

**Repatriating the “Mother Tongue”:
Should Quebec, Wales, Scotland, and the United States be speaking
Hebrew?**

“In the beginning was the Word...” (John 1:1)

In 2021, more than 750 unmarked graves were found on the grounds of a Canadian boarding school which had been a residential educational facility for Native children.¹ CNN news interviewed Bobby Cameron, a member of the Witchekan Lake First Nation (in northern Saskatchewan) and Chief of the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations. Cameron noted, “The world is watching as we unearth the findings of genocide. We had concentration camps here, we had them here in Canada, in Saskatchewan. They were called Indian residential schools. Canada will be known as a nation which tried to exterminate the First Nations, now we have evidence.”²

This discovery came after the remains of another 215 children were found in late May of the same year, buried near another boarding school in Canada and as the nation grappled with its dark history involving Indigenous people. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the findings at both former boarding schools “reaffirm the truth” that families, survivors and Indigenous communities “have long known,” and the government will continue to provide funding and resources to bring “these terrible wrongs to light.”³

What is especially notable (and tragic) about these recent news reports of newly discovered Indigenous persons deaths is they follow earlier efforts by the Canadian government to address the history of ill-treatment of the Indigenous population. The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history, was

initially implemented in 2007.⁴ One of the elements of the agreement was the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada to address grievances of the former Indigenous students, their families, their communities with the surrounding Canadian population. Between 2007 and 2015, the Canadian government provided about \$72 million to support the TRC's work. The TRC traveled across the country and heard from more than 6,500 witnesses. It also hosted seven conferences to educate the Canadian public about the history and legacy of the Indigenous residential schools system. The Commission then authored a document discussing the residential schools system based upon over 5 million records, which are now publicly available at the University of Manitoba. In December 2015, the TRC released its entire six-volume final report.⁵

Obviously, the more recent findings described at the opening of this paper indicate that the earlier effort to fully document the repression of Canada's Indigenous population was not adequate. One of the means by which the current Canadian Government intends to "right this wrong" is to energize efforts to re-establish the spoken languages of its Indigenous peoples, including those Canadians who are First Nations/First Peoples, Metis and Inuit. When the British began colonizing Canada in 1763, there were several different indigenous peoples (tribes) residing in Canada, speaking over seventy different languages. In 1876, the Canadian Parliament passed the Indian Act, which (among other items) forbade the use of these languages and required Native youths to be sent to special Residential Schools, where they would be instructed in English.⁶ At present, there are 1,807,250 indigenous-descended persons in Canada; the most common indigenous language still spoken is Algonquin, followed by Cree.⁷ Most of the other original languages have been lost over time or are presently used by only a few hundred persons, mostly over the age of fifty.⁸ The Canadian Government has allocated \$4.1 million to help

reintroduce the predominant remaining languages to indigenous Canadians.⁹ A story in the *Washington Post* provides additional insight regarding the attitude of present-day Indigenous Canadians on the significance of reinstating the use of their languages, stating that “Isaiah Omeasoo studied and made himself fluent in Cree. His wife is expecting a baby in February...and he will speak to his son or daughter in their language...It’s not going to skip another generation.”¹⁰

What are the explicit and implicit rationales at work here? First, these narratives frame Indigenous languages as both a *product and possession* of the people who once spoke it. The language is central to their culture. As some of the Indigenous people commented, their world-view is best explained in their own language. Other languages may not have the vocabulary or nuances of meaning required to fully convey the meaning of the native speakers.

A second implication is that a shared mother tongue is a means for binding people in the community together; it creates a sense of commonality with other members and also acts to exclude persons who are non-speakers from the community. Native language is both a fence that keeps the community together, protecting its identity, and a barrier that excludes non-speakers from participating. By requiring indigenous peoples to learn only English, British Canada intended to not only forcibly absorb them into British culture, but also prevent them from maintaining their identities as Indigenous.

Turning Now to French Quebec

The French entry into what was to ultimately become British Canada in 1607 was small and somewhat haphazard.¹¹ The first French visitors to Quebec in 1534 were fur traders and fishermen who lived in temporary dwellings on the eastern coast. Notably, these French colonists, although sanctioned by the French government, acted primarily as extensions of

Huguenot coastal trading organizations headquartered in Brest, Rochelle, Caen, Lille and Calais, France.¹²

Most of these initial Quebec entrepreneurs were Protestant-Huguenot in religion, although several would later claim to be Roman Catholic, once the Edict of Nantes (discussed below) was rescinded.¹³ For several decades in the early 1500s, the Roman Catholic religion dominated France; however by 1550, Protestant Reformers became increasingly numerous and economically powerful, causing the French King Henry IV to acknowledge their value to the realm. Thus in 1598, the Edict of Nantes was signed guaranteeing Protestants “the enjoyment of their civil and religious rights.”¹⁴ The greater freedom of mobility encouraged Protestant French merchants to make additional efforts to establish trading sites on the North American shoreline above the area claimed by Spain.

Henry Baird’s (1885) historical documents indicate that the Protestant Huguenot population residing in France was primarily located in seaports along the Western coast—in particular La Rochelle, Rouen and Dieppe. From these cities, the Huguenots controlled the major share of the French economy, acting as merchants, transoceanic shippers, bankers, and entrepreneurs. These French Huguenot traders were often multi-lingual, e.g., speaking English, Spanish, Dutch, and German, and had business contacts in these same countries. As Baird notes, the fact that the Huguenots were the economic drivers of France placed them under the King’s protection and insulated them from overt attacks by the Roman Catholic clergy.¹⁵

In 1599, a Huguenot merchant named Pierre Chauvin (whose surname variously became Chafin, Chaffin, Cauvin and Calvin) was tasked by French King Henry IV to “colonize America.” Concurrent with the French exploration and trading posts established along what became the coast of Quebec and Maine, the British were also expanding their colonization efforts

north of Massachusetts Bay. As Baird reports, “In 1621, British King James I...made over to one of his subjects, Sir William Alexander—afterward Earl of Stirling – the whole area east of the St. Croix River and south of the Saint Lawrence...The grant included all of the French colony of Acadia and was to be known as Nova Scotia.”¹⁶

This was happy news to the many Huguenots who had already emigrated to England and Scotland and desired to help the English cause. Some of these new arrivals included David, Louis, and Thomas Kirk who had fled to England from Dieppe. Baird further points out that the British were also well aware that several of the ‘Catholic’ Acadians were in fact Huguenot Protestants, including surnames Alain, Barillot, Blanchard, Bobin, Boisseau, Briand, Cadet, Chauvet, Celemnceau, D’Ambroise, D’Amours, Dugast, Gourdeau, LaTour, Landry, LaPeriere, Morin, Petipas, Robichon, Robin, Roy, and Sibilleau.¹⁷

In France the political situation grew more threatening for Huguenots. The Roman Catholic Church was gaining favor with the French monarchy and by the late 1650s to early 1660s, Protestants were fleeing France for England and Holland and their American colonies. Finally in 1685, the Edict of Nantes, which had given the Huguenots in France their civil and religious freedoms, was fully revoked by Louis IV.

The Canadian land on which the French Huguenots settled changed hands repeatedly between France and Britain over the next forty years. Depending on the time period, the French settlers were treated well or badly by both their French and/or English overlords.¹⁸ In 1663, Louis IX took control of the French colony and enticed many new French settlers there based on promises of good farm land and religious freedom. As many of these colonists were originally unmarried French soldiers, the king also sent over 850 unwed women who were under the care of the state, known as *les filles du roi*. These newly formed families were promised 300 pounds a

year if they had ten children and 400 pounds a year if they had twelve children!¹⁹ This resulted in a highly in-bred population over the next several decades, since few new settlers arrived, and the children had to find marriage partners. This, the number of different surnames in Quebec is small, relative to the overall size of the French Canadian population.

By 1689, the French population in Canada was 10,700 persons; by contrast, the population of the British North American colonies was 160,000 persons.²⁰ Obviously, the French were ill-equipped to defend their colony against British annexation attempts. By 1713, Britain had prevailed over France in North America—the Treaty of Utrecht was signed giving Britain ownership of Acadia, Newfoundland, and the Hudson Bay.

As described above, the efforts by France to establish a sustained colony in North America failed. Yet the heritage, pride, and language among the descendants of their small colony remained intact—in part because of on-going British efforts to marginalize the remaining French population both economically and culturally.²¹ These original settlers have now grown into a population of 8,653,000 people, compared to a British-descended Canadian population of 30,000,000 persons.

A 1968 quote from former Premier Rene Levesque tells of their nationalist culture: “We are Quebecois. What this means first and foremost ...is that we are attached to this one corner of the earth where we can be completely ourselves: this is Quebec, the only place where we have the unmistakable feeling that “here we are really at home”...At the core of this personality is the fact that we speak French. Everything else depends on this one essential element.”²² Francois Rocher, a professor of political science in Ottawa, Canada published a detailed discussion of the “evolving parameters of Quebec nationalism,” which covers the period from the 1960s to the early 2000s. He states, “The dominant ideology in Quebec is nationalism,

and that partisan activism has been the means for promoting knowledge of Quebec's uniqueness within Canada."²³

According to Rocher, the 1960s saw the birth of a strong nationalist movement in Quebec, fueled in part by the improving economy of the province under regional efforts, as opposed to having its economy controlled largely by the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa. This movement grew under the guidance of Maurice Duplessis, a Francophone Quebec politician who defined Quebec's status as a nation based on its religious and linguistic independence from British Canada. Another Francophone Quebec political leader, Jean Lesage, then championed what is termed the Quiet Revolution.

The Lesage Government

In the provincial election of 1960, Lesage fought to unseat the Union Nationale, which under Maurice Duplessis and his successors Paul Sauvé and Antonio Barrette, had ruled Québec for the past sixteen years. Not only was this political party considered corrupt, it was also socially conservative, isolationist, and closely allied with the Roman Catholic Church.

Lesage's Liberals, on the other hand, presented themselves as leaders of the new Québec—progressive, urban and modern—a message that resonated within the province. Lesage campaigned with the slogan, "*C'est le temps que ça change*,"—It's time for a change. In June 1960, Lesage's Liberals won a narrow victory, removing the Union National from power and gaining 51 of 95 legislature seats. Lesage became the province's ninth premier, also taking on the posts of Minister of Finance and later, Minister of Revenue and Minister of Federal/Provincial Affairs.

A third Quebec francophone political leader, Daniel Johnson, Sr. described Quebec as a nation given its "historical, linguistic, religious and economic unity animated by a common will

to live.” He proposed that two nations—British Canada and French Canada (i.e., Quebec) existed in Canada, and that Quebec constitutes a national territory.²⁴

The new nationalistic ideology of Quebec as a separate nation had “the avowed goal...to permit French Canadians to allocate resources in their favour to counter the economic domination to which they were now (being) subjected.”²⁵ The Quebec government demanded that “the powers claimed by British Canada under the Constitution of 1867” should be now transferred to the Province of Quebec. “Provincial autonomy was presentedas a means of political, economic and social restoration of the French-Canadian people.” In 1977, the French Language in Quebec bill was passed by the Canadian Parliament which “reduced one of the great francophone fears, one that has consistently sustained nationalism, namely the fear of linguistic assimilation.”²⁶ The social effect of that bill was felt immediately: “Introduced by Camille Laurin, Bill 101, The Charter of the French Language, made French the official language of the Quebec Provincial Government and its courts. French became the normal everyday language of work, instruction, communication, commerce and business.”²⁷ Thus, Quebec succeeded in re-establishing its colonial ‘mother tongue’ as its national language.

Reintroducing the Welsh to their Language

This paper next turns to an examination of what Welsh historians have written about their country and its language. John Davies’ (1993) *A History of Wales* is perhaps the leading authority on the topic. At 718 pages, his volume covers the Welsh people, their language, and their culture from the mythic past to their modern political economy. Davies’ book was first published in 1987 in the Welsh language, and he, himself, is of Welsh descent. This personal history provides him with a deep admiration for the Welsh way of life.

Davies anchors his Welsh history in the LaTene people (a late Iron-Age Celtic culture)

from Central Europe, noting that there is evidence of their artifacts dating from around 400 BCE in Conwy, Wales, which lies in the Northwestern area of the country. Davies next turns his attention to the arrival of later Celtic peoples, which he describes as “The first culture of true splendor to develop in Europe north of the Alps.”²⁸ He notes that “around the year 300 BCE, the Celts were the most powerful people in Europe, with a territory which extended from Ireland to Anatolia ... They possessed energy, talent and pride.” Thus, In Davies’ view and that of most other Welsh historians such as J.E. Lloyd (who is widely recognized as the founder of the modern academic study of Welsh history),²⁹ the Celtic/Welsh language is the ‘mother tongue’ of the country and, because it is part of the indigenous landscape, should be given primacy in the modern-day Welsh society and culture.

As noted above, Welsh has been spoken continuously in Wales throughout its history, but by 1911 it had become a minority language, spoken by 43.5 percent of the population.³⁰ The majority of the Welsh population had adopted English as their mother tongue. Although this decline continued over the following decades, the language did not die out, especially in the west and northern parts of country where Welsh was still spoken by most of the population.³¹ By the start of the twenty-first century, numbers began to increase once more, at least partly as a result of the increase in Welsh-medium education in public schools.³²

The 2004 Welsh Language Use Survey showed that 21.7 percent of the population of Wales spoke Welsh, compared with 20.8 percent in the 2001 census, and 18.5 percent in the 1991 census. However, the 2011 census showed a slight decline to 562,000 Welsh speakers, or 19 percent of the population.³³ The census also showed a “big drop” in the number of speakers in the Welsh-speaking heartlands, with the number dropping to under 50 percent in Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire for the first time.³⁴ However, according to the

Welsh Language Use Survey in 2020–21, 22 percent of people aged three and over were able to speak Welsh, which indicated a re-emergence of the mother tongue in the youngest members of the population. It was also reported that 14.8 percent (448,400) of people aged three or older in Wales spoke Welsh daily in December 2021, with 5.2 percent (158,400) speaking it weekly and 7.6 percent (228,600) less often. Approximately 1.9 percent (56,500) reported that they never spoke Welsh despite being able to speak it, with the remaining 70.5 percent reporting they were not able to speak Welsh. Thus, the Welsh language seems to be clinging to life in its homeland, but certainly has not regained usage among the majority of the Welsh population.

The language survey also revealed that although most Welsh-speaking people also speak English, many are more comfortable expressing themselves in Welsh than in English. This is an important factor in seeking to re-introduce Welsh as the country's dominant language—promotional materials could emphasize that speaking Welsh in one's daily life is more comfortable and ethnically authentic than conversing in English. True to their historical Celtic in-migration patterns, Welsh speakers still remain largely concentrated in the north and west of Wales, principally Gwynedd, Conwy County Borough, Denbighshire, Anglesey, Carmarthenshire, north Pembrokeshire, Ceredigion, parts of Glamorgan, and north-west and extreme south-west Powys. However, first-language and other fluent speakers can be found throughout Wales. Thus there is a country-wide foundation for re-building usage of the Welsh language.³⁵ .

A balanced critique of efforts to re-establish Welsh as the dominant language spoken in the country is provided by C.H. Williams. He understands that the aim of the enhanced Welsh language program is to provide the Welsh people with a re-introduction to their mother tongue

and to enable them to better establish their sovereignty as a people apart from England. In Williams' view, and that of several other prominent Welsh historians educators and politicians, the predominant use of English over the past century has resulted in the weakening of Welsh people's ethnic ties with their Celtic past.³⁶ By re-focusing language education, public administration and discourse and Welsh business adoption of the Welsh language, the hope is that the Welsh people will be re-united not only with their past, but also take a new pride in their unique history, apart from that of England and the United Kingdom.

The Welsh government fears that Welsh ethnicity is being swallowed up by the population becoming overly British, especially as marked by the prevailing use of English in public discourse. Thus, country-wide laws and policies have been created to require the teaching of Welsh in public schools, including kindergartens, public signage, on-line governmental communications, tourism publicity, billboards, and mass media programming produced by the government; the stated goal is to create a million Welsh speakers in the population by 2050. At present, only around 500,000 persons speak Welsh out of a population of 3,100,000 persons. Thus, even if this goal is reached, two-thirds of Wales will still be primarily English-speaking.³⁷

In declaring their intent to provide a more Welsh-oriented society, distinct from Great Britain, the government cites the examples of Northern Ireland and Scotland, which also have moved to a 'reserved powers' political governance model designed to provide more decision making authority to the country government and reduce the dominance of the United Kingdom governance embodied in the UK Parliament and the Prime Minister. In essence, by advocating the widespread use of Welsh/Celtic language within its own borders, Wales hopes to strengthen its national voice and identity.

Dueling Native Languages in Scotland

Scotland is an ethnic anomaly when compared to Quebec and Wales. It was settled in two waves of incoming peoples. The first were the Celts who entered Scotland concurrent with their arrival in Wales.³⁸ Their descendants now reside primarily in the North, West and islands of Scotland and originally spoke a Celtic language akin to that in Wales. Popular culture portrays these Scots as Highlanders, complete with clan-based kilts and red hair.

The Southern and Eastern portions of Scotland were settled later by persons from Northern England who had moved further northward during the reign of Scottish King David I and—although not given sufficient attention in current accounts—by Norman knights and noblemen who ventured to England in 1066 with William the Conqueror.³⁹ These persons spoke primarily in French dialects which mixed with English and evolved into a Northern English/Lowland Scots dialect. Thus Scotland has two ‘native’ tongues distinct from the current English dialect. The existence of two ‘native’ languages—Celtic and Lowland Scots—makes it difficult to unite Scotland to form a linguistic barrier with England.

Yet, ironically perhaps, Scotland has the most marked military history of seeking to stand as a separate nation, as compared to Quebec and Wales, from its more populous and powerful southern neighbor. One of the ways in which Scotland is attempting to differentiate itself from England at the present time is by reinvigorating its national tongues through celebrating poetry and literature written in the Scottish vernaculars.⁴⁰ This movement has been especially active during the last twenty years.

Below is a part of the Scottish Government’s description of the plan it has developed to re-introduce Gaelic as the National Language of Scotland. As the observant reader will no doubt notice, however, the entire plan is written in modern-day English. The only Gaelic language on

the Scotland site is in the upper left-hand corner of the page; it reads: Riaghaltas na Ha-Alba/Scottish Government.

The Gaelic Language Act 2005 was passed by the Scottish Parliament with a view to securing the status of the Gaelic language as an official language of Scotland, commanding equal respect to the English language. This is a critical time for the future of Gaelic. The position of the language is extremely fragile and the declining numbers of those speaking Gaelic fluently threatens the survival of Gaelic as a living language in Scotland. It is essential that steps are taken to create a sustainable future for Gaelic in Scotland.⁴¹

One of the key features of this Act is the provision enabling Bòrd na Gàidhlig (the Scottish Government's principal Gaelic development committee) to require public services to prepare Gaelic Language Plans. This provision is designed to ensure that the public sector in Scotland plays its part in creating a sustainable future for Gaelic by raising its status and profile and creating practical opportunities for its use. ...Following our initial notice in 2006, the Scottish Government's Gaelic Language Plan was granted approval by the Bòrd and came in to operation in June 2010...⁴²

The Bòrd's guidance states that giving Gaelic equal respect does not automatically mean identical treatment for Gaelic and English, or that a particular level of Gaelic provision must be made available in all circumstances. Instead, it encourages public bodies to endeavor to be supportive and generous to Gaelic development and to prepare their Gaelic Language Plans with a view to facilitating the use of Gaelic as much as reasonably possible.⁴³

Sadly, a recent report has indicated that this noble effort has largely failed and that soon Scotland will be without its Gaelic language. The language does receive support from the Scottish government, but researchers say existing policies have failed. The Scottish research team published their findings in a new book titled “The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community: A comprehensive sociolinguistic survey of Scottish Gaelic.”⁴⁴ Study author Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, professor of Gaelic research at the University of the Highlands and Islands, notes that the language could be gone within ten years due to a rapid decline in the number of speakers that started in the 1980s. For the 1981 census, 80 percent of people on the Scottish islands reported an ability to speak Gaelic, but by the 2011 census that had fallen to 52 percent. This

represents a net loss of 9,660 Gaelic speakers over 30 years, with younger people in particular not speaking the language.⁴⁵ “There are currently around 11,000 Gaelic speakers in Scotland and most are over the age of 50, Ó Giollagáin said, but their networks are increasingly isolated and the language is not being passed down to younger generations...Language is a social competence,” said Ó Giollagáin, adding that speakers need friends to converse. Researchers say the existing government policy—which has included the building of Gaelic primary and secondary schools in Glasgow and Edinburgh to improve access to education—has failed.”⁴⁶

How Israel Learned to Speak Hebrew and became a Jewish State

The majority of historical Jews who lived in Jerusalem were dispersed to the four corners of the world during the Roman occupation in the early centuries of the Common Era. Some Jews continued to live in what was to later become the state of Israel, but they spoke Aramaic and later Arabic. During the Roman occupation, Jews were already scattered throughout the Roman Empire and were dwelling as far away as India, Gaul, North Africa, Britain, Italy, Mesopotamia, Central Asia and Central Europe. In these locales, they adopted the languages of their host countries, although many maintained a working usage of Hebrew which gave them the ability to communicate among each other. This greatly aided their roles as overland and maritime merchants, since other local merchants rarely spoke the languages of those to whom they were shipping in another country.

When Jews spread from Western Europe and the Mediterranean region to Eastern Europe due to pogroms during the Middle Ages, they developed a language called Yiddish (“Jewish speaking”) which was a conflation of multiple Germanic languages and Hebrew. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most Jewish people across the globe spoke primarily the language of the country in which they were living.⁴⁷ For example, many Sephardic Jews spoke

versions of Spanish and Portuguese, while Ashkenazic Jews spoke some Yiddish, but were primarily fluent in Polish, German, Russian, Italian, Hungarian, French, English, and several Slavic languages, depending upon the countries in which they were living.

Most had little or no formal training in speaking Hebrew, which had become a language used only in religious services and not normal conversations, and as a result, Hebrew lacked many words and concepts needed for twentieth century life.⁴⁸ Further, even Hebrew religious phrases were often known only to rabbis or Hebrew scholars. In essence, Hebrew had become a “relic” language, not fully deceased, but incapable of being used in common discourse or business transactions.⁴⁹

With the Zionist Movement to re-establish Jerusalem as a capital for Jews and to re-settle Jews in Palestine,⁵⁰ making it once again a Jewish country, one of the primary requirements was to re-invigorate Hebrew as the ‘mother tongue’ for the global Jewish people. When they returned to Palestine—the ultimate goal of the Zionists—they could form a Jewish State having its own, unique language.⁵¹ In 1900, approximately 30,000 Jews were living in Palestine, and by 1939 this number had grown to approximately 450,000. After the Holocaust, surviving Jews from throughout Europe were relocated to Palestine and in 1948 the State of Israel was brought into existence. Within the Zionist ideology it was believed that one of the criteria needed to define a nation was the use of a shared common language spoken both throughout the society and by each citizen.⁵²

At present, there are around 7,000,000 Jewish persons living in Israel, all of whom speak Hebrew as their ‘mother tongue.’ This was accomplished by a governmental policy requiring all new immigrants and their children to become fluent in Hebrew. An adult education program, the ULPAN, was begun in which all non-Hebrew speakers were required to participate. Immigrant

children were immersed in Hebrew upon entering kindergarten and throughout their education. All college and university courses were required to be taught in Hebrew.⁵³ Since all young Jews were required to perform two years of military service, this was also instructed entirely in Hebrew. Within two decades the Jewish Israeli population had become entirely Hebrew-fluent.⁵⁴

Importantly, however, this does not mean that they all practice the Jewish religion. Current research indicates that only around half the Israeli Jewish population consider themselves “observant,” that is, they follow kashrut dietary practices and regularly attend religious services. Thus, there is a large secular segment of the Israeli Jewish population that view themselves as ethnically Jewish, but not religiously Jewish. This divergence between secular Jewish ethnicity and religious Jewish practice will become an important part of our discussion in a later section.

Why English is the Mother Tongue of the United States

Next, consider how English became the ‘mother tongue’ of the United States, even though Americans fought and won a War of Independence against English-speaking Great Britain in 1776. The British were late colonial arrivals in North America. Already the Spanish and Dutch had established colonies in the northern and southern sections of the continent. Soon after, French and Swedish colonists arrived. So why were these non-British languages not chosen as appropriate for the newly founded United States, after the long and violent war with oppressive Great Britain?

The factor giving English a distinct advantage as the American ‘mother tongue’ was that by 1700 virtually the entire upper echelon of the country spoke English fluently, though some prominent citizens, e.g., Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, spoke French and Italian, as well. As a result, the primary documents founding the United States, e.g., the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, were written in English; this effectively elevated English to the

status of the ‘mother tongue’ of the new country.

Back to the Beginning...

The title to the present paper contained a question which this paper will now attempt to answer: “Why are Quebec, Wales, Scotland and the United States not speaking Hebrew” as the Israelis are now doing? The question seems absurd given that Quebec has French ancestry, Wales believes itself to be Celtic, as does Scotland, and the United States is, of course, primarily British in colonial ancestry, right? This premise was widely accepted as factual prior to 2018, but recent research has shown it to be fallacious.

A Closer Look at Quebec’s French Ancestry

A recent research article has shown that the majority of French Huguenot and Acadian settlers in what was to become Quebec were not among the majority of the people in France who are descendants of the Gauls, as is commonly believed, but rather Jews of both Sephardic and Ashkenazic origin.⁵⁵ How is this possible? The great majority of French settlers drawn to Canada were recruited from persons living in port cities such as Dieppe and Rochelle. The economy in these cities was based on international trade which was dominated by Protestant Huguenots who were of Jewish descent and still practiced their religion as crypto-Jews;⁵⁶ that is, they were publicly Protestant Christians, but among themselves and with other crypto-Jews who lived in countries where they traded, for example, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Italy, England, Scotland and Wales, they were able to communicate, perhaps even speaking Hebrew. Within this network, they discussed the possibility of moving to North America and establishing colonies where they would be freer to practice their religion.⁵⁷

The first three studies published in the aforementioned series found that the Mayflower pilgrims,⁵⁸ Central Appalachian settlers⁵⁹ and the ‘lost’ English colony at Roanoke⁶⁰ consisted

almost uniformly of persons having Jewish ancestry. Further, the Central Appalachian research identified Daniel Boone, David Crockett, and Abraham Lincoln as having Jewish ancestry. Daniel Boone and David Crockett had family lineages that were originally French and Welsh, whereas Lincoln's ancestry was from a part of England that once had a large Jewish population.⁶¹

Additional studies on the ancestry of prominent early American statesmen such as Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin found that they also had DNA indicating they were of Jewish ancestry.⁶² This opened up the possibility that large numbers of "British" persons immigrating to Colonial North America from Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales—which is where Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, and Franklin had ancestors—may have also been of Jewish ancestry. If they were aware they were ancestrally Jewish, they might choose to come to the British colonies in North America seeking a larger share of religious freedom.

Thus, additional DNA studies were conducted on the current populations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, which confirmed this hypothesis. In other words, several members of the remaining population in these countries, especially in Southeastern Wales and Southeastern Scotland, are also of Jewish ancestry—and notably these areas do not speak Celtic languages, but rather 'antique' forms of English. It was proposed that these areas had likely served as ethnic refuges for Jewish persons fleeing not only from France during the 1500s, but also the Jewish Exclusion Act in England of 1290.⁶³ It was learned that many of the formerly Jewish persons in England either converted publicly to Christianity, or fled to the far reaches of Britain. They re-settled where there were ports, cities and existing shipping lanes and began practicing their religion in Protestant congregations. Notably, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland has religious symbols incorporating the Burning Bush as a central motif and the motto,

“It is not consumed,” meaning their Jewish ethnicity lives on within this Protestant faith.



Note that the Huguenot Church images in the center and right incorporate the Tree of Life and also the Lion of Judah (HuguenotMuseum.org). The Presbyterian symbol on the left states “It flourishes within.”

Thus, French Canada, Southeastern Wales, Southeastern Scotland, Northern Ireland, and the descendants of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish Colonial Era settlers in the United States have primarily Jewish lines of descent. Does this make them Jewish? Should they be speaking Hebrew as their ‘mother tongue’? That depends on one’s interpretation of Jewish law, the Halakha.

Who is a Jew?

HALAKHA (Hebrew: מִיְהוּדִי יהודי) is the body of laws governing Jewish identity. It covers the accumulated laws and ordinances that have evolved since biblical times to regulate religious observance and the lives of Jewish people.

Orthodox and Conservative Judaism consider people to be “Jewish” if their mothers were Jewish or if they undergo a halakhic conversion. Reform Judaism and Reconstructionist Judaism accept both matrilineal and patrilineal descent, as well as conversion, in determining if one is Jewish. Karaite Judaism predominantly follows patrilineal descent as well as conversion. This

implies that if one's ancestral mother and/or ancestral father was Jewish, then his/her descendants are Jewish. Recall that Judaism began as a religion grounded in an inter-related set of tribes living in ancient Palestine; thus the ethnic basis of Judaism is, and always has been, one originating from hereditary descent.

Opinion polls have also suggested that the majority of Jews see being Jewish as predominantly a matter of ancestry and culture, rather than religion. In fact, the majority of Israeli Jewish citizens are not religiously observant.⁶⁴ This implies that the primary determinant of Jewish ethnicity is one's genealogical ancestry and not one's religious practice. If your direct male and/or female ancestor was Jewish, then ethnically you are Jewish also. One cannot 'opt out' of being Jewish by, say, joining the Protestant, Catholic or Muslim faith, because though you may choose one of these to be your public faith, it is not your ancestral ethnicity. Although use of one's genetic ancestry to determine his/her ethnicity may seem to be a radical imposition, consider the fact that persons whose DNA indicates their descent from sub-Saharan African ancestors do not have the option of just waking up one day and declaring themselves to be 'White.' Similarly, an American whose DNA is indicative of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean ancestry cannot suddenly announce to his/her/their work colleagues, "Today I have decided to become a WASP." Admittedly, not all Jewish-descended people 'look' Jewish, Semitic, or Middle Eastern. The interesting result to come out of the research studies discussed above is that none of those who have read the studies and learned they are of Jewish descent have contacted the author(s) and complained about having their ethnicity re-assigned.

Several who have taken the effort to make contact have noted that they had suspected that this may be their actual ethnicity through family stories, family naming patterns, family failure to regularly attend Christian church services, and so forth. Some whose direct ancestors were

included in the studies have written the author(s) and stated that they were already aware they were of Jewish ancestry, but chose ‘not to broadcast it.’ The only vehemently negative response to the research findings so far has come from an Orthodox Ashkenazi rabbi (whose ancestry was not covered in any of the studies) who wrote, “YOU ARE A LIAR!!! He did not want all these formerly “unknown” Jews to now try to rejoin the Jewish faith.

A final, rarely discussed point regarding contemporary Jewish ethnic ideology is that with their lengthy history of brutal pogroms, Inquisitions, repression, discrimination, and especially the attempted genocide of the Holocaust, many current-day Jewish people view themselves as a small, harassed, but brilliantly resilient minority which has survived, despite all odds. To quote an ironically appropriate Presbyterian hymn:

Faith of our fathers

*Faith of our fathers, living still
in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword.
Oh, how our hearts beat high with joy
whene'er we hear that glorious word!
Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
we will be true to thee till death.*

*Our fathers chained in prison cells
were still in heart and conscience free,
and bless'd would be their children's fate
if they, like them, should die for thee!*

It will be a shock to this Jewish ‘survivalist mentality’ to suddenly discover that Jewish-descended persons are not actually a put-upon minority in the world, especially the Western world. Most of the ‘WASP’ population in the United States is of Jewish descent—including those most revered for their historical contributions to the country’s cultural and economic success—the Mayflower Pilgrims, the Massachusetts Bay Colony/New England Colony, the First Families of Virginia, the Jamestown Colony, the ‘Lost’ Colony of Roanoke, the Texas ‘Old 300,’ the Defenders of the Alamo, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, John Adams,

John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, Alexander Hamilton, Daniel Boone, David Crockett, and some of more questionable cultural contributions: Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, Nathan Bedford Forrest, Frank and Jesse James, Anderson 'Devil Anse' Hatfield, and Bad Jim Vance.

If these findings are combined with those by other researchers who have identified majority crypto-Jewish populations in Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, as well as clusters in Spain, Portugal and Italy,⁶⁵ they would bring the Jewish population of the world to over 200,000,000 persons. And that is an important point to ponder, regardless of whether these newly discovered Jews decide to adopt Hebrew as their mother tongue or not.

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