

14

THE CRIC PAPERS

# Facing the Future: Relations Between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Canadians



Centre for Research and  
Information on Canada

J U N E 2 0 0 4

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# Preface

This paper highlights the concerns of a number of Aboriginal Canadians, and other observers, about attitudes among Canadians toward issues of importance to Aboriginal peoples. The contributors are all troubled by a major CRIC poll that identified low public support for treaty and land rights.

The findings of the 2003 edition of *Portraits of Canada* on relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians were released separately at the end of November. They generated significant media interest, raising red flags about public views on matters central to the aspirations of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. CRIC decided this called for further exploration. CRIC invited Aboriginal community and political leaders, as well as young Aboriginal leaders and experts, to discuss the findings through commentaries, interviews, and roundtable discussions.

*Portraits* measured public attitudes. Now, CRIC Paper #14 offers another perspective—the viewpoint of Aboriginal individuals and experts. The goal is to encourage greater dialogue and understanding among Canadians about the situation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and relations between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

# Survey Methodology

The 2003 edition of *Portraits* is based on a sample of 3,204 Canadians. As in past years, two separate surveys were conducted, one in Quebec and one in the rest of Canada. **Environics Research Group** surveyed 2,201 persons in the regions outside of Quebec between September 16 and October 3, 2003. **CROP** surveyed 1,003 persons in Quebec between September 15 and October 2, 2003. The data from the CROP and the Environics Research Group surveys were combined in order to establish results for the whole of Canada and weighted to reflect the actual proportions of the provinces and territories in the population. The results of surveys of this size have a margin of error of approximately plus or minus 1.7%, 19 times out of 20. The full poll, including graphics, methodology and additional breakdowns, is available on the CRIC website, [www.cric.ca](http://www.cric.ca).

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*“We must remind people that public opinion cannot, and will not, dictate to the courts or to Aboriginal peoples what the rights of Aboriginal people should or should not be. Neither will public opinion change or alter the constitutionally protected rights of Aboriginal people.”* Chief Joseph Gosnell

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# Good Cop and Bad Cop: The Canadian State and the East Coast Fishery

By Ian Stewart

It is almost five years since the Supreme Court of Canada acquitted Donald Marshall, Jr. of all charges stemming from his 1993 arrest for fishing illegally. A majority of the justices acknowledged that even though Marshall had been fishing eels without a license, out of season, and with an illegal net, he was protected under the terms of a 1760 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the British and the Mi'kmaq. The High Court found that Marshall had the right to secure "a moderate livelihood" from fishing; and that any regulatory incursions into that right for the purposes of conservation or other "compelling and substantial public objectives" would have to be painstakingly justified. Absent such justification, the Court concluded, Marshall must be acquitted.

On Canada's East coast, the response to the Marshall decision was pandemonium. Aboriginal peoples responded with predictable elation and articulated demands for greater access to a range of natural resources (including, for example, the Sable gas fields). Non-Aboriginals (especially those dependent upon the fisheries) expressed equally predictable despair. The two communities clashed repeatedly (and, at times, violently) in the following months. In fact, a previously unknown reserve in Burnt Church, New Brunswick briefly dominated the nation's headlines with fistfights, boat-rammings, and arson.

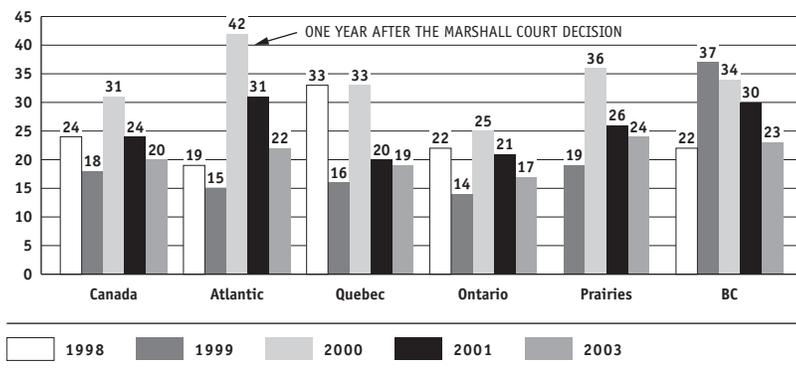
Initially, both the Marshall decision and the hysterical response caught the federal government off-guard. The two ministers most directly involved with the matter (Robert Nault of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Herb Dhaliwal of Fisheries and Oceans) issued conflicting signals and the government undertook a series of ad hoc responses intended to re-establish some semblance of social peace.

Within a year of the Marshall decision, however, the outline of the federal government's strategy was becoming clear. As it happens, it opted to recycle a gambit which had previously served it well in an analogous situation. Ottawa had been similarly unprepared for the closeness of the 1995 Quebec referendum on secession. In the vote's aftermath, it implemented the "Plan A-Plan B" strategy.

Under Plan A, some of the traditional demands of Quebec nationalists would be accommodated; the House of Commons passed both a resolution which recognized Quebec's distinctiveness and a law which effectively "loaned" Ottawa's constitutional veto to Quebec City. Under Plan B, Quebec's "right" to national self-determination would be vigorously challenged, first with the secession reference to the Supreme Court and, subsequently, with the passage of the Clarity Act. While some observers were publicly critical of one or both, federal policy-makers became increasingly convinced of the efficacy of their approach.

**FIGURE 1** RELATIONS WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLES: % SAYING THEY ARE DETERIORATING

Do you think relations between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians are improving, are deteriorating or are staying about the same?



It is perhaps not surprising that when dealing with the collective rights of Maritime Aboriginal peoples, Ottawa fell back on a variant of the Plan A-Plan B strategy. In this context, Plan A involved inducing the 34 First Nations bands in the Maritime Provinces (plus the Gaspé region of Quebec) to sign long-term fishing agreements with the federal government. As of spring 2004, 29 such deals had been struck. In return for accepting the federal fisheries regulatory regime, Aboriginal communities received a variety of benefits (including training, jobs, vessels, gear, licenses, and the like). In August 2002, the previously obstreperous Burnt Church band agreed to a \$20 million package of benefits. In total, Ottawa has spent over half a billion dollars integrating the region's Aboriginal peoples into the commercial fishery.

## Good Cop and Bad Cop: The Canadian State and the East Coast Fishery

As for Plan B, the federal government has vigorously (and successfully) prosecuted Aboriginal people who continue to flout DFO's regulatory authority. In recent years, native fishermen have been found guilty of a range of offences (fishing out of season, possessing undersized oysters, selling lobsters ostensibly caught for food). Ironically, the fines levied often have fallen far short of the costs incurred in providing legal assistance to the defendants. Even so, the federal government's determination to establish its authority has not seriously been questioned since a senior DFO official announced during the summer of 2001 that even Donald Marshall Jr. would be prosecuted if he sold lobsters illegally.

How successful has this two-pronged approach been in restoring civility and order to Canada's East coast fishery? What are the potential pitfalls of Ottawa's good cop-bad cop strategy? With respect to the latter, the risks are relatively few. Prosecuting Aboriginal fishermen for breaches of the federal Fisheries Act reassures non-natives that Aboriginal claims to self-regulation are unfounded (or at least unrecognized). And given the advances they have already made through the courts (including, but not limited to, such ground-breaking cases as *Calder*, *Simon*, *Sioui*, *Sparrow*, *Delgamuukw*, and, of course, *Marshall*), it hardly behoves the Aboriginal community to undercut the legitimacy of the judicial system. If there is a potential danger to this aspect of the federal strategy, it lies in the relative unpredictability of the Supreme Court. In spring 2004, for example, Canada's highest court agreed to hear an appeal of Joshua Bernard's acquittal for harvesting timber on New Brunswick Crown land. Whatever they decide, the Supreme Court Justices could well disturb the social peace that has been re-established tentatively between Maritime Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals.

Even so, the greater dangers to the federal government lurk not in Plan B, but unexpectedly in Plan A. For Ottawa to play the good cop successfully, it must offer incentives that are both sufficiently generous to attract Aboriginal support and sufficiently modest not to alienate non-Aboriginals. According to the 2001 census, about 35,000 Aboriginal men, women, and children reside in the three Maritime Provinces, (approximately 40% of whom live off-reserve). Since this constitutes less than four per cent of Canada's total Aboriginal population, it is possible to offer financial benefits to Maritime bands that would be difficult to replicate in Central and Western Canada. Even so, it is instructive that five of the region's Aboriginal communities have so far resisted Ottawa's blandishments. As recently as April 2004, 95 members of the Paq'tnkek band rejected Ottawa's \$8 million packages of benefits. Two weeks previously, 212 Shubenacadie band members had spurned a \$20 million offer. As Shubenacadie Chief Reg Maloney observed: "The community believes someone has to take a stand for our fishing rights. The interim agreements with DFO are an insult to us in the first place; our rights are worth more than that."<sup>1</sup> Having even one band outside DFO's regulatory umbrella poses obvious problems for both the legitimacy and effectiveness of the regime; moving beyond an offer of over \$80,000 per capita, however, may exceed even Ottawa's fiscal capacity.

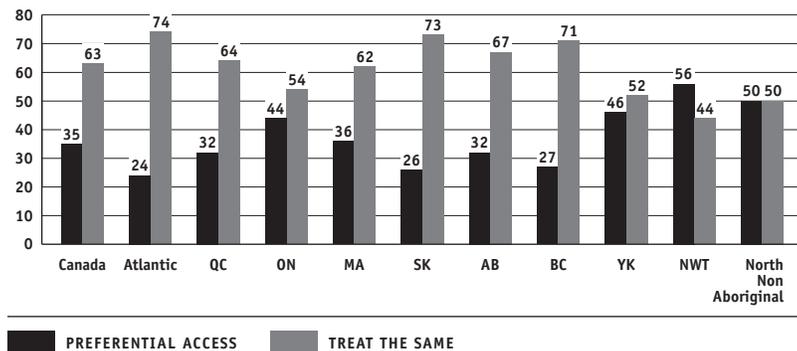
In any case, the existing level of federal benefits to Maritime bands has already alienated much of the non-Aboriginal fishing community. In its eagerness to integrate Aboriginal peoples into the lucrative lobster fishery without increasing the total catch, DFO has fuelled an extreme seller's market in lobster licences; prices are now approaching one million dollars. While the principal beneficiaries of this windfall have been retiring non-Aboriginals, the cost is now well beyond the reach of the next generation of non-Aboriginals who aspire to fish lobster. In the long run, this is certain to be a source of contention.

<sup>1</sup> *The Chronicle-Herald*, March 25, 2004, p. B1.

## Good Cop and Bad Cop: The Canadian State and the East Coast Fishery

**FIGURE 2** ABORIGINAL PEOPLES:  
ACCESS TO LAND AND RESOURCES

Do you think that Aboriginal peoples should have some type of preferential access to hunting and fishing grounds in areas where they have traditionally lived, or do you think that when governments regulate access to hunting and fishing grounds they should treat everyone the same?



One need not look to the future, however, for signs of friction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal fishermen. In the spring of 2003, for example, Fisheries Minister Robert Thibault outraged snow crab fishermen by both lowering the total annual quota from 22,000 tonnes to 17,000 tonnes, and by allocating 15% of that reduced catch to inshore and Aboriginal fishermen. An angry mob in Shippigan proceeded to destroy Aboriginal traps, torch four boats (one owned directly by the local Big Cove band and three more the property of DFO, but allocated for Aboriginal use), and burn down a private crab-processing plant where the Aboriginal peoples had intended to send their catch. Even after the season officially opened, inshore and Aboriginal fishermen were initially reluctant to leave the relative safety of port. Three years previously, in the waters off Burnt Church, Aboriginal fishermen had openly flouted Ottawa's regulatory authority. Ironically, the Big Cove chief, Robert Levi, now implored the federal government to impose order: "We will fish even if it means calling out the RCMP, the coast guard, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Even, if necessary, the army and the navy. The law has to be upheld here."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, there is no guarantee that the ostensible successes in Quebec of the federal government's Plan A-Plan B strategy will be reproduced on the East Coast. The gap between what is minimally acceptable to Aboriginal peoples and what is maximally acceptable to their non-Aboriginal counterparts seems, if anything, to be widening.

During the summer of 2002, in Nova Scotia, at least, the search for compromise led to a much-trumpeted umbrella agreement under which the federal government, the provincial government and the Mi'kmaq undertook to resolve all outstanding issues. Two years on, the parties are still in the pre-negotiation stage. In fact, the lead representative of the Mi'kmaq warns, "thinking in terms of a decade (to reach a deal) is not unrealistic."<sup>3</sup> Even with the additional breathing space, however, the contours of any package acceptable to all parties are difficult to discern.

*Ian Stewart is Professor and Head of the department of political science at Acadia University. He has written extensively on Maritime political culture and party politics.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Chronicle-Herald*, May 17, 2003, p. A12.

<sup>3</sup> *The Chronicle-Herald*, April 3, 2004, p. B5.

# Interview with Aboriginal Community Leaders in the Prairies

One way that CRIC chose to examine its survey results on relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians more closely was to organize a roundtable discussion with Aboriginal community leaders from the Prairies. Before the discussion, each participant was sent a summary of the pertinent survey results, and a discussion guide with points for consideration. The conference call was recorded. The resulting transcription was edited for length and clarity.

## KNOWING OUR HISTORY

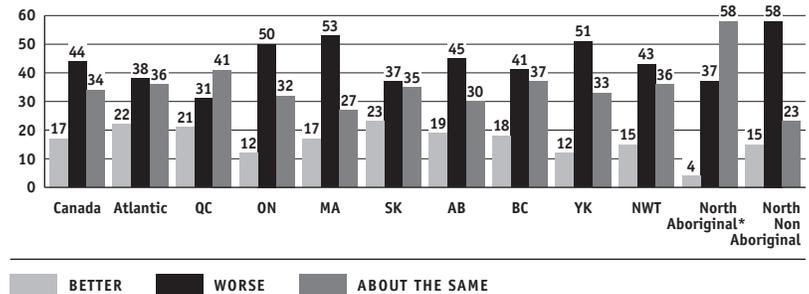
**CAROL CROWE:** The level of awareness about Aboriginal people by non-native Canadians is low. If we look at the survey questions, there is a fundamental contradiction between the support shown for distinctive Aboriginal cultures, on the one hand, and the lower support for land rights. To say that Aboriginal people should have their distinctive cultures is to say they should have access to their traditional lands. Aboriginal cultural practices require access to natural forests, prairies, mountains and waters to hunt, fish, gather, and camp. And, I don't believe land rights are up for debate. The Supreme Court of Canada, the highest court in the country, has clearly established that Aboriginal and treaty rights do exist.

**MARVIN TILLER:** I think the lack of understanding is a fairly significant obstacle. I think that the average person in the mainstream environment has a very limited understanding of the history of First Nations and the treaties and treaty rights, what all these mean to Aboriginal people today – to the management of their lives and businesses. There's a serious lack of understanding there. For example, there's a lack of understanding of what "urban reserves" mean. Most people on the street, or even in the business community, think it's some place where people are going to go and build houses, whereas from our experience in Saskatchewan and what's emerging in Manitoba, these are very sensible, commercial endeavours for a lot of people to benefit from.

**KELLY LENDSAY:** The optics and perceptions are disturbing. The news focus on land claims and land settlements has somehow left the public with a view that all Aboriginal people must be rolling in cash. Fifty-one percent of Canadians believe that Aboriginal people are as well off, or better off compared to other Canadians. The facts tell us otherwise. The United Nations indices suggest that Canadian Aboriginal people would rank 43<sup>rd</sup> in world in terms of living conditions. The social and economic deficits that Aboriginal people face are not well understood.

**FIGURE 3** SITUATION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES (2003)

In general, do you think the situation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is better than the situation of other Canadians, worse or about the same as the situation of other Canadians?



\*Note: The sample size for Aboriginal peoples in the North is very small. Results should be treated with caution.

**MARVIN TILLER:** The media generates a lot of the negative impressions because they tend to focus on the negative and ignore the positive. For example, I've been watching the whole issue of Aboriginal business and economic development for over 20 years and, on the positive side, we've come light-years ahead in terms of the number of people who are educated, involved and interested in trying to make a difference. And in Winnipeg, people walk by Aboriginal business people every day in the concourses of the commercial establishments – they meet them every day and don't even know that they're meeting them. Yet the newspaper focuses only on the negative fallout from the migration from the reserve to the urban community, and the difficulties people have adjusting.

## Interview with Aboriginal Community Leaders in the Prairies

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**CAROL CROWE:** I agree that the media plays a role. It is the media that suggests that land rights are up for debate, when they are not.

**KELLY LENDSAY:** I see growing polar opposites developing. On one end of the spectrum, you see this growing, positive supportive network of employers, educators and governments who recognize we need an inclusive Canadian society. They come on board, and really focus on skills, learning, education and employment. On the negative side, there is a growing “anti-minority” sentiment that exists. These hardened attitudes view public funding – such as scholarships for Aboriginal students – as race based special programs and in some cases, are very vocal in their opposition. Unfortunately they do not see it as an investment that’s going to lead people to better education and employment in our communities.

And, in Saskatchewan, you’re dealing with a have-not province. Times are tough. Recently, in the news, they reported that farming incomes have reached an all-time low. So what do you think the farming attitude is towards giving more support to Aboriginals this year? It points to the importance of better educating everyone about the issues and challenges facing all of us.

### **BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE FUTURE**

**KELLY LENDSAY:** The education systems have started to adopt Aboriginal curriculum into their schools. Educating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth is a good start. I would say that the awareness of Aboriginal issues in the 90s and now into this decade is better than it was before. Ask yourself the question: how much did you know about these issues 20 years ago? How about ten years ago? Today, people are sensitized to the Aboriginal issue. Unfortunately, much of this ‘sensitization’ is through negative media coverage which creates a backlash mentality.

On the other hand, more people today can name at least some good-news stories about Aboriginal people. It used to be that no one I asked could do this. Today, I’m encouraged by the growing number of people who can cite positive examples.

Partnership building is a specialization. You need to build social capital between and among groups. Social capital is like “sociological superglue”, a term borrowed from US sociologist Robert Putnam. Without the glue, it is impossible to take advantage of the human and knowledge capital potential.

**MARVIN TILLER:** I also agree that views are polarizing, and it is largely because mainstream groups and First Nations groups have difficulty communicating with each other. In terms of creating partnerships with businesses, one of the things that I worked on is attempting to develop a business culture that doesn’t compromise First Nations values or aspirations or objectives.

The opportunity is enormous. In Manitoba, for example, there are about three-quarters of a billion dollars worth of goods in the supply chain, heading to the north from the Winnipeg region. That’s everything from groceries and dry goods to building materials to petroleum. And there’s very limited participation by First Nations people in this, and a good part of their market is under-serviced and over-priced. This means there are enormous opportunities in this area for First Nations.

While there are enormous opportunities for First Nations, there are also enormous opportunities for the private sector to create joint ventures. We need to bring together the power of the market that the First Nations can bring, and the power of infrastructure and management and capital that the private sector can bring. The difficulty has been getting them together, to talk at the same level and organize, but there’s a will and very strong interest. When it’s done, it can be tremendously successful. For instance, I was the founding CEO for one successful company in this area. But there’s room in Manitoba alone for 12 of those kinds of organizations and there’s barely one going. And I’m sure the same is true right across the country.

**CAROL CROWE:** The focus needs to be on how can we get Aboriginal people and mainstream society to improve the relationship that they have with each other, in order to reduce the number of issues that have to be resolved through the courts. We have to work together to overcome inter-generational systemic racism in mainstream businesses and within public institutions.

One example of a partnership that works is the Canadian Unity Council's Crossroads conferences, which bring together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women, and now youth as well. These have had the greatest success in bridging the divides, and in helping to start a dialogue with mainstream leaders from government, from industry, from the community. The relationships that are created there have sparked the development of local, provincial and even national networks. There is a need for forums like Crossroads so we can learn from people who are involved in bridging the relationship.

**KELLY LENDSAY:** We have some solutions. There are many organizations across Canada working in the areas of Aboriginal socio-economic development and we have excellent examples, in every province and territory, of partnership models that are addressing education, skills, learning and employment. We call them "promising practices". You need a framework to build solutions. You need to create a partnership model that define targets, expected outcomes, investments and roles for all of the players. Effective solutions require a high degree of coordination and collaboration

Again, the most important factor is social capital, the ability to build bridges and linkages. Without that, I don't care how much money you put into an issue – if there isn't a willingness and trust to get people to work together, all the money in the world isn't going to solve it.

The very fact that we call it an Aboriginal problem is interesting. I've heard some people say "why is it called an Aboriginal problem? It's a community problem."

#### **FRAMING THE ISSUE: A FOCUS ON OPPORTUNITIES**

**CAROL CROWE:** I think we are finding out that people's opinions can be changed more quickly than we every would have imagined. There is polarization, but people are not entrenched in their differences.

**MARVIN TILLER:** The other thing is, when you look at the Aboriginal situation – certainly in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and other places – you can either say we have a huge problem with respect to the numbers of people unemployed and social problems and health problems, or we have a huge opportunity. We have significant labour and trade shortfalls. Most people I speak with can see the sense of attempting to do some things differently to tap this great resource we have of people in this growing young market, putting them into the mainstream economy. We have to find a way to do it better.

**KELLY LENDSAY:** That's right. Our education rates and employment rates are dismal but there are some positive improvements and trends. If we can close the gaps, we will see the social, economic and community benefits. In short, we need to have a social and a business case for change. The Aboriginal labour market should be positioned as a solution to skill shortages. To achieve this we need to work together to build and implement education, training and economic partnerships. We have tremendous knowledge. The challenge is to move knowledge to actionable knowledge.

We have champions of change. We need more of them.

## Interview with Aboriginal Community Leaders in the Prairies

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*Kelly Lendsay is recognized as one of Canada's foremost innovators of Aboriginal diversity in Canada. As President of the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada (AHRDCC) he leads the design of partnerships and knowledge networks that address a range of human resource development issues. The Council and its partners develop innovative models, incubate real-time projects, and transfer the knowledge to a growing network of committed practitioners throughout Canada.*

*Carol Crowe has over 23 years of business experience. Her knowledge is in Consultations and Negotiations required for resource development projects planned in the Traditional Territories of First Nations People. Ms. Crowe is an avid volunteer and contributes to national and grassroots initiatives, primarily involving building stronger relationships between mainstream Canada and Aboriginal People. In 2000 Ms. Crowe participated in the Governor General of Canada's Study Conference, Building Stronger Communities; Developing Tomorrow's Leaders. In February 2003 she received the Calgary Global TV program's "Woman of Vision" Award for Business and Entrepreneurship. In 2004 she received an "Esquao" Business Award, sponsored by the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women.*

*Marvin Tiller is the President and CEO of Canadian Shield Enterprises Inc. Prior to this, he was also President and CEO of Tribal Councils Investment Group of Manitoba Ltd., Arctic Beverages Ltd., First Canadian Health Management Corp. Inc., Rupertsland Holdings Inc. Mr. Tiller was also Vice President, and subsequently President and CEO of Hudson's Bay Northern Stores, and was a founding Director on the board of the First Nations Bank of Canada.*

# Interview with Stephen Kakfwi

The CRIC survey results in the Northwest Territories weren't a surprise. The issues are well understood and the social goals are well supported.

My generation was the first generation of people that were able to come out of school and be considered educated. Three decades ago, we started standing up for rights that were then considered extreme – the right to self-government and the right to our land. We said that we, the people who live here, should decide whether the pipeline went through. We said that we had the ability to design our own style of government, to put our rights in the Constitution, and to take back and manage most of our land. Nobody had ever said any of this before. The people thought we were wild and outrageous – and they loved it. The political establishment of the day, including those in the territorial and federal governments, was upset to see the traditional leadership losing ground as growing numbers got behind people like myself. I was only 24 years old when this process began.

The young leaders of the 1970s, including me, were determined and articulate. We said things that were hard for people to accept. But we got things moving, one step at a time. That we made it happen earned us grudging respect.

In the process, we learned a major lesson: it's easy to be radical in promoting the goals of your own people, but the greater challenge is to serve the broader community and get everyone to work together. Consequently, some of us committed to serving the wider public interest while simultaneously advancing the Aboriginal agenda. In my case, I have been doing this for 16 years. It's that type of commitment by Aboriginal leaders who made a difference by having an impact on public politics that made the difference. There were many politically active individuals, who knew the divisions were there, and what they were, who committed years of their lives to bridging them.

In the wake of social polarization through the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, we finally started to make overtures to each other – both the business community and the Government of the Northwest Territories. Some of us got ourselves elected. Within the Aboriginal community, we not only established that there was a major difference in approach between the new generation of Aboriginal elders and the older, more traditional one, we tried to find ways to bridge the gap and we've done that.

In the Northwest Territories, we realize that we are part of the global community, of the federal community, and of the community of non-Aboriginal people. We are not going to fence ourselves off, and say we just want reserves for the Dene. We never wanted that. We have so many different groups – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The strength of our society is based on partnerships and working through institutions.

We successfully sought out partners in the business community, and they were invited to operate in the Aboriginal communities and regions. We spent years getting familiar with the oil and gas companies. Where diamond mining is concerned, we've engaged De Beers, and BHP for example, and found some winning arrangements that make everyone equally unhappy or equally happy. It has made all the difference. In the beginning, we made some very strong assertions about things that had to be done, and while they alienated some, we tried to do those things.

We wanted our rights in the Canadian Constitution. Northern leaders were on the front lines of constitutional talks and reform initiatives, providing national leadership in the negotiation of Aboriginal rights. In the 1970s, we spoke with a lot of bravado. We knew we were just the little guys and the only way to get respect from the federal government, from Imperial Oil and all those other companies was to hit them as hard as we could right between the eyes. It was like confronting a bully when you are a kid. We showed people that you could be Aboriginal, come from a radical background, and still represent other viewpoints and interests.

## Interview with Stephen Kakfwi

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Aboriginal rights is not a racial or ethnic thing. There are non-Aboriginal people who support the concept because they believe in it, and non-Aboriginal people in the North who support it because they are part of us – our in-laws, our uncles, our aunts, our neighbors. These are people who are interrelated because their kids are marrying our kids. They recognize Aboriginal rights as a political imperative, an economic imperative, and a social imperative. Today, even the grumpiest contractors understand that the way to keep the peace is to make sure that Aboriginal people are working and getting benefits.

The day is coming when you won't be able to blame anybody anymore for the problems of Aboriginal people. Why? Because in the North we have demonstrated that you can change things with a determined and focused leadership that has public support. We can't keep laying the guilt trip on Canadians, saying that, "it's your fault, you did this, you shouldn't have done this, and you didn't do this". It's just not productive. Our attitude is clear and straightforward: it's our land, it's our life, it's our future, it's our North; it's up to us to make it the way we want it to be. It is not just some dream. It's a hard reality that we all accept. No one else is going to do it for us. All the work and commitment is paying off. It's so new, so fresh – there is no institution that is not worth challenging, or that hasn't been challenged.

We don't need to do any more research. The trick is to try to capture the attention of people, and create a momentum. In our case, we did it through audacity. We felt like we were absolutely right, and we acted like we were absolutely right. That's one message that I've always given young people. When they ask for advice, I tell them: "Always walk into a room like you own it because if you don't, someone else will. You own it. No one else does, so don't concede anything. Walk in with all the confidence in the world." That's the way we do business, that's the way we created Nunavut. Who the hell thought it was even possible? There have been some tremendous things that have been done because we had the audacity, the vision, and the determination to do them.

*Stephen Kakfwi was Premier of the Northwest Territories from 2000 to 2003. He was the former President of the Dene Nation, and was first elected to the Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly in 1987. While in elected office, he has held ministerial portfolios in Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development, Education, Housing, Safety and Public Services, Aboriginal Rights, Personnel, Workers' Compensation Board, Justice, Intergovernmental Affairs, and has also acted as Minister Responsible for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation. He was the first Aboriginal Minister of National Constitutional Affairs in Canada, and in this role, Mr. Kakfwi was the lead minister in constitutional negotiations at the national level, achieving a significant breakthrough on Aboriginal and territorial issues in the Charlottetown Accord.*

# All Singing, All Dancing, 24/7

## By David Newhouse

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For a decade I have taught first-year students enrolled in the Introduction to Native Studies course in Trent University's Department of Native Studies. Our first year class has approximately 120 students, evenly divided between Aboriginal students and others, mostly from southern Ontario. Last December, I presented the results of the CRIC survey on relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians to the class, which had been reading Jim Miller's *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens, A History of Indian-White Relations*. The report generated little surprise among them when presented in the context of a long historical relationship because the issues it raised were at the top of the students' minds.

After a decade of teaching Native Studies, I still find little difference between what non-Aboriginal students knew a decade ago and what those entering today know. Many arrive with stereotypical ideas about Aboriginal peoples. Most have thought little about Indian-White relations. Many have had little contact with Aboriginal peoples. Before entering the class, they knew little about the contemporary situation of Aboriginal peoples, or the history that we were exploring.

Many students also are confused as to what to call the original inhabitants of Canada: Aboriginal; First Nation; First Peoples; Indian; Native; Metis; Eskimo; or Indigenous. I always ask students why they take the course. Many focus on the cultural and spiritual aspects of Aboriginal life; they seek a spiritual experience. Many are disappointed that we do not include a larger spiritual component in our classes and teaching. Many also take the course out of a sincere desire to learn and to try to do something to change things.

We explore the origins of popular images about Aboriginal peoples, showing how they have remained remarkably consistent over the past 300 years or so. We also present an overview of the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, emphasizing the historical theme of "lack" used to characterize Aboriginal peoples. Once we have discussed images and history, we then move into a discussion of contemporary issues. These include: treaty rights; Aboriginal rights; self-government; the healing movement; and the literary artistic explosion of the last decade. Much of this information is new to students and many express anger and sadness at not being taught this history in high school. They become determined to try to make amends for the past.

If non-Aboriginal students come to the course with little knowledge but a desire to learn, many Aboriginal students come with a great deal of anger and a wariness of entering into dialogue with their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Aboriginal students know the broad parameters of the history, although not the details. They usually have a wealth of lived experiences in Aboriginal-non-Aboriginal relations. During the last decade, Aboriginal students have become more confident, more grounded in the traditions of their culture, and may even speak an Aboriginal language. More and more are from large urban Aboriginal communities. This is the generation that has grown up in the shadow of the powwow circuit, cultural renewal, and who have begun to experience certain aspects of self-government. Aboriginal students want to maintain their differences and want these differences to be recognized and respected. A dialogue between the two groups is difficult, if almost nonexistent, at the start. The Aboriginal students simply have more experience with non-Aboriginal peoples than vice-versa. The dialogue is characterized by passion, anger, hurt, fear and slowly moves to understanding. Aboriginal students lay the blame for many of the problems at the feet of the non-Aboriginal students who recoil and say we didn't do it, don't blame us, I wasn't there. We start there, but we don't end there. Consistent and good information combined with an opportunity for questions and dialogue lead to improved understanding.

## All Singing, All Dancing, 24/7

In a nutshell, the changes I have seen over a decade are these:

- Aboriginal people have changed and are moving on;
- most non-Aboriginal people still are caught up in the stereotypical images they see in the media and overlook emerging Aboriginal modernity, viewing Aboriginal people in cultural terms while Aboriginal people see themselves in cultural and political terms.

The survey suggests that most Canadians see Aboriginal peoples as part of the multicultural mosaic. They would argue that Aboriginal peoples have a right to practice and express their culture; they can sing and dance all they want.

On the other hand, Aboriginal peoples take the view that they, as the original inhabitants, have special rights that flow from this fact, as well as the treaties. The courts have agreed and there is now a set of rights emerging from litigation. The Constitution now “recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and treaty rights.” There are real differences in the political rights of Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, and also in terms of whose rights get priority and the accommodations necessary to recognize these rights. We ought not to forget that the Indian Act creates a legal person known as ‘status Indian’ who enjoys a set of rights not available to other Canadians.

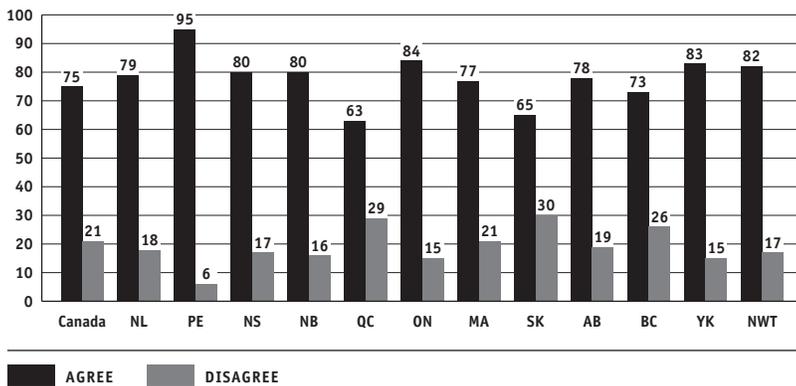
There is a tension here that is rooted in the democratic ideal of equality and its interpretation as meaning sameness and provisions in the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that, in my view, will always be present. It is one thing to be equal before the law, but true equality is about fairness, not necessarily the same treatment. Fairness of outcomes ought to be the criterion in interpreting equality.

Tension arises when Aboriginal people express a desire and act as more than just a cultural group, when we want to do more than just sing and dance, when we want to develop institutions of governance that reflect Aboriginal ideals and ways of doing things, and when we want our institutions to be visible, respected and paid attention to.

I am pleased that Canadians believe the relationship is improving. I am also pleased that education helps to change attitudes. It is disturbing, however, that there is still little desire to share in the wealth of the country through land claims, although these are slowly being recognized by governments. As our experience shows, Canada doesn’t fall apart when Aboriginal people control their own lands and non-Aboriginal people are not displaced. Perhaps as this experience becomes more widely understood, we

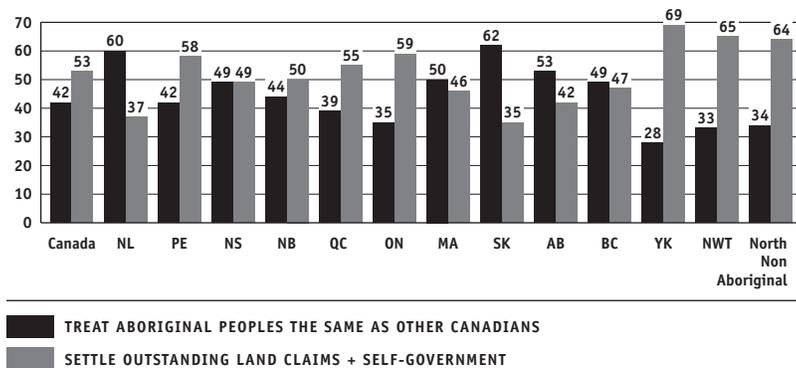
**FIGURE 4** ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND CANADIANS

Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: It is beneficial to all Canadians that the distinctive cultures of Aboriginal peoples remain strong.



**FIGURE 5** ABORIGINAL RIGHTS

In your opinion, which of the following two options would be better: Do away with Aboriginal treaty rights and treat Aboriginal people the same as other Canadians, or settle outstanding land claims with Aboriginal peoples and give them the powers they need to govern their own communities?



will begin to see that treaty rights, Aboriginal land claims, Aboriginal rights and Aboriginal self government are part of domestic political culture and don't pose a threat to the larger society or democracy.

Aboriginal peoples, particularly in the West, are seen in terms of burden and threat. Overwhelming poverty is highly visible and there is a sense that immense resources are required to help Aboriginal peoples. What is missing from the picture is the many Aboriginal organizations and institutions that have developed over the past two decades. These institutions are starting to make a difference, but face the huge challenge of changing long-standing public attitudes.

As Aboriginal people, we come to this issue with an awareness of the long history of the relationship between two peoples, with a desire for very quick results and a sense of difference. In the academic setting, my students begin to talk to one another. They learn how to work together. Anger erupts from time to time, but with knowledge comes mutual understanding. Canadian society, however, is not a classroom.

As Aboriginal peoples, we also come to the issue with a real sense of exclusion. To my mind, part of the way forward is to find ways of including Aboriginal peoples and our institutions in the everyday planning and decision-making of our country. Governments at all levels have a responsibility to lead by example. At the federal level, government could include Aboriginal peoples and their organizations as part of the everyday work of government in visible, real and meaningful ways that would promote Aboriginal achievement to help change the image of Aboriginal peoples in the public eye, and present Aboriginal peoples as contributors to Canada rather than a burden on the state. At the provincial level, government could ensure that primary and secondary school curricula include mandatory courses on Aboriginal peoples that deal with both historical and contemporary issues. Similar efforts, where applicable, are needed at the federal level. Municipalities must adjust planning and decision-making processes to include Aboriginal institutions.

Finally, Aboriginal organizations and institutions themselves have similar responsibilities to talk not just about problems, but also about Aboriginal contributions to civil society and how governance works.

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended a major public education effort focused on changing the attitudes of Canadians toward Aboriginal peoples and the image they have of them. So far, little has been done. There is still a need for public education, but I would argue that much can be done through inclusion.

The CRIC survey focuses on non-Aboriginal attitudes. I wonder what the results would be if one put the same questions to an Aboriginal sample. We would answer the questions with the history of Donald Marshall, Helen Betty Osborne, Neil Stonechild, Dudley George, Oka, the First Nations Governance Act, the debate over Louis Riel, and Indian Residential Schools among others. I work within a university that found it easier to name a college after an immigrant Canadian than an Aboriginal person. Each day is still a struggle when it comes to creating places of dignity and respect for Aboriginal peoples within this country.

*David Newhouse is Onondaga from the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory near Brantford Ontario. He is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Native Studies Program as well as a faculty member of the Business Administration Program at Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario. His research interests revolve around the idea of modern Aboriginal society.*

# Commentaries

*CRIC asked three Aboriginal youth leaders to contribute to better understanding of relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians by sharing their comments on the relevant survey results from Portraits of Canada 2003, and also by responding to the issues raised in the article written by Dr. Newhouse. Here is what they had to say:*

## **COMMENTARY #1: CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING IS THE KEY** BY KRIS FREDERICKSON

*As a Métis graduate student at the University of Manitoba, I often feel a deep connection with my ancestors and their struggle within a society that did not accept them as either Native or European. I did not grow up on a reserve; I did not tend a trap line; my physical features are not typically Aboriginal; I have blue eyes. However, the Aboriginal community at the University of Manitoba is inclusive and accepting of all peoples. Consequently, I am comfortable in both communities. In May, my sister attended the Annual Graduation Powwow at the U of M where approximately 100 Aboriginal students were honoured for their achievements. All were welcome and everybody feasted together. This is the type of inclusion essential to acceptance and understanding in the relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.*

*By contrast, my blue eyes and general appearance mean that in the eyes of many strangers, I am not Aboriginal, making it okay to relay racially degrading jokes and perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes too prevalent in non-Aboriginal society, giving me first-hand exposure to misunderstanding and intolerance. I try to rectify the situation when it arises, sometimes quite successfully. On other occasions, I find myself staring into the stony face of disbelief and prejudice.*

*My professional world is science and technology. The focus of my research is water treatment in northern Manitoban Aboriginal communities. Science and technology is a sector sorely underrepresented in the Aboriginal communities. In fact, of approximately 150,000 professional engineers in Canada, only about 150 identify themselves as Aboriginal. Thus, my perspective is unique.*

The findings in the CRIC study incited a chaotic and complex combination of feelings and surprise. The statistics are disturbing, alarming, angering and saddening. I consider them of major concern for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

In the last decade, record numbers of Aboriginal persons have graduated from institutions of higher learning. The 11<sup>th</sup> Annual National Aboriginal Achievement Awards honoured some impressive Canadians who just happened to be Aboriginal. However, in the past three to four years, attitudes toward Aboriginals have deteriorated. As someone born and raised on the Prairies, it is especially alarming to see the levels of misunderstanding and intolerance throughout the region that are formed more by emotion than fact. That nearly two of every three persons in Saskatchewan would do away with treaty rights emphasizes the level of ignorance about the true issues at play in the Aboriginal community. The non-Aboriginal population may have looked at 10 years of improvement and concluded, erroneously, that life in Aboriginal communities must be equal to or better than it is in their world.

The media may have contributed partially to this state of affairs. In fact, the Aboriginal spiritual movement, the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards, and National Aboriginal Day, to name but a few, have all garnered an exceptional amount of positive press about Aboriginal success. Success is essential to motivate the Aboriginal population, but it may also lead to a reduction in non-Aboriginal empathy with Aboriginal issues. This may be exacerbated further by an overwhelming suspicion of unfamiliar cultures that has developed since September 11, 2001. Conversely, the media focus is often narrow and local when there is dysfunction within a community (i.e. Kanasatake, Goose Bay, etc.) while ignoring larger issues plaguing Aboriginal communities nation-wide (substance abuse and suicide, unemployment, poor infrastructure, etc.).

Feelings on the Prairies could also reflect strained relations between new urban Aboriginals and established non-Aboriginal populations; a state of affairs complicated by economic and cultural barriers arising from the lack of opportunities

available to Aboriginals in cities. The dramatic increase in the urban Aboriginal population on the Prairies, due to a high birthrate and migration into larger municipalities, could also be a source for tension and misunderstanding.

Compare this to the Canadian North where the population is predominately Aboriginal. Non-Aboriginals have, in many cases, immigrated to the north and accepted a way of life that reflects this cultural reality. Understanding and relations between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals has been forged over a longer period through education and daily contact.

In my opinion, equality should be defined as equality of opportunity. It often takes exceptional measures to provide equal opportunity to a historically disenfranchised group. In the past, opportunities available to Canadian Aboriginals have been restricted due to racism and a colonialist government. These past wrongs must be righted to achieve equality of opportunity amongst all Canadians.

Cultural and historical understanding is the key. It is not enough to tout "tolerance" as a virtue. Canadians cannot afford simply to tolerate unfamiliar cultures. We must strive for understanding, acceptance and inclusion of all peoples, especially Aboriginals. Education is essential to this. All levels of government and all Aboriginal groups must play a role in developing the appropriate curricula.

*Kris Frederickson is a Métis graduate student at the University of Manitoba. He is currently investigating water treatment options on northern Manitoban First Nations communities. Mr. Frederickson has won the Manitoba Aboriginal Youth Achievement Award, the National Métis Youth Role Model Award, and the National Aboriginal Achievement Award. He is also featured in Maclean's 2004 "Leaders of Tomorrow" issue and is an Action Canada Fellow.*

## **COMMENTARY #2: STILL MUCH WORK LEFT TO BE DONE**

BY MATTHEW DUNN

There are those who see the big picture and those who do not. Fortunately, this will change as public awareness of pertinent Aboriginal issues increases. In his submission for this CRIC Paper, David Newhouse writes "most non-Aboriginal people still... see... Aboriginal people in cultural terms while Aboriginal people see themselves in cultural and political terms." As a Métis youth, I was not taught the political significance of being Aboriginal. While I was raised with an awareness of my culture, I was not instructed in the fundamentals of treaty rights.

In grade school, the focus of social studies was on current events and Canadian history, including settlement and the World Wars. The topic of treaties was ignored. If knowledge of Aboriginal issues is not taught in school, where else can the public learn about them? After attending an evening seminar on treaty awareness in Saskatoon last March, I was given background information on treaties and their implications for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. I was pleased to learn that information packages on Aboriginal issues, such as treaties, are being prepared for teachers to use in schools. I assume that this is occurring throughout the country, because only by teaching all Canadian children about treaties will public ignorance diminish. More seminars on treaty awareness need to be held across this country.

CRIC found that a majority of Prairie residents would do away with Aboriginal rights if given the chance. Ignoring the percentage of people clouded by racism, the only explanation for this is the pervading false stereotypes that flourish in Saskatchewan. In early May on CTV news, there was an excellent collection of segments that provided information on Aboriginal issues to the Saskatoon public. The segments followed a three-day seminar on Aboriginal awareness that the city police attended. Taxation and treaties were the focus of the two very informative segments that I watched. Saskatoon and the country finally are accepting the challenge to become informed about Aboriginal issues, issues that affect everyone in Canada to some degree. When I look to the future, I have no worries about where we are headed as a country. A lot of work, however, remains to be done.

Should Aboriginal people be treated exactly the same as non-Aboriginal people? In his submission, Dr. Newhouse answers that question when he writes “true equality is about fairness, not necessarily the same treatment. Fairness of outcomes ought to be the criterion in interpreting equality.” Gaze at the big picture and you’ll see that the only way this country will reach a social and economic equilibrium is by upholding treaty rights, thereby ensuring that Aboriginal youth can get a post-secondary education. Cutting off Aboriginal rights will only engender innumerable problems in the future. Even as they become more distant, historical events still affect the Aboriginal population today. My relatives and I have felt the repercussions our whole lives. Fortunately, we finally are in a position to become educated and take our place in society. We can do this because our rights as Aboriginal people continue to be upheld. We can increase the numbers of those who believe Aboriginal rights should be upheld by increasing public awareness of what those rights entail. We are well on our way. By continuing to improve school curricula, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will be able to achieve greater mutual understanding. In addition, adults and youth who were not given information in school should have access to a readily available and highly publicized source of information on Aboriginal issues.

David Newhouse’s submission summarizes what must be done to heighten public awareness of Aboriginal issues, including promoting Aboriginal achievements to improve public perception of First Nations peoples. For the past 11 years, some of this has been done through the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards, organized by the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation. Such positive work must be accentuated. Change in public opinion will occur only through the continued efforts of the government, the private sector, and the general public.

*Matthew Dunn earned a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Saskatchewan. He plans to study for an MSc in the same field then work towards a PhD in aerospace engineering. In March of 2003, Mr. Dunn was the Youth Recipient of a National Aboriginal Achievement Award.*

### **COMMENTARY #3: POLITE RACISM AND LACK OF MAINSTREAM ABORIGINAL EDUCATION IN CANADA**

BY DONITA LARGE

The results of the survey conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada on relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians confirm that Canadians, on the whole, lack education about the original inhabitants of this land, and that an accepted polite racism exists towards Aboriginal people.

History is written and taught in a way that reflects the beliefs and perceived truths of those who run the schools. In the mainstream education system in which I spent my childhood, First Nations, or, when I was in school, Indians, were described as a “savage, blood thirsty people” who circled the wagons hooting and hollering at the innocent settlers while stealing their horses. From a young age children are taught that “E” is for Eskimo but are not taught that “J” is for Jew and “U” for Ukrainian. Aboriginals have long been objectified in our education system. Children expect to see “Indians” as a people of the past, wearing feathers and war paint. Inuit are still called “Eskimos” and Métis is a foreign word to the average Canadian, forgotten by Grade 5.

Dr. Newhouse, a Native Studies Instructor, states in his submission to this CRIC Paper that there is, “little difference between what non-Aboriginal students knew a decade ago and what those entering today know. Many arrive with stereotypical ideas about Aboriginal peoples.”

If I had read this statement when I was working on my Social Work Diploma, I would have challenged Dr. Newhouse. My first two years of College were cushioned. I was surrounded by a group of students who were expected to be empathetic, understanding and ethical. While stereotypes of Aboriginal people existed, the professors dealt with issues and conflict effectively and professionally. However, after completing my diploma, I took a year of arts courses to earn the credits necessary to undertake a BSW Degree. My bubble was about to burst.

Having endured overt racism from a small town high school teacher, who stated that I should not bother attending his class, as “Indians don’t amount to much”, I was taken aback by the racist attitudes I faced during my third year of college. It was as though I had regressed into a high school environment where the “us” and “them” attitude applied. Often, as the lone Aboriginal student, I ended up in heated debates trying to reason with others who thought our medicine people were witch doctors or who thought that the government paid for all of us to have Nike shoes. The stereotypes were alive and well and many of the professors were ill equipped to answer questions on treaties, rights, or other Aboriginal issues. I was sorely disappointed at the level of ignorance in this post-secondary educational institution. I also felt a great deal of anger and a wariness about entering into dialogue with my non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Having traveled to other countries it became apparent to me that Canadians are known and respected for warmth, kindness and being polite. However, in discussing the plight of Aboriginal people during these trips I also realized that Canada can be a hostile, cruel place—and on a good day, a politely racist experience for Aboriginal people. Polite racism is subtle, it can come in the form of exclusion or as oversimplistic and negative generalizations. Often statements will be made with insulting overtones or derogatory comments will be made in private. It is so polite, everything delivered with a smile, that you could be stung in an instant and walk away trying to figure out what just happened.

As an Aboriginal person, you must make a hard decision: do you learn to hate and blame the ignorant; or do you try to make a difference by challenging stereotypical attitudes? My experience is but one of many. Too often Aboriginal students fail in the mainstream educational system. They are crushed under the pressure, self-fulfilling the negative stereotypes they came to believe of themselves.

**FIGURE 6 POVERTY: WHO IS TO BLAME?**

Generally speaking, in your opinion, which is more often to blame if a person is poor, lack of effort on his part, or circumstances beyond his control?

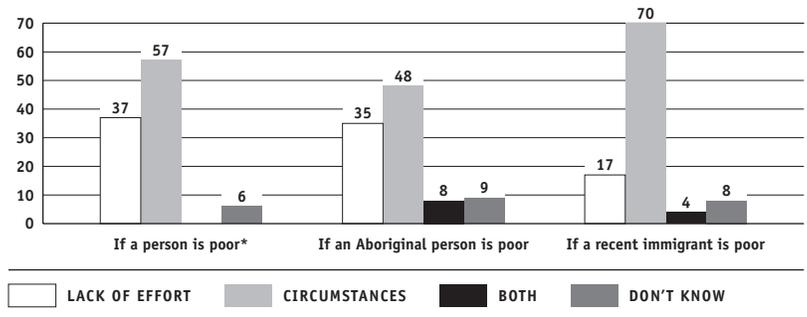
(\*Source: CRIC-Globe and Mail survey on the new Canada, Spring 2003.)

Generally speaking, in your opinion, which is more often to blame if an Aboriginal person is poor? Is it a lack of effort on his part, or circumstances beyond his control?

(Note: 50% sample.)

Generally speaking, in your opinion, which is more often to blame if a recent immigrant to Canada is poor? Is it a lack of effort on his part, or circumstances beyond his control?

(Note: 50% sample.)



Is there hope that relations between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals will improve?

Absolutely. The new generation of Aboriginal youth is overcoming adversity. At the same time, a growing segment of the Canadian population is actively bridging the cultural gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Committees are inviting Aboriginal people to sit on their boards, non-profit organizations are doing Aboriginal cultural awareness training, and Aboriginal education institutions are opening their doors to non-Aboriginal students.

At a government level, there is a slow transition toward Aboriginal inclusion. We are no longer fighting to sit at the decision-making table; we are now invited. Recently, I attended the first “Canada – Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable” in Ottawa with the Prime Minister. An estimated 150 Aboriginal leaders and sectoral experts attended this historic event aimed at strengthening Canada-Aboriginal relations. In his opening speech, Prime Minister Paul Martin stated: “Aboriginal communities and leaders will have a full seat at the table and that no longer will we in Ottawa develop policies first and discuss them with you later.”

This principle of collaboration will be the cornerstone of our new partnership.”<sup>4</sup> Aboriginal leaders now need to strategize to work together to make this possible.

Dr. Newhouse suggests that education needs to be transformed so that “mandatory courses on Aboriginal peoples that deal with both historical and contemporary issues” are part of curricula. In addition, I would suggest that education will always focus on erudition. However, the lack of focus on empirical knowledge and experiential learning puts the Aboriginal learner at a great disadvantage. Aboriginal children are taught through oral histories and tactile learning. Mainstream educators could learn from Aboriginal models of education, as all people are not auditory or visual learners of the written word.

I agree with Dr. Newhouse’s statement that, “consistent and good information combined with an opportunity for questions and dialogue lead to improved understanding”. I suspect that the reason why my first two years of college were so different from the third was because Aboriginal issues and cultural sensitivity were interspersed throughout the curriculum. Danika Littlechild, an Aboriginal youth advocate and lawyer, stated the following:

“Education has to be the most important step towards creating a space for inter-societal dialogue, which would lead to better understanding. I think that the curriculums of primary and secondary schools in Canada should incorporate Indigenous history as much as it incorporates “Canadian” history. The onus to create such elements in the curriculum should lie for the most part with the local school authorities, and with the province. However, this is not to say that non-Indigenous peoples would have control over the creation of the curriculum. This would have to be done with the full participation and consent of the Indigenous peoples in question.”<sup>5</sup>

If Canada is truly multicultural, then history should be taught from a multicultural perspective. It is necessary to teach Aboriginal history from the viewpoint of Canada’s original inhabitants. Provincial and territorial educators in each jurisdiction need to work with the Métis, First Nations and Inuit. Each of these cultural groups has different cultural values, beliefs, and history, based on their geographical area. For example, Alberta’s children should know more about Cree, Blackfoot, Dene, Stoney, Chipewyan, and Métis people versus learning the history of Eastern tribes such as the Iroquois Confederacy.

I am confident that the rapid growth of professional Aboriginal people moving into mainstream positions, combined with the increasing commitment of supportive Canadians, will dramatically change the results of the *Portraits of Canada* survey in as little as ten years. The old-school Canadian, mired in an outdated mindset, will struggle with new attitudes and acceptance of Aboriginal people as strong, independent, educated, contributors to Canadian society. As the new attitudes emerge Canadians themselves will challenge the arrogant and the polite racist. Old conflicts will be laid to rest, blame will have no place and true healing will begin.

*Donita Large is a Cree/Métis woman who lives in Edmonton, Alberta. Currently, she is the Senior Communications Officer of the Aboriginal Youth Network website and is a trainer at the Nechi Training, Research & Health Promotions Institute specializing in Youth Development.*

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4 Address by Prime Minister Paul Martin at the Opening of the First Canada-Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable, (April 19, 2004), Ottawa, ON.

5 Littlechild, Danika, B. A. (Hons) L. L. B. (May 11, 2004), Interview.

# Interview with Aboriginal Community Leaders in British Columbia

*One way that CRIC chose to examine its survey results on relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians more closely was to organize a roundtable discussion with Aboriginal community leaders from British Columbia. Before the discussion, each participant was sent a summary of the pertinent survey results, and a discussion guide with points for consideration. The conference call was recorded. The resulting transcription was edited for length and clarity.*

**JOE GOSNELL:** This report, in a sense, is very, very disturbing. Again, the unfortunate aspect is that not all Canadians are aware of the constitutional recognition of the rights of Aboriginal peoples. Part of the reason for this, I think, is that there is a lack of proper education materials about the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the First Peoples of Canada.

We must remind people that public opinion cannot, and will not, dictate to the courts or to Aboriginal peoples what the rights of Aboriginal people should or should not be. Neither will public opinion change or alter the constitutionally protected rights of Aboriginal people.

**DEBORAH JEFFREY:** I'm not surprised by the findings, but I continue to be disappointed because I think Canadian society is very much supportive of perpetuating the status quo, which includes marginalizing and, quite frankly, oppressing indigenous peoples, and the public school system has failed to address this in any systematic way. I also continue to be disappointed about the failure of all levels of government to embrace the notion of Aboriginal rights. Even when we do get support from the courts, it has often been quickly negated or mitigated in policy. So, from my take, I think it's really easy for the general public to marginalize and stereotype us because our governments continue to do that. In the public school system, kids are still taught that the French and English founded Canada, and we live in a country where police officers can murder Aboriginal people without there being a national outcry. Until we get a handle on those two big ticket items in terms of transforming relationships, unfortunately I think we're going to continue to have a lot of ignorance.

**PATRICK KELLY:** I'm not surprised by the findings of this report because I think there's a lot of education needed to help the general population understand more about the makeup of Canada, its history and its communities in relation to Aboriginal people.

Adding to the problem is how newcomers to Canada are educated about this country's history. There are more immigrants brought into British Columbia over a two-year period than the entire Aboriginal population of BC. Yet, the education that immigrants are given about Aboriginal issues is virtually negligible. You'll often hear political speeches that say that Canada is a place that respects diversity. If you look at the population base in Vancouver, for example, we're probably looking at about 56, 57 cultures that are reflected just in the city population alone. And yet you don't often hear that there are more than 30 First Nations language dialects that are part of that diversity in British Columbia as well. Why is it that we respect diversity, except when it applies to Aboriginal people?

**CRIC:** But from the outside, when you think about British Columbia, you think about a province that has a treaty process, and that had the Nisga'a process that captured the public's attention. If all of that is going on in BC, shouldn't the BC public be among the most informed of the whole country about Aboriginal issues?

**PATRICK KELLY:** Well, I think there are very clear pockets of opinion leaders. For example, if you go into the Union of BC Municipalities, at their annual general assembly, even if you go now, you'll find that there is a very active discussion on Aboriginal issues. So in that particular sector, amongst the leaders that are elected and actually have to engage the issues on a week-by-week basis, and are actually looking at very practical things in relation to their neighbours because every municipality has a First Nation or several First Nation neighbouring communities, you tend to find the people that actually have to engage the issues substantively are much more informed and much more supportive of Aboriginal issues. Yet, when you do a random selection just across the whole population, you end up getting the kind of results that this particular study shows.

## Interview with Aboriginal Community Leaders in British Columbia

**SOPHIE PIERRE:** I think the underlying thing here is the disservice that we get from the general media on these issues. Instead of being informative, it usually just blows things out of proportion. So I think that there are a lot of people reacting to that kind of reporting.

**CRIC:** Chief Gosnell, in terms of having led a lot of the discussion around the Nisga'a treaty in the mid-1990s, did you find that that served a kind of public education purpose, because it did attract national attention in a way that many agreements don't, or did you actually find that it didn't end up educating people at all because of the nature of the media debate and the nature of the political debate around it?

**JOE GOSNELL:** I think what the Nisga'a final agreement did was to bring people's thoughts to the surface. There are still people out there who totally disregard our rights or totally ignore them. We continuously fought against this one-law-for-all-Canadians concept. We were asked, "You know, what makes you so different? Why should you be different? Why should you be specifically recognized in the Constitution of Canada? Why should you have a treaty at all?" So there's a continuous marginalizing or stereotyping of our people that we have to fight against. We have to indicate very clearly that we have that ability to look after our own affairs, we have that ability to govern ourselves.

The Nisga'a final agreement created a lot of controversy in the province, and in my mind, it brought to the surface what always has been there, just slightly beneath surface in British Columbia.

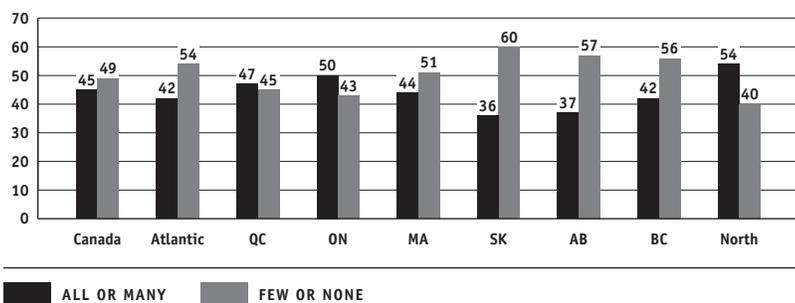
**DEBORAH JEFFREY:** When the Nisga'a treaty was being finalized, the Ministry of Education brought together some educators to develop curricula to provide some background information, but it was a lightning rod of conflict. They said you're politicizing kids, it has no business being in schools. So all the curricula what was developed for three different grade levels was resoundingly rejected, which was really again indicative of the attitudes that exist out there.

I think the government is strategic at times, because when you talk about the referendum as a means to educate, in fact the referendum was a means to inflame, because there was no systemic approach to educating or helping to inform British Columbians. A number of people were critical of the process. That \$9 million would have been better spent on educational materials and processes to create new relationships. So I don't think we have been as strategic as we could be to better educate.

**PATRICK KELLY:** I've participated in a lot of community forums during the time when the government of BC was debating and getting ready to hold a vote on the Nisga'a treaty in the Legislature and we'd actually developed a fact-based package of information about the Nisga'a treaty. I did presentations in Cornell and Victoria and Nanaimo, up in Fort St. John – all across the province. In a lot of these situations that I went into, quite often with cabinet ministers of the provincial government, I found that people had a very loaded opinion based on what they had heard was in the Nisga'a treaty. The fact-based presentation that we gave on what was actually in the treaty, as opposed to what they heard was in the treaty, ended up having a very profound effect in pretty much every situation where I faced in-your-face racism. And then when we finished the presentation of facts on the treaty, it was amazing actually to see that when people saw what was actually in the treaty, compared to what they thought was there, came forward and said "well, if that's what's in it, I think it's eminently reasonable and eminently sensible."

**FIGURE 7** ABORIGINAL LAND CLAIMS (2003)

When it comes to the land claims made by Aboriginal peoples, do you think that all of their land claims are valid, that many are valid, that few are valid or that no Aboriginal land claims are valid?



## Interview with Aboriginal Community Leaders in British Columbia

And that's where I see that the education system in particular, that chooses to not provide basic background information on such fundamentally important things, does a disservice to British Columbia.

**CRIC:** Is there no curriculum about First Nations people in BC in schools in BC? Does it come too late in the curriculum?

**DEBORAH JEFFREY:** There is curriculum. There are prescribed learning outcomes in various grades in various subjects, but its not willingly embraced. I think there is really an unwillingness to address the notion of diversity, particularly in regard to First Nations people because we're different, because we have constitutionally protected rights. People don't want to hear that, and some people feel if they have to learn about it in schools, they're giving an added advantage to First Nations.

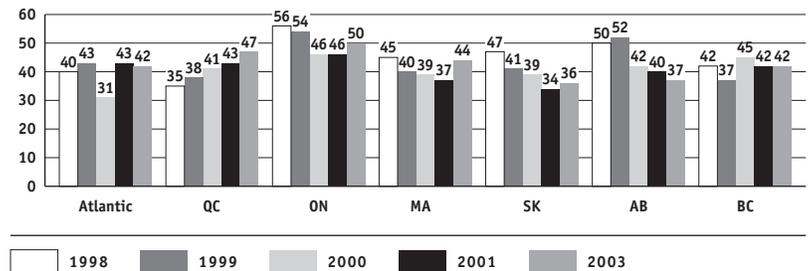
The system has allowed itself to perpetuate over time, and we need to find more comprehensive strategies that are going to transform education at the classroom level. We have made some major inroads over the last few years in terms of increased accountability and working to improve success. However, the fact that we have first nations students graduating at roughly 42% in comparison to almost 80% for non-Aboriginal students also speaks to systemic barriers and marginalization of our people.

I really think there are some fabulous opportunities for us in the public school system to transform relationships and make meaningful change, but I feel, from my experience as an educator – I've been a teacher for 20 years – that there is a resistance, and people feel that they don't know enough about the subject matter to teach it and be comfortable.

**CRIC:** What kind of models have you seen that really can work to bring different communities together? Also, does it always come back to First Nations leaders having to bear the burden of educating other Canadians – do you grow tired of that after a while?

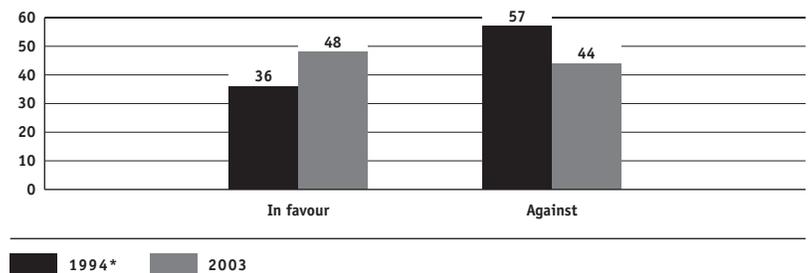
**FIGURE 8 ABORIGINAL LAND CLAIMS:  
% SAYING ALL OR MANY ARE VALID**

When it comes to the land claims made by Aboriginal peoples, do you think that all of their land claims are valid, that many are valid, that few are valid or that no Aboriginal land claims are valid?



**FIGURE 9 ABORIGINAL LAND CLAIMS  
(QUEBEC RESPONDENTS ONLY)**

As regards the territorial demands of Quebec's Aboriginal peoples, are you generally very much in favour of their demands, somewhat in favour of their demands, somewhat against their demands, or very much against their demands?



\*Source: CROP

**JOE GOSNELL:** We saw it as a definite need, as something that had to be done. Whether someone else did, our group never considered it. We just went out and did as other tribal groups have done. We spoke to literally anybody who would listen – high schools, universities, colleges, trade unions, church groups, municipalities, and editorial boards. We took part in national discussion groups and radio talk shows. These were the things that we deemed necessary to get our side of the story out there.

## Interview with Aboriginal Community Leaders in British Columbia

**DEBORAH JEFFREY:** I'd like to speak about a model that has worked for us. In 1999, we signed a memorandum of understanding with all education partners, all the players, the trustees, the teachers union, the college of teachers, the Ministry of Education, INAC, BC Principals Vice-Principals, FNEESC and First Nations Schools Association. We meet quarterly and we have action plans, we've got goals established for ourselves, we've established sub-committees. This is a mechanism whereby I believe we're building a sustained commitment within those respective organizations. But, because we're still fairly new in terms of moving in that direction within just a few short years, we still haven't got that transformation in the classroom. I'm optimistic in that it's coming because we all sit at the table and there are a lot of initiatives. We're trying to build a collaborative process so that there's mutual responsibility on everyone's part to improve those results. So I think that's a model that is showing signs of improved success for us.

**PATRICK KELLY:** I engage teachers quite a bit in discussion, and one of the questions I ask is: so what have you covered so far? And, often, the people who are coming in to speak to their classes tend to be very limited sources of information. Teachers are often so grateful to have someone go in to the classroom who actually knows about these issues in a substantive way and can actually engage the students in good discussion. A lot of the teachers tend to be very uncomfortable talking about something about which they admit they know very little. And so I think the teacher education programs at universities are quite important in terms of creating a knowledge base amongst the teachers coming out of the system who know something about the subject matter and can convert it into curriculum activity in their respective classes.

**CRIC:** Debbie mentioned that she was optimistic that, despite the problems that she identified in the first part of her remarks, there were processes in place that should be able to make a difference over the medium term. Is that a sentiment that's shared by others?

**PATRICK KELLY:** I have one example I'd like to raise. Ten years ago if you went to an annual assembly of the Union of BC Municipalities, you would not have found a regular item on the agenda called Aboriginal affairs. Now, if you go to one, you'll find that, for example, they have an Aboriginal affairs committee. So, in that particular forum, there's been a gradual embracing of the ideas that should be discussed in terms of the ongoing relations between themselves as mayors and councils and chiefs. They finally awakened to the reality of that critically important relationship.

**SOPHIE PIERRE:** The awareness in business and industry that they need to deal with Aboriginal people, and that they need some education and advice, is increasing. I find, just in the various meetings that I go to and in the presentations that I make, that when you do share the information with people, they are receptive to it, and that gives me optimism.

We just got to keep working at it. Yes, I guess we get tired of it sometimes, but I don't think that any of us is ever going to quit. This is what we do and we'll just continue doing it.

*Deborah Jeffrey has been an educator for several years, working for School District 52 (Prince Rupert) as a teacher, counsellor and Department Head for First Nations Education Services. Ms. Jeffrey is active on many local, regional and provincial committees and boards, and is President of the First Nations Education Steering Committee, a group active provincially in improving the quality of education for First Nations people. She is also Past President of the Tsimshian Tribal Council in British Columbia.*

*Chief Sophie Pierre has led her own band, St. Mary's, as chief for more than 20 years, and is a veteran leader of the Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council (KKTC). In 2002, Chief Pierre was recognized as CANDO's 2002 Individual Economic Developer of the Year, and also received the Queen's Golden Jubilee commemorative medal. In 2003, she was chosen one of the recipients of the National Aboriginal Achievement Award in the business category for her leadership in the creation of the St. Eugene Mission Resort. Chief Pierre is a past co-chair of the First Nations Summit, and a recipient of the Order of British Columbia.*

## Interview with Aboriginal Community Leaders in British Columbia

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*Chief Joseph Gosnell has been active in Nisga'a Tribal Council politics for more than a quarter century, and was elected President in 1992, twice winning re-election. He was lead negotiator for the landmark Nisga'a Treaty, which was initialed on August 4, 1998, in New Aiyansh. For his lead role in negotiating the Nisga'a Treaty, Chief Gosnell received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws Degree from Royal Roads University in Victoria in 1997, the Humanitarian Award from the Canadian Labour Congress in 1999, an Honorary Doctor of Laws from the Opening Learning Agency in Burnaby in 1999, the Order of British Columbia in 1999, the Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation in 2000, an honorary degree from the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George in 2000, and Simon Fraser University in 2000.*

*Patrick Kelly is a member of the Leq'á:mel First Nation in the Sto:lo Nation (part of the group commonly called the Coast Salish). The Leq'a: mel First Nation elected Mr. Kelly as Treaty Representative for treaty negotiations, a role he held from 1998 to 2001. In March 2001, the Public Service Commission appointed him Director of Strategic Planning & Communications with the British Columbia (BC) Region, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Mr. Kelly has been an active community volunteer holding executive positions with the Mission Chamber of Commerce, the Mission Heritage Association, the Mission Indian Friendship Centre, and the Coqualeetza Cultural Centre.*



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