

**An Analysis of the Assimilation of
French-Canadian Language and Culture
into American Language and Culture:
How French-Canadian
Became Franco-American
and then Became Invisible.**

submitted by

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Table of Contents:

Statement of Problem and Research Question	Page 3
Introduction	Page 4
Part 1: The French-Canadians in 1900	Page 7
Part 2: French-Canadian to Franco-American to Invisible	Page 15
Part 3: The Role of Higher Education	Page 23
Part 4: Discussion	Page 29
Part 5: Praxis	Page 40
Part 6: Conclusions	Page 44
Bibliography	Page 48

Statement of the Problem:

French-Canadian culture and language in the United States have been completely assimilated into American culture and language to the point of becoming invisible.

From 1900, when French-Canadian immigrants formed a large, well defined, homogeneous society to 2000, when French-Canadian immigrants and their descendants were effectively invisible, an assimilation of both the language and culture of the French-Canadians into the popular language and culture of the United States took place. The assimilation occurred on four fronts: economic, social, religious, and educational. The four are intimately intertwined into a complex morass that will be explored and analyzed. From this analysis, the role of higher education institutions will be gleaned.

Research Question:

What was the role of the educational establishment, and specifically the higher education institutions, in this assimilation and quasi-extinction?

The French-Canadians in America created and sustained a system of parochial schools that operated parallel to the public schools throughout the parts of the United States where they settled. In New England, these educational institutions began with elementary schools and extended through college. These schools were popularly supported with tuition revenues being a small part of the overall cost of operating and maintaining the institutions.

The policies of both public and parochial schools affected the survivability of the French-Canadian language and culture. These policies changed markedly over the years,

and the effects of those policies will be examined in light of the economic, social and religious pressures that were occurring concurrently.

Introduction:

To measure the vitality and health of an ethnic identity with a group, one may use three markers: *connubrium*, *commercium*, and *commensalitas*. All three are latin terms and are defined as the following:

Connubrium is the propensity to develop affective ties within the group in question. These affective ties may change over time, and they may contribute little to a body of experience, but they are necessary for identification purposes;

Commercium is the propensity to exchange within the group in question. These exchanges may take the form of goods and/or services; they may also take the form of ideas, knowledge, skills, and/or abilities. Schools and centers of vocational training may be a form of *commercium*; and

Commensalitas is the propensity to socialize within the group. *Commensalitas* deals with questions of how much “quality time” is spent within the group in question, and it is a very important criterion for developing a body of experience that defines the group.

Commensalitas and *commercium* are more important than *connubrium* for measuring vitality and health. In other words, *connubrium* names the group while *commensalitas* and *commercium* measure its pulse and determine its vital signs. This paper will concern itself primarily with these two markers and examples thereof.

In the introduction to his book, How the Irish Became White, Noel Ignatiev (1995) explains what it means to become “white” as follows:

“No biologist has ever been able to provide a satisfactory definition of “race”—that is, a definition that includes all members of a given race and excludes all others. Attempts to give a biological foundation lead to absurdities: parents and children of different races, or the well-known phenomenon that a white woman can give birth to a black child, but a black woman can never give birth to a white child. The only logical conclusion is that people are members of different races because they have been assigned to them.

Outside these labels and the racial oppression that accompanies them, the only race is the human. I’ll be examining connections between concepts of race and acts of oppression. By considering the notion of ‘racial oppression’ in terms of the substantive, the operative element, namely ‘oppression,’ it is possible to avoid the contradictions and howling absurdities that result from attempts to splice genetics and sociology. By examining racial oppression as a particular system of oppression—like gender oppression or class oppression or national oppression—we find further footing for analyzing the peculiar function of the ‘white race.’ The hallmark of racial oppression is the reduction of all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class within the dominant group. It follows, therefore, that the white race consists of those who partake the privileges of the white skin in this society. Its most wretched members share a status higher, in certain respects, than that of the most exalted persons excluded from it.”

Using Ignatiev’s terms, I believe the French-Canadians were seeking, as a group, to become “white” without becoming American, where American is used to mean English-speaking, Protestant (or acceptable to mainstream Protestants), citizens of the United States. They were “white” when they were in Quebec, but they were not “white” outside of Quebec in Canada (Roby, 1990; Wade, 1955). When they decided to settle within the United States, they sought to recreate their Quebec existence. I am examining only New England in this paper because 70 percent or more of the immigration was concentrated in the New England region. Although the number of immigrants to regions beyond New England (over 200,000 between 1860 and 1900 according to Roby (1990)), the geographic dispersion made *commercium* and *commensalitas* much more difficult and the pressures for assimilation more intense. The attempt at recreating their Canadian lifestyle in America was called *la survivance*, or survival. It was really a cultural survival because they were seeking to create “little Quebecs” throughout New

England. Most historians incorrectly label these communities as “little Canadas.” Since outside of Quebec, in Canada, they were not accepted as “white,” French-Canadian immigrants were referring to Quebec and French-Canada when they spoke of Canada. In their minds, English-Canada was a foreign land where they were not welcome (Roby, 1990).

It seems to me that when the late-Nineteenth Century wave of French-Canadian immigrants to the United States occurred, those settlers attempted to recreate the relatively privileged existence they enjoyed in Quebec in the United States without accepting English as a first language, and without becoming *WASPs* (White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants). They were repulsed by the example of the Irish who, in the eyes of the French-Canadians, had sold their souls to the English to be accepted economically.

The role of women in French-Canadian immigrant society will not be examined, except superficially, in this paper, but it struck me as noteworthy that women were the invisible backbone of French-Canadian society in America. My observations point to women being the founders and operators of the schools, the hospitals and the social service organizations. Men held titular posts but women held much power at the microeconomic level and the institutional level. This deserves a separate study.

It has been my personal experience that French-Canadian women maintained the family purse and the family records; they were the family bankers and custodians of vital records, and they tended to be more literate than the men, especially in the rural areas. In the few examples that I have observed of French-Canadian men maintaining control of the family funds and record-keeping, they were regarded within the community as overbearing and unreasonable. Their wives were pitied by the other women for having

married such ignorant men. I am not aware of this cultural norm among other ethnic groups that I have observed, and I think it merits study. This paper compares the changes that occurred between 1900 and 2000, and examines how those changes came about.

Part 1: The French-Canadians in 1900:

The French in New England began their history with the settlement on an island in the St. Croix River in June of 1604. From there, they explored south to present day Boston and north to present day Nova Scotia. They formed a permanent settlement in Port Royal, on the north shore of Nova Scotia. The area in question was known as La Cadie and is now referred to as Acadia; it officially encompassed the land between Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Halifax, Nova Scotia. The original explorers were nominally Catholic but were really Protestant Huguenot who changed their religion for political reasons (Rolde, 1990). For the most part, they were seeking to make their fortune in the newly discovered world. Later immigrants, who populated both Acadia and Quebec, were mostly pious Catholics, working class poor who were seeking economic opportunity and a peaceful place to raise families (Roby, 1990; Wade, 1955).

The French established usually cordial relations with the native Americans, and soon began to compete economically with British colonists who predominated to the south. The Acadians established trading routes across Maine to Quebec, and were a major economic force from the Maine coast, across northern New England, and throughout the Canadian Maritime Provinces and parts of southeastern Quebec (Rolde, 1990). Later settlers were primarily fishermen, farmers, and their families. As was the case throughout North America, the French settlers tended to coexist peacefully with the local Indians,

and there were many cases of intermarriage between the two groups (Roby, 1990; Wade, 1955).

This coexistence with the Indians was in marked contrast to the behavior and attitude of the British settlers to the south. The Puritans in Massachusetts tended to see the Indians as savages who were to be exploited or conquered. The French in North America saw themselves as missionaries who were bringing salvation to their Indian brothers and sisters. This religious attitude was not present among the earliest explorers, but it was strong among the waves of immigration that followed. The immigrants that followed the initial exploration were mostly pragmatic, rural people who were seeking a new home where they could live comfortably in peace with their neighbors. For the most part, the French immigrants viewed the Indians as neighbors. The French settlers were predominantly conservative, rural Catholics who were advocates of strong family ties and values having migrated to North America during a period of Catholic reaction against secularism and of religious revival in France (Doty, 1985; Roby, 1990; Rolde, 1990).

From these early origins, the French in New England dispersed throughout the northeastern regions of the United States, but they tended to live in very small groups. In the post-Revolutionary War period in America, there were approximately 60,000 people of French-Canadian origin located within the United States. Almost all were located in the northern states with most in New England. By the time of the mid 1800s, except for a few centers of French-Canadian population like Burlington and Winooski, Vermont, Worcester, Massachusetts, and the newly acquired regions of northern Maine, French-Canadians lived in small communities of a few dozen people and blended invisibly into the local landscape (Roby, 1990). Bad economic times and political oppression in

Canada forced poor, working class, French-Canadian people to emigrate to the mills of New England as migrant workers. They followed the long-established trade routes to Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont (Roby, 1990). This immigration pattern was later extended to Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. A similar migration was occurring all along the St. Lawrence River into New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan (Wade, 1955).

As these migrant workers returned year after year, they brought other family members and began putting down roots. If they were working in towns without a large French population, they found themselves confronted by Protestantism and a strange form of Catholicism, by a strange urban culture, and by problems communicating in a strange language. Earlier French settlers were bilingual and well educated, but the later arrivals tended to be monolingual and poorly educated. They gathered together in tenement houses and ghettos for survival. They formed mutual-support organizations, and they built their own churches. Their church was Roman Catholic, but rather than in English as in the United States, their liturgy was in French and it was imported from Quebec. They looked to the French Archbishop of Montreal as a spiritual leader rather than to the Irish Archbishop of Boston (Paquet, 1913; Roby, 1990; Vedder & Gallaway, 1970; Wade, 1955).

Contrary to the earlier immigrants, the French-Canadians who migrated after the American Civil War were less bilingual, less willing to change their names, and more concerned with maintaining their culture (Roby, 1990; Rowe, 1999). To avoid the melting pot of late Nineteenth Century America, French-Canadians imported nuns and priests from Quebec to educate their children and serve their religious needs. The system

of parochial schools that survives today began in earnest during the period of 1869 to 1901 (Quintal, 1990; Roby, 1990). The French-Canadians built churches and elementary schools. They eventually developed a system of parochial education that extended through high school and, in a few cases, college (Paquet, 1913; Paradis, 1964; Quintal, 1990; Roby, 1990; Wade, 1955).

Their church buildings were noticeably larger and more ornate than the English-speaking Catholic churches. The evidence remains today. If one drives through cities such as Lowell, Massachusetts, Pawtucket, Rhode Island, or Fall River, Massachusetts, for example, one could very easily identify which churches were formerly French parishes and which were always English-speaking parishes. It was as if there existed two different Roman Catholic Churches. In fact, I can vividly recall being admonished as a youth that attending Mass in a non-French Catholic Church did not count as attending Mass. I never set foot in an *eglise irlandaise* until I was in college. Never mind entering a Protestant church, we never even entered non-French Catholic churches.

As an example of the immigration pattern mentioned, consider my own family. Until I began doing genealogical research, I never realized that my father was born in the United States; I had always thought he was Canadian-born. His grandfather, Francois Paule Roy, emigrated from the town of Lister in central Quebec to Connecticut in the late 1800s. There he was required to use the name of Paul King to obtain work. He returned to Drummondville, Quebec; then he emigrated from Quebec to West Warwick, Rhode Island. My grandfather Edmond worked in textile mills in Connecticut, Quebec, and Rhode Island. My father, Gerard, was one of four brothers. The oldest, Edgar was born in

Connecticut; the next, Gildas, was born in Quebec. My father was born in Rhode Island, and his younger brother, Leo, was born in Quebec. I was never told about any of this when I was growing up, but I was admonished to never anglicize my name and to never forget that I was French-Canadian. Quebec and Rhode Island were the only places mentioned; I never knew that Connecticut was ever involved in the family history. Quebec was my homeland, a “promised land”. When a French-Canadian retired, even if he was a born-in-the-U.S. citizen, his dream should be to return to Quebec, the “promised land.”

We were imbued from birth with notions of being proud of being French-Canadian, French-Catholic, Democrat, hard working, and practical (Kerouac, 1950; Kerouac, 1959; Langelier, 1996; Quintal, 1996). I can easily find the roots of my attitudes and behavior in the attitudes and behavior of my people a hundred or two hundred years earlier. For example, my father cautioned me before I started college that if one takes a fool and sends him to school, the result would be an educated fool. He was not calling me a fool, but advising me to use my common sense and maintain perspective while studying new ideas. Also my father repeatedly warned me to never forget where I came from and to never be ashamed of being a French-Canadian or a working man. My entire family was taught to work hard, not to be arrogant, but to be quietly proud. Our guiding principles were duty, honor, hard work and survival.

From 1860 to 1900, the French-Canadian immigrants tended to be poor and uneducated. They were looking to survive economically. They were discouraged by the Canadian government from emigrating to any of the other provinces because of racism (Ignatiev, 1995; Roby, 1990; Vedder & Gallaway, 1970). Mill owners in the United

States welcomed them to counteract the Irish workers who were organizing unions. The migrant French-Canadians were effectively utilized as strike breakers in numerous textile strikes between 1880 and 1900 (Hadcock, 1955). This tended to isolate the French-Canadians from the Irish and other English-speaking working families (Brault, 1986; Ducharme, 1943; Wade, 1955).

The effect of these developments is that at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, French-Canadians in New England were, for the most part, speakers of English as a second language and apartment dwellers who worked in textile mills or related industries. But this trend was not uniform throughout New England (Brault, 1986; Ducharme, 1943). In northern and eastern Maine, earlier immigrants formed a rural underclass, tied to the land and to the woods (Rolde, 1990). They spoke French as a first language and English as a second language. In southern and western Maine, the French-Canadians were mostly groups of immigrant mill workers with few if any skills in English. They were nearly monolingual French speakers (Wade, 1955). This lack of English skills was a source of economic discrimination and social bias (Roby, 1990; Rowe, 1999).

In both groups, the entire family worked to enable the survival of the family. Children were educated in parochial schools by French-Canadian nuns in French, if parochial schools were available. Otherwise, there was a high probability of illiteracy or semi-literacy. When they were old enough to legally work, they took their place in the mill alongside their family members if they lived near a mill (Quintal, 1996). Otherwise, they were usually farmhands, working with their family from the time they could walk. They tended to be fatalistic. They were conservative, having rural traditions in an urban

setting (Langelier, 1996). They were dedicated to their family and their religion. They had an unusually strong dedication to duty, but they also had limited aspirations. They were pragmatic people who learned to survive with minimal formal education. They had historically and constantly been subordinated to strong authorities at home, church, school, and work. They had a sense of powerlessness in the face of powerful outside forces. They were an articulate and witty people, but only in French. To the outside world they appeared passive and meek. They were conditioned to not cause trouble (Langelier, 1996).

Individually, they had become accustomed to being “put down.” They were scolded by their parents for being arrogant. The nuns had taught them that pride was the ultimate sin; they were taught to avoid striving for high places. Humility and hard work were the hallmarks of a good French-Canadian (Langelier, 1996)). At work they were made fun of because of their funny accent and their passivity. Their language was not real French; it was “gutter French”. They had been conditioned to be rural peasants, and now they were living in urban communities, fighting for survival. The most common theme among any stories of the era was survival, *la survivance* (Brault, 1986; Ducharme, 1943; Ham, 1939; Lambert, 1975; Langelier, 1996; Roby, 1990; Wade, 1955). The major influences in their lives were Catholicism, language, dedication to family and duty, and conservatism arising from rural descendants. They were lower class, working poor who were highly innovative and practical. They were proud of what they could do, but they had low aspirations and avoided notice or controversy (Langelier, 1996). They suffered periodic persecution at the hands of nativists and the Ku Klux Klan (Quintal, 1996; Randal, 1965; Rolde, 1990) and other immigrant groups (Hadcock, 1955; Haley, 1936).

The French-Canadians in New England were identified the broad-based immigrant group that was most resistant to cultural assimilation in the United States (Roby, 1990). They were economic and cultural survivors.

As the Twentieth Century began, French-Canadians numbered over 500,000 in New England (Roby, 1990), and over 700,000 throughout the United States (Wade, 1955). They had constructed their own churches, and they had built their own school system. There were seventy five parochial schools (Quintal, 1990). They worked, shopped, studied, and prayed in French. They were segregated into “little Canadas” in every state in New England. They were poor, but beginning to move up the economic ladder (Ducharme, 1943; Roby, 1990). Many were safely established in the middle class. By concentrating on *la survivance*, they were succeeding in America without being assimilated into the great melting pot. They stood apart, humble but proud. They had survived; they had made it their way.

If one were to compare the French-Canadians of 1900 with the Irish in America at that time, one would notice immediately that the French were not yet accepted as American. The Irish had made the transition from outsider to insider (Ignatiev, 1995). The Irish had transcended racism and in the words of Noel Ignatiev “became white.” The French-Canadians were not yet “white;” they were still not accepted into the privileged economic class. Individuals had made the transition, but they were native-born in the United States and usually third generation American. The earlier French-Canadian immigrants had partially blended in with the Irish and other English-speaking minorities, and some of them had managed to become “white” at the same time the Irish were becoming “white” (Ignatiev, 1995; Roby, 1990).

The waves of French-Canadian immigrants from 1860 to 1900, for the most part, did not choose to trade their culture for social and economic acceptance in the United States. In the terms of Ignatiev, they were not willing to elect to become “white.” They stood apart from American privileged society. They were willing to risk social and economic acceptance in order to maintain their culture (Brault, 1986; Ducharme, 1943). They called this *la survivance*, and it was the rallying cry of a nationalist movement that came under attack from nativists and from other competing ethnic groups, the Irish being the most prominent (Roby, 1990). White Protestants controlled society and the economy, and unlike the Irish, the vast majority of the French-Canadians in America in 1900 were unwilling to compromise their culture and assimilate into “white” American society (Roby, 1990).

PART 2: French-Canadian to Franco-American to Invisible.

In the years leading up to World War I, the economies of both Canada and the United States prospered. The prosperity in Canada slowed the flow of immigrants to the United States to a trickle. In the United States, the boom in the textile industry as well as the general economic euphoria opened previously closed job opportunities to the French-Canadian immigrants and their children (Wade, 1955). In cities all over New England, French-Canadians were moving up in economic class, some even making it to the upper reaches of politics and society. For example, in 1909, Aram Pothier was elected governor of the state of Rhode Island. Many were moving out of their tenements in the so-called “little Canadas” and buying homes in the better parts of the cities. A few were able to move outside the cities and live comfortably in a suburban or rural setting (Roby, 1990).

With this relative affluence came greater pressures to assimilate. A serious rift began to develop within the French-Canadian community. Some found they could move ahead economically if they espoused English as a first language. They sent their children to public schools, and those children were taught to read and write only in English. French became a language spoken solely in the home for those people. Others, in the majority, maintained a nationalistic attitude, insisting upon parochial schools educating their children to read and write in French first, then in English as a second language (Roby, 1990).

The demographics of the situation favored assimilation, but it was rigorously contested. The number of French-Canadian children working in textile mills dropped from over 14,000 in 1880 to under 7,000 in 1900. By 1915 they numbered only 5,000. In the southern states, during the same time period, the number of children working in textile mills dropped from a constant 25,000 from 1880 to 1900 to under 5,000 by 1919 (Roby, 1990). The percent of American-born among the French-Canadians rose from 38.4 percent in 1890 to 46.9% in 1900, to 54.7 percent in 1910, to 61.7 percent in 1920, and to 64.4 percent in 1930 (Roby, 1990). There were fewer new arrivals to replace the older immigrants who were moving up the economic ladder. And as they tasted economic success, many questioned the validity of the old ways. Newer immigrant groups such as the Portuguese and the Polish were replacing the French-Canadians at the lower rungs of the economic ladder (Roby, 1990).

Almost to a person, the French-Canadians still belonged to their social organizations such as l'Union Saint Jean Baptiste d'Amerique or le Club Jacques Cartier, but some only spoke French among themselves. In many textile mills, French was

spoken all day; in others, French was spoken only occasionally during breaks because English was the *lingua franca* of the various ethnic immigrant groups (Brault, 1986; Ducharme, 1943). The French-Canadians still had some forty or so newspapers and written publications (Roby, 1990), but these were in various states of decline.

The French-Canadians had begun the Twentieth Century as mostly isolationists, but with the advent of World War I, there were strong patriotic pressures from both sides of the border. In the United States, these patriotic pressures came increasingly from nativist groups (Wade, 1955). The nativists were against the French-Canadian, nationalist, parochial school systems that were ubiquitous in New England (Rolde, 1990). The French-Canadian schools, taught by foreign nuns from Quebec, supported by the French-Canadian parishes, rivaled some public schools in size and quality (Quintal, 1990; Roby, 1990). The nativists disliked the fact that the French-Canadians built massive churches styled on European models and imported foreign-trained priests from Canada (Roby, 1990). These Quebec born and trained priests preached in French and led their congregations in French prayer. These French-Canadian parishes were the spiritual as well as social and cultural centers of the French-Canadian communities (Ducharme, 1943). In many instances, they were also the financial center of the communities; they created credit unions in each parish based on the *caisses-populaires* of Quebec. The issues of language, culture, religion, education, and economic self-determination were all intertwined within the parish (Roby, 1990; Wade, 1955).

During the 1920s, the economy prospered, but the textile mills in the southern part of the United States drained sales away from the New England mills as the southern mills achieved lower labor costs by vigorously resisting unionization (Wade, 1955).

During this period of time, renewed immigration from Quebec, due to the failure of farming in Quebec and anti-French sentiment in the federal government, found large numbers of immigrants streaming into American mill towns (Roby, 1990). Wages in textile mills were approximately 40 percent less in South Carolina than wages in Massachusetts (Roby, 1990). This resulted in pressure on the French-Canadian workers to develop other industrial skills to survive during times of rapid economic change (Roby, 1990). The French-Canadian parochial school system lacked vocational training for men; it had concentrated on training females as nurses and teachers. Men who sought higher education were directed into an academic education that led to the priesthood, classical liberal arts, medicine, or law (Quintal, 1990). This led more French-Canadians into the public schools (Roby, 1990).

When the stock market crashed in 1929 and the Great Depression began, French-Canadian immigrants suffered along with all the other immigrant groups. Inter-group hostility increased, and the Irish often sided, usually out of sight, with the nativists and the Ku Klux Klan when they targeted the French-Canadian foreigners and other limited-English-speakers (Roby, 1990). The oppressive economics of the depression exacerbated the pressures encouraging assimilation and inter-ethnic-group conflict.

During the 1920s, the Bishop of Providence, Rhode Island, Mgr. Hickey wished to establish a strong Catholic, secondary school system in his diocese (Roby, 1990). The French-Canadians maintained a classical high school in Central Falls, called Sacred Heart. It was operated by the Brothers of the Sacred Heart who originated in Quebec. The brothers also operated similar schools in Nashua and in Manchester, New Hampshire (Quintal, 1990). In 1918, in the Precious Blood parish, Woonsocket, Rhode Island, Mgr.

Charles Dauray initiated a fund raising project led by his nephew, Fr. Georges Bedard. In short order, Fr. Bedard raised pledges for over \$100,000, mostly in the immediate parish (Roby, 1990). Mgr. Dauray intended to establish Mount Saint Charles Academy. It was the intention of Mgr. Dauray and his financial backers to establish the academy as a prep-school affiliated with Assumption College in nearby Worcester, Massachusetts. This was a nationalist dream to strengthen the French-Canadian school system K-16 (Daignault, 1935). Elphege-J. Daignault, the head of *l'Association Canado-Americain*, was at the forefront of the nationalist movement (Roby, 1990). With the blessing of Bishop Hickey, the Federation of Franco-American Catholics, a federation of all the important French-Canadian social societies, began a campaign to raise \$500,000 to endow the proposed Academy (Roby, 1990). Because of nationalist fears that Mgr. Hickey would usurp Mount Saint Charles Academy, most French-Canadian nationalists refused to contribute until the question of mission was agreed to publicly by the Bishop Hickey and Mgr. Dauray (Daignault, 1935). Daignault was adamant in his demands that Mount Saint Charles not be an instrument of assimilation; he insisted on a nationalist mission for the new, classical high school. He publicly accused Bishop Hickey of using Mount Saint Charles as a cornerstone for his dream of a strong, statewide, Catholic, secondary school System (Daignault, 1935).

At this time, Sacred Heart Academy in Central Falls was experiencing financial difficulties with part of their school operation. Sacred Heart had boarding students and commuting students. The number of boarding students was declining due to cost pressures. The number of commuting students was stable (Roby, 1990). Daignault accused the bishop of forsaking the brothers in Central Falls in favor of the new academy

in Woonsocket (Daignault, 1935). Woonsocket and Central Falls are separated by only twenty miles or so. Daignault accused the bishop of sabotaging the nativist operation in Central Falls in order to create an assimilative institution in Woonsocket. Bishop Hickey would not answer the charges. The \$500,000 campaign had netted only \$47,500 in a year (Roby, 1990). When Mgr. Dauray received guarantees of \$100,000, Bishop Hickey broadened the campaign to the diocesan level and increased its scope. He also authorized construction of Mount Saint Charles and issued a mortgage from the diocese for the balance of the construction costs (Roby, 1990). Daignault was outraged and openly feuded with the bishop, urging French-Canadians to boycott second collections intended to finance the new schools. Daignault accused the Irish Bishop Hickey of taxing the French-Canadians to build English schools that would replace their French schools (Daignault, 1935). Daignault appealed to the Archbishop of Montreal while Mgr. Hickey appealed to the Archbishop of Boston (Roby, 1990). The conflict eventually made its way to Rome. The Vatican sided with Bishop Hickey. Pressure was put on *l'Association Canado-Americain* to replace Daignault as its leader (Roby, 1990). Daignault and the other nationalist leaders were threatened with excommunication because of their public defiance of the bishop and their encouragement of the collection boycott (Roby, 1990). Daignault controlled a newspaper called *La Sentinelle*. The events were referred to as *l'Affaire Sentinelle*, and the backers of Daignault were referred to as *sentinellistes* (Roby, 1990).

In the end, the *sentinellistes* were portrayed as enemies of the Roman Catholic Church and were excommunicated. Henri Bourassa, a prestigious French-Canadian author and publisher, issued five widely distributed articles condemning Daignault and

his supporters (Bourassa, 1929). The affair was over, but the scars did not heal for decades. The bishop's fund raising campaign was successful; it raised over \$1,000,000 to begin the construction of a series of Catholic, high schools throughout the state of Rhode Island (Roby, 1990). *L'Affaire Sentinelle* was a death knell for the nationalists (Roby, 1990). From that point forward, French-Canadian schools taught French as a second language. With the Vatican siding with the Irish bishop, assimilation became the norm among the French-Canadian nuns (Quintal, 1990). It was only among individual French-Canadian pastors that the old nationalist ideals were upheld (Roby, 1990). As an example from my personal experience, Fr. Mathieu Hebert, the pastor of Saint Cecilia's parish, where I attended elementary and middle schools in the 1950s, in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, was one of the last of the nationalist pastors. My father told me that Fr. Hebert's French-Canadian nationalism prevented him from being named a monsignor. He was my pastor all through my years at St. Cecilia's school. He died in the 1970s.

The combination of the Great Depression and the defeat of the *sentinellistes* sealed the fate of the use of French as a first language (Roby, 1990). But it was not until World War II and its subsequent boom times that French as a viable second language was threatened. By World War II, French-Canadians mostly called themselves Franco-Americans (Brault, 1986). The patriotic pressures forced French-Canadians to prove their "American-ness" (Roby, 1990). New immigrants from Quebec were scarce or non-existent. The war increased the number of women working outside the home. Prior to World War II, the religious orders were the sole source of education for many French-Canadian women. Girls went to a convent to be educated; those who sought higher education had to become nuns (Quintal, 1990). They were trained as nurses, teachers and

social workers, also as administrators and managers of hospitals, schools and social institutions. Over time, these female-only, religious schools became female-only, private schools training for vocational careers in nursing, teaching, and social services (Quintal, 1990). The women had an advantage over the men when it came to training for professional service skills. The men were classically trained to be priests, or to go on to graduate study in medicine or law, but there was little or no training for clerical, business, or engineering skills (Quintal, 1990).

After World War II, with the passage of the G.I. Bill, large numbers of French-Canadian veterans became eligible for admission to college. The federal money that flowed into higher education enabled the education of large numbers of Franco-American men and some Franco-American women. The only problem from a cultural standpoint was that the education was all in English. Even Assumption College changed from being a French liberal arts college to being an English liberal arts college that had a strong French department (Quintal, 1990). The only places where French was still spoken openly were in church and in certain homes and social clubs. Parents spoke to their children in French, and the children responded in English. The children spoke haltingly, if at all, in French. The only constant was in church. Sermons, announcements, and prayers were done completely in French (Brault, 1986).

In 1960, Franco-Americans joined with Catholics all across the United States to revel in the election of John Kennedy as President. They became Catholics first, French-speaking Catholics second. When in the mid 1960s the Second Vatican Council decreed that masses would be said in the vernacular language of the country, English became the language of religion in the United States. In my own case, I never knew any English

prayers by heart. I could read them, but I did not memorize them. When I prayed, I prayed in French. That changed in the 1960s. We reluctantly began to learn prayers in English. Initially, masses were alternated between French and English, but the number of English masses increased and French masses decreased. Today, it is rare to find a French mass anywhere in New England. Today, I consider it a nostalgic treat to visit Quebec City and attend mass in French.

In my personal experience, from the standpoint of both *commercium* and *commensalitas* French-Canadian language and culture is dead throughout New England. Although there are still over 300,000 people in New England who admit to speaking French occasionally in the home, they are dispersed so much that only three cities have concentrations over 10,000. Lewiston Maine, Manchester New Hampshire, and Boston Massachusetts are the three identified in the 1990 U.S. census, but it is only in the first two cities named that the people identified are of French-Canadian descent (Giguere, 1994). Except for a few isolated places like the St. John Valley in northern Maine, it is practically impossible to conduct business or to visit socially completely in French. It is extremely difficult to find families where each and every family member is at ease conversing in French (Quintal, 1996). Even in northern Maine, efforts are being made to restore the French language before it is completely extinct. The efforts of *Le Club Francais* and the French Immersion Program in School Administrative Districts 24 and 33 and in the Madawaska School District are specifically designed to reinvigorate the French language before it dies as it has in other areas of Maine.

Part 3: The Role of Higher Education.

By 1900, there was a widespread, relatively homogeneous, system of parish schools that operated fairly autonomously, educating French-Canadian children from the first grade to the ninth grade. For the few that sought education at the secondary level, a system of classical high schools covering grades ten to twelve existed (Roby, 1990). They taught a classical liberal arts curriculum, and they were designed to prepare male students for higher education as priests or to attend public universities to become doctors or lawyers. The elementary schools consisted of what we now consider elementary and middle school. A grade nine education was considered sufficient for most male students. Female students who wished to study further had to join a convent to receive education as a nurse, teacher, or social service provider (Quintal, 1990). Unless a girl had a wealthy parent or patron, she had few educational opportunities beyond the ninth grade outside of the convents. Vocational training for boys was available through apprenticeships and some public schools (Roby, 1990).

For male and for female French-Canadians, higher educational opportunities were to be found in Quebec City, Montreal, and other cities in Quebec (Roby, 1990). The educational institutions were designed to prepare men as priests for pastoral and/or educational work, and to train women as nuns to operate the schools, hospitals, and social service organizations (Quintal, 1990). It was culturally acceptable for a man to receive an education and decide that he did not have a vocation for the priesthood. He could then go on to a public university to train to be a professional person, such as a doctor, a lawyer, or a professor. For the women, that was not an option culturally. A woman who chose not to be a nun was under great social pressure to find a husband and to have children

(Ducharme, 1943; Langelier, 1996). Single professional women who were not nuns were rare. The few usually came from wealthy families (Roby, 1990).

To offer opportunities for men in New England, Assumption College in Worcester, Massachusetts was founded in 1904 to train French-Canadian men for the priesthood and for professions (Quintal, 1990). The college was initially staffed by three Assumptionist Priests who left France because of persecution due to the Law of Association in 1901 (Quintal, 1990). The college grew quickly despite the restrictions imposed during World War I which required some of the professors and students to serve in the armed forces and all of the students to study military science along with their other studies (Quintal, 1990). The curriculum was modeled after that of colleges in Europe. It consisted of intensive training in the Greek and Latin classics and the liberal arts. What set it apart from other Catholic liberal arts colleges in America was its use of French as a primary language (Quintal, 1990).

Assumption College prospered until the depression (Roby, 1990). Then it suffered along with every other institution of higher education. World War II nearly emptied it of students (Quintal, 1990). The nationalist bent of Assumption College assured it of continued support from the French-Canadian nationalist hardliners through the Great Depression and the 1940s (Roby, 1990). With the conclusion of the war and the passage of the G.I. Bill, the Archbishop of Boston, Mgr. Cushing was anxious to increase Catholic higher educational capacity in New England. He offered to have the Assumptionist fathers operate a new college in northern Massachusetts (this later became Merrimack College). There was a stipulation by the archbishop that Assumption concentrate on assimilation of Franco-Americans in Worcester. Assumption could

continue as a bilingual college, but it would have to place greater emphasis on English instruction (Quintal, 1990).

The rest is history; in 1956, Assumption College officially recognized what had been wrought some ten years earlier. Assumption College changed its mission from being a French-Catholic liberal arts college to being a Catholic liberal arts college, albeit with a strong French department (Quintal, 1990). The assimilation was so complete that they could no longer maintain what was by then a charade of being a Franco-American college.

Throughout the Twentieth Century, French Catholics developed institutions of higher education. Initially higher education meant classical high schools or academies. Later that included two year colleges and four year colleges. Examples include the Brothers of the Sacred Heart and the Marist Fathers and Brothers (Quintal, 1990). For example, in Van Buren, Maine, the Marists established a classical high school and expanded it to include a two year college. Their work concentrated on providing upward mobility for children from poor families (Quintal, 1990). Because of that mission, they tended to favor assimilation over nationalism. Throughout New England, the higher educational opportunities, both public and private, that opened up for lower class French-Canadians were biased toward assimilation (Paradis, 1964; Quintal, 1990).

What has been underestimated in my opinion is the other form of assimilation that occurred in both forms of higher education. As a matter of fact, it was stronger at Assumption College than at most of the other French-catholic colleges (Quintal, 1990). What I am referring to is the elitist attitude among the teachers of French in higher education. Because of the prevailing attitude in France that the French Academy,

l'Academie Francaise, was the ultimate arbiter of what was French, North American French along with all other regional variations of the language were judged to be inferior. I was told by teachers that the term Parisian French came into vogue in the United States to differentiate the French spoken in academia from the French spoken in Quebec and among French-Canadians. North American French was decried as inferior to academic French in both public and private institutions of higher education (Paradis, 1964; Quintal, 1990). It mattered not that Jean Jacques Rousseau spoke and wrote in much the same manner as Quebecers did; that was not good enough for the French Academy. The result is a more subtle but just as deadly form of assimilation. The message was clear: North American French was not real French; it was a gutter French. We not only couldn't speak English correctly, but also we couldn't speak French correctly. We were just a bunch of ignorant hicks; we didn't know anything. This elitist message came on top of years of "being put down;" it reinforced the degradation of the French-Canadian culture by pointing to its "obvious" inferiority (Ducharme, 1943; Kerouac, 1950; Quintal, 1996).

As a matter of fact, the nuns and our families maintained the French language in better condition than did the elitists of most of our own higher educational institutions (Quintal, 1990). When one considers the public schools, one should not be surprised to see assimilation stressed (Lambert et al, 1974; Paradis, 1964). That message was consistent with the myth of America as a great melting pot. The myth served the white, English-speaking, economic and social power structure (Brodkin, 2001; Hess, 2001; McIntosh, 2001; Takaki, 1993). It also served to preserve male domination because of the lack of availability of opportunities for classical training for women. French-Canadian women's higher educational opportunities were much less elitist since they were focused

on women serving the social and religious needs of the French-Canadian immigrant population (Quintal, 1990). It is my opinion that because men were the only ones being trained for the upper echelons of power, they were the only ones that were mandated to read, write, and speak French “correctly.”

In the second half of the Twentieth Century, because of the lack of new immigrants, this attitude began to creep into high schools and eventually into elementary schools (Quintal, 1990). With the drastic drop in the number of teaching nuns in the 1960s, this attitude became prevalent throughout the education system.

In public higher education, this attitude prevailed throughout (Paradis, 1964). We were forced to learn French as a foreign language, not as a first or second language. If one considers the University of Maine System for example, the flagship campus in Orono was supposed to be supporting the French population of the state. Since the formation of the combined university system in 1969, the Orono flagship campus trumpeted the fact that it served the French community in Maine. In a 1980 publication, the school bragged of its emphasis on bilingual instruction. It also bragged about its ties with the campus in Fort Kent where a majority of students were French speakers and its community college in Bangor where they produced health care practitioners who were proficient with older French-speaking patients (Carroll, 1980). I have found no evidence that those claims ever materialized. If the Orono institution truly served its Franco clientele, why wasn't the Franco-American Centre ever integrated into the curricular offerings of the campus? Why was the Franco-American Centre continuously starved for funds over the years? Finally, twenty years later, a Franco-American Studies program has been established and funded. Doesn't the fact that a Franco-American Studies program is needed *per se* indict the

French department of that campus for past elitist crimes? North American French was sneered at for years. Finally, the emphasis seems to have changed. I hope the change is not too late.

Consider also the University of Maine at Fort Kent. For a campus that still , to this day, has a majority of Franco-American students, and has as part of its mission statement to serve that population, the French program is nearly moribund (Raymond, 2000). My observations show that most students take a CLEP test to avoid having to take French courses, and nearly each and everyone of them passes with six credits in French equivalency. At a campus where the janitors and some secretaries speak French when they are among themselves, isn't it strange that the students do not value the French language enough to want to study it further. Unfortunately, most students see little value in their second language. The problems are known, but the solutions are not yet implemented.

In summary, the role of higher education in the assimilation process was mostly to enhance the social and economic pressures that encourage assimilation, but it also gave credence to a subtle devaluation of a valuable linguistic asset due to an elitist bias and ignorance.

Discussion:

Nowhere in the various higher education establishments have I found historical evidence of pride that students had learned bilingual proficiency without formal training. It has been only recently that this fact has been recognized and changes in academic attitudes have begun to occur. For example, at the University of Maine at Fort Kent, my

personal observations find that French classes now stress that there are many forms of French language, and that they are all real and good. Students are encouraged to learn to express themselves and to value regional linguistic variations. At the University of Maine, my personal observations find that attitudes toward French language variations are similar to what was experienced at Fort Kent. If one considers analogous situations, could one imagine a school system or a teacher being appalled that students were entering school already knowing how to read and write? Would the schools and the teachers deride the formal abilities of the self-taught readers and writers? Could one imagine teachers and schools officially scoffing at students entering school with advanced mathematical abilities if those abilities were not formally expressed in the syntax or symbolism adopted by the school or by a particular teacher? One would hope not, but my opinion is that symptoms such as mentioned above would suggest that the school or teacher in question perceived the student or group of students as threats to existing privilege or power structures.

The role of higher education in the assimilation of the French-Canadians is to make invisible the abilities, skills, and knowledge of that ethnic group. Higher education aided and abetted the economic and cultural assimilation by downgrading the value of existing knowledge, skills and abilities with an attitude of defensive linguistic elitism promoted via the wholesale embrace as an objective standard that there was one true French language and that what was the official French language was to be determined by *l'Academie Francaise* in collaboration with the government of France. This linguistic dictatorship was a form of classicism that flourished in France as Parisian French was declared the standard against which the numerous regional variations of language were

measured. This attitude was exported from France to the rest of the world via the academic community and higher educational institutions; this attitude formed the basis for formal educational validation and a mark of class for the people certified fluent. Higher education poisoned the minds of students with concepts of inferiority of North American French language and culture. Combining this inferiority of language with an economic perception of inferior career opportunities and a religious establishment's desire for homogeneity and orthodoxy and one has a formula for cultural extinction.

In the public schools, assimilation has always been the policy (Leroux, 1959; Paradis, 1964; Quintal, 1990). In the state of Maine, it was held to be illegal for a student to speak French on the school grounds until 1969. In reality, that was not exactly accurate. Maine Public Law, 1857, chapter 103, stated that, in Aroostook County, teachers must use English as the language of instruction. Also, Maine Public Law, 1873, chapter 380, stated that, in the Madawaska Territory, teachers were required to speak English. Finally, Maine Public Law, 1919, chapter 146, stated that the basic language in all public and private schools would be English. While it was not specifically stated in law that French was not allowed to be spoken in schools in Maine, that was the practical effect because the public laws were interpreted by school boards to mean that. Consider the following quote from a Madawaska handbook for teachers (Leroux, 1959):

“As School Union #127 is located in an area where French predominates, each teacher has an added responsibility in making sure that English is used at all times at school.

The children in Madawaska, Frenchville and St. Agatha are Americans and, as such, are citizens of a country where English is the official language. These children have been blessed in that they can speak French fluently. It is our hope that by introducing the teaching of French in the elementary school, they may learn to speak French more correctly and may be able to read and write it too. However, the primary function of each teacher is to teach the children how to speak, read and write as fluently in English. All teachers should be aware of this and should constantly be on alert to advance the quality and amount of English which they use.

Any teacher violates her trust, both legally and morally, who allows herself or any pupil to revert to French in the classroom. Any teacher violates her trust when she encourages children

to speak anything but English at recess, around the playground, before and after school or even away from school.

Let no child approach you in French. If he has difficulty in making you understand, help him by suggesting words, but do not revert to the French yourself to make it easier for him. If you do, you are not helping, you are penalizing him for he will feel that there is no need to work hard to learn English because he can always revert to his French when he has difficulty.

Always be aware of your responsibility. Make the children proud of their heritage and make them realize how many advantages they enjoy when they can master not one but two languages”.

French-Catholic nuns, teaching in public schools, used corporal punishment to prevent students from speaking French. I have heard personal testimony from numerous individuals of similar stories of atrocities throughout the St. John Valley. It was only natural for this attitude of English assimilation to permeate higher education (Lambert et al, 1974; Paradis, 1964; Quintal, 1990). The role of the teacher in the assimilation process is crucial because many of the elementary school teachers were nuns who also taught religion classes outside of the public schools. These nuns had become public school employees when the state purchased the buildings of the parochial school systems and converted them into a public elementary school system. To this day, there are still a few nuns teaching in the elementary schools of Van Buren. By converting the parochial schools to public schools and, in so doing, converting the nuns to public-sector employees, the state was able to accelerate the linguistic assimilation process throughout the St. John Valley, a stronghold of French-Canadians (Quintal, 1990).

The role of degrading Franco-Americans was further accentuated by the linguistic elitism that flowed from France. Language elitism is a form of bias that occurs when some group perceives themselves as guardians of a specific form of a language. They utilize that accepted form of language as a source of privilege and power to enhance their authority and /or prestige. In France, one finds *l'Academie Francaise* and the French government complicit in such an elitist scheme. It has been my experience, over the last

thirty-plus years of dealing with the University of Maine, that the French Department at the Orono campus was elitist, and that the French faculty feared damage to their professional reputations if they recognized or acknowledged the value of the French popularly spoken in Maine and the rest of New England. This resulted in duplicity. In public, the university claimed that it valued and served the Franco-American population of Maine; in academia, the university degraded North American French as clearly inferior to Academic French, or Parisian French as it was popularly called.

My own opinion is that if one were to compare the educational assimilation pressures on Franco-Americans, one could find analogies to every other ethnic group in America. Nativist pressures to homogenize America were very strong throughout the Twentieth Century (Darder, 1996; Wright, 1996). The eugenics movement, with its effects on both science and popular thought, and the nativist movement, that was particularly strong between 1860 and 1940, occurred concurrently with the American concept of Manifest Destiny (Takaki, 1993). The white, Anglo-Saxon, protestant (WASP) men, who ruled the United States and controlled its economy, believed that they were superior to everyone else, and that this superiority was predetermined by their god. They defined the societal norms concerning privilege and public morality, ethics and education. They defined white, male, land owners as the privileged class; they defined English as the legal and commercial language; they defined Calvinism as the acceptable form of Christianity; and they defined Christianity as the acceptable form of religion (Tierney, 1993). Public education, by and large, accepted all of those norms as objective and absolute.

The fact that the French-Canadians wanted to maintain their language, culture,

and religion in a hostile environment brought them into direct conflict with the status quo in the United States (Roby, 1990; Wade, 1955). The fact that they were allowed to establish “little Canadas” throughout New England between 1860 and 1900 was due, in my opinion, more to the fact that they were viewed as a convenient and reliable source of low cost, non-union labor. As long as they were perceived as a valuable tool in the capitalist fight against the development of unions in the industrialized parts of New England and other states, they were tolerated. When the French-Canadians began to move up the economic ladder, and more importantly, when they began to join unions, there was less reason for allowing their deviant behavior.

Public education in the United States appeared to be strongly influenced by WASP norming (Tierney, 1993). Catholic education institutions, both public and private, seem to me to have been greatly influenced by the pressures to assimilate all other groups to the WASP norm. Education in America, including higher education, was caught between two standards. The Western European concept of the *Renaissance* man and the American concept of a pragmatic, white, male, Christian engineer were significantly different. The *Renaissance* man seemed to lose out to the Calvinist engineer. The relative demise of the classical humanities to the physical sciences in higher education further undermined the educational survivability of the French-Canadians because the educational institutions had to find validation within an educational system that undervalued French, Catholicism, and the humanities.

The marginalization of women, people-of-color, Native Americans, and ethnic minorities, as well as the standardization of ethics and morals based on a Western European, WASP model had a profound effect on validating only those educational

institutions that aligned themselves with the assumed norms (Tierney, 1993). Anything different from the established norm was labeled as inferior, abnormal, deviant, or perverted, and therefore not educationally valid.

The evolution from being a vibrant, healthy, French-speaking ethnic minority in 1900 to being an English-speaking, marginally recognizable ethnic group that lacks significant evidence of either *commercium* or *commensalitas* in 2000 is a story of the victory of America's melting pot. The economic and social pressures to assimilate into the popular culture of America were no greater on the French-Canadians than they were on other immigrant, ethnic minority groups such as the Irish, Italians, Chinese, Jews, or Mexicans, for example (Abramson, 1973; Hess, 2001; Rendon, 1996; Wright, 1996). What differentiated the French-Canadians from the Irish and most other minorities was the fact that they were migrant workers. In that respect, they most resembled the Mexicans and certain other Hispanic groups (Franklin, 1996; Steinberg, 1996).

From an educational standpoint, the Puerto Ricans were in an analogous situation with most opportunities for higher education being in Puerto Rico and with assimilation being the predominant theme in all stateside, higher educational opportunities. It is noteworthy that Puerto Ricans are also predominantly Catholic and they also utilize parish churches as community cultural centers (Olivas, 1996; Washington, 1996). I am not aware of an analogous educational drive for linguistic purity among the Hispanics. I have found no "put downs" among Hispanics for any group's Spanish not being real Spanish. It is common for ethnic groups to mutually deride one another, and for there to exist inter-group conflicts (Abramson, 1973; Hess, 2001; Rendon, 1996), but group taunts do not rise to the level of governmental and institutional declaration of what

constitutes “real Spanish” for example. It is not uncommon to see language associated with classism, but I am not aware of official government intervention on the scale that is and has historically been evident in France and across the French-speaking world.

What the French-Canadians attempted to do when they established “little Quebecs” was to replicate a society in which they were privileged in a larger society which extended to them little economic or social privilege. Using Ignatiev’s language, the French-Canadians wanted to be “French-white” within an “English-white” society and economic structure (Ignatiev, 1995). This appears to be similar to what Cuban-Americans are attempting in southern Florida, and what some Mexican-Americans are attempting in states along the Rio Grande River (Abramson, 1973; Hess, 2001). Similar attempts by French-Canadians are evidenced in the states bordering the Great Lakes and in isolated geographic pockets along the northern plains (Wade, 1955). What gave the New Englanders a better chance of success were the sheer size of their numbers, the relative compactness of the New England states, and the proximity to the mass of French-Canadians located just across the border in Quebec and parts of New Brunswick (Roby, 1990).

If one were to analyze the situation in 1900, one could not rule out the possible success of the over-half-million French-Canadians who were accomplishing exactly what they sought to accomplish. They lived in areas where French was the first language; a person could live, work, play and pray comfortably without ever using English. Newspapers were in French; neighborhood commerce was in French; schools and church services were conducted in French; even work in factories and shops was conducted in French (Roby, 1990). Social events were centered around the family and the local church,

social societies, and social clubs; all of these institutions used French as the *lingua franca* (Brault, 1986; Ducharme, 1943; Quintal, 1996). It was only in those areas where the number of French-Canadians was not sufficiently large that these conditions did not exist. One must note that many of the textile mills were owned and operated by upper class, Protestant Huguenot immigrants from France who were pleased to allow the lower class, poorly educated French-Canadian Catholic families to provide cheap labor for their textile mills (Roby, 1990). They had no economic incentive to assimilate the French-Canadians into American popular culture since that culture included English-speaking, Irish-dominated labor unions. From 1850 to 1900, the French-Canadians provided cheap, non-union labor that was loath to strike (Hadcock, 1955; Roby, 1990). Why would a capitalist lord-of-industry want to undermine such a profitable source of labor?

It was the assimilation of those French capitalists into the English-speaking business culture, the upward mobility of the French-Canadian workers, and the inclusion of these non-English-speakers into the labor movement, and the post-World War I deluge of immigration that engendered both increased capacity at French Huguenot mills in the south and a nativist backlash against the nationalist French-Canadians (Roby, 1990). French-Canadian nationalists were identified as un-American; therefore, they had to prove their American-ness (Roby, 1990). From the end of World War I to the beginning of World War II, cultural battles were fought on numerous social fronts across the entire geography of New England (Brault, 1986; Ducharme, 1943; Roby, 1990; Rowe, 1999; Wade, 1955).

Economic pressures from lower labor costs in southern textile mills, massive immigration from Quebec during the 1920s, and a resurgence of nativist sentiment

throughout the United States contributed mightily to the social pressures to assimilate. The Great Depression and the influx of other ethnic immigrant groups heightened the perceived need to change. New industrial skills were needed; vocational education for men became an urgent requirement (Roby, 1990). Northern textile mills couldn't accommodate the large demand for job opportunities and southern textile mills were located in culturally hostile territory (Roby, 1990). French-Canadians had to survive outside their cultural enclaves. The pressure for assimilation did not ease. With World War II, the pressures increased and almost every French-Canadian was forced to assimilate. French went from being a first language to a valued second language. French-Canadians became Franco-Americans (Brault, 1986). The French-Canadian nationalists were occasionally winning small cultural battles, but they were clearly losing the cultural war. Economic and social pressures forced the loss of the French language.

However, the cultural war was not yet lost. It was in the post World War II era that the emphasis turned to the cultural wars. All the earlier arguments about "losing one's religion if one's language was lost" were resurrected (Roby, 1990). It was in the cultural arena that the schools and the Catholic Church became the battleground. The French parochial schools maintained their separation from the "Irish parochial schools" (Quintal, 1990). I use quotation marks around Irish parochial schools because, in the eyes of the nationalists, that term encompassed all the other parochial schools, regardless of nationality. It was in this arena that the elitism of French higher education had its most corrosive effect. It was in the educational arena that North American French was derided as inferior. If one spoke French (or Italian or Portuguese for that matter) in public, one was susceptible to be admonished to "speak white." I have heard that comment from

diverse sources in diverse geographic regions of New England, and I personally experienced that comment although it was directed at a friend of mine, not to me directly.

Through the 1950s, in French-Canadian schools, we were admonished to maintain our language, to be proud of our French-Canadian roots, and to support our French-Canadian institutions and businesses. The French-Catholic schools, churches, and social clubs were the last bastion of French-Canadian culture. The language war was already lost but nationalists were reluctant to admit that fact, much the same way as some southerners have long refused to admit loss in the Civil War. In French-Canadian schools, we spoke English; we read and wrote in English. We studied Parisian French as a foreign language. In my personal experience, it seemed that academic French was a foreign language that I had to translate into real French or into English. Studying French in school was very similar to studying Latin or Greek; it was like studying a dead language. Personally, whenever I couldn't understand some obscure writing in French literature, I would recite the passage phonetically in my mind and could usually intuit the correct meaning. I didn't realize that I was using a different part of my brain to understand the difficult writing. It was far easier to understand French literature when I was thinking in French than when I was thinking in English. It was not until I was a college student, a sophomore majoring in mathematics but taking an upper level French literature course to fulfill a foreign language requirement, that I began to realize what a gift I had. When discussions in French began, I soon found myself thinking in French and expressing myself fluently, although sometimes crudely. My classmates were thinking in English and translating in their minds—a very slow process. I was thinking in French and expressing my feelings without pause.

No one ever recognized and/or praised the linguistic abilities of the French-Canadian students. Because of my training in parochial schools, I had an English education that was equal to or superior to what I would have received in any public or non-French school. When I later studied Latin and Greek, as a seminarian, I had no difficulty even though I was not particularly interested in learning foreign languages.

The Roman Catholic Church was complicit in the cultural demise of the French-Canadians (Daignault, 1935). Because of the perceived need to homogenize Americans, and the need to placate dominant Irish prelates, the Vatican mortally wounded the linguistic hopes of the French-Canadian nationalists during what is known as *l'Affaire Sentinelle* (Daignault, 1935). I personally believe that guilt was a major reason that Mgr. Gelineau of Vermont was chosen as Bishop of Providence in the early 1960s. The hierarchially-fixated leaders of the Roman Catholic Church had tremendous difficulty to understand the semi-autonomous French-Canadian parishes and their strong economic support among poor, working class families. Bishop Hickey was trying to usurp the French-Canadian model for financing Catholic high schools when he precipitated *l'Affaire Sentinelle* (Daignault, 1935). Today, in Rhode Island as throughout New England, Catholic schools have been regionalized to survive. There are now no truly-ethnic Catholic schools (Quintal, 1990). Now the prelates are fighting for government funding in the form of vouchers to maintain their schools. Perhaps if the leaders were a bit more enlightened they would have anticipated some of the unfortunate effects wrought by their lust for centralized power.

Praxis:

Today, Franco-Americans are trying to rediscover what they lost (Quintal, 1996). Throughout New England, one may find efforts to regain the past. Genealogy and French-Canadian culture are now nostalgically searched for. If one is to judge by the mission statement of the Franco-American Studies Program at the University of Maine, it is recognized that there is a need for Franco-American studies, just as there are needs for Native-American, Black, and Women's studies. In other words, Franco-Americans are invisible. Franco-American studies are intended to enable a student to see the invisible. Utilizing the tools of multiculturalism, students are taught to recognize and to appreciate what once existed and what was lost (Tierney, 1993). Furthermore, they are taught how to recognize what still exists, and how to recreate or resurrect some of what has been lost.

For Franco-Americans to fully regain a significant amount of *commercium* and *commensalitas* seems to be a dream. But to restore the identity of Franco-Americans, higher education institutions may broaden current ethnic studies programs to include Franco-American studies and to celebrate Franco-American heritage and language. within New England, higher education should recognize the near-extinction of the Franco-American identity as well as develop an appreciation of and validation of Franco-American ethnic and linguistic diversity.

To evaluate the value and viability of the diverse efforts, one might use *connubrium*, *commercium*, and *commensalitas* as guidelines. Franco-American studies programs seem to be a necessary precondition to developing *connubrium* if it is lacking. In other words, if resurrection of an ethnic identity is needed, then an ethnic studies

program, or a reasonable facsimile thereof, seems to be a necessity.

Concerning *commercium*, this can be divided into considerations of trade and of education. In the area of trade, efforts as are currently underway under the aegis of the *Forum Francophone des Affaires*, (FFA), are highly desirable. The FFA encourages business connections between regions where significant francophone populations are located. These areas include but are not limited to the countries and regions that were part of the former, global, French colonial empire.

In the area of education, Franco-American studies programs, Franco-American heritage societies and French language immersion programs are highly recommended. The immersion programs are necessary to increase the incidence and proficiency of French speaking skills. The studies and heritage programs enhance language but only indirectly. Their primary mission is usually more concerned with history and culture. Native fluency language skills seem to be best developed between individual infancy and puberty; therefore, language programs should be directed to the earliest possible intervention. By the time someone is involved with higher education, the difficulty with developing native fluency is greatly increased. For that reason, I believe the role of higher education with respect to language development should include outreach programs that encourage language development as early as possible or feasible.

To address *commensalitas*, one must again divide the consideration. Language and culture are two different areas of investigation when one considers group socialization. Socialization within the group does not have to be done in French. All that is necessary is that the native language be encouraged. Care should be taken to not repeat the elitist errors of prior times. We cannot tolerate “language nazis.” I don’t believe I

have to define what I mean by that. Immersion programs, ethnic festivals, and language competitions are conducive to language development. Ethnic festivals and similar celebrations, as well as genealogical studies not only encourage cultural identity but also further socialization and study. Celebrating life together encourages increased group celebration and socialization. Again, the most important element is social connectivity. The number and type of connections made impact directly the emergence of *commensalitas*. By encouraging increased socialization, one automatically sets in motion social changes that cannot be accurately predicted, but the chance of increased *commensalitas* is enhanced.

The viability of any curricular or social efforts will be in direct proportion to the number and frequency of ties and connections developed within the Franco-American communities. Adequate funding will follow popular interest. Consider the parochial school systems of my ancestors; when people wanted their own schools and churches they paid for them even though the people were economically limited. I believe that the Franco-American studies program at the University of Maine will prosper in direct proportion to the support it engenders in the various Franco-American communities within the state of Maine and the other states of New England.

If one considers the various Native-American studies programs, the vitality of these programs seems to flow from direct ties with individual tribes (Olivas, 1996). Governmental funding always seems to be a problem. For Franco-American studies to prosper at the University of Maine or at any other state university, popular interest has to be generated. Student numbers in specific course offerings, community involvement in outreach programs, and legislative involvement in meeting the needs of constituents are

all factors in determining future viability and vitality of any program. The cross curricular efforts seem promising, but only in as much as they can reach an audience wider than the student body at the home campus. In Maine, for example, the affected population covers a wide geographic area and have few interconnections. Involving these dispersed groups and enhancing development of connections across space and institutions will greatly increase the probability of future success Franco-American studies and of future vitality of Franco-American culture and language.

Part 5: Conclusions.

French-Canadian language and culture have disappeared from public awareness. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 1990 Census, of the 17,143,907 people of French-Canadian descent in the United States, only 1,930,404 claimed to speak French occasionally at home. Occasional French speakers represented 0.78 percent of the population of the United States. Only 11.25 percent of Franco-Americans claimed to speak French occasionally. Schools where French is taught as a first language are non-existent. The closest examples are the elementary schools of Van Buren, Madawaska, St. Agatha, and Frenchville in Maine where there exists a French immersion program that begins in kindergarten. But even there French is taught as a second language; the major difference from ordinary schools is that some subjects are taught in French so as to reinforce the students' language development. In other words, French is taught as a second language rather than as a foreign language.

Commerce within the United States occurs primarily in English. In isolated

regions, one can operate in the community speaking only French, but even in those areas, English is overheard as the primary language of popular discourse. In Madawaska, Maine, for example, it is possible to sit in a restaurant and order a meal in French, and overhear diners conversing in French, but unless someone is known to be a francophone, the person will be addressed in English by everyone in the restaurant.

Throughout New England, it is nearly impossible to find a Catholic Mass said in French. Prayer books found in church pews are entirely in English. It is possible to find signs that French is spoken in certain business establishments, but nowhere in New England is it assumed that a stranger would speak French. It is obvious for any observer to see that evidence of *commercium* and of *commensalitas* is lacking.

What were the material causes of the near-extinction of the French-Canadian identity? Economic pressures to learn English and social pressures to be American are probably the most obvious and most important (Roby, 1990). The Roman Catholic Church, with its emphasis on centralized control and orthodoxy, and the Roman Catholic Church in America, with its Irish prelates firmly in control of the political apparatus, assisted in destroying the nationalist churches out of a fear of loss of control and a desire to protect the privileges of the status quo (Daignault, 1935). However, higher education, specifically French higher education had a special role in the demise. The elitist attitude toward North American French that pervaded higher education in both the United States and Canada oppressed the lower class French-Canadians. French-Canadians were “put down” for their language, their low class, and their resulting low self-esteem (Langelier, 1996). The pride of being able to survive was depreciated in higher education as ignorance.

It seems that members of higher education who have had to deal with language issues were not as sympathetic to the issues involved with the question of the value and survivability of North American French as they could have been. It also seems that officials concerned with higher education favored assimilation over nationalistic tendencies among French-Canadians much in the same manner that they preferred to assimilate all the other ethnic and linguistic groups in America (Hess, 2001). Higher education officials seemed to suffer from ignorance much in the same way that nativists did; they usually differed from nativists in the reasons for those ignorant beliefs and the methods used to express their opposition. Their reasons seemed to reflect more a desire to preserve the status quo and their relative privileges in society, and their methods were usually non-violent, legal, and overt.

One cannot prove that the task of being “French-white” in the United States is impossible to accomplish, but it is clear that the French-Canadian nationalists, of whom my family was definitely part, failed. Some of us are still proud survivors, but we are few in number. We are still looked down at by our northern brethren in Canadian higher education because our French is neither pure nor elegant. I see a clear parallel between the wars fought by my ancestors and the current nationalist movement in Quebec, but it is a Quebec war, generating little sympathy among Franco-Americans. They are reinventing the wheel, so to speak. They are trying now, just as my great-grandfather and his relatives did, to be “French-white” in an “English-white” system. They threaten to break away, but what they really seek is to be separate but equal. They have sufficient numbers and sufficient resources, but the answer to the question of their success and/or survival is not yet clear. Whether the Quebec experiment of “separate but equal within Canada” or the

New Brunswick experiment of “separate but equal within the province” will be more successful over the long term is an interesting question that will be answered over the next few generations. Maybe then, after one has also had the opportunity to examine the current, European effort at economic unification without cultural unification, one could answer the question about whether or not it is possible to be “French-white” in an “English-white” system. Or perhaps the European model will illustrate an example of a society of difference, where ethnicity, race, language, gender, and sexual preference are recognized as valid variations within a range of personal characteristics, and are socially accepted as normal.

In higher education, one currently finds ethnic studies programs in which language and culture are explored, validated and celebrated. If such programs had existed a hundred years ago, I feel the social history of the Twentieth Century would have been significantly different. However, I also feel that it would have been highly unlikely for any American institution of higher education to have taken such enlightened action. Today, it is possible and highly desirable for institutions of higher education to value diversity, but, even a casual reading of the popular literature strongly suggests that there are serious efforts at denigrating diversity and restoring the primacy of absolutist norms. Higher education has to resist the reactionary pressures, recognizing them for what they are—efforts to preserve privilege and power for white, Anglo-Saxon, heterosexual men (Tierney, 1993).

My recommendations would include encouraging establishment and development of Franco-American studies programs in higher education institutions located in areas with a substantial Franco-American population. I would also encourage development of

Franco-American heritage programs within institutions of higher education and within public/private social organizations to complement the Franco-American studies programs located nearby. Connections between the various ethnic studies and heritage programs would be desirable to encourage self organization and autonomous cultural and educational developments that cannot be predetermined. I would also encourage someone with greater resources and abilities than myself to seriously examine the history and role of women in French-Canadian society in America. I believe there are a great story and learning opportunities there. I would also encourage the University of Maine campuses to continue and even broaden the joint efforts in the area of Franco-American studies. The work being done with Laval University, including the web site www.francoMaine.org, is a terrific beginning, and is a wonderful educational tool.

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