

Perspectives on Separation

Québécois had a wide range of ideas about the appropriate relationship between their province and Canada.

This excerpt is from a 1961 essay, "Why I am a Separatist," by **MARCEL CHAPUT**, a passionate *séparatiste*:

Since I naturally owe my first allegiance to French Canada, before the Dominion, I must ask myself the question: which of two choices will permit French-Canadians to attain the fullest development—Confederation, in which they will forever be a shrinking minority, doomed to subjection?—or the independence of Quebec, their true native land, which will make them masters of their own destiny? . . . To affirm, as some do, that Confederation was freely accepted by the French-Canadians of the time, is to play with words, to distort the meaning of liberty. First of all, the B.N.A. Act was never put to the vote. It was imposed by a decree of parliament at Westminster, and by a majority vote of twenty-six to twenty-two among the Canadian representatives. For Confederation to have been labeled the free choice of the French-Canadians, it would have been necessary to have given them the freedom of choice between Confederation or total sovereignty. And this freedom was not granted, either by the London parliament or by the English-speaking colonies of America.

This excerpt is from a speech made by **PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU** in May 1980, on the eve of a Québec referendum on sovereignty-association:

I was told that no more than two days ago Mr. Lévesque was saying that part of my name was Elliott and, since Elliott was an English name, it was perfectly understandable that I was for the NO side, because, really, you see, I was not as much of a Quebecer as those who are going to vote YES.

That, my dear friends, is what contempt is. It means saying that there are different kinds of Quebecers. It means saying that the Quebecers on the NO side are not as good Quebecers as the others and perhaps they have a drop or two of foreign blood, while the people on the YES side have pure blood in their veins. That is what contempt is and that is the kind of division which builds up within a people, and that is what we are saying NO to.

Of course my name is Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Yes, Elliott was my mother's name. It was the name borne by the Elliots who came to Canada more than two hundred years ago. It is the name of the Elliots who, more than one hundred years ago, settled in Saint-Gabriel de Brandon, where you can still see their graves in the cemetery. That is what the Elliots are. My name is a Québec name, but my name is a Canadian name also . . .

My dear friends, Laurier said something in 1889, nearly one hundred years ago now, and it is worth taking the time to read these lines: "My Countrymen," said Laurier, "are not only those in whose veins runs the blood of France. My countrymen are all those people—no matter what their race or language—whom the fortunes of war, the twists and turns of fate, or their own choice, have brought among us."

. . . [The] world is looking at Canada . . . a country which is composed of the meeting of the two most outstanding cultures of the Western world: the French and the English, added to by all the other cultures coming from every corner of Europe and every corner of the world. And this is what the world is looking at with astonishment, saying: These people think they might split up today when the whole world is interdependent? When Europe is trying to seek some kind of political union? These people in Québec and in Canada want to split it up?

[From the floor: NO]

EXPLORATIONS

1. Paraphrase each speaker's main points. How does an essay differ from a speech in terms of its tone and purpose? How does each man appeal to his audience?

How might the context for Chaput's essay and Trudeau's speech have changed between 1961 and 1980? You will learn more about these changes in the rest of this chapter.