THE CATALONIAN QUESTION

BACKGROUND

In April, WAC learned about the Catalan desire to separate from Spain. To understand Spain’s cultural predicament, we must go back to the Reconquista¹: Spain does not yet exist as a nation, instead there are six kingdoms² in Hispania, each with its distinct culture. Of these, only two would survive to 1492—the end of the Reconquista: Castile³ and Aragón⁴—though these two kingdoms would be united under one monarch. But in the War of the Spanish Succession, the Catalans of Aragón and Catalonia would fight against⁵ the King in Madrid, Philip V. Following his victory over the Catalans, he abolished the Crown of Aragón and formally united Spain as a nation-state with the Nueva Planta decrees⁶, which also curtailed the region’s autonomy and made Castilian Spanish the sole official language.

In the Spanish Civil War⁷ the Catalans again fought for the losing side and Generalissimo Francisco Franco⁸ retaliated by forbidding Catalan to be taught in schools and cracking down on Catalan agitators. In 1975, power was transferred back to the King Juan Carlos I⁹, who began the re-democratization of Spain, which gave back Catalonia the much-desired autonomy they had not had for many decades.

Beginning with the Great Recession¹⁰ in 2009, Catalonia has seen a notable spike in nationalist tendencies. Driven by feelings of cultural ‘otherness,’ historical slights, political upheaval¹¹ and a stagnant economy, Catalonia has put its independence up for vote twice now. In the 2015 Catalan general elections, a pro-
Independence majority of representatives was voted into the Catalan regional parliament, the Generalitat\textsuperscript{12}, who promised a referendum would be held like the one in Scotland\textsuperscript{13}. The referendum was scheduled for October 1, 2017, but the Guardia Civil was called in to assure the voting was suspended, as according to the Spanish constitution, the Kingdom of Spain is “indissoluble” and such vote would be unconstitutional.

Nonetheless, after the votes that were cast were counted, the Catalan parliament unilaterally declared their independence on October 27, and the Spanish authorities subsequently suspended the autonomous government of Catalonia and arrested multiple prominent politicians. Carles Puigdemont, the president of the Generalitat has been charged with sedition and rebellion, and subsequently fled to Belgium. The current state of affairs between Catalonia and Madrid remains very tense, and with elections called for 21 December of this year, observers are still to see whether or not the region will again elect a pro-independence majority Parliament.

\textsuperscript{1}The Reconquista was the Middle Age, centuries-long “reconquest” of the Iberian Peninsula by the Christian kingdoms of Spain against the Muslim Moors who had conquered it in the 700s, ending with the fall of Granada in 1492.

\textsuperscript{2}The Christian kingdoms of Spain in 1210 were Galicia, León, Castile, Navarre and Aragón; with Galician, Leonese, Castilian, Basque and Catalan cultures respectively. In the south, the Moorish Almohads ruled over Andalusia. Today, these historic kingdoms largely have their own autonomous communities in the United Kingdom of Spain.

\textsuperscript{3}Castile was the most powerful of the kingdoms in Iberia, situated in central Spain. The Castilian culture was promulgated throughout the Spanish Empire, dominating both the peninsula and the New World; the Castilian language today is known simply as “Spanish.”

\textsuperscript{4}Aragon was a historic kingdom in eastern Iberia that had a distinctive Catalan culture on the eastern coast of Spain centered around Valencia and Barcelona.

\textsuperscript{5}In the War of Spanish succession, the Catalans supported a rival of Philip V: Charles of Austria, who was of the same Habsburg dynasty as the previous king.

\textsuperscript{6}The Nueva Planta decrees were a series of laws which centralized the Spanish state under the Bourbon monarchy, which, among other things, greatly reduced Catalan autonomy and supplanted their culture with the Castilian one.

\textsuperscript{7}The Spanish Civil War was fought between the republican and fascist factions in Spain, with Catalonia being a major republican stronghold.
Francisco Franco (1892–1975) was a Spanish general who later became leader of the Spanish state after his victory in the Spanish Civil War. He is remembered for 35 years of oppressive dictatorship, similar to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

Juan Carlos I was King of Spain from the death of the Franco, who after his death willed that the country return to an absolute monarchy; the king, however, took a democratic approach and was instrumental in creating a constitutional monarchy. In 2014, he abdicated the throne to his son, who succeeded him as Felipe VI.

The Great Recession was a major worldwide economic downturn begun in the United States. In Spain, the economic recession was particularly bad with unemployment reaching as high as 25% overall, with about 50% unemployment for young people.

The political situation in Scotland and the UK may have influenced the Catalanian government’s decision to go on with the vote, despite the referendum in Scotland resulting in a no-vote.

The Generalitat is the regional parliament of Catalonia, existing since the days of the independent Counts of Barcelona and Kings of Aragón.

Arranged by the devolved Scottish parliament, the question of Scottish independence was put to a vote in 2014 in a referendum; the results showed 55.3% against independence but nonetheless the referendum inspired calls for similar referenda in other regions, including Catalonia.

**LET’S THINK ABOUT IT**

Your SWAC leader will prompt you with questions revolving around the same idea: as a foreign onlooker, what do you think is in the best option in the Catalanian question and why? Express your thoughts and contribute to discussion with your fellow peers!

**MY THOUGHTS ON THE CATALONIAN QUESTION**

(room to write your thoughts)

This lesson plan is meant as an aid for the Faculty Sponsor, President or Vice-President to lead their respective SWAC chapter in the discussion of this two weeks’ focus: Spain and Catalonia.
Kahoot! Introductory Quiz

Kahoot! is an online Quiz platform. This small ten-question quiz is to test the student's prior knowledge of Catalonia and introduce them to the discussion to come. The quiz does not require the proctor to have a Kahoot account in order to start. Students will use an electronic device in order to answer. The link is below; click START NOW and select Classic mode. After the Game PIN is generated, students will be able to join the session by accessing kahoot.it on their computer or mobile device. Begin the quiz once all students have joined! This activity shouldn't take more than 15 minutes.

LINK: https://goo.gl/Mv6Prs

Lesson Handout

Now is when the handouts should be passed out to students. It is split into two sections, one which covers the historical relations between Spain and Catalonia and a second that covers the modern issue of Catalonian independence. It is recommended that the handout be read aloud as a group instead of individually. Take some time after the document has been read to cover the material with the students and make sure that it's been generally understood. Ask questions to students; get them to summarize what they've read and make sure that the students are engaged and understanding. The reading shouldn't take more than 15 minutes.

Video Resources

We have four video resources below that will go over in more detail the current event portion of the handout and expand upon it. Following each link we’ve included a description of the video and possible questions that you can ask students to see what they've taken away from watching the clips. Each video clip is between 1 and 3 minutes; coupled with questions, this segment shouldn't take more than 15 minutes.

CATALONIA WANTS INDEPENDENCE FROM SPAIN

LINK: https://goo.gl/RTVWi6

This quick two-minute video by NBC News covers some modern reasons for, and reactions to the call for independence in the Catalonian region in Spain. This is an introductory video, no discussion necessary.
CATALAN VOTE FOR INDEPENDENCE SENDS SPAIN INTO CHAOS

LINK: https://goo.gl/KKGY3A

This VICE News video follows a Catalan man who was only recently pushed to the independence camp and the controversy surrounding the referendum vote.

›Do you think that the seizure of ballot boxes by national police is contradictory to democracy? Even if that vote is unconstitutional? Should it be unconstitutional?

‘STAND UP IF YOU’RE SPANISH’: THE CATALANS WHO BACK MADRID

LINK: https://goo.gl/jB5163

BBC Newsnight explores the aftermath of the Catalan vote and the divisions that the referendum has created.

›What do you think of the police’s actions during the incident?
›Is it strange to see Europeans so publicly celebrate their police? Does it have parallels to the US? Why or why not?

THOUSANDS OF CATALANS OPPOSE SECESSION FROM SPAIN

LINK: https://goo.gl/JFV6Hd

This PBS NewsHour segment explores the unionist side of the Catalan question.

›Were you aware that opposition to succession was this large? Does it or does it not change your mind on what you think would be the course of action?

DISCUSSION

What do you think is the best option in the Catalan question and why? Could there be possibly be a middle compromise ground? Having heard the Catalan story and history, did that change your opinion on the matter? Is the Spanish government in the right to dissolve the Catalan Generalitat? Do you see this issue resolved in the near future or coming back like the Scottish independence issue?

This shouldn’t take more than 10 minutes – total estimated meeting time: no more than 1 hour
BIBLIOGRAPHY


