



NFB FILM

STUDY GUIDE

Louis-Joseph Papineau

THE DEMI-GOD

(The History Makers series)

Black & White — 26 minutes 56 seconds
Produced by the National Film Board of Canada

Suggested Uses: History classes in junior and senior high schools.

SYNOPSIS

A proud, defiant man, skilful in parliamentary debate, Papineau's sympathies lay with the plain people being exploited and pillaged by a mercenary ruling clique. This film concerns Papineau's attempts to halt Parliament by refusing to take his seat as Speaker of the Assembly, and the beginning of his swing from personal protest to outright rebellion against arbitrary government.

CONCEPTS

Major Concept:

Papineau, in a determined effort to put the control of the government of Lower Canada in the hands of the majority, refused to take his position in the Speaker's chair of the Assembly. A combination of English members and French moderates nullified this device and turned Papineau's course in the direction of violence.

Supporting Concepts:

- Louis-Joseph Papineau was the seigneur of Montebello, and a lawyer who had received the traditional seminary training at Quebec.
- He was the leader of the extremist reform group in Lower Canada and tended to be both republican and anti-clerical in sentiment.
- From 1815 to 1836, with one brief interruption, he served as Speaker of the Assembly.
- In 1835, as a method of protest in his contest with Governor Aylmer and the English-speaking oligarchy, he refused to take his seat as Speaker of the Assembly.
- His action was applauded by most French members of the Assembly, who favored any action that would disrupt Parliament and ruin the English merchants.
- Papineau could see no other course and was ready to accept, for a time, commercial paralysis and a general increase in provincial misery.
- Both the Governor and some of Papineau's more moderate compatriots tried to persuade him to resume the Speaker's chair.
- Many French Canadians, who were less fully committed to extreme measures, viewed some of the results of Papineau's action with genuine alarm. They held him responsible for unemployment and the spread of a cholera epidemic.
- A demagogue — a demi-god — some called him.
- His supporters saw him as the saviour of French Canada, a bulwark against English oppression.
- For years he had frustrated a succession of governors and the Executive Council by refusing to vote a permanent civil list in exchange for complete Assembly control of all revenue.
- The year 1835 was no time for the Patriotes to capitulate.
- The pros and cons of Papineau's action were debated endlessly. He was praised as a great patriot and condemned as a visionary and a dogmatic fool.

- Aylmer and the English commercial interests feared the effects of the free trade he advocated.
- Some saw his action as anti-Montreal and felt that in the long run Quebec would suffer more.
- Papineau outlined his position privately to a moderate, Elzéar Bédard. He recited all his former complaints and summed up his point of view by insisting that the Canadians who made the country should control the means of exploiting it for their own profit.
- Papineau's device was, however, abortive. A combination of fifteen French moderates and fifteen English members provided the Assembly with the necessary quorum of thirty votes.
- Papineau conceded the failure of his device. His gamble had lost, and he now had to face the grim alternative of open rebellion.

SUGGESTED CLASS PREPARATION

a) Introduction:

This film deals with the problem of oligarchical government in Quebec in the period just prior to the Rebellion of 1837. The wisdom of Papineau's refusal to take his seat as Speaker of the Assembly was roundly debated by representatives of all shades of French-Canadian opinion. Use of the film should grow quite naturally out of the study of the struggle for responsible government. It provides an excellent inside view of the dilemma faced by the average French-Canadian citizen.

An easily obtained picture of Louis-Joseph Papineau should serve as an effective focus for class attention. Then the film can, in its turn, not only delineate the main features of the racial and constitutional problem but also add a realism to the dramatic events, which could not be achieved by other more traditional methods.

b) Words That May Cause Difficulty:

palpable	inertia	lucid	theocracy
injunction	capitulate	torpor	austere
demagogue	temporal	aberration	abjection

c) Directive Questions:

1. Why did Papineau decide not to take his place as Speaker?
2. What effect did this action have on most French Canadians?
3. What effect did it have on the English minority?
4. What point of view was represented by: Bourdages? Bédard? Henriette Lafontaine?
5. What was Papineau's concept of the best form of government? How did he justify his position?
6. What did the English merchants think of Papineau's whole campaign?
7. How was Papineau forced to return to the Speaker's chair?
8. What was the significance of his failure in 1835?

SUGGESTED FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

1. Take up and discuss the directive questions.
2. Investigate in some detail the reasons for the discontent in Quebec.
3. Compare the grievances in Lower Canada with those in Upper Canada.
4. Some students may wish to do a full biography on Papineau.
5. Discover what action was taken by Papineau at the actual outbreak of fighting in 1837.
6. Discuss the proposition, "Papineau was the very personification of contradiction".
7. The cry of many present-day French Canadians is "maître de chez nous". To what extent were similar views expressed by Papineau more than a century ago?