while he was working out. I explained the mystery I was trying to resolve and he told me a story that began at the tipping-point period of the late 70s and early 80s.

He had just graduated law school when the PQ was elected. I had heard over the years that the election of the PQ left English-speaking leaders stunned and isolated. Few of them spoke French fluently and they were capitalists, familiar with making discreet deals in private clubs. The old elite was totally ill-equipped to debate policy in public en français with progressives and "radicals." The Anglo elites had strong connections with the Quebec Liberal Party and a working relationship with the Union Nationale. They had no connections with the upstart Parti Québécois.

Eric and his friends were shocked that the English-speaking leadership had been blindsided by the 1976 election. How could the millionaire businessmen, who should receive first-rate intelligence, not have been prepared? The young professionals saw that the old elite had no influence over the new government, so they decided it was time for them to step up. They were young. They could speak French. They wanted to

know their francophone peers and be actively involved in the modernization of Quebec, so they formed a group called Participation Quebec. Eric was the VP external relations. His friend Michael Prupas was the president.

As Eric spoke, I remembered a book I had bought shortly after graduating from the National Theatre School, while I was trying to understand Quebec politics. After the call with Eric, I located my copy of Gerald Clark's *Montreal: The New Cité* (McClelland and Stewart, 1982). Clark had also been trying to make sense of the rapidly shifting politics and had interviewed dozens of Quebecers, English and French, young and old. I found the book enlightening when I had first read it as a complete outsider. Forty years later, it was enlightening in a different way and I was surprised by how many of the people Clark interviewed I had encountered over the years.

Michael Prupas went on to become a major film producer, and in the early days of ELAN, he had shared some of his credibility by sitting its advisory board. When Clark investigated Participation Quebec,

> Betty Palik, a freelance journalist, and her husband, Michael Prupas, a lawyer, were in their late 20s when the Parti Québécois election sweep stunned the anglophone community and set off fresh departures. At that point there was no language legislation to disturb the couple, no heavy talk of referendum. So their attitude was not one of hostility towards the Parti Québécois; instead, concern was directed at the negativism of the anglophones. Accordingly, they invited a score of friends to their home with the intention "to allay panic by saying the Anglophone community could adapt." After three or four casual sessions the group decided to hire a hall, and that was how Participation Quebec (which drew 250 members, mostly in the age bracket nineteen to thirty-five and from the professions of medicine, law and education, with some businessmen), came into existence. (p. 220)

Eric Maldoff, as VP external affairs of Participation Quebec, travelled around the province meeting regional groups, inviting them to join a broader coalition that would become the Council of Quebec Minorities (CQM) from 1979 – 1982.

Eric and his young collaborators elaborated a set of foundational rights: to receive education and health services in English and for community institutions to be managed by the people they served. CQM organizers deliberately modelled their new organization on the grassroots success of the Parti Québécois. They collected data to identify existing community resources and community needs and they studied the impact of Bill 101. After three years, the CQM had collected better data than anyone else and had gained community-wide support. Their process was representative, democratic and very public. Thousands of people filled out coupons to become members and the CQM became darlings of the media, English and French.

By 1982 a broad Anglo coalition was forming. Initially called the Alliance of English-speaking Quebecers, the new organization simplified its name to Alliance Quebec. As the date of the founding convention approached, Eric and his executive committee were invited to meet René Lévesque, leader of the PQ, and Claude Ryan, leader of the Quebec Liberal Party. Lévesque was impressed. He said, "If your convention works out, I'll see you again."

Two months later, in May 1982, Alliance Quebec held its founding convention, designed to look like a PQ convention, complete with voting cards and policy books. Instead of the ballroom at the Ritz Hotel, the traditional meeting place for the Anglo elite, they rented the gym at Loyola Campus. A new organization was born, and Eric, though he didn't seek to be frontman, was elected its new leader. René Lévesque met with the young president in a media mob scene. It appeared that a new generation of leaders had emerged from the Anglo community and they knew how to collaborate with the PQ. This explains why Clark devoted three pages of his book to the young Eric Maldoff's views:

> We're prepared to see the other point of view. Bill 101 was at first perceived as vindictive — it still may be — but when you relate it to francophone fears about continuity of culture, the challenge becomes: Let us understand why a certain measure has been introduced, so we can bring about changes that will help both main groups in Quebec society. We've learned that the process of understating is important. (p. 224)

Eric and other young professionals devoted years of their lives, as unpaid volunteers, to create a new institution, document the community's needs and advocate for solutions. During the three years that Eric was president, Alliance Quebec was well-connected across English-speaking communities and funded from a variety of public and private sources, including corporate leaders who wanted to encourage the new generation.

As Eric spoke to me, I wished I had understood what Alliance Quebec was trying to accomplish back in the early 80s. I only encountered it in the 90s and it did not match Eric's description. I asked what had changed.

"You remember the fire?"

I did remember there had been a fire in Alliance Quebec's offices in the late 80s but I did not recall the incident as a major inflection point for the English-speaking community. Eric told a story so full of bare-knuckle politics and high-level intrigue that it will make a page-turning thriller when he finds time to write his memoires, so I will leave the details of that story for him to reveal in the manner he desires.

Officially, no one knows who set the Alliance Quebec fire in 1988, or why. Sûreté du Québec (SQ) had set up a covert surveillance operation across the street from Alliance Quebec's offices on Crescent Street. The SQ surveillance team saw Alliance Quebec's president Royal Orr enter the offices but did not see him leave and they did not see anyone else enter the building. The SQ immediately made that information public, implying that the president of Alliance Quebec had destroyed his organization's offices.

The authorities did not offer an explanation for this debilitating act of self-harm, which annihilated the priceless community information collected for a decade. It is hard to imagine, in an era when data has multiple back-ups in multiple locations, that unique paper records stored in filing cabinets could be totally destroyed. Therefore, it is impossible to imagine the terrible sense of loss and irreplaceability that followed.

The young team that had worked so hard to mobilize the English-speaking community — from Participation Quebec and the CQM to Alliance Quebec — was devastated by the fire and then overwhelmed by a very public scandal and media frenzy. "Royal was besieged by mobs

of media camping on the front lawn of his home in the Townships," Eric said. Royal Orr sued *Le journal de Montréal* and *Télé-Métropole* for falsely accusing him of setting the blaze. The lawsuit was eventually settled out of court.

Who had the greatest interest in destroying Alliance Quebec's offices and its records? The fire took place in December 1988, the same month in which Canada's Supreme Court rendered an incendiary judgement about Bill 178 and bilingual signs.

If you don't remember Bill 178, here is a thumbnail sketch. Part of Bill 101 had imposed unilingual French signs. A group of Quebec retailers challenged the law prohibiting the use of English advertising on outdoor signs and the case eventually went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. The Ford v. Quebec case did not question Quebec's right to impose French or the primacy of French on signs. Canada's Supreme Court simply agreed with the Quebec Court of Appeal that freedom of expression under the Canadian and Quebec charters of rights included the right to advertise in the language of one's choice. Outlawing English on signs was not a reasonable prohibition. In 1988, the reasonable right to bilingual signs was an explosive issue.

In *Community Besieged*, Garth Stevenson provides further insight:

> Nationalists responded with predictable denunciations of the Supreme Court of Canada. The rhetorical nadir of the language debate was perhaps reached when Paul Rose, who had been paroled after serving eleven years of a life sentence for his part in the kidnapping and murder of Labour Minister Pierre Laporte during the October Crisis, described the Supreme Court's decision as "very extremist." (p. 190)

Prior to the decision, Bourassa had made irreconcilable promises to the French-speaking and English-speaking wings of his party. The Supreme Court of Canada forced him choose which promises he would keep. Within a few days of the decision, Bourassa's Liberal Party, which had formerly supported the right to display signs in languages other than French, passed Bill 178, which affirmed Bill 101's requirement for commercial signs be in French only. Because this law had already been judged to violate the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and

Quebec's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, Bourassa invoked the notwithstanding clause that had become part of Canada's constitutional law after the repatriation of the constitution in 1982. Anglo members of the Bourassa government were outraged at the betrayal of their leader who had recently defended bilingual signs. Now he was defying Quebec Court of Appeal and Supreme Court rulings and invoking the notwithstanding clause to override the charter of rights. Three of the four English-speaking members of Bourassa's government resigned in protest. Clifford Lincoln articulated their reasons: "Rights are rights are rights."[137] Neither Lincoln's impassioned statement nor the group resignation of MNAs had any discernable impact.

"Bill 178 thus demonstrated, even more clearly than Bill 22 in 1974 and Bill 101 in 1977," Stevenson writes, "the impotence of the English-speaking community":

> In 1988, anglophones had been well-represented in a cabinet and a caucus formed by the party which they had traditionally supported, their representatives had carried their protest to the point of resignation, and it had made no difference. The point was not lost on English-speaking voters, whose fury and frustration knew no bounds. The Liberal Party, as they saw it, had betrayed them by breaking its promise and adopting legislation which from their perspective appeared unnecessary, petty and vindictive. Alliance Quebec had proved ineffective if not irrelevant. The moderate anglophone leadership, which had argued that anglophones could count on the goodwill and moderation of francophones, was discredited. (p. 193-194)

In the next provincial election, francophone voters did not reward the Liberals for taking their side but re-elected the PQ, while many Anglos parked their protest votes with four members of the newly formed Equality Party. The mysterious fire silenced Alliance Quebec at a critical moment. It is impossible to know if Alliance Quebec could have convinced the Liberal Party that Bill 178 would be bad for Quebec's English-speaking communities, for Quebec and for the Liberal Party. After the fire, Quebec

[137] *Quoted in "Bill Tierney: Clifford Lincoln Still a Voice of Vision and Generosity," The Gazette, May 2, 2014.*

English-speaking communities, and their leadership, were divided and increasingly irrelevant. Eric remained supportive of Alliance Quebec's goals but, "It progressively disintegrated into craziness, in my opinion."

Eric helped me understand how the old Anglo leadership of the 1950s had been pushed aside by rapidly changing politics of the 1970s. Many of the old elite left Quebec for more hospitable business environments. Alliance Quebec, after a promising beginning, became marginal and even detrimental to the English-speaking community. Its replacement, the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN), tried to represent the English-speaking community, though few members of the general public were actively involved with the revamped organization[138]. QCGN also attempted to maintain dialogue with the francophone community but the CAQ government pretended it didn't exist.

This is the current reality. English speakers in Quebec watched from the sidelines as the CAQ ruthlessly imposed Bill 96 and MPs in Ottawa renegotiated the Official Languages Act. There was still some truth to Lemieux's preposterous metaphor in the 1960s about a tiny Anglo figure beating up a hulking francophone bonhomme. It had ceased to be true by the 1990s, and in the 2020s, the nationalist delusion that Quebec is still dominated by the all-powerful Anglos of Westmount is nothing but self-serving fantasy.

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I am now ready to predict the future of Quebec with a koan.

If you say to someone, even a total stranger, "I have a problem and I need help," most people will answer, "Tell me about it. I'll see what I can do."

If you say to someone, "I have a problem, and you're it!" you have left no option but conflict, which will never end.

Quebec will determine its own future: cooperating with evolving allies or combatting its eternal enemies.

▼▼▼

I am going to give the final word to Abbé Lionel Groulx. He is easy to villainize but the priest-historian saw the suffering of his people and

[138] *QCGN rebranded itself as TALQ in 2025*

wanted to raise them up, and for that nobody can fault him. In 1939, Canada was preparing for war in Europe. The previous Great War had bitterly divided English Canada and French Canada, particularly over conscription. Groulx was invited to speak to a pan-Canadian youth conference taking place in Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue. Yes, the same town where his great-nephew François Legault would later be born.

Groulx allowed that dialogue was possible between enlightened intellectuals (the elite) but not between the tribal masses. He did not believe the English and French "races," as he called it, had anything whatsoever in common, other than the relationship of conqueror and conquered, but he expressed conditional optimism that some collaboration might be possible based on shared aspirations for a better future:

> A human rapprochement, to some extent possible, between intellectuals, between a few men enamored of humanism and capable of a certain breadth of vision. A chimerical rapprochement between the deep masses of two races too divided by everything that divides men: religion, law, language, culture, philosophy of life, private and public morals. When has a conqueror been seen to withdraw from his conquest, to abdicate his spirit of domination without being forced to do so? Too many examples, as I write these lines, confirm this sad truth. This conclusion will therefore be explained in my letter to the youth gathered at Macdonald College.
>
> If men cannot unite around the same past, the same capital of glory, culture, memories, and suffering, they need, at the very least, some shared aspirations, for example, the ambition to build a great country, and to make it a place where a certain ideal of humanity, justice, well-being, and fraternal collaboration will triumph.[139]

[139] *« Rapprochement humain en quelque mesure possible entre intellectuels, entre quelques hommes épris d'humanisme et capable d'une certaine largeur de vision. Rapprochement chimérique entre les masses profondes de deux races trop divisées par tout ce qui divise les hommes : religion, droit, langue, culture, philosophie de vie, mœurs privées et publiques. Quand a-t-on vu un conquérant se retirer de sa conquête, abdiquer son esprit de domination sans y être forcé? Trop d'exemples, à l'heure où j'écris ces lignes, confirment cette triste vérité. On s'expliquera donc cette conclusion en ma lettre*

No wiser words could be written. But the historian in Groulx knew that words only have the meaning we give them, based on what we agree to remember, and what we choose to forget.

aux jeunes congressistes du Collège McDonald [sic].
« Si les hommes ne peuvent se grouper autour d'un même passé, d'un même capital de gloire, de culture, de souvenirs, de souffrances, il leur faut, à tout le moins, quelques aspirations communes, et, par exemple, l'ambition de constituer un grand pays, d'y faire triompher un certain idéal d'humanité, de justice, de bien-être, de collaboration fraternelle ». Groulx, Mes Mémoires, vol. 7.