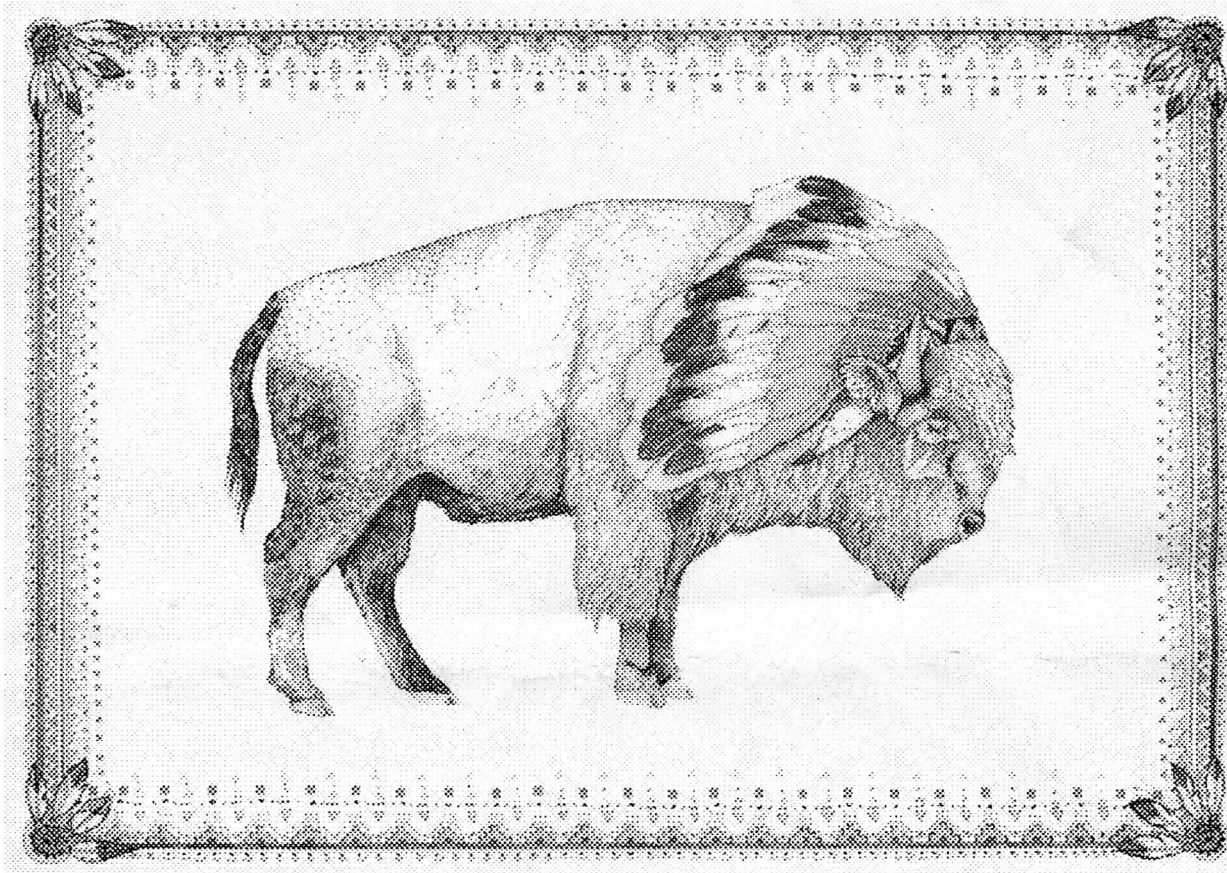


A Historical Analysis and Understanding of:

The *Decadence* and *Deprival* in Trusting an *Unsacred* Dominion



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Contemporary Issues Aboriginal Soc.

SSC1786 010

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April 24, 2012

Hear me, people: We have now to deal with another race—small and feeble when our fathers first met them, but now great and overbearing. Strangely enough they have a mind to till the soil and the love of possession is a disease with them. These people have made many rules that the rich may break but the poor may not. They take their tithes from the poor and weak to support the rich and those who rule.

- Chief Sitting Bull, speaking at the Powder River Conference in 1877

Introduction – Autonomous Nation

For over 500 years, colonization of the North American continent has threatened the culture, lives and lands of Indigenous peoples.¹ Our holistic approach that allows balance in all emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of life has been weakened by the impacts of a skewed historical and contemporary relationship between First Nations and the Imperial British Crown. We were once masters of our own fate. We made decisions for our own people according to traditional institutions given to us by our ancestors who learned them from their ancestors, and so on since time immemorial. These traditional methods of governance have not been used for many generations now because there is a much bigger and powerful nation that has come to dominate us, and essentially dictate what directions we may take our lives in. You see, the birth of the Canadian nation concerned not only the European settlement, but also it marked the beginning of official captivity for the original inhabitants of the lands. As captive as we are, we are not *weak*, our traditional institutions are not forgotten. We were not conquered, nor were we defeated. The colonizing nation authorized our captivity without our consent and their authority over us has extended into the present day. In order for our present day political status to be understood, it is essential to tell Indigenous history. That is, history from the Indigenous perspective. Indigenous history is Canadian history. We are not asking, but demanding the original agreements made in First Nations and Crown Treaties be restored. We will continue the struggle against the Dominion of Canada until they surrender their control of our peoples and the recognition and implementation of our original self-ruling, self-determining, self-sufficient status inherent among our many nations.

¹ Throughout this paper, I will be using the terms Indian, First Nations, Aboriginal, and Indigenous Peoples interchangeably in reference to the original inhabitants of the territories called Canada.

Pre-Confederation Relations

In the beginning, First Nations peoples greeted European newcomers with both hostility and open-arms. It would appear, from the non-Aboriginal perspective, that hostility was entirely warranted (Did you mean unwarranted? If you mean that Europeans felt they were justified you should explain why before moving on to explain Europeans benefited from the open-arms treatment.). Europeans encroached on land, which was sacred to the Indigenous inhabitants. However, the open-arms treatment of the newcomers says a great deal about Aboriginal values. We were, and remain, a generous, caring, nurturing people. During this time, our spiritual dogmas were put into practice to help their weakened people. When the Europeans stepped off their strange wooden ships and were starving, sick, and dirty, the Indigenous peoples were the ones who brought them back to life. They were fed, and with them shown how to hunt. It was our people who healed them back to good health, and our people who showed them how to gather the Indigenous medicines of the land. We sheltered them through our winters. It was even so that some of our men and women married theirs, and brought with them life to embrace their explanation of spirits and all Creation.

It remained like this for many years, but the time soon came when it was we, our peoples, who would then answer to them. Soon they took all of our teachings on how to survive on the land of our ancestors and essentially used it to dominate us. They depleted our traditional economy. Where we were once abundant and wealthy, we were now sick and hungry. We needed their medicine for their sicknesses. We needed their food when ours was no more. Their leader across the sea, the Queen, offered us *Her* help and we accepted it. Our leaders met with theirs to discuss our futures together and they spoke through interpreters. Agreements were made and finalized, but neither party understood the others intentions. This is the great irony of our relations with the White man—a weakness of theirs greeted by our generosity as they forever prospered. And from then it was understood that such respect would not be returned. Instead, they celebrate our weaknesses because it feeds their greed while they indulge in the lust for power. Pity the nation whose breath is money and sleeps the sleep of the too well fed. They distorted our history, but now we will take the power back by setting the truth free.

Early Treaty Establishment

When the Treaties were first made, it was understood by First Nations peoples that with the Crown's acknowledgment, through the Treaties, that if its citizens came into the territories of the First Nations, all people, Indigenous and newcomers alike, would benefit. The early Peace and Friendship Treaties would acknowledge First Nations right to self-determination and to self-government. However, as relations between First Nations and the Imperial British Crown wore on, First Nations saw the ideals and aspects of the Treaties as imposition of words, which prevent the fulfillment of original understandings, in spirit and intent. One Treaty of great significance, which says more by way of symbols than any written words, is of the "Gus-Wen-Tah", the "Two-Row Wampum," which was established around 1680. The following is an account of the Haudenosaunee on the Two-Row Wampum:

Later on, when your ancestors came to our shores, after living with them for a few years, observing them, our ancestors came to the conclusion that we could not live together in the same way inside the circle. So they decided that something had to be done; because we had to live together somehow, some sort of agreement had to be made. So our leaders at the time, along with your leaders, sat down for many years to try to work out a solution. This is what they came up with...We call it "Gus-Wen-Tah" or the "Two-Row Wampum". It is on a bed of white wampum, which symbolizes the purity of the agreement. There are two rows of purple, and those two rows have the spirit of our ancestors; those two rows never come together in that belt, and it is easy to see what that means. It means that we have two different paths, two different people.²

This exemplifies very simply and effectively the types of relationships and behaviors that were expected from early relations between the White man and First Nations in accordance to the Treaty-making process. The above process of illustrating the intention of First Nations when further explained reveals one other less obvious, but significant, symbol. Professor Patricia Monture-Angus explains:

We do not believe that writing everything down is a very advanced idea. When you write things down they are easily forgotten as you assume the paper will do your job of remembering for you. When you write things down they are very easily destroyed. Fire would be one example of how easily words on a page can be destroyed. But, if a wampum belt is thrown into the fire, the shells will still be there when the ashes are cool. If you have learned well, you will be able to put that wampum belt back together again. This is

² Tizya, R. (1982). *Self-Government in Self-Sufficiency in Northern Justice Issues*. Winnipeg, MB.: Kromar Printing Ltd. pp. 42-43

the standard of knowing the law that all Mohawks will be responsible to. The only way that you can destroy a wampum belt is willfully. It cannot happen by accident. Those shells will last a very long time and the law of the people will be taught from those belts.³

The respect to which all First Nations hold the Treaties to be is symbolically captured in the tenacity and endurance of the Wampum. To First Nations, the Treaties are sacred agreements made on a Nation-to-Nation understanding in co-existing with one another. Even today, the Treaties are regarded as sacred, binding international agreements, in the view of Indigenous peoples. It is understood that the Treaties cannot be destroyed, ignored or forgotten; they are to endure for as long as the sun shines and the river flows, for it is so that we were to honor our promises as peoples to the land and to our ancestors. However, as time and settlement moved on, and as the swift adoption of the European legal-base standard came to be, our people found it difficult to understand how such a Treaty of great significance and magnitude, met with so much spirit of rightful intentions, could have been so greatly disrespected.

Broken Agreements

Historically, at the time of settlement and long-standing rivalries, Aboriginal peoples allied with both colonizing English and French armies. The settler rivalry kept the Aboriginal presence not only throughout their continual battles with one another, but also throughout the many wars with the newly-formed United States as well, who wanted to expand their colonies westwards. The American Revolution, as it would be known, would later be recognized instead as the U.S. 'Indian wars'⁴. Now, prior to the century long war, Britain was holding claim to a vast area of land, after the French surrender of 1763, which would soon lead remaining French settlers disrupted and hostile, and the Indigenous peoples with a resistance, hard and unkind. Subsequently in response, although later unconvincingly enough, the British would then establish a new law to which would enforce boundaries to all Western settlers along the coast and issue that no trades or settlement occur without the legal surrender of Indigenous lands to the British. This legal document was, and is

³ Monture-Angus, P. A. (1994). *The Familiar Face of Colonial Oppression: An Examination of Canadian Law and Judicial Decision Making*. Unpublished manuscript prepared for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.

⁴ Miller, J. (2000). *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (3rd ed.). Toronto, ON.: University of Toronto Press Incorporated. pp. 76-92

recognized as the Royal Proclamation of 1763; a substantial document in which would now *acknowledge* Aboriginal inherent right to land; the beginning, of what would later solidify First Nations injustices and grievances in the ever-constraint Red man / White man relations.⁵ Additionally, it must be noted that, with respect to the Nation-to-Nation Treaty-making process, that the historical Indian Treaties of Canada were made not with the Canadian government, but with the Imperial British Crown at the time.⁶

Colonization& Colonial Legislation

The year 1867 marked the year of Canadian Confederation, where British North American colonies would begin to unite as dominant bodies under a newly established federal government. However, Confederation marked yet another meeting of minds in which Aboriginal peoples were neither represented nor acknowledged.⁷ In the years following Confederation, Canada essentially continued with the signing of Treaties with First Nations; however, Canada adopted a more delegated imposition of power. The initial relationship between First Nations and the European Nations was based on peace, friendship, and co-existence, which is reflected in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, along with the many subsequent Treaties. Even so, in the midst of the Treaty-making throughout the territories, Confederation and the *Indian Act* came about in such an apprehensive response.

Now, *clearly* the Canadian federal authorities had ignored the interpretations of the First Nations peoples' concern with the Treaties. What happened was that the relationship between First Nations and the British Crown had already been established through the Treaties, so the United Kingdom was then able to pass on its responsibility with those relationships to the newly established Dominion of Canada. Now, as it appears to be the case, in passing on such responsibilities it was seen by such Imperial authority almost as

⁵ The Proclamation is regarded as the first major legal link between First Nations and the British Crown as co-existing Nations.

⁶ Office of the Treaty Commissioner. (2007). *Treaty Implementation: Fulfilling the Covenant*. Saskatoon, SK.: Office of the Treaty Commissioner.

⁷ Agreements and negotiations surrounding disputed land territory, and the signing of the 1783 Treaty of Paris, which would declare the end of the American Revolutionary wars between Great Britain (their Aboriginal allies) and the United States, was also very much so unrepresented by First Nations. In addition to such lack of acknowledgment, First Nation representatives were also left out of the Charlottetown and Quebec conferences—discussions and documents in which eventually lead to Canadian Confederation.

unproblematic to further alter the original agreements of the Treaties. (I think this would be clearer if you make a note referring to the Constitution Act 1867 and 1972, and the designation of Federal powers over Indians). The relationship of the two nations as equals was not respected, and the promises made during the Treaties consistently breached by Canadian government. *In effect*, the nature of the original agreements were reduced from a promise, dependent on the presence of two parties, to a decision made by one party on behalf of all those involved. This marked a shift in relations and appeared to change the overall tone and purpose of the Treaty-making process. The following is a quotation from former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Georges Erasmus, in concern to the Treaty breakdown, he states:

When our people Treated with another nation, each nation's interests, its pride, and its word were at stake. The word of the agreement, the Treaty, was given in a very sacred way. And it was not very easily broken.

So it was quite amazing to our people—and it took them a long, long time to realize—that they could sit with other people whose religious leaders were present, and who would be virtually lying to our people as they were executing the Treaty. Even before the document reached London or Paris or Ottawa, they were already forgetting the solemn promises they had made. That never happened on the side of the indigenous people.

It didn't help that the European interpretation of a Treaty, often differing radically from the First Nation's interpretation or understanding, significantly altered the intent of the original agreement.⁸

The undermining of Treaty rights through the Crown is seen as diminishing to the presence of First Nations peoples who, seen as many distinct nations, never broke or tried to alter the Treaties. Nevertheless, somehow in the process of Confederation, the status of First Nations peoples changed from that of a respected partnership to an extension of the land. It was clear that the Canadian authority saw Indians merely as a wild aspect of a great landscape in which would inevitably die out when the land was tamed.

In 1876, the *Indian Act* is born. The Act remains federal legislation that proclaims Indigenous peoples and their lands as legal wards of the state. Armed with the Act, the Dominion of Canada gained an officially authorized vision of assimilation, to which First Nations peoples became tenants on their own lands where they were considered as Crown property. The Act

⁸ Erasmus, G. (1992). Canadian History: An Aboriginal Perspective. In D. Engelstad, & J. Bird (Eds.), *Nation to Nation: Aboriginal Sovereignty and the Future of Canada*. Concord, ON.: House of Anansi Press Ltd. pp. 4-5

confined First Nations to reserve lands, to which they were removed from the Canadian settlements; and it would soon be known by the distinct nations that the Act was not so much concerned anymore with the maintenance of their traditional institutions. In fact, traditional ways of living were not permitted. Indigenous peoples, well forced to abandon their traditional cultures and teachings of their ancestors, were instead taught standards on how to be 'civil' by the White man. Further articulating the prevailing philosophy that all Indigenous inhabitants were recognized as children of the state, the following excerpt from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples notes:

Our Indian legislation generally rests on the principle, that the aborigines are to be kept in a condition of tutelage and treated as wards or children of the State....The true interests of the aborigines and of the State alike require that every effort should be made to aid the Red man in lifting himself out of his condition of tutelage and dependence, and that is clearly our wisdom and our duty, through education and every other means, to prepare him for a higher civilization by encouraging him to assume the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship.⁹

A new system of governance was imposed on all Indigenous nations, on all Indigenous lands; and contrary to the objective of encouraging higher civilization and citizenship, the state exercised their representative form of government to the exclusion of the original inhabitants of the lands. It was with the introduction of systematic governance possessing elected assemblies.¹⁰ Multifaceted ideals within the constitution, legislations, bills, and laws of the British Crown were, and continue to be, detrimental to our traditional institutions, governance, economies and overall culture.

Indigenous Identity

To understand our uniqueness and distinctiveness as a whole, a look at the role played by our language is essential. During the Treaty-making process and all other periods of early contact between the Crown and First Nations, neither spoke the others' language fluently. Negotiations were made through interpreters who failed to translate the nature and intent of each party.

⁹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1991). *Excerpts From: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*.

¹⁰ In colonies settled by the English, the inhabitants could be legislated for and taxed only by a legislature in which they were represented, or by the British Parliament itself.

It must be understood that Aboriginal languages are not so much universal as much as they are separate, beautiful and poetic. It is with the language in which contextualizes the culture, expresses its unique ways of looking at the world, to further articulate the traditional concepts and philosophies of our peoples. It is highly understandable that language holds a sense of self-identity and oneness among a people. So to it, with its own beauty and inimitable qualities, language carries traditional wisdom, cultural context and its own interpretation of life. To speak in any other form is incomparable. You would not receive the same impact or meaning by using another language, like English, as you would in your mother tongue. To do so, it is as if the meaning is being carried in a completely new and revised form; a *sort-of* re-made culture, if you will. The concept that Aboriginal language and English language are not translatable further illustrates the communicational void to which so greatly affected the early Treaty-making establishments. For example, the concept of land ownership was incomprehensible in Aboriginal languages. Further, it made no sense to First Nations that an agreement on peaceful co-existence could result in such a great exploitation of power. These concepts are European and they do not have meaning or translations in Aboriginal languages.

Canada's Identity

First Nations cultures, languages, governments and spirituality have been and continue to be ignored, rejected, and sometimes even despised in Canada. The current system no longer accurately represents the people of Canada; citizens are not simply Canadians, but members of many, many distinct cultures (I am not sure which citizens you are referring to). The current system of representatives can no longer provide an accurate voice, let alone a single identity.

Although priding itself in being recognized as a multi-cultural society, a national hunger for a Canadian identity persists. The problem present day Canadians face is that they are so out of touch with what gives them life. Families are breaking up—forgetting mothers and fathers, grandparents, great-grandparents and so forth. Citizens who are of second, third, fourth generations are all removed from the grounds that essentially give them life—the sun's fire, the water and air.

Many of the images children obtain follow them into adulthood. This is especially true in social perceptions of Aboriginal people among non-Aboriginal people – the reason being, given the nature of the reserve system, Aboriginal populations are largely socially segregated from the Canadian society, which then leaves a large proportion of the non-Aboriginal demographic with little to inform them of Aboriginal cultures and issues. This further leads to an unsubstantiated non-Aboriginal perspective providing information to the public concerning their sometimes-biased portrayals and inevitable misunderstandings. This is not to say that all the Canadian public is blind when it comes to the issues faced by First Nations. If the non-Aboriginal Canadian population were to learn from the perspective of the colonized, then perhaps they would not view our people in such a manner so misunderstood from birth.

The urban First Nations population is growing despite the frequency of ignorance, the social misconceptions, and the general attitude observed among those with limited cultural understanding. However, the social misconceptions will perhaps always be present, but it is helpful to note that First Nations culture is not weakened by condescension from the surrounding Canadian population. Because (of our resolve to keep our cultures strong?), we, as Indigenous peoples of many distinct nations are in no position to become (not sure what you mean here – are you trying to say that because we still have our cultures that we refuse to be acculturated?) superseded by the clever and witted social order of Western civilization. It is also essential to note that the urban First Nations community is growing in many ways, with an empowerment stemming because of such growth.

Today's generation of First Nations youth who are trying to reclaim and rediscover what it means to be a part of a distinct culture, while at the same time trying to live in a society in which they have been historically segregated from. Understand that the growing First Nations population is leaving the reserves in greater numbers than in any other time in history. The off-reserve First Nations population is a sharp contrast to the past demographic—and because of this, many are taking the opportunity to gain further knowledge, knowledge in which was not so readily available to First Nations on the reserves.

First Nations view – Identity& Relationship to the Land

First Nations peoples, our peoples, are entitled to the land. Saying so reasserts our place in this country, Mother Earth has always been sacred to our ancestors who understood the vitality and power of the land and all life that is supported by it. The important realization for our peoples today is that we must be able to develop our own idea of self-government, in order to move away from the dominance. It will be with concrete definitions of our peoples that will establish the first steps of implementing the process. However, it is to be understood that, with the detailed definitions, we cannot swiftly achieve such justices—for we cannot *just* anticipate the various circumstances of all Aboriginal peoples. It will be a long and hard fought process to with the great resilience of our First Nations leaders responsibility, will compromise for the collective rights of our people.

Our people want to preserve our cultural identities, and preserve our languages to which carries our wisdom as peoples, to essentially give us cultural context to our own traditions and to our own interpretations of life. We need to recapture the traditions and the values of our societies. Because what is so impressive of our traditional values is how simple they are—how simple, and yet how difficult it is to apply to the world of politics, and to the struggles of the government. For example, the principle of respect is a very simple requirement of human relations, though for our peoples it is difficult to achieve a relationship of mutual understanding with the Canadian society for there is no respect. Kindness is also a very simple principle—it goes a long way to healing people. At this time, if we apply these traditional values among ourselves, in our work and our communities, we will not have to talk about unity because it will just exist by virtue of the way we relate to each other.

The inherent right of self-government is a simple concept. It means that our right to govern ourselves comes from our peoples, our distinct past, and our cultures. It is an aspect that cannot be granted by any government, it is ours; a pre-existing root in Aboriginal peoples occupation on lands long before the settlement of the White man. Now, however, the process of achieving true self-governance for our people can be unsettling and or discouraging to the soul and mind. In the following reference, current Chief of Grand Rapids First Nation, Ovide Mercredi, speaks of the importance in recognizing the purpose to which advocates First Nations inherent right:

The European nations arrived in our lands with a belief in manifest destiny and a strong conviction that they were racially superior. Our peoples were dispossessed of our territories, our self-determination and our inherent rights to language and culture. Even our religious beliefs were deemed inferior and subjected to cultural imperialism. Yet indigenous peoples persevered and still survive as distinct peoples throughout the world...We have learned the bitter lesson that our rights have been repeatedly violated. We know that our future survival depends on our present abilities to secure not only our lands, but also the recognition of our inherent right to self-rule.¹¹

Our peoples had governments long before European arrival and continue to have governments. The right to govern ourselves is inherent, as peoples, we do not need the consent of a foreign power to be self-governing. There is no better way in making the position of First Nations any clearer. It is with the inherent right to which is being advocated for a purpose, and that is to protect our identities, languages, cultures and traditions, and to ensure our integrity as peoples. We seek to preserve a way of life, to use our own institutions of self-government to deal with the social and economic needs of our people, to heal our communities, and to make some progress so we can have vibrant societies. We want to preserve a distinct way of life that has suffered dramatically under Canadian policies of assimilation.

What you took from the people *will* go back to the people

First Nations peoples in Canada believe our Treaties confirm the inherent right of self-government for Treaty signatories. However, Canada does not appear to understand the relationship between the Treaties, nor understand First Nations traditional economy; so subsequently, Canada should, at the very least, understand that First Nations could not rely on such an *extralegal*¹² systematic structure to consolidate its history, for it is with our peoples who live in the unjust structure of the bureaucratic model. That is the familiar story of the

¹¹ Mercredi, O. et al. (1993). *In the Rapids: Navigating the Future of First Nations*. Toronto, ON: Penguin Books Canada Ltd. pp. 66

¹² In his paper, *The Constitutional Right of an Enriched Livelihood*, James (Sekej) Youngblood Henderson states, "The reasons that the Treaties did not generate an enriched livelihood or happiness or wealth lie in the false assumptions and extralegal effects of colonization in Canada. As in Latin America, the colonialists created a parallel extralegal political economy that confiscated natural assets and trade for the immigrants. This paper economy produced the generative capital that created their wealth. This political economy and its legal consciousness left Aboriginal peoples with dead capital, an inability to deploy its potential, and an inability to compete economically with colonialists." Henderson further establishes that it is essential, in order to move forward, for Canada as a whole to recognize and distinguish old misconceptions of First Nations Canadian history.

distinction of power within an ever-longing (*ever-longing* does not make sense to me here. Are you using this adjective to describe a sense of achieving greater oppression?) oppressive makeup we call the Canadian legal system. It is understood that if negotiations with Canada on self-government ever persist, that there will be restrictions—restrictions to which we, as First Nations, shall impose ourselves. This is what would need to be discussed during negotiations in order for each Indigenous nation to make their position clear, given its history. If Canada were ever to recognize our inherent rights and implement them, it will be met with limits. Our peoples have come to be accepting of certain conclusions about the political reality in Canada. Yet, it is hard to decipher how a nation imprisoned by another is allowed the opportunity for *self-government*, however, denied the right to exist as an independent nation internationally. It is but with the one-sided stories imposed by the Crown for years amongst the historical Treaties in which turned the process of Treaty-making into the eventual dispossession of Aboriginal rights and lands. Understand that all historical Treaties were based on foreign legal concepts, written in and under foreign occupying understandings. With such foreign notions, the validity of the spiritual intent of the Treaties were not recognized by the Crown; even though our ancestors knowledge and understanding of the Treaties is no less the truth, and no less valid merely because it was of oral understanding and tradition. We, as Indigenous peoples to the land, have a duty to restore our traditions, to advocate for our rights, and to do so in a way that is consistent with our sovereignty and our contemporary needs. To achieve such inherent right to self-government means correcting the imbalance that exists between our peoples and the rest of Canada. Once more, Mercredi articulates:

The Treaties are not responsible for our problems today. They have not converted our people into inferior human beings. The relationship of dominance we have experienced is a product of government policies like the Indian Act, not a product of the Treaties. Our freedom, our liberation, will not be secured simply by looking at legislative changes. Why should we beg another nation to modify its laws so that it will not violate our rights? Our rights were negotiated and secured by our ancestors; we must look beyond the laws passed by Parliament and the provinces and find other ways of guaranteeing protection for our Treaties and Treaty rights.¹³

¹³ Supra note 11 at 192.

It remains the view of the Canadian Government that the Numbered Treaties are simply land surrenders; specific terminology used is to *concede* all land rights and resources by means of sale.¹⁴ It further details the ceding of all land and territory within the text of the Treaties—that it was a *total* surrender of all lands and resources. On the other hand, it was with our peoples oral understanding of the Treaties and negotiations that we agreed to share the lands; that with the Treaties we would be assured our rights were protected if we shared. For that reason, due to the lack of a common understanding of the original “spirit and intent” of the Treaties, and subsequent lack of implementation, the federal government, instead, responded with a legislated relationship under the authority of the long-standing and colonial *Indian Act*. It was through several Treaty agreements by the Imperial Crown and several First Nations across the land that ought to have shaped and governed First Nations relationship with the Crown and, through the Crown, and with all non-First Nations people. *However*, with such improper understandings of the Treaties by the Crown, it has left First Nations people confined; confined by boundaries, real and invisible, imposed by the Crown since the making of the Treaties. It is understood today that there is not a single living Treaty anywhere in Canada to which the Treaty rights of First Nations peoples have been fully implemented.¹⁵ It is important to identify with the history, the injustices, and grievances created by non-implementation of the Treaty relationship. For First Nations to understand their history in Canada is to understand their distinctive place as peoples today. It is true that First Nations peoples like to articulate their history. History for First Nations peoples is important in understanding the initial relationship in the encounters amongst the newcomers and their ancestors—important in the sense of the connection that comes from having always occupied the lands of our ancestors. Again, it is significant to note, that with such a history of relationship and contact between nations is important in understanding how Indigenous peoples find themselves today.

In order to reassess the relationship of the Red man / White man relations, negotiations on a Nation-to-Nation basis will have to be clear in keeping with the established legal principles of Treaty interpretation. The purpose of clarity is vital in order to enable the implementation of the Treaties. With such accession, it should enable the revival of the original Treaty

¹⁴ Supra note 6.

¹⁵ Supra note 11 at 78.

relationship in showing meaningful respect for the autonomy of nations and values of self-determination. Professor Monture-Angus speaks of this process as being fundamental before a truly equal partnership can be forged between First Nations and Canada, she states:

The first small step in creating a renewed partnership vision is to understand the nature of the gaps in our conversations. This is particularly true if it is recognized that a new relationship between Canada and Aboriginal Peoples interfaces with both legal and political discourses. What are the differences and similarities between the legally accepted Canadian definitions of Aboriginal experience and at the same time the understanding Aboriginal Peoples have of the legal/political/ personal concepts of self-determination and self-government.¹⁶

It will be necessary to pay particular attention to the historical relationship, that is, the one that existed at the time of the Treaty-making. Canada also needs to respect and understand its history with Indigenous peoples. For a federal and political response to understand and rekindle its history with First Nations peoples, Canada is to act accordingly in concern to that of original intention of the co-existence of Nations; to value that First Nations had made the original agreements with their forefathers, with such an established promise and fortitude, on a Nation-to-Nation basis.

Conclusion

In recent years, First Nations in Canada have become more politically organized according to the European-based Canadian standards. Not only do they have governance over their own political organizations and bands, many have also taken much of the responsibility for the operations of education institutions, health centers, social services and economic enterprises intended to serve their people. Utilizing such contemporary instruments, this movement has reflected First Nations resilience and perseverance to awaken their self-determining nature. As illustrated in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples:

Aboriginal nations have accepted the need for power sharing with Canada. In return, they ask Canadians to accept that Aboriginal self-government is not, and can never be, a "gift" from an "enlightened" Canada. The right is inherent in Aboriginal people and their nationhood and was exercised for centuries before the arrival of European explorers and settlers. It is a right they never surrendered and now want to exercise once more.¹⁷

¹⁶ Supra note 3.

¹⁷ Library of Parliament. (1996). *The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*.

Visions of a Future Canada

The objective of First Nations peoples is to reassess its relationship with the nation state. Therefore, in order to realize our aspirations as self-determining peoples, we need to re-establish a new relationship entirely, based on renewed and enlightened understandings. And evidently, in order for our peoples to fully co-exist with the White man and his nation, the very nature of wisdom and care for the land is to be respected, and not to any longer be altered nor rearranged for capital gain. Canada must learn to respect the bones of our ancestors, and not have them dug up almost effortlessly, and with such thoughtless intention, only then to have them displayed for all to see. With the indignities our ancestors suffered, no honor is to be seen nor appreciated when their bones are served as simple museum pieces.

Now, you can start to understand and *appreciate* the decadence and deprivation in trusting an unsacred Dominion, when you are able to ask yourself, how far can, and will they go? What other aspect of Canadian history is the White man to misunderstand in relation to our peoples? Why are the major misconceptions of Canadian First Nations history still taught to the masses? To address these questions, our history must be known. The place to start is by understanding our peoples past as traditional bearers of the land and our responsibilities to all of the land's creations. Subsequently, our history has to present the collective and dispiriting past that begins with the first European contact with our ancestors, leading to the expropriation of Indigenous lands, and to the eventual stripping of a culture and tradition, so on and so forth. Can it be only then that visions of a future Canada will be possible? Will proceed? Will endure? Or may exist in both the eyes of the oppressed as well the oppressor? Well, once more to reiterate, in order to co-exist, Canada must be receptive to, and accepting of our shared history, our Treaties and the autonomy of our nations within the territorial boundaries. And it will be only then when we, as First Nations, will regain our rightful status' as distinct nations, and as peoples.

However, before anything can be done, we, as Indigenous peoples, need to go, and first, get a hold of our ancestors' bones—all of them, and bring them home.

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Loretta Ballantyne



Loretta Ballantyne is from Pelican Narrows, Sk., but resides in Prince Albert, Sk. She has been an educator for over 20 yrs. Her participation in the Sister Journey is to Honour & Dedicated it to Residential School Survivors.

Ellen Wood



Ellen Wood was born in Winnipeg, MB. She started canoeing at 14. She farms with her partner Walter Jess, they have some grain land, a herd of cattle, and a small apple orchard. They farm near Richard, SK. She's honoured to be part of "Sister Journey." Building relationships is one of the most important activities we can do for each other and Mother Earth.

Heather Balas



Heather Balas lives in Saskatoon, SK. She's involved with the Mothers' Centre Coalition and provides childcare to families and community organizations. A single mother with 3 children. She's on the Sister Journey to find peace, safety and to restore her spirit and is blessed to be on this journey with 15 other strong and courageous women.

Lee Ann Bird



LeeAnn Bird currently resides in Debden, a mother of 3, who has done volunteer work for TRC. She's one of the planning team members, who wants healing for her family and community.

Gail Starr



Gail Starr is a Cree woman from the Star Blanket Cree Nation. She is a proud mother of 3 and a Kokum to 1 granddaughter & 1 on the way. She believes in kinship & has placed high value in family and close friends. Her values and passion to build relationships and honor her family who have experienced residential school. is her main reason for attending this canoe trip.

Audrey MacDonald

Audrey McDonald is from the Onion Lake First Nation. She admires her late dad's independence and strength; it is because of his teachings that she became a teacher herself. Audrey's husband is also a survivor. Audrey sees this canoe trip as a part of her healing journey. It is her second overnight canoe journey, and she will be bringing the paddle she used in her first canoe trip.

Edith Starr



Edith Starr is from the Starblanket Cree Nation. She's been married for 37 years and raised 4 daughters (1 deceased) and 1 grandson. She has 7 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren. She attended Residential School at Birtle and File Hills. The oldest person on the "Nimis Kapimotat" Journey, she hopes to set an example for others of a strong woman, who's grateful to the Creator for this opportunity.

Deb Gunther-Hansen



Deb Gunther-Hansen lives in Saskatoon with her husband of 35 years, Cliff. They have 2 fabulous children. She's a paediatric Physical Therapist and has worked with children and their families, in many First Nations, for the past 40 years. She has gained so much knowledge and insight from them. She is honoured to be chosen to be part of this life giving journey of sharing, learning and healing in her "happy place" with Mother Earth & on the northern waters with 15 wonderful women.

Nimis Kahpimotat-Sister Journey 2012



Terry Harrison



I am Terry Harrison. Paddling in wilderness areas has been a passion of mine for over 35 years, beginning as a teenager. Personal growth is nurtured as well as building relationships with all living beings around us. I look forward to sharing laughter and tears amidst stories of pain and empowerment, while embraced by Mother Earth. We are setting out on this journey together, as we travel into new friendships, deeper understanding, and a path of reconciliation. I am a retired teacher living in Saskatoon and I am active in social justice issues.

Maggie King



Tanisi/Sekon, My name is Maggie King, originally a Mohawk of Akwesasne, now residing in Saskatchewan with my children and now grandchildren for over 35 years. I work with survivors of Indian Residential School and those affected by intergenerational impacts of residential schools. When my grandchildren ask what I did to help, I will be proud to say I travelled the river of life with some totally awesome sisters! Niawen Kowa, Hiy Hiy!!

Ally Harms



Ally Harms is a mother of three and recently a grandmother to a beautiful baby girl. Ally works as a Parent-Aide and enjoys assisting families gain parenting skills. She is honoured to be a part of Sisters Journey with such wonderful, Strong Sisters

Erin Wolfson



Erin Wolfson lives in Saskatoon where she is a graduate student in medical anthropology at U of S. Her thesis is on the meaning & processes of healing in the TRC. She's had the privilege of attending TRC gatherings in Sask. & Nova Scotia – 2 places she calls home. The youngest in Nimis Kahpimotat, she is humbled at the opportunity to listen & learn from the Elder Sisters.

Sue Bland



Sue Bland is a mother of 4 beautiful daughters. She grew up in Ontario, an artist who is also self-employed. The opportunity to share precious time with 15 beautiful women and listen to their stories is, "Great the Day!"

Dawn Guenther



Dawn Guenther is from Saskatoon and a retired nursing manager. Her passion for canoeing took her all over the world. She feels a strong connection to creation and the spirit in moving or still water. Dawn looks forward to making live long friends with the sisters in Nimis Kahpimotat.

Angela Bishop



Angela Bishop is originally from Green Lake, Sk. She has 4 children and 5 grandchildren. As a Metis woman she is familiar with the challenges in our communities. She wants to 'walk the talk' and is committed to leading a healthy lifestyle. She believes that healing begins with each individual and is a lifelong process. She is honored to participate with this group of wonderful women as they "Paddle to Reconciliation!"

Carol Zacharius



Carol Zacharias lives on a farm near Rapid View with her husband Glen of 32 years. They have 5 children & also proud grandparents of Madelyn Eva, who is 9 months old and recognizes her grandma! She attended Swift Current Bible Institute for 2 years. She drove a school bus for 22 years and continues to teach piano lessons. She is so excited to be a part of Nimis Kahpimotat,