

Montreal

# Teachers and community leaders demand action from school boards over textbook's use of N-word



Westmount High School teacher calls for textbook's immediate removal from classrooms

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Sabrina Jafralie is an ethics and religious teacher at Westmount High School and says she doesn't want the N-word 'visible, available' for her students to have to see. (Sarah Leavitt/CBC)

Shock that the N-word would be spelled out, and frustration that its use is still up for discussion is what Sabrina Jafralie says she felt when she saw the word printed in a recently published Quebec history textbook.

This week, a colleague of Jafralie's, Westmount High School social sciences teacher Robert Green, shared photos of [the textbook](#) which is in use at some Montreal high schools.

A passage in the book *Journeys through the history of Quebec and Canada* features the N-word, spelled out in full in French and English. It references a 1968 book by journalist and Front de libération du Québec member Pierre Vallières, which compares the struggle of francophone Quebecers to the civil rights struggle of African Americans.

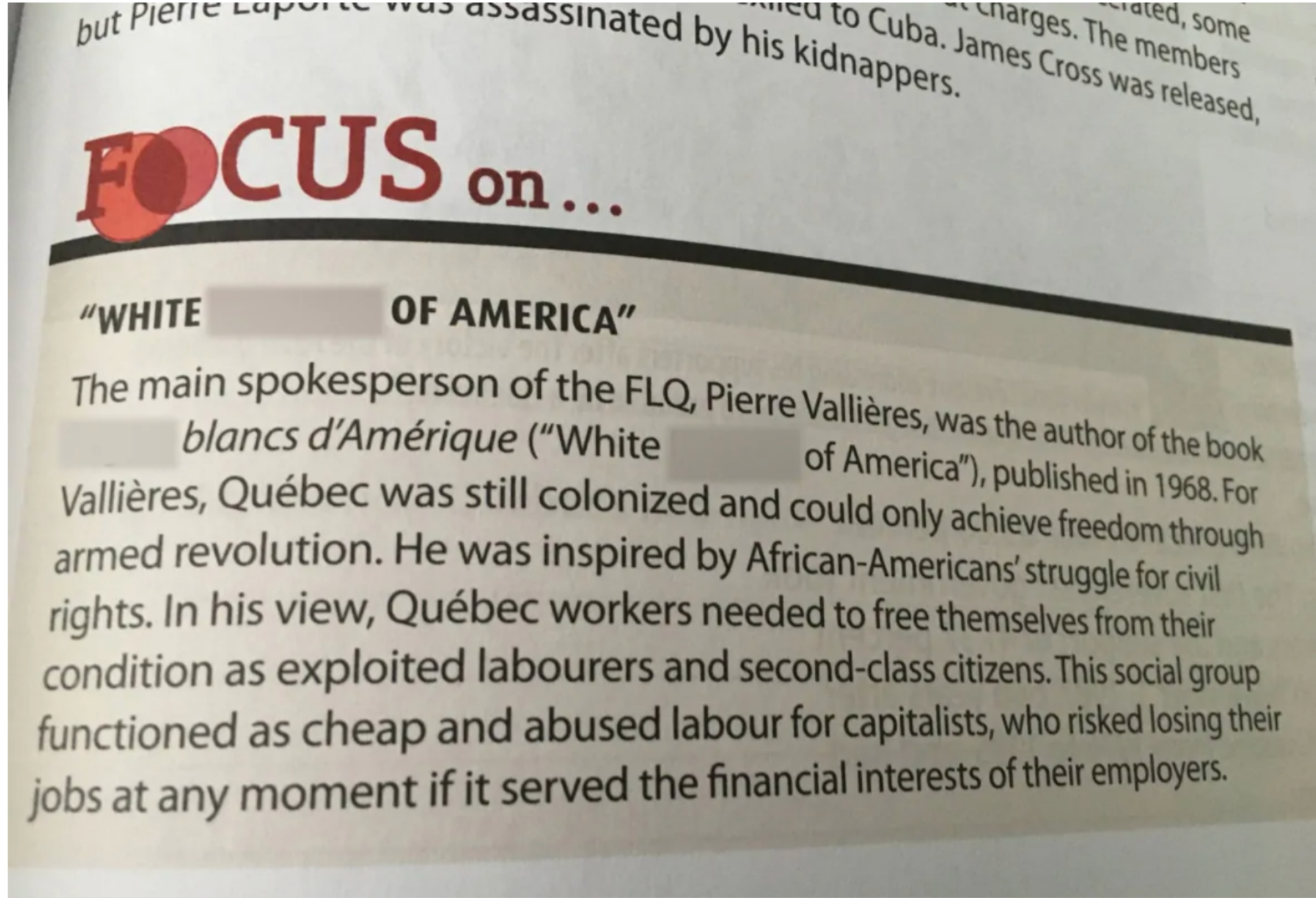
The English Montreal School Board and Lester B. Pearson School Board have both confirmed some of their schools use the textbook and said they were looking into the matter.

- [N-word found in history textbook used by Montreal high schools](#)

Jafralie, who teaches ethics and religious culture at Westmount High, says the school boards should take immediate action.

"It should be removed, automatically," she said.

"Right away, I knew that I don't want that word visible, available for my students to see. All my students."



The passage shocked high school teacher Robert Green when a McGill University researcher alerted him to it. (Submitted by Robert Green)

Use of the word has been widely discussed in [Quebec media](#) and [politics](#) after a University of Ottawa professor was suspended after she said it in class, referring to some Black communities who re-appropriated it. Politicians at the national assembly defended its use in academic setting.

A word that was created to demean and dehumanize has no place in a textbook, no matter the context, says the director the Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association, Tiffany Callender.

"It's not just about content, it's about living in the world," Callender said. "We do better as a society when we retire words that are hurtful and originated in degrading other people."

She said the book's authors and translators could have used star characters to avoid spelling the word out in full.

"Do whatever you need to do, but make sure you do not traumatize the Black students and the Black teachers who have to use this tool, because they have a right to say how they feel about it, too. And they have a right to feel comfortable in a learning environment."



Tiffany Callender, the executive director of the Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association, says Black students and teachers 'have a right to feel comfortable in a learning environment.' (Sarah Leavitt/CBC)

Jafralie says the significance of Vallières's book can be taught without saying or spelling the word.

She says teaching about the book should also involve providing students the context of the African-American and African-Canadian experience it purports to draw inspiration from.

"We need to have history books that are reflective of the inclusive history narrative in Quebec, and not just limited to one perspective," she said.

With files from Sarah Leavitt

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