

# The Myth of a Racist Quebec

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Translated from French

*The accusations of racism brought against the people of Quebec in the wake of Bill 21 on the secularism of the state are very ill-founded. On the contrary, the history of this minority people in North America shows an exemplary openness and rapprochement with cultural communities.*

Historically, French Canadians have distinguished themselves from the beginning by their “interbreeding” with the First Nations. They owe between 1 and 2% of their genetic heritage to the Native population of North America. This “mix” reflects their love of nature and freedom, their social democratic sensibility, their search for consultation, consensus and compromise, their taste for mediation, and their aversion to divisions and conflicts.

Québec’s humanitarian role internationally reflects their hospitality and generosity to immigrants. Already, in 1978, the Quebec government was the first in the West to welcome refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia ( boat people ). In fact, the refugee sponsorship operation had been a remarkable success in 192 Quebec cities and towns. In addition, the solidarity of Quebecers with the struggle of the Salvadoran people is well known.

We must recall that it was in Quebec that the first Member of Jewish origin in the history of Canada and the entire British Empire, **Ezekiel Hart**, was elected in 1807, while McGill University refused the admission of Jewish students. It was in Quebec as well that **Jean Alfred**, a Haitian, was the first black to be elected deputy, in the county of Papineau under the banner of the [Parti Québécois](#). As for illegal immigrants, Quebec has shown flexibility and humanity.

Under the 1976 and 1978 programs, Quebec accepted 40% of refugees wishing to flee the Lebanese civil war. We must not forget, too, the generosity of Quebecers who tried to relieve the victims of the earthquakes in Italy in 1980.

Of particular note is the efforts of **Gérald Godin**, Minister of Cultural Affairs in René Lévesque’s government, to introduce the Native Language Education Program as a bridge to intercultural communities.

These measures reflect the goodwill of successive Quebec governments to reach out to ethnic groups and accommodate them to ensure their fulfillment.

Yet, we are accused of racism for having enacted the law on secularism.

However, the former Mufti of Marseille, and analyst of Islam **Soheib Bencheikh** warns us:

“By defending the right of the most reactionary elements to impose their interpretation of religion, this West all well- intentioned – and armed with charters of every gender – undermines the internal struggle of the more progressive elements of the Muslim community. “

With regard to the debate on the veil Bencheikh states the following:

“Of course, you have to give everyone liberties, especially if it’s about freedom of conscience. But is the veil, the burqa, the niqab, problems of conscience and spirituality? Is it not rather the avant-garde banner of a conquering ideology that uses the freedoms offered by the West – secularism, religious freedom, etc.? – like a Trojan horse to impose itself little by little?”

Thus, accusations of racism, xenophobia and intolerance against the people of Quebec do not hold water. As **René Lévesque** often said:

“The mark of a civilized society is reflected in the way it treats its minorities. “

Religious symbols are symbols of a political proselytism that has nothing to do with religion. Asking officials and teachers in positions of authority not to wear religious symbols during working hours ensures the neutrality and impartiality of the state. Secularism is the opposite of racism and discrimination. This is the very illustration of the principle of equality and freedom of conscience. Obscurantism and misogyny must not be condoned in the name of openness to diversity.

Ethnic groups have everything to gain by living in harmony with the French-speaking majority, instead of curbing the legitimate aspirations of Quebecers.

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