

# University of Guelph, Department of History

**Marc-André Gagnon**

**PhD Final Oral Examination**

**“À mon drapeau: je jure d’être fidèle”:  
le mouvement des Sociétés Saint-Jean-Baptiste, 1947-1984**

## *A B S T R A C T*

**Date: Monday, May 8, 2017**

**Time: 1:00 pm**

**Location: MCKN 304**

**Advisor:  
Dr. Matthew Hayday**

**Examining Committee Members:  
Dr. Alan Gordon  
Dr. Stéphanie Nutting**

**External Examiner:  
Dr. Harold Bérubé (Université de  
Sherbrooke)**

**Chair: Dr. Stuart McCook**

This thesis explores the role played by the Société Saint-Jean-Baptiste (SSJB) in Quebec as a political lobby group between 1947 and 1984. One of the oldest civil society organizations still active in Canada, the SSJB helped build a sense of belonging to the French-Canadian nation by promoting the history, symbols and national myths of French-speaking Canadians. Initially rooted in clerical nationalism and around the pillars of language, traditional institutions and the Catholic faith, the Society went through a period of profound changes starting in the late 1950s. Under the influence of neo-nationalism, it gradually abandoned these references in order to adopt a territorial and secular definition of nationalism.

In parallel with these changes, the SSJB in Quebec adopted a political program focused on strengthening the province’s constitutional, linguistic, cultural, and economic sovereignty and autonomy. In addition, the organization’s structures were modified to reflect changes with regards to gender, class, and religion. As a consequence, the relationship between the SSJB in Quebec and Ontario deteriorated as the two branches of the Society increasingly promoted different, and divergent, political projects for French-Canadians. In 1972, the Fédération des Sociétés Saint-Jean-Baptiste du Québec became the Mouvement national des Québécois.

Drawing on social movement theory, the thesis explores how the SSJB’s leaders and their network mobilized their resources and used their symbolic capital to influence public decision-makers on constitutional and linguistic policies. It also demonstrates the contributions made by the SSJB by looking at their critique of Canadian federalism, and the promotion of the sovereigntist project. The study also investigates how public policies and militancy influenced the organization’s identity.

