BACKGROUND TO FRENCH-ENGLISH RELATIONS, 1600-1944

* Up until the end of the Seven Years War in 1763, what is now Canada was the French colony of New France. The Seven Years War was a global conflict involving Britain, France, and their colonies. In Canada, the British defeated the French forces at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. With the arrival of British ships for reinforcement, the French troops were forced to agree to conditional surrender. Under this agreement, they were given the right to maintain their Catholic religion and their French culture. With the Treaty of Paris in 1763, France gave up New France, and was left with only a few islands off of Newfoundland. As a result, the French Canadians felt betrayed.
* In 1774, the Quebec Act was passed by the British, which entrenched the rights of French Canadians. This was Canada's first constitution. In 1867, Quebec joined Confederation based on the understanding that the rights of French Canadians would be protected.
* Between 1885 and 1944, a number of events occurred to exacerbate tensions between French and English Canadians:
  + Metis leader Louis Riel was executed for leading a second rebellion
  + Prime Minister Laurier compromised French interests in the Manitoba Schools controversy
  + The Boer War
  + The Naval Crisis
  + Quebec became dissatisfied with conscription in both the First and Second World Wars.

FRENCH-ENGLISH RELATIONS IN THE 1950s AND 1960s

THE DUPLESSIS ERA

* Maurice Duplessis served as the Union Nationale premier of Quebec from 1936-1939 and 1944- 1959.
* Duplessis was a Roman Catholic and political conservative. He became known as le chef —the boss.
* Duplessis avoided English influence at all costs. He even refused any money from the federal government as he was a strong supporter of provincial rights.
* The Duplessis era was also known for bad working conditions, as Duplessis dis­couraged unions and used strong arm tactics against them. For these reasons, the period of his rule is sometimes referred to as la grande noirceur -the Great Darkness.
* By 1959, with the advent of the "swinging sixties," people started to want social change, and therefore, no longer supported Duplessis who was considered to be old-fashioned.

THE QUIET REVOLUTION

* From 1960 to 1966, Jean Lesage of the Liberal Party was premier of Quebec.
* Lesage campaigned under the slogan MaItres chez nous—masters of our own house.
* Lesage wasn't seeking independence for Quebec, but he wanted more control over decisions affecting its future. Essentially, Lesage sought to create a new and equal partnership with English Canada. Lesage also recognized that although English Canadians amounted to a small percentage of Quebec's population, they controlled a large percentage of the business in Quebec.
* During this time, Quebec went through a period of rapid reform and mod­ernization called la revolution tranquille—the Quiet Revolution.
* The Quiet Revolution was characterized by secularization (a move away from the Catholic Church in political affairs); the strengthening of the welfare state; massive in­vestments in public education; the unionization of the civil service; measures to control the economy; and the nationalization of hydroelectric production and distribution (Hydro-Quebec).
* Lesage also sought "special status" for Quebec in order to protect the French language and cul­ture. The federal government allowed Quebec to run its own pension plan, loans, and medical insurance. However, arguably the most drastic change that occurred during the Quiet Revolution was a huge increase in Quebec nationalism—French Canadians became "Quebecois."

"VIVE LE QUEBEC LIBRE!", 1967

* During Expo '67 in Montreal, the French President Charles De Gaulle ended his speech with "Ville le Quebec libre!"—Long live a Free Quebec! This statement encouraged French-Canadian nationalism and enraged English Canadians, as this slogan had been scrawled on the wall at the site of the 1963 FLQ firebombing in Montreal

THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT, 1969

* In 1969, Prime Minister Trudeau signed the Official Languages Act, giving all Cana­dians the legal right and ability to deal with the federal government in either French or English.
* All products sold in stores across the country had to be labelled in both French and English. Also as a result of this act, French Immersion programs were implemented across the country.

FRENCH-ENGLISH RELATIONS IN THE 1970s

THE OCTOBER CRISIS 1970

The Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ)

* The Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ) was a Canadian separatist group founded in the 1960s and based primarily in Montreal. The FLQ was a virtually unknown group of young French Canadians who occa­sionally spoke of Marxist objectives, and of Quebec's separation from Canada.
* The FLQ was committed to using violent actions if necessary to achieve their goals. They had a number of very secret cells within Quebec.
* From 1963 to 1970, the FLQ committed over 200 political actions includ­ing bombings and bank hold-ups, resulting in at least three deaths by FLQ bombs, and two deaths by gunfire. Targets included English-owned businesses, banks, McGill University, and the homes of prominent English-Canadians.
* By 1970, many members of the FLQ were in jail.

The Kidnappings

* On October 5, 1970, four men of the FLQ's Liberation cell kidnapped the British Trade Commissioner James Cross at gunpoint in Montreal.
* The FLQ demanded a ransom of $500,000; transport to Cuba; that they be allowed to read the FLQ Manifesto in public; as well as the release of FLQ "political prisoners" who were jailed for terrorist bombings.
* Five days later, on October 10, the Chenier cell kidnapped the Quebec Vice-Premier and Minister of Labour, Pierre Laporte.

The October Crisis

* On October 17, 1970, Laporte’s dead body was discovered in the trunk of a car. The Canadian government, under Prime Minister Trudeau, agreed to broadcast the FLQ Manifesto over the radio, and to transport five FLQ terrorists to Cuba in exchange for Cross' release.
* Cross was released, and the FLQ terrorists were allowed passage into Cuba. Over the years, most of these terrorists eventually returned to Canada and received light sentences. In total, 23 people went to prison as a result of the October Crisis.
* The October Crisis was the first political kidnapping in Canadian history.

The War Measures Act, 1970

* In response to the October Crisis, the Canadian government invoked the War Measures Act, which gave the government the power to take away certain civil rights. As a result, thousands of searches were con­ducted, and over 400 arrests were made. Membership in the FLQ became criminal, and all political rallies were banned. The government now had the ability to arrest, question, and detain suspects without charge for a period of 90 days.
* The War Measures Act was invoked based on the belief that there was a widespread conspiracy to overthrow the Canadian government. When asked by a reporter how far he would he go (in terms of the restrictions of the War Measures Act), Prime Minister Pierre 'frudeau responded, "Just watch me." Rudeau showed no sympathy: "There's a lot of bleeding hearts around—go on and bleed."

BILL 22, 1974

* In 1974, the Liberal Premier of Quebec, Robert Bourassa, introduced Bill 22. Bill 22 made French the official language of Quebec, and strengthened French in the workplace.
* Children had to pass an English pro­ficiency test before being allowed to register at English schools in Quebec. Bourassa introduced Bill 22 because birth rates were declining in Quebec, and immigration was increasing. Therefore, there was reason to fear that the French language might disappear.

THE PARTI QUEBECOIS (PQ)

* In 1976, the Parti Quebecois (PQ), led by Rene Levesque, defeated the Lib­erals in the provincial election. The PQ was a non-violent separatist party that was dedicated to winning independence for Quebec by following the rules of Canada's political process.

BILL 101, 1977

* In 1977, Rene Levesque proposed Bill 101 to replace Bill 22. Bill 101 became known as the Charter of French Language bill.
* Bill 101 required that French be the language used by governments, courts and businesses in Quebec, and that commercial signs be displayed in French only.
* Bill 101 also further restricted access to English schools—at least one parent had to have previ­ously attended an English school in Quebec. Bill 101 created enormous backlash within Quebec and across the country. As a result, many English businesses left Quebec for other parts of Canada.
* In 1988, a Montreal store owner was charged with violating Section 58 of Bill 101, the section which required that all outdoor commercial signs be in French only.
* In 1989, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 58 was un­constitutional, as it violated the right to freedom of expression. However, under the Charter of Rights of Freedoms, governments may pass a law that overrides certain sections of the Charter for a period of five years. This is called the Notwithstanding Clause. In other words, "not­withstanding" the store owner's right to freedom of expression, the Quebec provincial government can nevertheless pass a law that violates this right for a period of five years.
* The new law, Bill 178, still requires that outdoor signs be in French, but allows indoor commercial signs to be bilingual, providing French is given priority.

FRENCH-ENGLISH RELATIONS IN THE 1980s AND 1990s

REFERENDUM, 1980

* In 1980, Quebec held its first referendum on the issue of sovereignty-association with Canada.
* A referendum is when a political issue is submitted to a direct vote of all the citizens.
* The proposal was that Quebec would be an in­dependent state, with control over its own taxes, social policies, citizenship and immigration, but would maintain close economic ties with the rest of Canada.
* Over 90% of the people in Quebec cast their ballots in this referendum, which resulted in 60% voting "Non." Quebec would remain as part of Canada.
* Those who had campaigned vigorously for a "Non" vote in the 1980 Quebec referendum promised the people of Quebec a new constitutional arrangement if the referendum was defeated. Pierre Trudeau kept his promise by patriating the Constitution in April of 1982.

CONSTITUTION ACT, 1982

* Canada's original constitution, the British North America Act of 1867, was an act of British Parliament.
* Prime Minister Trudeau wanted Canada's constitution to belong to Canada, and so he proposed the Constitution Act of 1982. Under the Constitution Act, Canada's constitution was repatriated—brought home to Canada.
* The ten premiers met in November 1981 to draft the new constitution. However, on the final night of the meeting all were awakened in the middle of the night to look at last minute revisions except for Rene Levesque.
* While the Prime Minister and nine premiers reached an agreement, Quebec felt betrayed, and did not sign Canada's new constitution.
* The new constitution included an amending formula, which gave Canadians the ability to make changes to the constitution (changes which would no longer require the consent of the British Parliament), and also included the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

MEECH LAKE ACCORD

* In 1987, Prime Minister Mulroney and all ten premiers (this time the premier of Quebec was once again Robert Bourassa) met at Meech Lake to change the constitution to include Quebec.
* The Meech Lake initiative was Brian Mulroney's attempt to create constitutional harmony by bringing Quebec into the fold. All ten premiers reached a tentative agreement at Meech Lake. Thus began a three-year race to get unanimous consent from Ottawa and the other nine provinces.
* First, however, there were a number of concerns with the Meech Lake Accord. It included a clause that referred to Quebec as a "distinct society." In this context the term distinct society meant that French speakers in Quebec wanted a separate definition of what it meant to be Quebecois. This clause was left open to interpretation, and therefore it worried many English-Canadians.
* Aboriginal peoples did not feel that Quebec should have any special consideration, if no special consideration was being given to them.
* At first, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Manitoba didn't ratify the Meech Lake Accord, and finally it was Manitoba, led by aboriginal leader Elijah Harper, that refused to sign the Accord. There were essentially five parts to the proposed Accord:
  + Quebec would be considered a "distinct society."
  + Three of the nine Supreme Court judges were to come from Quebec.
  + Any amendments to the new constitution would require agreement from all ten provinces.
  + Provinces could choose to opt out of federal funding.
  + Quebec would be able to control its own immigration.
* The Meech Lake Accord also became known as the Quebec Round of con­stitutional amendments.

CHARLOTTETOWN ACCORD, 1992

* As a result of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, Quebec was still not included in Canada's constitution. Again, all leaders met in Charlottetown to try and reach a new agreement.
* The Charlottetown Accord made provi­sions for aboriginal self-government, Senate reform, universal health care, workers' rights, and environmental protection.
* This round of negotiations was called the Canada Round, as the Accord included a Canada Clause in addition to the "distinct society" clause for Quebec. The Canada Clause outlined the values and characteristics that define all Canadians, including a commitment to the equality of men and women, and to the well-being of all Canadians.
* In a referendum to decide upon the Charlottetown Accord, only four of the ten provinces approved, as they felt that the provisions were too large and daunting. Once more, aboriginal peoples and many women opposed the accord, as did the Reform Party.

BLOC QUEBECOIS

* In 1993, the separatist federal party of Quebec, the Bloc Quebecois, became the Official Party of Opposition in Canada. The Bloc Quebecois was led by Lucien Bouchard.

PARTI QUEBECOIS

* In 1994, the Parti Quebecois defeated the Liberals in the Quebec provincial election, and Jacques Parizeau became the Premier of Quebec.

REFERENDUM, 1995

* The rejection of Charlottetown left many French Canadians feeling that the rest of Canada was indifferent to their wishes.
* In 1995, Jacques Parizeau, Premier and leader of the Parti Quebecois (PQ), held another referendum on the question of Quebec's sovereignty—whether or not to separate from Canada.
* In a close and heated campaign, the "Non" side won with 50.6% of votes.
* After the referendum, Parizeau resigned and was replaced by Lucien Bouchard. Bouchard had every intention of calling for another sov­ereignty referendum but only "under winning conditions." The question remained—could Quebec legally separate from Canada on a unilateral basis, or did separation require the consent of all of the provinces?

CALGARY DECLARATION, 1997

* In 1997, in a gesture of goodwill, the Canadian government declared Quebec to be a "unique society" as part of the Calgary Declaration. However, the leader of the Bloc Quebecois, Lucien Bouchard, did not attend this meeting.

SUPREME COURT DECISION, 1998

* In 1998, the Supreme Court ruled that Quebec did not have the right to sepa­rate unilaterally (it wasn't allowed to decide by itself) from Canada. In order to achieve independence, Quebec would have to negotiate with the federal government, the nine other provinces, the aboriginal nations living in Quebec, and the other minorities living there. Additionally, negotiations could begin only after a referendum in which a "clear majority" voted "Yes" to a "clear question."
* Both sides hailed the decision. Prime Minister Chretien claimed that the Court made it clear that separation was a much more complicated process than the PQ had led supporters to believe.

CLARITY ACT, 1999

* The Canadian government passed the Clarity Act in 1999, which stated that in any future referenda, Quebec must ask a clear question, and win a clear majority.