




# **A First Nations Perspective on Diversity and Canadian Identity**

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# Aboriginal Diversity in the Context of:

- Ω **Perspective on the Canadian identity**
- Ω **How Aboriginal communities define themselves and how their quest for self determination affects their relationship with other Canadians**
- Ω **The complexities and challenges that Canada's central government has to face in developing national policies; and,**
- Ω **How national security in Canada is also defined by factors not directly related to national threats.**




**It is not healthy when a nation lives within a nation as First Nations people must do living inside Canada.**

**A nation cannot live confident of its tomorrow if its refugees are among its citizens.**

*Adapted from Pearl S. Buck What America Means to me*

# Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

*"Canada is a test case for a grand notion - the notion that dissimilar peoples can share land, resources, power and dreams while respecting and sustaining their differences. The story of Canada is the story of many such peoples, trying and failing and trying again, to live together in peace and harmony."*



*"But there cannot be peace or harmony unless there is justice. It was to help restore justice to the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and Canada and to propose practical solutions to stubborn problems that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was established in 1991." RCAP*

# The Central Conclusion of RCAP was:

**“The main policy direction, pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial then by Canadian government, has been wrong.”**

**“Successive governments have tried to absorb Aboriginal people into Canadian society. Assimilation policies are a denial in the principles of peace, harmony and justice for which this country stands.”  
The enduring sense of ourselves as peoples with a unique heritage and the right to cultural continuity is what has preserved our cultures and traditions.**

# The Demographics of Aboriginal People in Canada

- Ω The First Nation population is characterized as the youngest and fastest growing segment of the overall Canadian population. According to the DIAND Indian Register the total First Nations population as of December 31, 1998 was 642,414.
- Ω The age group of 5-9 represents the largest segment of the First Nations population (74,444)
- Ω The age group 20-24 represents the second largest population segment with 55,395
- Ω By the year 2010 the population is expected to increase to about 822,200 individuals.

Source: AAFN/DIAND Indian Register



# Total Population of Aboriginal People According to Statistics Canada:

**North American Indian -Indian, Metis or Inuit : 957,650\***

**Métis - Aboriginal people of Indian and European heritage- : 266,020\***

**Inuit - Aboriginal people in Northern Canada/Nunavut/NT, Northern Quebec and Labrador:  
51,390\***

**Total People of Aboriginal Origin: 1,319,890**

**Total Population of Canada: 31,414,000**

**More than one aboriginal origin: 44,835**

## **Reserves**

**People of aboriginal origin living on reserve: 285,625**

**People of aboriginal origin living off reserve: 1,034,260**

**People of non-aboriginal origin living on reserve: 36,230**

*(Source: 2001 Census, Statistics Canada- a study of urban Aboriginal people)*

*\*includes people of a single aboriginal origin and those of a mix of one aboriginal origin with non-aboriginal origins. Note: data is self-reported by respondents*



# Regional First Nation Distribution:

<b>Number of First Nation Bands in Canada</b>	<b>633</b>
• <b>Ontario</b>	<b>126</b>
• <b>British Columbia</b>	<b>197</b>
• <b>Saskatchewan</b>	<b>70</b>
• <b>Manitoba</b>	<b>61</b>
• <b>Alberta</b>	<b>43</b>
• <b>Quebec</b>	<b>39</b>
• <b>Atlantic Region</b>	<b>31</b>
• <b>Northwest Territories</b>	<b>26</b>
• <b>Yukon</b>	<b>16</b>
• <b>Total Number of First Nation Bands</b>	<b>609**</b>

Note: AFN includes 24 First Nations who are not recognized by DIAND bringing the total to 633



# Fundamental Change is Required:

Canadians need to understand that Aboriginal peoples *are nations*. They are political and cultural groups with values and lifeways distinct from those of other Canadians.

We lived as nations - highly centralized, loosely federated, or small and clan-based - for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans.

We have a right to govern ourselves and have a mutual relationship of recognition and respect, sharing and responsibility.



## ***"Looking Forward, Looking Back"***

**After some 500 years of a relationship that has swung from partnership to domination, from mutual respect and cooperation to paternalism and attempted assimilation, Canada must now work out fair and lasting terms of coexistence with Aboriginal People. (RCAP, 1996)**

# Canada was founded on a series of “bargains” with Aboriginal people....

bargains this country never fully honored. Treaties between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal governments were agreements to share the land. (RCAP) They were replaced instead by policies intended to:

- remove Aboriginal people from their homelands
- suppress Aboriginal Nations and their governments
- undermine Aboriginal cultures
- stifle Aboriginal identity

# **“The Approach to Treaties was Schizophrenic” (RCAP - 1996)**

**“By signing treaties British authorities appeared to recognize the nationhood of Aboriginal peoples and their equality as nations.....”**

**But they also expected First Nations to acknowledge the authority of the monarch , and increasingly, to cede tracts of land to British control - for settlement and to protect it from seizure by other European powers or by the United States.”**

# Policies of Domination and Assimilation- A Chronology:

- Ω Colonial and Canadian governments established “reserves” of land for Aboriginal people. The system began in 1637.
- Ω In 1857 the Province of Canada passed an act to “Encourage the Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes” providing the means for Indians “of good character,” declared by a board of non-Aboriginal examiners, to be non-Indian
- Ω Confederation, declared in 1867, announced the government’s goal to “do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion.”

# A Chronology - Continued:

- Ω The British North America Act made “Indians and lands reserved for Indians” a subject for government regulation. Parliament passed laws to replace traditional Aboriginal governments with *Band Councils* with insignificant powers, taking control of valuable resources located on-reserve, finances and imposing unfamiliar systems of land tenure and applying non-Aboriginal concepts to marriage and parenting through the Indian Act 1876. 1880. 1884 and later.
- Ω 1849 the first of what would become a network of 130 residential schools for Aboriginal children was opened in Alderville, Ontario. Aboriginal children were taken from their families at an early age and instilled the ways of dominant society during 8-9 years of residential school training or more. Thousands of FN children died in residential schools. There are 93,000 Residential school survivors alive today. The last residential school closed in the 1990's in Yellowknife, NT . The residential school system was a conscious and brutal attempt to force Aboriginal people to assimilate.

# A Chronology - continued:

- Ω 1885 DIAND instituted a pass system. No insider could come onto a reserve to do business with an Aboriginal resident without permission from an *Indian agent*. In many places no Aboriginal person could leave the reserve without a pass from the Indian Agent.
- Ω “During the world wars 3,000 registered Indians and unrecorded numbers of Inuit, Metis and non-status Indian people volunteered for the Canadian Armed forces. When they returned from service land was taken from their reserves and used for “military purposes.” Many were denied benefits awarded to other veterans.
- Ω The 1969 White Paper proposed to abolish the *Indian Act* and all that remained of the special relationship between Aboriginal people and Canada . First Nations were unanimous in their rejection.



# The Present:

- Ω *Existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights* were recognized in the Constitution Act of 1982 - acknowledging that Aboriginal rights are older than Canada itself and that their continuity are part of the “bargain” between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that made Canada possible (RCAP)
- Ω 1991 - 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in response to Oka
- Ω 1997 Reconciliation Statement and launch of *Gathering Strength* DIAND's response to RCAP
- Ω 2002 Bill C7 First Nations Governance Act (provincial like governance imposed on First Nations) and C19 First Nations Fiscal and Statistical Management Act

# The Problem with the Treaty and Negotiation Process:

Aboriginal negotiators fight for authority and resources sufficient to build their societies and exercise self-government - as a matter of right not privilege.

Non-Aboriginal negotiators strive to protect the authority and resources of Canadian governments and look on transfers to Aboriginal communities as privileges they have bestowed.

# **Social conditions in Aboriginal Communities = Failed Federal Programs/Policy:**

- Ω **FN Diabetes rates are double and triple the total rates in most provinces**
- Ω **Morbidity rates for intentional injuries are almost 5 times higher in FN on-reserve populations than the total population in most provinces**
- Ω **Fewer FN children graduate from school 34% versus 70% for Canada**
- Ω **Suicide rates for FN youth age 15-24 is 8 times higher than the national rate for females and 5 times higher for males**
- Ω **FN houses are 10 times more likely to be crowded . Only 54% have adequate water and 47% sewage disposal .**
- Ω **Four times as many Aboriginal people are below the poverty line than other citizens**
- Ω **Incarceration rates are 5-6 times higher for Aboriginal people than the national average.**

# Why Government Programs Don't Work

- ∞ The values and culture are western/Euro-.Canadian rather than Aboriginal
- ∞ Policy makers assume Aboriginal people live in communities connected to healthy labor markets with ample access to employment and training.
- ∞ Services are not holistic. They are fragmented with limited integration of resources or standards.
- ∞ The approach looks at the disadvantaged individual within society and not the society being disadvantaged.<sup>20</sup>

# Failed Negotiations Lead to Bitterness

- ❧ **Frequent failure to come to a meeting of the minds has led to bitterness and mistrust among Aboriginal people, resentment and apathy among non-Aboriginal people.**
- ❧ **Aboriginal people have made it clear, in words and deed, that they will no longer sit by, waiting for their grievances to be heard and their rights restored** eg. Burnt Church, Davis Inlet, Ipperwash, Stonechild.

# What Aboriginal People Aspire to is simple:

- ∞ Control over their lives in the place of well-meaning but ruinous *paternalism* of past Canadian governments
- ∞ Lands, resources and self-chosen governments with which to *reconstruct* social, economic and political order
- ∞ Time, space and respect from Canada to heal their spirits and *revitalize* their cultures
- ∞ Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs -physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, self-actualization

# Sources of the Right to Self-Government

- Ω The Creator placed each nation on its own land and gave the people the responsibility of caring for the land - and one another - until the end of time.
- Ω International law - where all peoples have a right of self-determination which includes governance.
- Ω In Canadian History - the colonial powers won no "rights" of conquest - North America was not terra nullis - free for the taking as was claimed - Canada recognized Indigenous peoples as self-governing, codifying their recognition in treaties and in the Royal Proclamation of 1763.
- Ω Through protection by the Constitution which recognizes that Aboriginal rights are older than Canada. The right is inherent in Aboriginal people and their nationhood.

# CORE Aboriginal Jurisdiction

- Ω **Citizenship and membership**
- Ω **elections and referendums**
- Ω **access to and residence in the territory**
- Ω **lands, waters, sea-ice and natural resources**
- Ω **protection and management of the environment**
- Ω **economic life, including commerce, labour, agriculture, hunting, trapping, fishing, etc.**
- Ω **regulation of businesses, trades and professions**
- Ω **management of public monies and other assets**
- Ω **taxation**
- Ω **family matters, including marriage, divorce, adoption and child custody**
- Ω **property rights, including succession and estates**
- Ω **social welfare, including child welfare**
- Ω **education**
- Ω **health**
- Ω **language, culture, values and traditions**
- Ω **some aspects of criminal law and procedure**
- Ω **policing**
- Ω **administration of justice**
- Ω **housing and public works**



# Aboriginal Nations Have Unequal Access to resources and economic Opportunity

The historical self-sufficiency of Aboriginal people and nations was destroyed in several ways:

- diminished control over lands and resources
- agriculture and manufacturing were monopolized by non-Aboriginal people and businesses
- governments failed to live up to the spirit and intent of Treaty promises to preserve traditional means of self-sufficiency - hunting, fishing, trapping, trading
- legislation, especially the *Indian Act* interfered with economic activity on reserves by restricting flow of capital and limiting decision making capacity of First Nation governments and entrepreneurs
- education, training, business and industry did not welcome, support or accommodate Aboriginal people

# Several challenges to the Revitalization of Aboriginal economies :

- ∞ Dependence - on government funds because of limited job opportunities
- ∞ Inequality - 54% of annual incomes are less than \$10,000.00 - unemployment is high and is rising
- ∞ Rapid labour force growth - higher birth rates and life expectancy has implications on future job needs
- ∞ Variability - Aboriginal Nations are isolated with limited natural resources at their command because of the Indian Act.



# The Two Row Wampum Belt Representing the 1613 Treaty Between the Mohawk and the Dutch

This belt symbolizes that treaties were statements of peace, friendship, sharing or alliance - not submission or surrender.

A bed of white wampum symbolizes the purity of agreement. There are two rows of purple, and those two rows represent the spirit of our ancestors. Three beads of wampum separating the two purple rows symbolize peace, friendship and respect. The two rows of purple are two vessels traveling down the same river together. One, a birch bark canoe, is for the Indian people, their laws, their customs and their ways. The other, a ship, is for the white people and their laws, their customs and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel.



# Yellow Horse-

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*Knowledge  
is like  
the wind.....*

*once obtaining it  
you can go  
anywhere.....*



# Niawan-kowa

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Ω Do you have any questions?