Hydro
Caroline Desbiens (2004)

• For Quebeckers Hydro-Québec is essential
  – As practical, economic reality
  – As symbolism
Hydro Electricity

• Derives from the topography of northern Quebec
• Shield country with major relief and river systems
  – Can be dammed, tapped for power
• Quebec willing to impose impacts on the north
  – Environmental
  – Cultural, social on First Nations
  – Hydro discharges interfering with North Atlantic drift, ice cover in James Bay
Quebec
Pre-1960

- Quebec lacked modern institutions
- Education, health care run by the churches
- Lacked a modern taxation system
- Quebec nationalism backward-looking, conservative
  - Trying to resist the challenges of industry, cities, immigration
Quiet Revolution

- By Mid C20th Quebec had industrialised
- Culture becoming secular
- Early 1960s: Jean LeSage’s Liberals come to power
Quiet Revolution

- Rapid liquidation of the Duplessis legacy
  - Education secularised
  - Hydro nationalised (Hydro-Québec)
  - State modernized
  - Hydro began an ambitious expansion programme
Hydro Electricity

- Quebec forced Newfoundland to sell power from the Churchill Falls scheme at 1969 prices
  - Because Quebec controlled the only transmission lines which could get the electricity to market
  - Quebec refuses to update the deal
  - Quebec nationalism placed ahead of fairness to Newfoundland
Hydro Electricity

- A key resource for the Quebec economy
- Essential to its Quiet Revolution
- Gives Quebec cheap, renewable energy for domestic use or export
James Bay Cree

- Want to stay in Canada
- The North a vital economic resource for Quebec
Hydro-Québec

• Began its James Bay developments without proper consultation with the Cree
  – La Grande River 1971 12,000 mW capacity
• Quebec, Canada forced to negotiate a deal with the Cree in 1975
Great Whale

- Hydro-Québec announces another round of hydro development in 1989
- James Bay Cree assert their claims over the territory, with international support
- Scheme killed in 1995
Eastmain, Rupert

- Another round of major hydro development in James Bay watershed
- Follows 2002 agreements between Hydro-Québec and the Cree
Rupert River

- A major river in northern Quebec
- Now dammed for hydro
- Significant opposition from both environmentalists and the Cree
ROUTE DE LA BAIE JAMES
Hydro Electricity

- Quebec still has major northern rivers untapped by hydro resources
  - Rupert River in 2009 diverted into a hydro scheme
  - Part of James Bay II
• An elder cleans sturgeon at Eastmain QC
Caroline Desbiens (2004)

• The waters of northern Quebec are essential political ground
  – Vital to the Cree and other indigenous groups
  – Vital to southern Quebec
  – Vital to at least two competing nationalities
Two Separatisms

- Québécois from Canada
- Cree from Quebec
Hydro-Québec

- Hydro-Québec remains a public asset
  - Hydro in Ontario largely privatised
- Quebeckers have little interest in following Ontario’s example
  - And privatizing hydro