

Quebec's Secondary III & IV History Curriculum: In Need of Change

In the Spring of 2016 Quebec's Liberal Government announced it would be implementing a reform to the province's Secondary III and IV History curriculum that had been initiated by the previous PQ Government. Ostensibly this reform was intended to address what was widely recognized as a structural problem with the program that many felt was causing undue confusion for students: namely the thematic rather than chronological approach of the current Secondary IV program. However, thanks to lobbying efforts of *La Coalition pour l'histoire* – an organization founded and financed by some of the most conservative elements of Quebec's nationalist movement – this reform came to be about far more than changes to the program's structure. It became about changing the content of the course to reflect the narrow ideological views of *La Coalition pour l'histoire* and its supporters.

What We Are Asking For

- **First and foremost, we want a curriculum whose content acknowledges the complexity and diversity of Quebec society and challenges students to develop critical thinking skills in examining historical events.** A curriculum that seeks to indoctrinate students with a simplistic ideologically driven narrative is an insult to the intelligence of students and a disservice to society as a whole. To be clear, we are not asking to replace one narrow ideological vision of history with another. This is not about replacing a sovereigntist narrative with a federalist one or a conservative narrative with a liberal one. Conservative nationalist perspectives have a place in the telling of Quebec's history. But they, like other important currents of thought, should be presented as that, perspectives, not the defining narrative.
- **We want a curriculum that addresses Indigenous History as noted in items 62, 63 and 64 of the Calls to Action made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).** The current reform has ignored these recommendations. We also want a curriculum that reflects the current scholarship on Indigenous history which reveals the active role of Indigenous people in shaping North American history in every historical period, rather than portraying them merely as hapless and passive victims of colonization. Achieving these goals will require extensive consultation with Indigenous communities and scholars at every step of the curriculum development process.
- **We want a curriculum that acknowledges the struggles and positive contributions of Quebec's various ethnic minority and local communities.** Students need to learn about the over 4,000 Black and Indigenous people enslaved in Quebec during the French regime, about the struggles against discrimination faced by Jewish, Italian and Greek immigrants during the early waves of immigration, about the more recent efforts to welcome refugees fleeing war and oppression in places like Vietnam, Lebanon, Chile, Haiti or Syria. The history of Quebec's Black community also needs to be integrated into the curriculum rather than leaving it to be taught at the discretion of individual teachers. The current curriculum has completely omitted the historical contributions of its minority communities. No community that has contributed to the development of Quebec society should be rendered invisible or demonized.
- **We want a curriculum that acknowledges the diversity of Quebec's Anglophone community and its positive contributions to Quebec society.** Students need to know that the majority of Quebec Anglophones were not elites living in the Golden Square Mile. Many were working class Irish who suffered untold indignities at the hands of the British merchant class. Some, as in the 1837 rebellions, even worked hand in hand with Francophones resisting British authority. Still others, such as the Anglophone women who participated in the beginnings of Quebec's feminist movement made significant positive contributions to making Quebec a more egalitarian society. The current curriculum reduces Quebec's Anglophone community to a monolithic block of elites intent on impeding the society's progress at every turn.
- **We want a curriculum that acknowledges the important developments in Quebec's history that have been motivated by progressive political values.** Students need to learn about the Parent Report, the resistance to Duplessis led by individuals like Georges-Henri Levesque and institutions like the *Cité Libre* journal and the inclusive nationalism of René Levesque. The current curriculum omits this progressive history and instead offers a very conservative vision of Quebec's history

where, for example, even widely reviled figures like Maurice Duplessis are recast as defenders of Quebec's autonomy.

What We Are Not Asking For

In order for the aim of this statement to be 100% clear and transparent we will outline some things that we are not asking for, so as to avoid any confusion.

- **We are not asking for the 'denationalization' of the program.** References to the Quebec nation and various forms of national consciousness existed in the program prior to this reform and should continue to do so.
- **We are not asking for the program's focus to be anything other than Quebec's Francophone majority.** To say that we want a program that is inclusive of ethnic minorities and Indigenous communities does not mean that we want them to be given equal weight to the Francophone majority.
- In suggesting that the diversity and positive contributions of the Anglophone community be acknowledged, **we are not in any way suggesting that the various negative actions of the British Regime and the English merchant class should be omitted or minimized.**

What We Are Asking of The Government of Quebec

- **We are asking The Government of Quebec to work with school boards and key stakeholders to immediately produce supplemental pedagogical materials.** These would address the most glaring omissions in the new curriculum. The Precisions of Learning curriculum document and Ministry exams would need to be updated to include this material.
- **This would be a stop-gap measure until a process of public consultations could be held that would allow Quebec's various communities to offer their input.** The aim of this consultation would be to develop a new inclusive History curriculum with new textbooks and pedagogical resources for teachers.

Further Reading (in chronological order)

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- Cardin, Jean-François. "[De la supposée «dénationalisation» des programmes d'histoire.](#)" *Le Devoir*. N.p., 11 Mar. 2013. Web. 05 Aug. 2016.
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- Green, Robert. "[Quebec's Rotten History Curriculum Is Fault of Both PQ and Liberals.](#)" *Ricochet*. N.p., 30 Aug. 2016. Web. 20 Sept. 2016.

- Nadeau, Jessica. "[Le nouveau cours d'histoire déplaît aux écoles anglophones.](#)" Le Devoir. N.p., 05 Nov. 2016. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

About the Committee That Initiated This Statement

This statement was initiated by the Committee for the Enhancement of the Curriculum of History in Quebec (ComECH-Quebec), an ad hoc committee created by the English Parents' Committees Association (EPCA), Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network (QAHN), the Quebec Federation of Home and School Associations (QFHS), and the Quebec Association of Geography Teachers. The Committee is chaired by Westmount High School teacher Robert Green.