Expert Group #4- Decapitation Theory Challenged

**Jean Hamelin- Julie**

Historian born at Saint-Narcisse, Québec in 1931. He was a history professor at Laval University. He is largely considered one of the most important Quebecois historians of the second half of the twentieth century for his literary contributions backed by solid scientific foundations. Jean Hamelin dedicated his career as a historian to “tell again the mystery of man.” Many times Hamelin would pioneer new theories or contest the traditions of many past historians, working to renew the purpose and broader approach of political, economic, social, cultural and religious history. Hamelin threw himself into the change from conservatism to progressivism during the silent revolution, and became the pioneer of a more humanist approach to history, and learning.

In 1970 Hamelin published a book called *Economie et Société en Nouvelle-France* which contained his argument challenging the Decapitation Hypothesis.

**Thesis:** The absence of a business class in French Canada after 1760 is an outcome of the French Régime rather than of the Conquest.

**Arguments:**

Hamelin doubted the existence of a significant Canadian bourgeoisie for the British to decapitate. If a decapitation took place at all, it was of the military and administrative caste, *the Canadian nobility.* There is no evidence of the existence of the existence of a French Canadian middle class before 1760.

* Few well-to-do immigrants in New France, people with very little experience in commerce, knowledge of crafts, were unable to make their capital productive. “one must regret that the metropolis did not, after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, direct the exodus of Protestants toward her North American colony…” The Huguenots were the merchants of France, however they were not allowed to settle in North America because of their faith. They weren't able to use their expertise to make the colony productive and profitable.
* Merchants came to enrich themselves and return home. They had no motivation to settle in New France.
* If there had been upper bourgeoisie living in Canada who owned lucrative companies they would not have emigrated, similar to the habitants who possessed land and remained in Canada.
* Those who did emigrate were agents or associates of metropolitan companies, foreign temporary merchants, administrators who traded, Canadiens whose activities were dependent on those of French merchants, and suppliers of the military. They were not loyal to their New France colonies, but to Frenchmen across the Atlantic.

**George Ramsay Cook- Noah**

1. The historian of this piece is George Ramsay Cook. He was born in Alameda, Saskatchewan in 1931 and is an English Canadian. Cook was educated at the University of Manitoba (BA), Queen's University (MA) and the University of Toronto (U of T) (PhD). Cook is a Canadian historian and is a general editor of the Dictionary of Canadian Biography. He was a professor of history at U of T and later at York University, where he taught until his retirement in 1996.
2. Cook wrote this piece in 1969 in *French Canadian Nationalism: An Anthology*. He also wrote the piece two years after Canada’s centennial, when Canadian nationalism was a major talking point. Some other events that happened during the author’s time period were the Quiet Revolution and the rise in Quebec Nationalism.
3. Cook’s main thesis is: The Canadiens optimism about regaining control and preoccupation with cultural survival allowed the British to solidify their rule over the colony.
4. The main arguments that Cook used to support his thesis were: the British acquisition of the economy, the control of political rights, and the Canadiens continuous optimism about French Canadians regaining political and economic control of the colony.

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| Economic Acquisition | Political Rights | Canadiens Optimism About Control |
| The English merchants’ connections back to London’s large market helped grow the economy after France had abandoned its colony.  “Because of their connection with the London market they had quickly supplanted the *Canadien* merchants, who were cut off from the support of a metropolis.”  “The Conquered were not duly alarmed by the situation. Since they could not foresee the ultimate consequences of the conquest, they remained optimistic.” | The Canadiens had their political rights expanded but still had to hold “subordinate posts” as England “entrusted the administration of its new colonies to its own subjects”  “Control of the political and economic life of the vanquished colony belonged to a group that the Canadiens now called ‘Londoners’ or ‘the English’.” | The Canadiens optimism about eventually gaining control of the colony caused them to not fret about the expanded British rule of the colony.  “The *Canadiens* did not doubt that sooner or later they would regain political and economic control of the country that they still considered as their own, a country belonging to them by right. They secretly thought that the ‘Londoners’ would not always be on top. A day would come when they would once again be masters of their own destiny.”  “They cherished this fond hope and believed it to be both legitimate and realistic because they refused to see, or had not yet seen, that a new Canada-an English Canada this time-was in the process of rising on the ruins of the old French Canada.” |

**Fernand Oullet- Danielle**

Fernand Oullet was born on November 6, 1926. He is a history professor at Laval University. After taking his doctorate from University of Laval, he went to Paris to do specialized studies. He taught history at Carleton University, University of Ottawa, and York University. Oullet utilized his techniques in economics and social sciences to teach the structures of history, and to undermine the Quebec nationalist interpretations. He is a member of the Royal Society of Canada and an Officer in the Order of Canada. The time in which he has written this article is in 1977.

**Thesis:** After the Conquest, French Canadiens economically benefitted from the British system, rather than have their economy destroyed.

**Arguments:** Oullet doubted the origins of the French Canadian national feeling, as New France did not have any sort of nationalism with regards to France. He challenged the existence of the decapitation theory by stating the French Canadians actually benefitted and improved under the British rule, and it is hard to prove that the Conquest had destroyed the French Canadian economy. Some arguments he made are:

* Though many people say that New France had their nationality taken away, they never had French nationalism.
* The Conquest was not responsible for the poor economic weakness of French Canada. The French Canadiens had access to new markets from the British Empire which significantly benefitted the economy until the American Revolution.
* The Conquest did not cause any changes in the lives of the inhabitants of the Laurentian valley. The Conquest eliminated aspects of the old system of French Canada, such as the French merchants, which benefited the merchants.
* It is difficult to prove why the Conquest led to the deterioration of French Canadian society because between 1760 and 1791, there were conflicts. However, the conflicts were not between the French and English, but they were between the Habitants and Seigneurs, who have always had conflicts.

**Susan Mann Trofimenkoff- Dania**

Historian Susan Mann Trofimenkoff was born in Ottawa 1941. She became a professor teaching at the Université de Montréal from 1966-1970 as well as the Universities of Calgary and Ottawa between 1970 and 1992. She researched into women’s issues and founded the women studies program at the University of Ottawa and the Women Studies House at the University is called the Susan Mann House in her name. She contributed greatly to the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women and has been on the Status of Women Committee of the Council of Ontario Universities. Trofimenkoff became the first president or York University in 1992 and has been a member of the Order of Canada since 2000.

Written in 1983.

Thesis: The conquest has been viewed differently based on the politics in the time period.

Arguments:

1. Historians have interpretation at it differently throughout different time periods of the 20th century.   
   Lionel Groulx said in 1910 that the French Canadians survived the Conquest because God was on their side.  
   By the mid twentieth century secular historians that were not part of the church like Fregault, Brunet and Seguin shared a different approach to the Conquest. They said that the French Canadians were doing fine before the Conquest and had great growth in Quebec, but they could no longer grow after the Conquest because the upper middle classes were hurt by the British.   
   Hamelin and Ouellet said that the French Canadian society did not thrive because they did not have their own merchant class.
2. The interpretation of these historians on the Conquest have it wrong.

Today the Conquest is viewed as either a challenge or an obstacle.

The Sovereignist established in the 1950’s felt that Quebec must leave and not be a part of Canada as they would never get fair deal. They have pointed out economic, political and social status challenges due to their minority in Canada, and that the goal of the English has always been to assimilate. They relate themselves to Lord Durham who said assimilation would occur.

Other French Canadians see the fact of being a minority as a challenge rather than an obstacle. The Federalists in Canada met this challenge by sometimes arguing and displaying superiority over the English French.

This approach by the Federalists emphasizes a healthy competition. The French had to work with the English rather than blaming and whining about it.

Compensation vs Collaboration.

Rene Levesque and Pierre Trudeau are the present day representations of these two points of view. (sov vs fed) Without the Conquest, these two points of views would not exist.