

This brief will examine and respond to only one issue raised by the Quebec Minister of Culture's document entitled *Un nouveau chapitre culturel pour le Québec*. The primary focus will be on the English language, its connection to the English community's identity and to cultural policy in Quebec.

"Language," wrote the Supreme Court of Canada, "is not merely a means or medium of expression; it colours the content and meaning of expression. It is a means by which a people may express its cultural identity. It is also the means by which one expresses one's personal identity and sense of individuality." It is undeniably true that the English language in Quebec, and by necessary extension, the culture of Anglo-Quebecers as a people, have formed an historic component of the province since 1759. English is an official language of the provincial assembly and of the courts of Quebec. English is recognized officially in the education sector. And yet, in *Un nouveau chapitre culturel pour le Québec*, under *Axe 1: L’Affirmation de l’identité culturelle*, there is no mention whatsoever of the English language or of the English-speaking community. In fact, in the entire document, the word *Anglais* appears precisely six times, and never in connection to a culture or a community – and never as part of the cultural policy of the government.

L’Affirmation de l’identité culturelle speaks of the French language and the importance of its protection. It speaks of ethno-cultural diversity and of the necessity to strengthen what is called "intercultural dialogue." It speaks of the native communities, the promotion of their artists and the protection of their patrimony. But the English-speaking community hovers, like an unnamed ghost, over the entire document, never to be spoken of, despite its centuries of existence, its legal recognition, and the incontrovertible contributions of its people. Such oversight is shocking and shameful. How can English-speaking artists and their creations be properly supported if the community from which they emerged is consigned, in a major cultural policy document, to oblivion?

I draw the attention of the Committee to the Preamble to the French Language Services Act of Ontario, adopted in 1985, now a generous generation in the past:

Preamble

Whereas the French language is an historic and honoured language in Ontario and recognized by the Constitution as an official language in Canada; and whereas in Ontario the French language is recognized as an official language in the courts and in education; and whereas the Legislative Assembly recognizes the contribution of the cultural heritage of the French speaking population and wishes to preserve it for future generations; and whereas it is desirable to guarantee the use of the French language in institutions of the Legislature and the Government of Ontario, as provided in this Act....

Can I, a native-born Quebecer, be forgiven the following dream?

Preamble

Whereas the English language is an historic and honoured language in Quebec and recognized by the Constitution as an official language in Canada; and whereas in Quebec the English language is recognized as an official language in the courts and in education; and whereas the National Assembly recognizes the contribution of the cultural heritage of the English speaking population and wishes to preserve it for future generations; and whereas it is desirable to guarantee the use of the English language in institutions of the Legislature and the Government of Quebec, as provided in this Act....

What is it that prevents this government and this province from uttering such generous phrases? Is the status of the French language so threatened, so precarious as to obviate such generosity? Stated differently, is the status of the French language so threatened, so precarious that the English-speaking community must be written out of Quebec's cultural policy?

Resumé

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About The Special Committee for Canadian Unity

The Special Committee for Canadian Unity exists to defend before the courts the rights of Canadians who reside in Quebec, whenever those rights are challenged or abrogated by the political adversaries of Canada. The President of The Special Committee is Keith Henderson. He is also the Managing Editor of DC Books.