



# First Peoples

A GUIDE FOR NEWCOMERS

## First Peoples: A Guide for Newcomers

Published by:



Social Policy  
City of Vancouver  
vancouver.ca

Project Coordination: Social Policy  
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We are grateful to Vancouver Community College and the Vancouver Public Library for their support of this initiative.

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ISBN: 978-1-894152-38-9

### Cover (from left)

Young Aboriginal girl. UN Photo by John Isaac.  
Chief Robert Joseph. Courtesy of Reconciliation Canada.  
National Aboriginal Day. Courtesy of Vancouver Community College.  
Coast Salish woman. Courtesy of Truth and Reconciliation Canada.

### Cover (background)

Walk for Reconciliation, September 22, 2013.  
Courtesy of Truth and Reconciliation Canada.

Canada 



WelcomeBC

*This project is made possible through funding from the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia*

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# Introduction

## **FIRST PEOPLES: A GUIDE FOR NEWCOMERS TO VANCOUVER**

Vancouver welcomes newcomers from all parts of the world. Newcomers are often at a disadvantage when it comes to learning about First Peoples because of language barriers, access to information, or the time to learn. They may have few opportunities to meet Aboriginal people in their daily lives and may learn about Aboriginal people only in the news. Yet, learning about the rich and diverse history and experiences of Canada's First Peoples is key to building understanding between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities.

*First Peoples: A Guide for Newcomers* aims to fill the need for clear information in simple language about the First Peoples in Vancouver. It introduces newcomers to three important topics: who are Aboriginal people (or First Peoples) in Vancouver and Canada; a brief overview of the relationship between the Government of Canada and First Peoples; and current initiatives and ways for newcomers to learn more about Aboriginal people in the community.

*First Peoples: A Guide for Newcomers* grew out of the Vancouver Dialogues Project (2010-2013), a City of Vancouver initiative to create more opportunity for understanding between Aboriginal and immigrant communities. As participants shared their stories, they found there was a need for educational materials about Aboriginal people for newcomers. The *Guide* became a key initiative under the Welcoming Communities Project in 2013, and was supported by the Province of B.C. Immigration Integration Branch.

The *Guide* was based on comprehensive research of various topics identified by the Dialogues Steering Committee. It draws on contemporary academic, First Nations and community sources. A Working Group made up of First Nations and community members provided advice and resources. Members of the group discussed how the *Guide* could best meet the needs of newcomers and enhance newcomers' understanding of Aboriginal people in Vancouver and Canada.

## **SUMMARY**

There are three distinct groups of Aboriginal people in Canada: First Nations, Inuit and Métis. The City of Vancouver is on the traditional territories of three Local First Nations: the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh. As stated in *Vancouver Dialogues*, "The land where we live is *both* unceded Coast Salish territory *and* the City of Vancouver." Just over half of Aboriginal people in Canada live in cities, and Metro Vancouver has the third largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada.

Aboriginal cultures are an expression of a community's worldview and, most often, of the community's unique relationship with the land. Aboriginal cultures across Canada are very diverse, but in general, their traditional societies have been communal and rooted in spiritual ceremonies and values. Aboriginal people have not been allowed to tell their own stories and histories in the mainstream media. Newcomers are exposed to negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people, but often do not have enough information to see past the racism.

Understanding the relationship of Aboriginal people and the Government of Canada is key to understanding the situation of both today. Treaties and the struggle for self-determination and self-government are rooted in historical experience. The *Indian Act* has governed Canada's First Peoples for over a century. Indian Residential Schools have had a profound effect on Aboriginal people and communities. Yet, the First Peoples have always resisted harmful policies and shown great resilience to their impacts.

In the context of these historic relationships, immigrant and Aboriginal communities are finding new and creative ways to link together. The Vancouver Dialogues Project included dialogue circles, community research, cultural exchange visits, an intergenerational program, a neighbourhood storytelling project, and a youth summit, all of which culminated in the release of two books and a video launch.

Newcomers have many opportunities to learn about First Peoples in the community. Vancouver is home to public art by Aboriginal artists, from the numerous pieces created for the 2010 Olympics to the totem poles in Stanley Park. There are museums, galleries and cultural centres that offer programs or exhibits of Aboriginal art, history and culture, and an events calendar that lists Aboriginal events open to the public. Finally, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the recent national events in BC, and Vancouver's proclamation of the Year of Reconciliation have all created new awareness and brought many communities together.

A short guide cannot hope to be a comprehensive resource on the First Peoples of Vancouver. It does not cover the long and diverse history of First Peoples before contact with Europeans, or the experience of contact. It only touches on government-Aboriginal relations. The guide does not address the many contemporary issues facing First Peoples. The hope is that readers will learn enough to ask more questions, and will contribute to more conversations between newcomers and interested members of communities and the First Peoples of Canada.

## **HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE**

This *Guide* will be available on the City of Vancouver's website at [vancouver.ca/newcomers](http://vancouver.ca/newcomers) and also through the Vancouver Public Library's ebook collection. Readers can read through the Guide cover to cover, or skip to chapters that interest them. The extensive end-notes in each chapter are useful for seeking out further information, and there is a Glossary of Terms which is useful for quick reference.

We believe this *Guide* is a valuable resource to the people of Vancouver. The *Guide* will be made available to newcomers through local organizations including immigrant settlement agencies, the Vancouver Public Library, and ESL language centres across Metro Vancouver. Newcomers will be able to read it independently, or use it in the classroom as a learning material. Concurrent with this Guide, the Welcoming Communities Project is also publishing Classroom Materials for ESL students and teachers. As a succinct resource, the Guide (and the classroom materials) will be useful to both newcomers and people who have lived in Vancouver for a long time, but who would like to learn more about the First Peoples in Vancouver.





## Chapter 1

# First Peoples in Canada

### 1.1. FIRST PEOPLES IN CANADA

First Peoples in Canada, also called **Aboriginal** people, have diverse languages, ceremonies, traditions and histories.<sup>1</sup> The Canadian Constitution Act recognizes three distinct groups of Aboriginal people in Canada: **First Nations**, **Inuit** and **Métis**.

In 2011, an estimated 1,400,685 people in Canada identified themselves as Aboriginal. That is 4.3 percent of the total population of Canada. Of this population,

- 851,560 were First Nations
- 451,790 were Métis
- 59,440 were Inuit.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter you will learn about the three distinct groups of Aboriginal people. If you would like to learn more, there are links to more readings at the end of the chapter.

### 1.2. FIRST NATIONS

**First Nations** people have lived all across Canada for thousands of years. They have many different languages, cultures, and spiritual beliefs. First Nations people are Aboriginal people who do not identify as Inuit or Métis.

For many thousands of years, First Nations managed their lands and resources with their own government, laws and traditions.<sup>3</sup> Their societies were very complex and included systems for trade and commerce, building relationships, managing resources, and spirituality.



Nisga'a chief in feast robe, 1902. Photo by the Edwards Brothers. Courtesy of Vancouver Public Library. Accession no. 2675

With the formation of the Government of Canada, the ways of life for all First Nations were changed forever. The government developed policies that forced a system of **“band”** governance on First Nations so that they could no longer use their own system of government. A band is a community of First Nations people whose membership is defined by the Government of Canada. Many bands now have an elected council, called a “Band Council,” and an elected **chief**. Traditionally, some First Nations leadership was hereditary, and was passed down through the generations. Today many First Nations still have systems of hereditary leadership. Some bands continue to recognize their Hereditary Chief in their Band Councils, in addition to their elected Chief, but others do not.<sup>4</sup> Today band councils are responsible for administering the education, band schools, housing, water and sewer systems, roads, and other community businesses and services for their First Nations members.<sup>5</sup> There are 203 First Nations bands in BC,<sup>6</sup> and 614 in Canada.<sup>7</sup>

Today in BC there are 32 surviving First Nation languages, which account for more than half of the First Nations languages in Canada.<sup>8</sup> The majority of First Nations languages are considered in danger of becoming extinct within the next generation. Many people are working hard to keep these languages alive and teach them to youth. There is more information about First Nations culture in [Chapter 4](#).

Today, First Nations people are working hard to reclaim their traditions. There are many celebrations and festivals held in Vancouver that are open to non-Aboriginal people. You can read more about these events in [Chapter 11](#).

**“Indian”** is an important legal term in Canada. Most Aboriginal people associate this term with government regulation and colonialism, so it is not acceptable in public use. Non-First Nations people should not call First Nations people “Indians,” even though some First Nations people choose to use the word to describe themselves.<sup>9</sup> You can read more about its history in [Chapter 6](#).

### 1.3. INUIT

**Inuit** have lived in the Arctic lands and waters of northern Canada for thousands of years. Traditionally, they lived off the resources of the

land by hunting whales, seals, caribou, fish and birds. Many Inuit continue to harvest these resources today.

Their way of life and culture changed when they made contact with European settlers and began participating in the fur trade. It changed again when the Government of Canada moved many Inuit communities away from their traditional “hunting and gathering” or transient way of life on the land and into permanent, centralized settlements.

There are now more than 59,440 Inuit.<sup>10</sup> The majority of Inuit live in small northern communities. Hunting and fishing continue to be important parts of the Inuit economy, culture and lifestyle. Many families leave their permanent communities in the spring and summer to set up camps to gather and prepare traditional foods. During this time, young people are surrounded by their language and develop many skills that keep their culture alive through watching and learning from their elders.<sup>11</sup> They have access to modern conveniences, but they have kept and protected their traditional way of life and their language. There are several dialects of Inuit language spoken.<sup>12</sup>

The well-known icon of the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, the Inukshuk, is an Inuit symbol. In the Arctic, the Inukshuk is a welcoming signpost to hunters. Now, it also has a ceremonial function as an introduction to new cultures.<sup>13</sup>

There are four Inuit regions, known together as “Inuit Nunangat.” Inuit Nunangat includes land, water, and ice. Each region has a unique form of self-government. The best known is the Nunavut Territory, created in 1999.<sup>14</sup>

Non-Inuit used to call Inuit people “Eskimo”, but, like “Indian,” it may be considered insulting and should not be used.

### Further Resources

- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national Inuit organization in Canada. For more cultural, community, and political information: <https://www.itk.ca>
- Pauktuutit is the national Inuit women’s organization in Canada. <http://pauktuutit.ca>



Inukshuk at English Bay in Vancouver. Photo by Christina Chan. Released under CC BY 4.0.

### Red River Métis

The most well-known Métis people are from the Red River region of what is now Manitoba. They lived in and used this region's land before it became a part of Canada.<sup>19</sup> They developed a culture that combined First Nations and European cultures, yet were also independent from them.<sup>20</sup> Louis Riel was a famous leader of the Red River Métis in late 1800s. He led two resistance movements against the Canadian Government for Métis people's rights to the land.<sup>21</sup> Government recognition of Métis rights continues to change, and, in recent years, major legal decisions have continued to affect them.



Métis sashes. Photo by Chris Corrigan. Released under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

Métis Naming Ceremony in Barrie Ontario. Photo by antefixus U.E. Released under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

### 1.4. MÉTIS

“Métis” comes from the word “to mix.” In the 1600s and 1700s, many French and Scottish men migrated to Canada for the fur trade. Some of these men had children with First Nations women and formed new communities. Their children became the first people called Métis. They created their own language, Michif, that has many regional variations and is often a mixture of Cree and French. The distinct Métis culture is known for its fine beadwork, fiddling, and jigging. The infinity symbol on the Métis flag symbolizes the joining of two cultures and that the culture will live forever.<sup>15</sup>

About 451,795 people in Canada identify as Métis.<sup>16</sup> That is more than 30 percent of the Aboriginal population.<sup>17</sup> 18,485 Métis people were estimated to live in Metro Vancouver in 2011.<sup>18</sup>

Not everyone agrees on the definition of who is “Métis.” Some people use the word “Métis” to describe any person of mixed Aboriginal and European heritage. Others say that it only refers to descendants of specific historic communities. Some Métis people prefer the Cree word *otipêyimisowak* over “Métis.” It means “independent.”

#### Further Resources

- <http://www.louisrielinstitute.com>
- <http://www.learnmichif.com>
- <http://www.metismuseum.ca>
- <http://www.vancouvermetis.com>
- <http://www.mnbc.ca>
- <http://metisportals.ca/wp>



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3. "Our Homes are Bleeding," (Classroom resource.) Union of BC Indian Chiefs. (19). Accessed April 24, 2013. <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/government-policy/the-indian-act/bands.html>
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6. "British Columbia First Nations By Region." Aboriginal Tourism Society. Accessed April 16, 2013. <http://www.aboriginalbc.com/first-nations/british-columbia-first-nations-by-region>
7. "First Nations People of Canada." Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. Accessed November 6, 2013. <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1303134042666/1303134337338>  
The number of BC First Nation Bands and the number in Canada vary depending on source. The largest number is 203 in BC and 633 in Canada.
8. "BC's Unique Linguistic Heritage." First Nations Languages Program, UBC. Accessed April 16, 2013. <http://fnlg.arts.ubc.ca/FNLG1.htm>
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21. Endnote 21 REPLACE with: Louis Riel Institute of Canada. Accessed March 2, 2014. <http://www.louisrielinstitute.com>



## Chapter 2

# Local First Nations

### 2.1. VANCOUVER'S LOCAL FIRST NATIONS

There are three **Local First Nations** in Vancouver: the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh. These three are part of a larger cultural group called the Coast Salish. The City of Vancouver is on the traditional territories of these three First Nations. They have a special spiritual, cultural, and economic connection to this land that goes back thousands of years.<sup>1</sup> Some of their **traditional territories** overlap, and they share these lands and resources.

It is now a recognized **protocol** for guests to acknowledge the host nation, its people and its land. You may hear people, groups, or institutions say that they are on **unceded land** or thank their First Nation hosts. For example you may hear someone begin an event by saying *"We would like to acknowledge the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish people."*

Vancouver and 95 percent of British Columbia are on unceded First Nations land. In many parts of Canada, **treaties** were signed with First Nations that gave incoming settlers rights to much of the land, but in British Columbia very few treaties were signed. **"Unceded"** means that First Nations people did not give up or legally sign it away to Britain or Canada. As stated in *Vancouver Dialogues*, "The land where we live is *both* unceded Coast Salish territory *and* the City of Vancouver."<sup>2</sup>

You may have seen the Welcome Figures at the Vancouver International Airport. Musqueam artist, Susan Point, designed these traditional Coast Salish figures to welcome travelers to Coast Salish Territory.<sup>3</sup>

### What Brought You Here?

"Let's imagine a society, maybe Canada; we'll call it northern Turtle Island.<sup>5</sup> Imagine when people came off the airplane they were met by Indigenous people, not a customs person. When we look at traditional ways of entering up here on the coast, there was a whole protocol of ceremony and approach. What is your intent in coming? Are you coming for war? Are you coming for peace?"

If the newly arrived say, "I'm coming here for my family. My family is struggling, we need to help make money for them," Indigenous people would welcome them. They'd help them get a job and help them get what they need. They would teach them about the real name of this continent, Turtle Island, and about the territory they've entered."<sup>6</sup>

— Curtis Clearsky, Blackfoot and Anishnaabe First Nations, *Our Roots: Stories from Grandview Woodland*

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“Aboriginal people represented Canada’s first welcoming community.... If multiculturalism is a fundamental value [of the Canadian nation] it is thanks to First Nations Peoples. Their vision of one land — an abundance belonging to all — their tremendous sense of hospitality and sharing, their respect for all and for every living thing, have instilled their values in us and shaped the fundamentals beliefs of our society.”<sup>4</sup>

— SYLVIA KASPARIAN

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The following information is based on the three Local First Nations’ websites. Please refer to those websites for the most up to date information.

## 2.2. MUSQUEAM NATION

<http://www.musqueam.bc.ca>

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“Although a metropolitan city has developed in the heart of Musqueam territory, our community maintains strong cultural and traditional beliefs.”

— MUSQUEAM FIRST NATION

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The Musqueam (pronounced *Mus-kwee-um*) **traditional territory** includes what is now Vancouver and surrounding areas. Today, parts of Musqueam’s traditional territory are called: Vancouver, North Vancouver, South Vancouver, Burrard Inlet, New Westminster, Burnaby, and Richmond.<sup>7</sup>

The Musqueam people’s traditional language is hə́n’q’ə́min’əm’. The University of British Columbia offers classes in the hə́n’q’ə́min’əm’ language.

The name x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy’əm (Musqueam) means “People of the River Grass.” The story of their name has been passed on from generation to generation. It says that, like the River Grass, the Musqueam people have periods in which their population grows and shrinks.



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Susan Point, Musqueam, *Female and Male Welcome Figures* (1996). Courtesy of Vancouver International Airport.



Today, the Musqueam have three reserves in Metro Vancouver. This is a very small portion of their **traditional territory**. The Musqueam Nation has an elected **Chief** and Council.

The Nation has several social and economic projects, such as the Musqueam Golf and Learning Academy, and is actively involved in the development of others. The Musqueam Cultural Education Resource Centre and Gallery opened in July 2013. The gallery shares Musqueam culture from the Musqueam perspective, including historic cultural objects and contemporary arts. There are self-guided and guided educational tours open to the public.

### 2.3. TSLEIL-WAUTUTH NATION

<http://www.twnation.ca>

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“We have always been here, and we will always be here.  
Our People are here to care for our land and water.”<sup>8</sup>

— TSLEIL-WAUTUTH NATION

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Tsleil-Waututh (pronounced *Slay-wah-tuth*) people’s **traditional territory** is 1,865km<sup>2</sup>. It reaches from the Fraser River in the south to Mamquam Lake in the north. Their oral history and archaeological evidence shows that they have lived in the lands and waters of their traditional territory surrounding the Burrard Inlet for thousands of years. Tsleil-Waututh people’s traditional language is hən’q’əmin’əm’.

Tsleil-Waututh means People of the Inlet. They are sometimes called the “Children of the Takaya” or “Children of the Wolf.” The story of the wolf says that the Creator made the wolf into the first Tsleil-Waututh and made the wolf responsible for their land. Tsleil-Waututh people have a saying that, “*When the tide went out, the table was set.*” Traditionally, this area had more than enough fish and game to sustain the Tsleil-Waututh and their neighbours and allies. Now, Tsleil-Waututh people live in an urban area. They live on three reserves, and some live off-reserve.

Tsleil-Waututh Nation is governed by an elected **Chief** and Council, as well as a Traditional Council. All nine family groups who are part of the Nation are represented in the family-based Traditional Council.

The Tsleil-Waututh Nation owns and operates several businesses and is partners in several more. These include recreational facilities, real estate projects, a forestry company, and a cultural tourism operation.

Every August, people of all walks of life are invited to join the Tsleil-Waututh Cultural Arts Festival held at Whey-ah-Wichen/Cates Park in North Vancouver. The festival celebrates Aboriginal culture, community, and the Nation's inseparable link to its territory.

#### 2.4. SQUAMISH NATION

<http://www.squamish.net>



Map of Squamish Territory.  
Created by OldManRivers  
for Wikimedia. Released  
under CC-by-2.0

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“Our society is, and always has been, organized and sophisticated, with complex laws and rules governing all forms of social relations, economic rights and relations with other First Nations.”

— SQUAMISH FIRST NATION

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The Squamish Nation (pronounced *Skwa-mish*) **traditional territory** is 6,732 km<sup>2</sup> that cover present day Metro Vancouver, Gibson's Landing and the Squamish River watershed. The Squamish Nation has occupied and governed their territory since beyond recorded history.

The Squamish People's traditional language is Skwxwú7mesh Snichim. The Skwxwú7mesh Snichim, although in danger of being lost, is still an important part of the Squamish culture.<sup>9</sup> Currently, there is a resurgence in language and culture in the Squamish Nation and the language is being taught in the local schools.

The Squamish Thunderbird symbol represents a bird watching over the people. The wings are watching over the sea creatures. Its crest is male and female. The tail feathers represent the past, present, and future.

The Squamish Nation has 24 reserves, and four of these are in Metro Vancouver and others extend up the coast. The reserves represent 0.4230 percent of their traditional territory. Most of the Nation's 3,800 members live on urban reserves in Vancouver, North and West Vancouver and the municipality of Squamish.

In 1923, after many years of discussion, 16 Skwxwú7mesh Hereditary Chiefs signed an Amalgamation document declaring that the traditional governance of Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw, our People and lands, was still in place. The Amalgamation was established to guarantee equality to all Squamish people and to ensure good government. Now, the Squamish Nation is governed by a council of 16 elected councilors who elect two Co-Chairs instead of a Chief.

The Squamish Nation owns several businesses, such as marinas, a restaurant, gas stations, an RV park and a forestry company. They host an annual Powwow every July. It is a family event that is open to the public, with a salmon BBQ and arts and crafts for sale.

The Squamish Nation shares a Cultural Centre with the neighbouring Lil'wat Nation in Whistler. The Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre shares art, history and culture with the community and visitors.

## 2.5. NAMING VANCOUVER

Aboriginal people have their own names for their territories and places. European explorers and settlers did not learn these names but invented their own instead. This is one way that Europeans re-wrote history and excluded Aboriginal people. For example, the city of Vancouver is named after Captain George Vancouver, who was born in England in 1757, and not after a Chief of the territory whose family had lived in Vancouver forever.

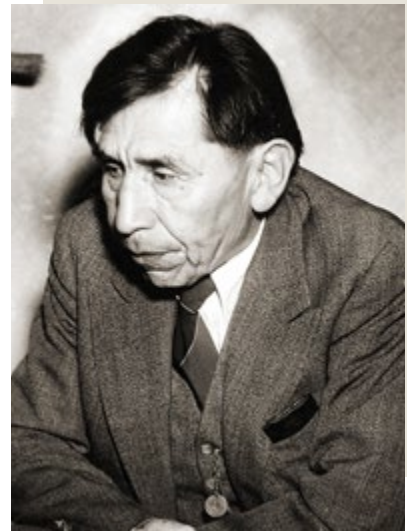
Some Vancouver place names used today are English versions of Aboriginal words. Often these Aboriginal words were not place names. Naming places after faraway places or people who have never lived there is a European, not Aboriginal, custom. Some examples of local or BC Aboriginal names and words used as Vancouver street names are: Capilano, Cheam, Comox, Haida, Musqueam, Nootka, and Sasamat.



Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre in Whistler BC. Courtesy of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.



In recent years, there have been some interesting attempts to reverse this colonial history. In 2010 the Government of Canada and Aboriginal leaders recognized the waterways between Vancouver and Vancouver Island as the “Salish Sea.” This name, which recognizes long Aboriginal presence in this area, now co-exists with other names, such as the “Georgia Strait” (named after English King George), that are part of colonial history.



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Chief August Jack  
Khahtsahlano, 1941.  
Courtesy of the City  
of Vancouver Archives.  
AM54-S4-: Port P920

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Map of the Salish Sea by  
Stefan Freelan, Western  
Washington University.  
Released under  
CC BY-NC 4.0

## ENDNOTES

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5. “Turtle Island” is an Anishinaabe term that used by many First Nations people to refer to North America — ie. North America looks like the back of a turtle. It is not a traditional Coast Salish term.

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## Chapter 3

# Urban Aboriginal People and Organizations

### 3.1. URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN VANCOUVER

Just over half — 56 percent — of Aboriginal people in Canada live in cities. There are now close to 800,000 urban Aboriginal people in Canada, the highest number ever.<sup>1</sup> Metro Vancouver has the third largest **urban Aboriginal** population in Canada with 52,375 people. Vancouver's Aboriginal population is extremely diverse and includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people from all across Canada. The population is young and growing: close to half of all Aboriginal people in Canada are under the age of 25.<sup>2</sup>

As described in [Chapter 2](#), some First Nations' traditional territories and reserves are now part of cities. Vancouver sits on the traditional territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh, who have communities within the city region. Though they are part of a larger urban community, they are not "urban Aboriginal people" in one sense because they have not moved here from other areas. They identify as Musqueam, Squamish, or Tsleil-Waututh.

Many Aboriginal people move to cities looking for employment or educational opportunities. Some urban Aboriginal people have lived in cities for generations, while for others, the transition from rural areas or reserves is still very new.

#### Global Indigenous People in Vancouver

There are Indigenous people in Vancouver from other countries. The word "Indigenous" is often used to describe Aboriginal people from countries other than Canada.<sup>3</sup>

### **3.2. AT HOME IN VANCOUVER**

Most urban Aboriginal people consider the city they live in to be their “home.” However, it is also important for many people to keep a close connection to the First Nations, Métis, or Inuit community of their family’s origin. This might be the place where they were born, or where their parents or grandparents lived. These links are part of strong family and social ties that many have to Vancouver. Connection to these communities helps many people to retain their traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture.<sup>4</sup>

#### **According to the Environics *Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study in 2010,***

- 85 percent of Aboriginal Vancouverites said they are “very proud” of their specific Aboriginal identity (i.e., First Nations, Métis or Inuit). 52 percent are “very proud” of being Canadian.
- 44 percent are not concerned about losing their cultural identity. They feel it is strong enough to continue and that they can protect it.
- 70 percent of First Nations people, Métis and Inuit think Aboriginal culture in Vancouver has become stronger in the last five years.
- 25 percent hope that young people from the next generation will stay connected to their cultural community and 17 percent hope their young people will experience life without racism and discrimination.
- Aboriginal Vancouverites have a higher tolerance and acceptance for other cultures than their neighbours: 81 percent of Aboriginal people in Vancouver believe there is room for a variety of languages and cultures in this country, in contrast to 51 percent of other Vancouverites.
- A majority of Aboriginal people, living in Vancouver, believe they are viewed in negative ways by Canadians. You can read more about stereotypes in [Chapter 5](#).
- Urban Aboriginal people want to be an important and visible part of urban life. Six in 10 feel they can make their city a better place to live, which is similar to the way that non-Aboriginal urban people feel.<sup>5</sup>



### 3.3. URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE’S ORGANIZATIONS IN VANCOUVER

Aboriginal people in Vancouver have a rich history of organizing in their communities. These organizations bring together Aboriginal people from all over BC and North America. This section will tell you about two current organizations: the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre and the Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council. In [Chapter 6](#), you can read about two historical organizations: the National Indian Brotherhood and the Indian Homemakers’ Association. Many other organizations with provincial and national reach are also located in the city. Examples include the BC Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations Summit, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs.

### 3.4. VANCOUVER ABORIGINAL FRIENDSHIP CENTRE

The [Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre \(VAFC\)](#) is at 1607 East Hastings Street, near the intersection of Hastings and Commercial Drive. This building has been a safe and supportive place to many Aboriginal people in the city. The VAFC offers holistic, drop-in support to Aboriginal people who are new to Vancouver. It also supports Aboriginal people in Vancouver in keeping their cultural connections and values.

The VAFC draws on the many different Aboriginal traditions represented in Vancouver. “The Aboriginal Friendship Centre is a good place to find out about who lives here,” says Sandra Todd, a Cree First Nation and Métis woman.<sup>6</sup>

In *Our Roots: Stories from Grandview Woodland*, Peggy Shannon from the Haida First Nation describes the importance of the VAFC:

---

“The Aboriginal Friendship Centre means a lot to me because I have so many different friends here now. I get really lonely sitting at home all by myself. People from all different places come here. They’ve got Métis people, Cree people, and people from all up and down the coast. It just seemed like I fit right in and I started doing everything that I’m doing right now...”



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Students speaking with an Elder in the fireplace lounge of the NEC Native Education College. Photo by Jason Brawn. Courtesy of NEC Native Education College.

Without the Friendship Centre, elders might just live in a room downtown and some might not even have a place to have their food. I know that traditional foods are very important for the elders for their strength.”<sup>7</sup>

**The Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre offers many programs and services, including:**

- Weekly Elders’ luncheon
- Weekly Powwow Night: A family-friendly evening of drumming, dancing, and foods in the prairie traditions
- Weekly West Coast Night: A family-friendly evening of drumming, dancing, and foods in the West Coast traditions
- Gym for sports and community events
- Kitchen, computers, youth lounge
- Sundance Daycare
- Friendship Catering Services — a catering company run at the Centre
- Youth programs: basketball, soccer, girls’ group
- Arts and crafts, cooking classes, Métis jigging (dancing)<sup>8</sup>

The Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre was the second Friendship Centre in Canada. After World War II, as more Aboriginal people began moving to cities, Aboriginal people began grassroots organizing to support each other. Friendship Centres have always depended on volunteers and grassroots fundraising.

There are now 119 Friendship Centres in Canada.<sup>9</sup> The Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre is a member of the [BC Association of Friendship Centres](#) and [National Associations of Friendship Centres](#). These organizations advocate for the development of programs that improve the lives of Aboriginal people who live in urban areas.<sup>10</sup>

**3.5. METRO VANCOUVER ABORIGINAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL**

The [Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council](#) is a group of over 20 urban and off-reserve Aboriginal organizations. It was formed in



Peggy Shannon, Haida Gwaii First Nation, an active member of the Elders Program at VAFC. Photo by Laura Forster.

2008. Its goal is to be a unified voice to represent Aboriginal people living in Metro Vancouver. The MVAEC works with all levels of government, First Nations leadership, the private sector and others to help them understand the needs of Aboriginal people in Vancouver.

### 3.6. FURTHER RESOURCES

- [Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council](#)
- DVD: *Our City Our Voices: Follow the Eagle and Slo-Pitch*. NFB Canada. 2005. Two short films (5-10 min) from a DTES Aboriginal filmmaking workshop. They show positive stories of DTES Aboriginal residents, the Follow the Eagle healing program, and Slo-Pitch Aboriginal baseball teams.
- *Our Roots: Stories from Grandview Woodland*. City of Vancouver. 2012. 24.
- [Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre](#)
- [Urban Native Youth Association](#)

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## Chapter 4

# Teachings, Knowledge and Culture

### 4.1. CULTURE IS MORE THAN SINGING AND DANCING

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“Overall, most First Nations, regardless of where they were located, had a connection to and respect for the earth, were communal in nature, practiced sacred spiritual ceremonies, and were oral-based peoples who passed on our history through storytelling, pictographs, art, songs, and dances. While dancing, regalia, food, and many other things are an important expression of culture, they are not culture itself.”

— LYNDA GRAY<sup>1</sup>

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Aboriginal culture is an expression of a community's worldview and, most often, of the community's unique relationship with the land. Aboriginal cultures across Canada are very diverse, but in general, Aboriginal people have not had the same relation to the world through economics, the growth of material wealth, and control as European people have had.<sup>2</sup> Traditionally, their societies have been communal and rooted in spiritual ceremonies and values.

Here, you will learn about some of the significant characteristics of Aboriginal cultures, and two important traditional activities from First Nations cultures on the west coast: the potlatch and the use of cedar trees.

#### 4.2. CULTURE IS PASSED ON THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

Traditional Aboriginal education is different from European-style education. Children learn with their families and immediate community. Learning is ongoing and does not take place at specific times. Children learn how to live, survive, and participate in and contribute to their household and community. They are encouraged to take part in everyday activities alongside adults to watch and listen, and then eventually practice what they have learned.<sup>3</sup> Education is a lifelong process as people grow into different roles: child, youth, adult, and **Elder**.<sup>4</sup>

Aboriginal cultures are traditionally inclusive. Lynda Gray, an author from the Tsimshian First Nation writes, “Everyone had a place in the community despite their gender, physical or mental ability, sexual orientation, or age. Women, Elders, Two-spirit, children, and youth were an integral part of a healthy and vibrant community.”<sup>5</sup>

In Aboriginal cultures, Elders are cherished and respected. However, an Elder is not simply an older or elderly person. Although each community has its own definition of who an Elder is, an Elder is usually someone who is very knowledgeable about the history, values and teachings of his or her culture. He or she lives their life according to these values and teachings. For their knowledge, wisdom and behaviour, Elders are valuable role models and teachers to all members of the community.<sup>6</sup> Elders play an important role in maintaining the tradition of passing along oral histories.

#### 4.3. ORAL TRADITION

First Nations pass along their important lessons, values and family and community histories through oral storytelling. There are many different types of stories, including ones about: life experiences, creation and moral values. Some are oral histories of a particular place, community, or an important event.<sup>7</sup>

People repeat stories orally to keep information alive over generations.<sup>8</sup> Particular people within each First Nation have memorized oral histories with great care for accuracy.<sup>9</sup> While everyone knew some history, not everyone was a historian.<sup>10</sup>



Group of four Kwakwaka'wakw elders, seated, clothed in blankets, c. 1900s. Courtesy of Vancouver Public Library. Accession no. 71740

Some First Nations' oral histories describe geological events, such as environmental disasters that happened thousands of years ago.<sup>11</sup> These oral histories and stories have been passed down from generation to generation and they are essential to maintaining Aboriginal identity and culture.<sup>12</sup>

Each Aboriginal culture, community and even family has its own historical and traditional stories, songs, or dances. Different cultures have different rules about ownership. Some songs, names, symbols, or dances belong only to some people or families. They cannot be used, retold, danced, or sung without permission. Sometimes they are given to someone in a ceremony. Other songs and dances are openly shared.<sup>13</sup>

Aboriginal cultures also tell stories and histories through symbolic objects. Carved totem poles and house posts are a great example of this kind of visual language that have long histories here on the west coast. For examples, see [Chapter 10](#).

#### 4.4. NORTHWEST COAST CULTURE

Aboriginal cultures have many different ceremonies and rituals. They may mark important events such as births, deaths, or new leadership. They may be private or involve entire communities. This section will introduce you to two important cultural activities of the First Nations on the west coast.

##### The Potlatch

A [potlatch](#) is a formal ceremony used by First Nations on the north-west Coast of North America. The Potlatch is the essence of the culture as it is the cultural, political, economic, and educational heart of the nation. A potlatch may be held to recognize and celebrate births, marriages, deaths, settle disputes, totem pole raising, giving cultural names, passing on names, songs, dances, or other responsibilities, or formalizing aspects of relations between families or communities.<sup>14</sup> Potlatches are large events that can last several days. They often include two important aspects: the host giving away gifts and the recording, in oral history, of the events and arrangements included in the ceremony. Potlatches are also a way to redistribute wealth as



Totem pole at Alert Bay.  
Photo by Kory Wilson.



Potlatch Group, c.1897, reproduced c.1941. Courtesy of the City of Vancouver Archives. AM54-S4-1-: A-15-58

Skwxwú7mesh kex sitn (coiled cedar root carrying basket) attributed to Melina Moody, Shíshálh (Sechelt) married into Skwxwú7mesh. North Vancouver Museum & Archives. NVMA 1986.019.0165

traditionally great wealth and gifts would be given away and this would raise the rank of the Chief.

As you will read in [Chapter 6](#), the Canadian government used the *Indian Act* to ban the Potlatch from 1884-1951. The government took away cultural items that were used in the potlatch, such as drums, blankets, and masks. In spite of the ban, many communities continued to hold potlatches in secret.

First Nations have worked hard to revive and continue the songs, dances, and protocols of governance that were lost during the time that the potlatches were banned.<sup>15</sup> It takes tremendous time and energy and significant resources to host a potlatch. Lynda Gray writes that a potlatch in the past could last up to a few weeks. Today they are usually 1-2 days. The host must organize dancers and singers, meals for hundreds of guests, the fire, and gifts for guests, Chiefs, and Elders.<sup>16</sup> Gifts for guests might include blankets, food, jewelry and even large gifts such as canoes or carvings.

### The Cedar Tree<sup>17</sup>

The cedar tree is a well-known symbol of the northwest Coast. There are two kinds of indigenous cedar trees on the coast: red cedar and yellow cedar. They can be found throughout Vancouver. Almost every part of the tree, including the roots and the bark, can be used for practical and cultural purposes.

Each culture has its own specific traditions, uses, ceremony, and etiquette for using cedar. There are some practices that are shared by Aboriginal cultures along the west coast. Harvesters and the people who collect the cedar are careful to make sure that they do not take too much and that the tree as a species will survive. Traditionally, before a tree is cut down, the woodcutters say a prayer to thank the tree's spirit for providing a great benefit to the people who are about to use it.

### Cedar is used for medicine and everyday and ceremonial objects like:

- Woven hats, baskets, and rope
- Canoes, paddles, hooks, spears, and fishing floats



- House building materials
- Carvings including masks
- Smokehouses
- Bentwood boxes: boxes for everyday or ceremonial storage in which a plank is bent using steam
- Bedding and linens

Cedar has ensured the survival of First Nations on the northwest Coast for thousands of years. It has become a powerful symbol of strength and revitalization. It continues to be culturally, spiritually, and economically important.

#### 4.5. FURTHER RESOURCES

- The link to the Legends Project website is: [http://www.cbc.ca/aboriginal/legends\\_project.html](http://www.cbc.ca/aboriginal/legends_project.html)
- National Film Board “Aboriginal Perspectives” Portal  
Films and excerpts are organized according to theme with introductory materials designed for upper-elementary/high school level. The “Indigenous Knowledge” theme may have clips relevant for this chapter.

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## Chapter 5

# Myths and Realities about Aboriginal People

### 5.1. STEREOTYPES OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Surprisingly few people living in Canada know much about Aboriginal people, their histories, cultures, or the current issues they face. There are many reasons why. For example, there have been many years of government policies to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream Canadian society. Also, many Aboriginal people have lived on reserves away from mainstream Canadian society for many generations. The Canadian school system has contributed to these stereotypes as very little is taught about Aboriginal people and their real history.

Aboriginal stories and histories in the mainstream media have normally been told from a non-Aboriginal view, and often focus on problems or unrest. Usually what people do know, or think they know, comes from the images and characters that they see or read about in movies, TV shows, magazines, books and news reports. For example, the Hollywood film industry has made millions by telling stories about “cowboys and Indians.”

In TV shows or movies, Aboriginal characters are often played by non-Aboriginal people and the representations of Aboriginal people are not accurate or true. Instead, they use stereotypes of Aboriginal people.

Often the Canadian public only hears about Aboriginal people through the mainstream media or news. In the news business, “bad” news gets more attention and higher ratings, so many of the stories about Aboriginal people are about violence, crime or tragedy.

Today, Aboriginal people are involved in the media and work professionally in newspapers, radio, book publishing, film, or television. Others blog or write on their own. The [Aboriginal People's Television Network](#) (APTN) is a cable television network in Canada that produces and broadcasts programs by and for Aboriginal people. These films and TV shows can help break down some of the negative stereotypes. There are now many movies and TV shows that present a more complete account of Aboriginal life.

For non-Aboriginal Canadians, the visible and positive presence of Aboriginal people in the media is a real alternative to stereotypes. Real people, places, and cultures are much more complex than stereotypes. Also, having personal relationships with a Aboriginal people breaks down negative stereotypes and can heal some of the damage they cause. Many people are now working to assure that future generations of children in Canada will receive more complete and accurate views of Aboriginal people and a more truthful account of Canadian history in their education.

## **5.2. APPROPRIATION**

To “appropriate” means to take something that belongs to someone else and use it for yourself. “Cultural appropriation” describes what happens when people take something from another culture and start to use it for themselves. Usually in this process, the original meaning gets lost or changed. Appropriation may or may not be considered stealing, depending on the situation.

Fashion and popular culture often take Aboriginal symbols and use them to sell their products and make money. They change the meaning of the symbol, or treat something that has deep spiritual significance as “cute” or “cool.”

One way to think about appropriation of Aboriginal culture is to consider who is benefiting or making money from the use of the Aboriginal art or symbols. If it is non-Aboriginal people, do they have permission? What is their intent? What kind of message is it sending?

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## Myths & Facts

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**MYTH**

Aboriginal people do not pay taxes.

**FACT**

All Aboriginal people are required to pay taxes like all other Canadians. There are exceptions for those who have a Status Card in very specific situations, such as when they purchase goods and services on a reserve or earn their income on a reserve.

**MYTH**

Aboriginal people never had a written language.

**FACT**

European and Asian writing systems are one way of transmitting information in visual symbols, but there are others. Aboriginal people have used symbols and a variety of markings to communicate and tell a story. Totem poles are a great example of the use of visual language.

**MYTH**

Everything that happened to Aboriginal people happened so long ago that they should just get over it.

**FACT**

Aboriginal people are still dealing with the effects of colonization. For example, the *Indian Act* still controls many aspects of their lives and places limits on Aboriginal people, and new developments happen in Aboriginal communities and cultures every day.

**MYTH**

Aboriginal people are all the same.

**FACT**

Aboriginal people across Canada are very diverse. They are composed of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. They speak over 50 different languages. They have a wide range of cultural practices and traditions.

**MYTH**

Aboriginal cultures were very primitive.

**FACT**

Aboriginal people have had complex cultures, and systems of governance, commerce and trade, and agriculture. Aboriginal cultures and traditions are thriving today.

**MYTH**

All Aboriginal people get a free university education.

**FACT**

Some Aboriginal people may get money for school if they have a Status Card and if their First Nation has money to fund all or part of their post-secondary degree. Many receive no help at all from their communities or the government.

**MYTH**

Nothing happened to the younger generation so what is their excuse?

**FACT**

Colonization has had a lasting effect on Aboriginal communities. This has resulted in challenges including: poverty, depression, intergenerational trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. There are many social and economic barriers the communities and their youth must overcome in order to break this harmful cycle. Many Aboriginal people continue to experience racism, sometimes direct and intentional, and sometimes in the form of uninformed misunderstandings.

### 5.3. MYTHS AND FACTS

The Aboriginal Gathering Place at Vancouver Community College created the list of myths and facts about Aboriginal people on the previous page.

Many Aboriginal people today are redefining and reclaiming their Aboriginal identity. They are freeing themselves from the stereotypes that they have seen all around them growing up. They are articulate, educated, creative and modern, and they are finding ways to construct new Aboriginal identities that blend traditional language, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs with mainstream Canadian culture.

### 5.4. FURTHER RESOURCES

#### Films

The following films were written and directed by Aboriginal people:

- *Kanehsatake: 270 years of Resistance* by Abenake filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin is perhaps the most important historical film by an Aboriginal director. It documents the Oka crisis, an important event in 1990. [http://www.nfb.ca/film/kanehsatake\\_270\\_years\\_of\\_resistance](http://www.nfb.ca/film/kanehsatake_270_years_of_resistance)
- *Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)* by Inuit filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk is the first feature film by an Aboriginal director in Canada entirely in an Indigenous language. It is a beautiful film based on an Inuit legend.
- *Reel Injun* (2009) is a documentary by Cree filmmaker Neil Diamond that explores the portrayal of Native Americans in film. [http://www.cbc.ca/documentarychannel/feature-programs/reel\\_injun](http://www.cbc.ca/documentarychannel/feature-programs/reel_injun)
- *I'm Not the Indian You Had in Mind* (2007) by Thomas King, professor of creative writing at the University of Guelph, is a six minute spoken word poem that challenges some of the stereotypical images of First Nations people in the media. <http://www.nsi-canada.ca/2012/03/im-not-the-indian-you-had-in-mind>

- *Smoke Signals* (1998) is an award-winning movie directed by Chris Eyre and written by Sherman Alexie. It is a funny, witty, coming-of-age story about two young Aboriginal men.
- *The Story of the Coast Salish Knitters* (2000) is a documentary by Christine Welsh produced by the National Film Board. It tells the story of the famous Cowichan sweaters and the struggles of the knitters to get a fair price for their work.

## Television

- Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) has TV programs that feature Aboriginal actors and news reports that discuss issues and events from Aboriginal perspectives.  
<http://aptn.ca>

## Magazine

- SAY Magazine  
<http://www.saymag.com/index.phtml>

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Published by  
UNION OF B.C. INDIAN CHIEFS  
2140 W. 12th Avenue,  
Vancouver, B.C. V6K 2N2  
Telephone 736-6751

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THE VOICE OF B.C. INDIANS

Vol. III, No. 3 POSTAGE PAID IN VANCOUVER — SECOND CLASS MAIL Reg. No. 3025

August, 1974



EUGENE SEYMOUR, National Indian Brotherhood housing expert speaks to delegates at the national conference in Vancouver on a paper he presented. To his left are president George Manuel and newly elected vice-president, Clive Linklater. The three day conference covered a wide range of

subjects but the two topics of primary concern were the land claims and the revision of the Indian Act as proposed in a large report compiled and presented by the Alberta Association of Indians. (Photo by Ken Iwamura).

## NIB conference

# Land is paramount to Indian future

VANCOUVER (Staff) — A resolution claiming that all the lands of Canada are rightfully owned by Indian people and the presentation of a report on the revision of the Indian Act highlighted the fifth annual general assembly of the National Indian Brotherhood held August 6-8 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

More than 60 delegates from provincial member organizations across Canada were in attendance

at the meetings which were hosted by the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs.

Of primary importance at the conference was a proposal presented by Quebec and accepted by the delegates which outlined the basic rights of Indian people.

The basic principals read: "Indians own all the land. Indians have the right to regulate the law of living and of use of the lands. Indians have the right to live and decide how they are going to live and use the land."

The proposal went on to say, in a section it termed "sub-principles" that: "Fundamental rights of all Indian People are the same. There is a unique relation with basic rights, life values, culture of Indian people. These basic rights have not been sold, given up or taken away by conquest. Indian Rights and Indian Lands are 'NOT' for sale."

In an accompanying resolution the delegates proposed that NIB Executive Council meet soon with the Prime Minister to establish the basic principals and that all future land claims in Canada be based on these assumptions.

There was much discussion at the conference regarding land claims negotiations and the relationship of a national policy co-existing with the specific provincial claims. Chief Andrew Delisle, president of the Quebec association, said in reference to the struggle in James Bay that the "discussions and negotiations as they are presently taking place are taking place with the objectives of

the department of Indian Affairs in mind and not with objectives of the Indian people."

In regard to the proposed principals he said: "The principals that we would like to establish are the principals that our people had prior to the arrival of the white man. Some people will say we are taking a step backwards. I say no, we are taking a step we should have taken long ago."

He went on to say: "And that step is to stand strong and say what we think as Indian people not influenced by government officials, legal advisors, professional consultants or otherwise."

There was some concern expressed by delegates on the effect the B.C. land claims negotiations would have on Indians in other parts of the country. Dave Ahemenkew of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians argued for the rejection of the federal land claims commission headed by Phil Girard who is dealing presently with B.C. Indians.

Sol Sanderson suggested that the B.C. claims would effect permanently laws regarding claims throughout the rest of Canada.

UBCIC Chief Councilor Bill Wilson answered saying that B.C. Indians would be very reluctant to withdraw from negotiations at this point now that they are already entered into.

He said that he felt the problem was that "we're all unique" and that that should be kept in mind in negotiations in every part of the

country. It was not B.C.'s intentions, he said, that Phil Girard be imposed on the rest of Canada's Indians.

UBCIC lands claim director, Philip Paul told the delegates that it would be very difficult for B.C. to pull out of negotiations now because of the positive stand taken

by B.C. chiefs at the last UBCIC general assembly.

Speaking generally about land claims Paul said that past government policies have been designed to assimilate the Indian and "the policies and programs that are presently being designed are not designed to work they're [See page 3, NIB Conference]."



THE NIB CONFERENCE enjoyed wide news coverage across Canada. Here, an unidentified newsman interviews Chief Andy Delisle, president of the Indians of Quebec Association and an outspoken exponent of the aboriginal ownership of land. (Photo by Ken Iwamura).

If undeliverable, please return to Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs,  
2140 West 12th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C., V6K 2N2, Canada  
Postage paid in Vancouver — Second Class Mail Reg. No. 3025



## Chapter 6

# The Indian Act

### 6.1. ABORIGINAL AND EUROPEAN CONFLICT

Europeans and Aboriginal people have had different ideas about property and ownership, sovereignty, and equality of people and societies.<sup>1</sup>

First Nations have traditionally managed their lands and resources with their own systems of government, laws and traditions.<sup>2</sup> They have believed that they were in close and sacred relationship with the land and all living things and decisions should benefit everybody.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of first contact, European nations were competing for power and control over land and resources all over the world. Europeans thought that they were superior to non-Europeans and some did not consider Aboriginal people to be people at all. Therefore, they did not consider Aboriginal laws, governments, medicines, cultures, beliefs, or relationships to be legitimate. Europeans thought that they had the right and moral obligation to make decisions affecting everybody, without consultation with Aboriginal people.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, they considered themselves separate from and superior to nature and saw North America as a source of resources that they had the right to take.

The conflict of Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian ideas and interests is clear in the history and current reality of the *Indian Act*.

**Band** - A band is a group of First Nations people whose membership is defined by the Canadian Government. A band does not always include an entire nation. Each band has to have an elected Chief and Council.

## 6.2. THE INDIAN ACT

The *Indian Act* is federal legislation that has governed First Nations people with “**Indian status**” and controlled their lives. It includes laws about:

- Land use and ownership
- Taxation
- Use of natural resources
- **Band** membership, elections and governance
- Relationship with the Government of Canada.<sup>5</sup>

Two of the most important things the *Indian Act* controls are “status” and “reserves.”

First created in 1876, the *Indian Act* tried to place distinct and separate First Nations under one law.<sup>6</sup> The *Indian Act* helped the government take control of land and try to **assimilate** First Nations people into Euro-Canadian society and values.<sup>7</sup> A Canadian government department was created to operate the *Indian Act*. Today it is called the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. This Department has a Minister appointed by the Prime Minister of Canada. It regulates and controls many parts of First Nations life today.

## 6.3. INDIAN STATUS: WHO IS AN INDIAN?

In the *Indian Act*, the Government of Canada defines who is an “Indian.” For this reason, “Indian” is a legal word, and not one that many Aboriginal people are comfortable using to describe themselves. Not all people who identify as First Nations have legal **Indian status**. Over time there have been many different laws about who is and who is not eligible for legal Indian status—who the Canadian government defines as “an “Indian.” That definition continues to change. Most recently, in January 2013, a Federal Court ruled that the definition of who is included in the *Indian Act* must change<sup>8</sup> again to include **Métis** and non-status Indians.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Indian Act has been used to discriminate against First Nations women**

The government definition of who is an “Indian” has divided Aboriginal families, communities and nations. For example, until 1982, the legal

status of First Nations women was decided by their relationships to men. Women and their children lost their Indian status when they married Métis or non-Aboriginal men.<sup>10</sup>

The Indian Homemakers' Association was one of the first organizations to represent both non-status and status First Nations people. This organization of Aboriginal women started on reserves in the 1930s and became an important voice for Aboriginal women. The Association pointed out how the status laws discriminated against women. Some of those challenges still remain.

#### **6.4. RESERVES**

Before Europeans arrived, First Nations and Inuit peoples had the use of all the land and water in what is now Canada. Their **traditional territories** are large. Often Nations' traditional territories overlapped and they shared resources according to traditional protocols. With the arrival and settlement of Europeans, First Nations people and Europeans came into conflict over who would control these lands and resources.

One way that the British and Canadian governments seized control of land was through a system of **reserves**. The Government of Canada divided First Nations people into **bands** and told them that they had the use of only a certain piece of land, and no longer had the right to their **traditional territories**. These small pieces of land are called "reserves." The *Indian Act* defines a reserve as land that has been set apart by the Federal government for the use and benefit of an Indian band.<sup>11</sup>

First Nations people were not consulted when reserves were created. They did not give consent. They were not compensated for the lands that were taken from them.<sup>12</sup> Since their creation, reserves have been moved, reduced and their resources taken without compensation to First Nations.<sup>13</sup> When the government created reserves, it did little to consider First Nations' societies and their use of traditional territories.<sup>14</sup> The government divided up lands and peoples and Nations that had existed for hundreds if not thousands of years.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a rapid increase in poverty on reserves. Reserves were isolated and marginalized in the larger Canadian economy. Canadian laws made it illegal for Aboriginal people to use their traditional means of resource distribution, and limited their ability to fish and hunt.<sup>16</sup> It also made it illegal for them to pursue redress in court.

Many Aboriginal people living on reserves found that they could not sustain themselves or their families. However, leaving the reserve meant facing discrimination and **assimilation** in the cities and giving up their rights as status Indians. It could also mean losing or putting at risk their connections to family and territory.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the hardship caused by the reserve system, reserves have also been a place of cultural survival, because of “the strength of the people who live on them.”<sup>18</sup>

### 6.5. RESISTANCE TO THE *INDIAN ACT*

Aboriginal people have always fought against the *Indian Act* and for their rights.<sup>24</sup> Aboriginal leaders have gone at different times to the British government and the Prime Minister of Canada to protest the oppressive laws and systemic denial of their rights.<sup>25</sup>

Though they have had serious consequences, the laws did not succeed in destroying all Aboriginal traditions. Aboriginal people have continued to practice their culture underground, or found new ways to avoid persecution.<sup>26</sup> They have organized against residential schools, as you will read in [Chapter 8](#). Aboriginal people have continued to raise their children to be proud of their cultures and identities and to resist assimilation in their everyday lives.

Aboriginal resistance to the *Indian Act* is supported by many international human rights organizations: [Amnesty International](#), the [United Nations](#), and the [Canadian Human Rights Commission](#) have called the *Indian Act* a human rights abuse.<sup>27</sup>



Map of the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Courtesy of the Historical Atlas of Canada Dissemination Project.

1870

1880

1890

1900

1910

1920

1930

1940

1950

1960

1970

1980

1990

# A History of the Indian Act

Over the years, the Indian Act has legislated extreme changes in the lives of Aboriginal peoples. Here are some examples:

## 1867

Canada became a country with passing of the *British North America Act* and in Section 91(24) it assigned the Federal Government (Canadian Government) the responsibility for all “Indians and lands reserved for Indians”.

## 1876

The *Indian Act* became law. First Nations governance systems were replaced with elected or appointed Band Councils. Women were not allowed to participate.<sup>19</sup>

## 1879

Residential schools became the official government policy for educating First Nations children. Residential schools forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their families and communities to attend distant schools where many died and many more suffered abuse.

## 1884 – 1951

The *Indian Act* banned ceremonies such as the **potlatch**, ghost dance, and sun dance.<sup>20</sup> People were arrested and their ceremonial materials taken away by the government. The effects of this prohibition are still felt today.

## 1911 – 1951

The government could take **reserve** land from **bands** without their consent, and (1918 – 1951) could also lease reserve land to non-Indians without the band’s agreement.<sup>21</sup>

## 1914 – 1951

It was illegal for Aboriginal people to wear traditional and ceremonial clothing.<sup>22</sup>

## 1927 – 1951

It was illegal for status Indians to hire lawyers or seek legal advice, fundraise for land claims or meet in groups. Many had to stop organizing but others continued to do so secretly to fight for their rights.<sup>23</sup>

## 1951

Political organizing and cultural activities became legal.

## 1985

It was no longer possible for the government to force people to give up their “status” and lose their Aboriginal rights. In the past, people could lose their status through marriage, for example. Before 1960, a person had to give up Indian status in order to vote federally.

## TODAY

The *Indian Act* has changed throughout the years, and continues to change, but its basic principles of assimilation and control continue.

## 6.6. RESISTANCE TO THE WHITE PAPER

While the *Indian Act* has had terrible effects on Aboriginal people, it also acknowledges and affirms that Aboriginal people have a special historical and legal relationship with Canada.<sup>28</sup>

In 1969, the Government of Canada introduced the “White Paper,” a proposal to cancel the *Indian Act*, **treaties**, reserves and status. If it had become law, Aboriginal people would have become “ordinary citizens” and all Aboriginal rights would be ignored, including those established by treaties.<sup>29</sup>

The National Indian Brotherhood, an organization of First Nations people with status, led a campaign against the White Paper. One of their leaders, Harold Cardinal, wrote, “We would rather continue to live in bondage under the inequitable *Indian Act* than surrender our sacred rights.” In other words, First Nations people would rather live under the unfair *Indian Act* that acknowledges their rights, than give up their rights as First Nations peoples. Cardinal also argued that they would be happy to write new Indian legislation to replace the *Indian Act*.<sup>30</sup>

In 1971, Aboriginal people won their campaign and the government retracted the White Paper.<sup>31</sup> In 1982, the National Indian Brotherhood became the Assembly of First Nations, a political organization representing over 600 First Nations identified as bands under the *Indian Act*.<sup>32</sup>

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- National Film Board “Aboriginal Perspectives” Portal  
Films and excerpts are organized according to theme with introductory materials designed for upper-elementary/high school level. The “Colonialism and Racism” and “Sovereignty and Resistance” themes may have clips relevant for this chapter.

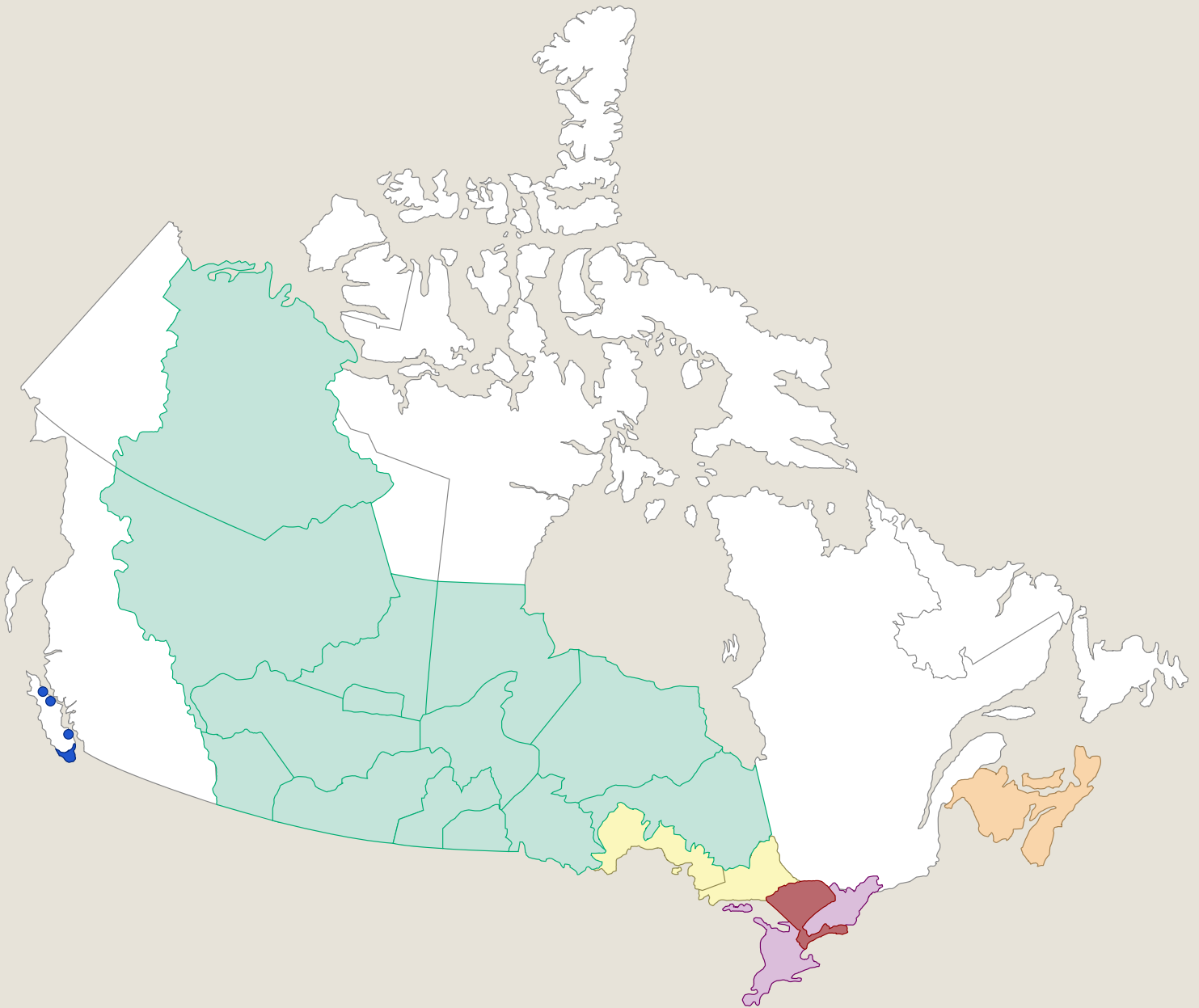
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# Historic Treaties in Canada

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**Douglas  
Treaties**  
(1850-1854)

  
**Numbered  
Treaties**  
(1871-1921)

  
**Robinson  
Treaties**  
(1850)

  
**Williams  
Treaties**  
(1923)

  
**Upper  
Canada  
Land  
Surrenders**  
(1781-1862)

  
**\*Peace &  
Neutrality  
Treaties**  
(1701-1760)

  
**Maritime  
Peace  
and  
Friendship  
Treaties**  
(1725-1779)

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\* Note: As there is no defined geographic extent for the Peace and Neutrality Treaties, they cannot be represented on a map.



## Chapter 7

# Treaties and Self-Government

### 7.1. A DECLARATION OF FIRST NATIONS

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“We the Original Peoples of this land know the Creator put us here. The Creator gave us laws that govern all our relationships to live in harmony with nature and mankind. The Laws of the Creator defined our rights and responsibilities. The Creator gave us our spiritual beliefs, our languages, our culture, and a place on Mother Earth which provided us with all our needs. We have maintained our Freedom, our Languages, and our Traditions from time immemorial. We continue to exercise the rights and fulfill the responsibilities and obligations given to us by the Creator for the land upon which we were placed. The Creator has given us the right to govern ourselves and the right to self-determination. The rights and responsibilities given to us by the creator cannot be altered or taken away by any other Nation.”<sup>1</sup>

— ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

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Ninety-five percent of British Columbia is unceded land. That means that First Nations did not sign treaties or otherwise give this land to Britain or Canada.

Since Europeans arrived, First Nations have negotiated with the European and Canadian governments as independent nations. A nation is a group of people in a particular territory who are united by a common history, culture, or language.<sup>2</sup>

In 1996 the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples appointed by the Government of Canada wrote that, “The arguments for recognizing that Aboriginal peoples are nations spring from the past and the present. They were nations when they forged military and trade alliances with European nations. They were nations when they signed treaties to share their lands and resources. And they are nations today — in their coherence, their distinctiveness and their understanding of themselves.”<sup>3</sup>

## **7.2. WHAT IS A TREATY?**

A treaty is an agreement between governments. It names the rights and responsibilities of each government that signed it. In signing treaties with Aboriginal groups, the British and Canadian governments recognized them this way — as governments.

A treaty may include who gets access to land, waters, and natural resources. A treaty may also set up processes for regulating industries, or for resolving conflicts between First Nations and Canadian governments. Treaties sometimes include financial payments as compensation for past wrongs. Finally, treaties can define the structure and authority of different governments, such as the Canadian federal government, provincial governments, or First Nations governments.

## **7.3. HISTORIC TREATIES**

Historic treaties are treaties signed between First Nations and the British and Canadian governments between 1701 and 1923.<sup>4</sup>

The British Government and the Canadian Government wanted treaties with First Nations to reduce the possibility of conflict and to

support European immigration and land settlement, agriculture, natural resource use, trade, and other economic developments.

First Nations often saw treaties as an alternative to conflict as well, but also saw treaties as a way to make a strong relationship based on respect and a commitment to live in peace and help each other.<sup>5</sup> They wished to protect their own laws and customs, and to secure on an ongoing basis the means to provide for their families' material and spiritual needs.<sup>6</sup> They saw the benefits of trade with Europeans, and, at times, the need for military alliances. Often, however, they were not informed of the real content of the treaties. The treaties were written in English, which they often could not read, and oral translations to First Nations leaders were not always accurate. Leaders often had no real way of verifying what they were signing, and assumed that the oral agreement surrounding the paper treaty was just as important.

#### 7.4. ABORIGINAL RIGHTS AND TITLE

These two important Canadian legal concepts are connected to traditional territories.

**Aboriginal Title** means the inherent Aboriginal right to land or a territory. This comes from the long history Aboriginal people have had with the land. "Inherent" means nobody can take the right away.

**Aboriginal Right** means the authority to access and use land, water, and natural resources without needing the permission of another person or government. For example, the right to fish and the right to hunt in an area are Aboriginal rights that people or communities might have. Aboriginal people have practiced and enjoyed these rights since before European contact."<sup>7</sup>

In Canadian law, Aboriginal title and rights are different than the rights of non-Aboriginal Canadian citizens. Aboriginal title and rights do not come from the Canadian government, although they are recognized by it. They are rights that come from Aboriginal people's relationships with their territories and land, even before Canada became a country, and from Aboriginal social, political, economic, and legal systems that have been in place for a long time.<sup>8</sup>



Royal Canadian Mounted Police representative handling treaty paper to Ocheise man, Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. c. 1948. Courtesy Glenbow Archives. NA-1954-5

## 7.5. MODERN TREATIES

Because 95percent of British Columbia is unceded, that is, never given up in treaties, many treaties are being negotiated today. They are called “modern treaties.” As of March 2013, there are 60 First Nations in BC negotiating treaties with the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia. The Government of Canada officially calls modern treaties “Comprehensive Land Claims.”<sup>9</sup> The first modern treaty in British Columbia was completed in 1999 with the Nisga’a First Nation.

There are many barriers to First Nations peoples achieving a treaty. Some First Nations have been working for decades to get treaties for their people. The process is very slow and expensive.<sup>10</sup> Also, for many years the Government of Canada tried to stop First Nations from organizing a treaty process. From 1927-1951, the *Indian Act* made it illegal to meet or fundraise for Aboriginal rights and lands issues.<sup>11</sup> Finally, when a First Nation begins the treaty process, the government controls the rules, timelines, and methods.

### Modern Treaty #1: Nisga’a

<http://www.nisgaalisims.ca/nisgaa-final-agreement>

Nisga’a means “people of the Nass River.” The Nisga’a Nation in northern British Columbia began organizing to protect their lands legally in 1890. They were initially ignored and then, in 1927, Canada made it illegal to fundraise for land claims. In 1973 the Nisga’a went to the Supreme Court of Canada and the Court acknowledged that First Nations had legal title to their lands. This court case is known as the Calder Case.

In 1976 the federal government entered negotiations<sup>12</sup> with the Nisga’a. In 1990 the provincial government finally joined these negotiations. It took many generations, persistence, conviction, and a lot of work to achieve the Nisga’a Treaty in 1999.

### Modern Treaty #2: Tsawwassen

<http://www.tsawwassenfirstnation.com/finalagreement.php>

Tsawwassen means “land facing the sea.” The Tsawwassen First Nation is located on the Strait of Georgia near the Tsawwassen ferry terminal,



10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration of the Nisga’a Final Agreement, 2010. Courtesy of Province of British Columbia.

approximately 25 km south of Vancouver.

The Tsawwassen First Nation treaty took effect April 3, 2009.<sup>13</sup> It made history as the first urban treaty in British Columbia and the first modern treaty negotiated under the British Columbia Treaty Commission process.<sup>14</sup>

After more than a century trying to assert their rights, the Tsawwassen spent 14 years in negotiations with the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada to build the treaty.<sup>15</sup> Seventy percent of members voted for the treaty.<sup>16</sup>

The Tsawwassen First Nation, like the Nisga'a, are no longer governed by the *Indian Act* because of their modern treaty.

Kim Baird, the former Chief of the Tsawwassen First Nation who negotiated the treaty, notes, "The Tsawwassen treaty, clause by clause, emphasizes self-reliance, personal responsibility and modern education. It allows us to pursue meaningful employment from the resources of our own territory for our own people. Or in other words, a quality of life comparable to other British Columbians."<sup>17</sup>

## 7.6. REJECTING TREATIES

Some First Nations in BC do not agree with the BC Treaty process.

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs describes some of the reasons why they think that these agreements are not fair or equal:

- The Government of Canada gets recognition of its sovereignty, that is, its authority and power to govern itself, but First Nations do not. First Nations get limited recognition of their right to a piece of land that is always much smaller than their traditional territory. They have to co-manage that land with the government.
- The First Nation may achieve self-government, but they have to obey Canadian and provincial laws. Canada does not have to obey any First Nations laws.
- Modern treaties are the "full and final settlement" between First Nation and the government. The First Nation agrees it will not make any legal claims against Canada or BC about historical wrongs. For example, it must not seek compensation



Signing the Tsawwassen Final Agreement, 2006. Courtesy of Province of British Columbia.

for any past extraction of resources or destroyed habitat.

### **7.7. WHAT IS SELF-DETERMINATION?**

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples includes the right to self-determination. The [Assembly of First Nations](#) describes self-determination as a nation's right to choose its own government and decide its own economic, social and cultural development. Aboriginal people have the right to use and benefit from their wealth and resources.<sup>18</sup>

For many Aboriginal people, self-government is a tool to reach self-determination, not an alternative.

### **7.8. WHAT DOES SELF-GOVERNMENT MEAN?**

First Nations governed themselves for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans. Their governments were organized to meet their economic, social and geographic conditions and needs and shaped by their cultures and beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

First Nations governments were weakened by policies that imposed Euro-Canadian laws and forms of government. Under the *Indian Act*, the Canadian Government created Indian Bands and Councils to administer and provide services to their memberships, and made aspects of traditional Aboriginal government illegal. First Nations are in the process of rebuilding and asserting their forms of self-government.

Self-government means First Nations can take control and responsibility for decisions affecting them. It can take many forms.

Self-government can include making laws, deciding how to spend money, or raise money through taxation, delivering programs, and building economic opportunities.<sup>20</sup> These are some examples of programs and services that First Nations can control with self-government:

- Language and culture
- Education
- Police services
- Health care and social services

- Housing
- Property rights
- Enforcement of Aboriginal laws
- Adoptions and child welfare<sup>21</sup>

First Nations with self-government are not treated as though they are separate countries. Canadian laws and provincial laws such as the Constitution, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Criminal Code still apply to First Nations.<sup>22</sup>

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## Chapter 8

# Indian Residential Schools

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**The goal of the Indian Residential School  
is “to kill the Indian in the child.”**

— DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT (1920), HEAD OF INDIAN AFFAIRS,  
GOVERNMENT OF CANADA, 1913-1932

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### **8.1. WHAT WERE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS?**

For more than one hundred years, Aboriginal children in Canada were educated through the Indian Residential School system. This system consisted of 140 Indian Residential Schools. Schools were located in almost all provinces and territories. The schools were funded by the federal government and run by Christian churches. More than 150,000 Aboriginal children attended these schools.<sup>1</sup> Many died in them, and many more experienced significant abuse.

The Canadian government wanted to assimilate Aboriginal people into Euro-Canadian society. This meant that Aboriginal people would have to give up their languages, spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. The federal government thought that adult Aboriginal people would be unable or unwilling to assimilate into the mainstream Euro-Canadian culture, so they focused on the children. They decided that Aboriginal children should be removed from their villages and completely separated from their parents, communities and all Aboriginal influence. The Indian Residential School system was developed to do this.

The first government-funded Indian Residential Schools were opened in the 1870s. Aboriginal children lived at residential schools for months or years at a time rather than going home every day after class. This

meant that many of these children did not see their families for very long periods of time. In 1920, the government of Canada made it mandatory for Aboriginal children between the ages of 7–15 to attend Indian Residential School. Aboriginal parents could no longer choose whether or not to send their children to these schools. In fact, parents who tried to keep their children with them at home could be fined or even sent to prison. The last federally funded Indian Residential School closed in 1996.

Aboriginal children are the only children in Canadian history to be taken away from their families and required by law to live in institutions because of their race and culture.<sup>2</sup> The United States of America and Australia also had residential schools for Aboriginal children.

In British Columbia, the first Indian Residential School was started in Mission in 1861. It was run by the Catholic Church. This residential school was the last to close in the province, shutting down in 1984.

The majority of Indian Residential School students experienced neglect and abuse at the schools. They suffered the disconnection from their home families, communities, languages, and cultures. Many children were physically, mentally and sexually abused. Some committed suicide. Some died trying to escape.<sup>3</sup>

## 8.2. WHAT WERE THE SCHOOLS LIKE?

The goal of the system was to assimilate Aboriginal children into Euro-Canadian culture. The plan<sup>4</sup> was that these children would forget their language and their culture, and would not be able to pass them on to the next generation.

Children were forbidden to speak their Aboriginal language, practice their cultural traditions, or spend time with children of the opposite sex, including their own brothers and sisters.

When they arrived, the staff took away the children's clothes and cultural belongings. The children's hair was cut and they were required to wear uniforms of Euro-Canadian clothing. Children did not get enough food and lived in poor quality buildings that were hot in the summer and cold in the winter. The overcrowding and malnutrition meant that



Alberni IRS orchestra, c. 1930.  
Bob Stewart Archives, B.C.  
Conference. Courtesy of the  
Bob Stewart Archives, BC  
Conference. BCCA 2-79

diseases often spread rapidly, and many students died in the schools. The schools were overcrowded because the government paid the church a certain amount of money for each student. The more students there were at the school, the more money the church would receive.

The children usually attended school in the morning and worked in the afternoon as agricultural labourers or cleaning staff.<sup>5</sup> They often received only up to a Grade 5 education.<sup>6</sup> They were required to practice Christianity. It was expected that they would be low-paid workers in Euro-Canadian society.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the worst part of Indian Residential Schools was the physical, psychological and sexual abuse that some Aboriginal children experienced. There are some Aboriginal people who have fond memories of their time at Indian Residential School<sup>8</sup> but the majority of people who attended these schools, do not have pleasant memories. Instead, they remember feeling lonely, hungry and scared. They remember being told that Aboriginal culture is strange and inferior, that Aboriginal beliefs and practices are wrong, and that they will never be successful.

### 8.3. EFFECTS OF THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

Canada's system of Indian Residential Schools had, and continues to have, serious consequences for Aboriginal people.

#### On the individual

Many of the people who attended Indian Residential Schools left with very little education and a belief that it is shameful to be an "Indian." Many were unable to speak their language, so they could not communicate with their family members and particularly their grandparents, who in many communities would have been important sources of knowledge for them.

Many also found it hard to fit into Euro-Canadian society. They had a low level of education and faced racism and discrimination when they tried to find work. Unable to fit into community life and not accepted in mainstream society, some did not feel that they belonged anywhere.



Students at the blackboard, Red Deer Institute, Alberta c.1914. Courtesy of the United Church Archives, Toronto. 93.049P/850N

Three psychological concepts are used for the effects of Indian Residential Schools. The first, “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD), is a serious health problem that develops after a terrifying experience. People with PTSD can experience terror, nightmares, and flashbacks. The second, “survivor syndrome”, is a group of symptoms that are experienced by people who have survived a threatening situation that others did not, and often feel guilty that they survived. The third, “intergenerational trauma,” is where the effects of traumatic experience are passed on to the next generations. For example, the children and grandchildren of Indian Residential School students may live with the effects of the schools on their older relatives. Many survivors have had difficulty talking about their experiences, and so many children have grown up feeling something was wrong, but not having a way to understand it. There has been a deep silence about this part of their family’s lives.

### **On the community**

Traditionally, Aboriginal histories, traditions, beliefs and values were passed on from one generation to the next through experiential learning and oral storytelling. With the children away at school, there was no one left to pass on, language and spiritual practices to. Many Aboriginal languages that were spoken in Canada are now gone. Many cultural and spiritual practices have been lost. The loss of culture is a loss for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. Aboriginal people are working hard to save and revive their languages and cultural practices.

Families suffered from the separation for many years. Because they were removed from their families, many students grew up without the knowledge and skills to raise their own families.<sup>10</sup> It prevented children from learning from their Elders and growing into a role in their community.<sup>11</sup>

Since the intent of the government and church was to erase Aboriginal culture in the children and stop the transmission of culture from one generation to another, many people think that the Indian Residential Schools were a form of cultural genocide.

#### 8.4. HEALING

Many Aboriginal families and communities have organized formally and informally to heal Indian Residential School legacies and many survivors are now **Elders**.

The [Indian Residential School Survivors Society \(IRSS\)](#) grew out of a committee of survivors in 1994. It has centres in BC cities including Vancouver. Its many projects include crisis counseling, court support, workshops, conferences, information and referrals, and media announcements. The society researches the history and effects of Indian Residential Schools. The IRSS also advocates for justice and healing in traditional and non-Aboriginal ways.<sup>12</sup>

#### 8.5. APOLOGIES AND REPARATIONS

In the 1990s, more Aboriginal people turned to the legal system in their search for justice. There have been many legal claims and class action suits against the government and churches that created and ran the 140 schools. A class action suit is when a group of people join together to sue a person or a group of people in court. In this case, groups of Indian Residential School survivors sued the Canadian government and the churches that ran the schools.

One of the largest class action suits in Canadian history was settled in 2007. It resulted in the establishment of the Residential Schools Settlement and payment of \$1.9 billion. This settlement made several promises. It gave more funds to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (now closed) for healing programs in communities,<sup>13</sup> and offered payments to survivors as reparation. Reparation payments are compensation for past wrongs endured by the victims. The Residential Schools Settlement also set up a process in which survivors could be granted more money if they could prove particular abuses, and provided funds for commemorative projects. The settlement included a government apology made in the Parliament in 2008 by Prime Minister Stephen Harper on behalf of the federal government. It also established the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#). You can read about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in [Chapter 12](#).



View of Indian Residential School in Alert Bay. Date unknown. Courtesy of Vancouver Public Library. Accession no. 38471

## 8.6. STATEMENT OF APOLOGY TO FORMER STUDENTS OF INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Here is a part of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology:

*"The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history...*

*Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child." Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country....*

*To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you. Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry..."*



Prime Minister Harper offers full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools system, 2008. Courtesy of the Office of the Prime Minister of Canada.

## 8.7. FURTHER RESOURCES

- Two timelines:  
<http://www.ahf.ca/downloads/condensed-timeline.pdf>  
<http://www.legacyofhope.ca/downloads/100-years-of-loss-booklet.pdf>
- [Legacy of Hope](#)
- [Indian Residential School Survivors Society](#)
- [Residential School Settlement Agreement](#)
- [Aboriginal Healing Foundation](#)
- <http://www.ahf.ca/publications/residential-school-resources>
- A Residential School Bibliography (Books, Videos, Articles, Theses, etc.)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#)
- [Where Are the Children?](#)

## ENDNOTES

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## Chapter 9

# Vancouver Dialogues Project<sup>1</sup>

### 9.1. INTRODUCTION

Vancouver is one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world. Close to half of the City's population was born outside of Canada.<sup>2</sup> However, "Over the years, First Nations, urban Aboriginal groups and immigrant organizations have acknowledged that there is limited intercultural interaction between Aboriginal and immigrant Canadians. Within Aboriginal communities, there is a sense that their history, culture, and heritage are not well understood by others living within their traditional territory. For newcomers, it seems there are few opportunities to learn about the Aboriginal community."<sup>3</sup>

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"The Dialogues Project was meant to engage in the sharing of our pasts — who we are and where we are from — but also to create a shared understanding about who we aspire to be in the future."<sup>4</sup>

— HENRY YU, VANCOUVER DIALOGUES PROJECT CO-CHAIR

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In 2010, the City of Vancouver began the Vancouver Dialogues Project to create more opportunities to increase understanding between Aboriginal and immigrant communities. The City worked with 27 community partners on this big project.

## 9.2. DIALOGUE CIRCLES

In nine dialogue circles, participants shared stories and experiences. Each group met at least three times, and a facilitator guided the discussions. Two dialogue circles were for youth.

Wade Grant is of Chinese-Musqueam descent. He was co-chair of the Dialogues Project. Here he describes the Dialogue Circles:



From Left: Project lead Baldwin Wong with co-chairs Henry Yu, Susan Tatoosh and Wade Grant. Photo by Dennis Rosenfeld.

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“We brought together Urban Aboriginals..., local First Nations, and the immigrant communities. They came together, told their stories, and they talked about them; and it was an opportunity for First Nations to give these histories, the histories that aren’t told in the newspapers, the histories that aren’t told on the television sets, the histories that aren’t told in the books in the library. It’s the personal histories, what these people have experienced. Not only what they’ve experienced, but their ancestors as well. These are the histories they wanted to share, and, vice-versa: We wanted to hear from the immigrant communities about why they came to Canada, what brought them here, why they want to learn more about Aboriginal people. We want to learn about their cultures... So when we completed that last July, I believe it was very successful: We had almost 500 people throughout these dialogue sessions come together and learn from one another.”<sup>5</sup>

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Some themes appeared in the dialogues:

- Racism
- Land and belonging
- Identity, language and culture
- Reconciliation and future generations

The participants also came up with suggestions for building future relationships.

### 9.3. COMMUNITY RESEARCH

There were four community research projects:

1. The Dialogues Project investigated how much information is available to newcomers about Aboriginal people. Not much reliable information is found online or from community service organizations.
2. An online survey found that Aboriginal people and immigrants had common experiences of racism, loss of language and culture, and exclusion. They also shared hope for change.
3. Ten individuals were interviewed about their diverse experiences and their ideas about relationships between cultures. Their stories were published in the *Vancouver Dialogues* book. <http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/dialogues-project-book.pdf>
4. The Project supported a Vancouver report, part of a national research project by the Environics Institute, called the “Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study,” which documents Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal views on life in the city. <http://www.uaps.ca>

### 9.4. CULTURAL EXCHANGE VISITS

Community partners hosted 12 cultural exchange visits. First Nations, Aboriginal, and immigrant community members visited different sites as guests. For example, the Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh Nations each hosted a visit. For many participants, this was their first time in a First Nations community. There were visits with the Ismaili, Jewish, and Chinese communities, and the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, Native Education College, and the UBC First Nations Longhouse and Museum of Anthropology also welcomed guests. In these exchanges, hosts shared their knowledge of their communities and invited participants to see special places and join in activities.



NEC Native Education College: BC's largest private Aboriginal college. Photo by Jason Brawn. Courtesy of NEC Native Education College.



Youth and Elders PhotoVoice project group. Photo by Karen Fong.

### **9.5. YOUTH AND ELDERS PROGRAM**

Elders and seniors from Aboriginal and immigrant communities met for discussions. They also discussed issues they share with young people, such as housing, transportation services and discrimination.

Youth also met for group discussion. They discussed power and ways of building bridges across differences.

Youth and Elders worked together on the PhotoVoice project. They combined photography and stories to deliver messages that were important to the participants. After the project one Elder said:

*"It's so important to let the young people know that we love them. We want to share what we can to help them lead a good life. We need to listen to them."*

### **9.6. NEIGHBOURHOOD STORYTELLING PROJECT**

The Dialogues Project launched a story-telling project called *Our Roots* in the Grandview-Woodlands neighbourhood. Thirty-six Aboriginal and immigrant residents were interviewed. The stories were published in a book called *Our Roots*. Some of the stories were displayed on posters at the 2010 Storytelling Festival.

### **9.7. BOOK AND VIDEO RELEASE**

On July 5, 2011, a special event brought participants and partners together. Art installations and performances celebrated the spirit of the Dialogues Project. At this event, participants could see the project's video, *Sharing Our Stories: The Vancouver Dialogues Project* for the first time. The event also celebrated a new book, *Vancouver Dialogues: First Nations, Urban Aboriginal and Immigrant Communities*.

### **9.8. GROWING FROM THE PROJECT AND SUPPORTING FIRST PEOPLES: A GUIDE FOR NEWCOMERS**

In 2012, a Dialogues website was created for youth in the city, followed by a summit in July. One hundred and fifty Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth participated in the 2½ day event.

Other activities included an Artists' Dialogue hosted by urban ink Production Society, a Food Dialogue at Collingwood Neighbourhood House, and a culinary and art-making event at the Skwachàys Healing Lodge and Residence in collaboration with the Vancouver Moving Theatre. The Dialogues Project also worked with the Vancouver School Board to create cross-cultural activities for Aboriginal and newcomer youth.

This *First Peoples: A Guide for Newcomers* was first conceived by the Dialogues Project Steering Committee and has become a key initiative under the Welcoming Communities Program.

The Dialogues Project continued until March 2013. The Project has achieved its key goals of finding new ways for Aboriginal and immigrant communities to come together, to explore shared interests and concerns, and confirm the value of communities supporting and working with each other. The Welcoming Communities Program and other future civic projects will continue to foster stronger relationships between Aboriginal and newcomer communities in Vancouver.



*Contemplate*, 2011  
by Shya-fen Tsai.  
Painting inspired by the  
Dialogues Project and the  
artist's own Indigenous  
ancestry. Courtesy of  
Shya-fen Tsai.

## ENDNOTES

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## Chapter 10

# Public Art by Aboriginal Artists

Vancouver is home to many talented Aboriginal artists and to many public works of art. Here are a few of the works of art in the public realm that you can view and visit for free.

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## Vancouver International Airport

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More information and photographs of these and other artworks are available on the [YVR website](#).

### **THE SPIRIT OF HAIDA GWAI:**

#### **THE JADE CANOE**

by **Bill Reid, Haida (1994)**

Vancouver International Airport – International Departures, Level 3

A bronze statue of a “spirit canoe” containing 13 figures in the Haida tradition. It is a second casting of a statue at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

### **WELCOME FIGURES**

by **Joe David, Nuu-Chah-Nulth (1986)**

Vancouver International Airport – International Arrivals, Level 2

Two ten-foot cedar carved figures carved in the Tla-o-qui-aht tradition to welcome guests to special events.

### **SUPERNATURAL WORLD: THE SEA, THE LAND AND THE SKY**

by **Richard Hunt, Dempsey Bob, and Robert Davidson (1999)**

Vancouver International Airport – Domestic Terminal, Level 1

Three cedar sculptures represent the sea, land and sky.



### **K'SAN TOTEM POLES**

by **Walter Harris and Earl Muldoe, Gitxsan (1970)**

Vancouver International Airport – International Terminal, Chester Johnson Park  
Three red cedar totem poles are in a park between the International Terminal and the parkade. They are part of the Museum of Vancouver's permanent collection. They were erected on this land with the approval of the Musqueam People.

### **CEDAR CONNECTION**

by **Susan Point, Musqueam (2009)**

Canada Line – YVR – Airport Station  
A red cedar sculpture represents the First People and their relationship to the rainforest and the Fraser River.

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## **East Vancouver**

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### **Various Artists**

Vancouver Community College,  
1155 East Broadway St  
A collection of 14 pieces of art created by Aboriginal artists are on display throughout VCC's Broadway campus. You can [watch a video](#) about them.



Bill Reid, Haida, *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii: The Jade Canoe* (1994). Courtesy of Vancouver International Airport.

Joe David, Nuu-Chah-Nulth, *Welcome Figures* (1986). Courtesy of Vancouver International Airport.

### **KINGSWAY TRAIL**

by **Sonny Assu, Ligwilda'xw of the We Wai Kai First Nation (2012)**

Kingsway, from Main St to Boundary Rd  
These aluminum laminated street signs mark Kingway's shared history as an Aboriginal foot trail and colonial wagon road.

### **CHIEF DAN GEORGE WELCOME POLE**

by **Zac George, Tsleil-Waututh (2010)**

Pacific Coliseum, 100 North Renfrew St  
The pole honours the artist's grandfather, Chief Dan George, who was chief of the Tsleil-Waututh First Nation as well as author and Academy Award-nominated actor.

### **SACREDNESS OF FOUR**

by **Ray Natraoro, Squamish Nation (2010)**

Trout Lake Centre, Victoria Dr & East 19<sup>th</sup> Ave  
A granite and steel sculpture that honours the four directions, winds, peoples, seasons, and four stages of life.



Susan Point, Musqueam, *Flight Spindle Whorl* (1995).  
Courtesy of Vancouver International Airport.

First Nations Longhouse, UBC. Photo by Antonieta Rivera. Courtesy of First Nations House of Learning.

## **BRIGHT FUTURES**

**by Brent Sparrow, Musqueam (2010)**

Killarney Centre, 6260 Killarney St by 49<sup>th</sup> Ave

A glass sculpture on a steel base. A Salish face is surrounded by triangles that represent the athletes of today.

## **ABUNDANCE FENCED**

**by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Haida (2011)**

Knight Street at 33<sup>rd</sup> Ave

Whales pursue salmon down the slope in this steel fence above the street .

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## UBC

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### **SALISH PATH**

**by Susan Point, Musqueam (2010)**

UBC, Museum of Anthropology, Welcome Entrance,

xʷə́niwən ce:p kʷθəθ nə́wəyət

The granite mosaic welcomes people to the museum. It is a reminder that the surrounding lands are traditional Musqueam territory.

### **TRANSFORMATION**

**by Joe Becker, Musqueam (2010)**

UBC, Museum of Anthropology, Welcome Entrance,

xʷə́niwən ce:p kʷθəθ nə́wəyət

A sculpture in which water and salmon symbolize the close ties of the local Musqueam people to their traditional territory.



## **THUNDER**

**by Thomas Cannell, Musqueam (2010)**

UBC, Thunderbird Arena

The five-foot cedar sculpture welcomes fans and hockey players to the arena. It features two Thunderbirds, which are good luck symbols for the Musqueam.

## **TAKE OFF**

**by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Haida (2010)**

UBC, Thunderbird Arena

A sculpture that uses the artist's style of Haida manga, which combines stories about the people of Haida Gwaii in Japanese manga-style comic book stories.

## **UBC FIRST NATIONS LONG HOUSE**

### **UBC**

The First Nations Long House is a unique building that reflects the architectural traditions of the Northwest Coast.

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## **Stanley Park**

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### **TOTEM POLES**

**by Various Artists**

Stanley Park, Brockton Point

### **PEOPLE AMONGST THE PEOPLE**

**by Susan Point, Musqueam (2008)**

Stanley Park, Brockton Point

Three slant structures with carved posts welcome people to traditional Coast Salish lands.



Tony Hunt, Kwakwaka'wakw,  
*Thunderbird House Post*  
at Brockton Point (1998).  
Courtesy of the City of  
Vancouver.

### **RAVEN: SPIRIT OF TRANSFORMATION**

**by Richard Krentz, Sechelt**

Stanley Park, Klahowya Village at the Miniature  
Railway Plaza

Carved from a Douglas fir stump brought down in  
the large windstorm of 2006.

### **INUKSHUK**

**by Alvin Kanak, Rankin Inlet (1986)**

English Bay at the foot of Bidwell Street

A large figure made of stacked stone traditionally  
used as a marker.




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## Downtown

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### **COAST SALISH GALLERY**

#### **Various Artists**

Vancouver Convention Centre, 1055 Canada Place  
A collection of work by Coast Salish artists, including Susan Point and Joseph Wilson.

### **UNTITLED (MEDALLIONS)**

#### **by Susan Point, Musqueam (1995)**

Jervis St and West Georgia St, Vancouver  
Bronze street medallions cast from carved 2.5' yellow cedar panel.

### **TREE OF LIFE**

#### **by Susan Point, Musqueam (2008)**

Christ Church Cathedral, 690 Burrard St, Vancouver  
Five stained glass windows measuring 15'×20'.

### **SPIRITS IN A LANDSCAPE**

#### **by Abraham Anghik Ruben (1992)**

1111 West Georgia Street  
A bronze sculpture representing transformation and the nature world.

### **BIRD OF SPRING**

#### **by Abraham Etungat, Cape Dorset, NWT (1979)**

Robson Square on the stairs near the Vancouver Art Gallery  
A stylized bird form made of bronze.

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Skwachàys Healing Lodge.  
Photo by Jason Vanderhill.  
Released under  
CC BY 4.0

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Wade Baker, Squamish,  
*Salish North Star in Maple Leaf* (2010). Courtesy of the  
City of Vancouver.



Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas,  
Haida, *Abundance Fenced*  
(2011). Courtesy of the City  
of Vancouver.

## Various Neighbourhoods

### **ART UNDERFOOT:**

#### **STORM SEWER COVER DESIGN**

by **Susan Point and Kelly Cannell (2007)**

Various Vancouver neighbourhoods,  
in the pavement

These cast iron sewer covers are based on a Coast Salish traditional design that represents the transformation of four frogs from eggs through to the tadpole stage.

#### **CENTENNIAL POLE**

by **Mungo Martin, Kwakwaka'wakw (1958)**

Hadden Park, Odgen St & Cypress St

This is a duplicate of a 30-metre totem pole carved and presented to Queen Elizabeth. Mungo Martin was helped by his nephew Henry Hunt and his son David Martin.

#### **SKWACHÂYS HEALING LODGE**

31 West Pender St

The healing lodge has a workshop and gallery featuring art made by residents. On the front of the building you will see the Dreamweaver Pole carved by Khut Whee Mul Uch. You can see photos of the carving of the pole at <http://skwachays.com/image-gallery>.

#### **SPINDLE WHORLS**

by **Aaron Nelson Moody, Squamish (2010)**

Hillcrest Park, 575 Clancy Loranger Way

Coast Salish carvers made disc shaped weights and long spindle for spinning wool. These spindle whorls are cast in concrete on stainless steel mounts.

#### **CANADA'S NORTH STAR**

by **Wade Baker, Squamish (2010)**

Olympic Village, South East False Creek Plaza,  
1 Athletes Way

The stainless steel sculpture of the Coast Salish North Star within the Canadian Maple Leaf symbolizes the Winter Games and welcomes the world to the community.

## Chapter 11

# Learning in the Community



Gulf of Georgia Cannery.  
Photo by Heidi Ramfl.  
Courtesy Gulf of Georgia  
Cannery Society.

Museum of Anthropology,  
UBC. Photo by Goh Iromoto.  
Courtesy of Museum of  
Anthropology.

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## Places to Visit

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There are many museums, galleries and cultural centres that offer programs or exhibits of Aboriginal art, history and culture. Most of those listed below charge an entrance fee and may have group rates.

### Bill Reid Gallery

<http://www.billreidgallery.ca/PlanVisit/GroupVisits.php>

- ESL tours

### Firehall Theatre Company

<http://www.firehallartscentre.ca>

- Often includes Aboriginal playwrights and performers in their season. Check their website for current shows.

### Fraser River Discovery Centre, New Westminster

<http://www.fraserriverdiscovery.org/education.htm>

- “*Our Bones are Made of Salmon*” group activity. Students explore the connection between Aboriginal people and salmon along the lower Fraser River through a storytelling film, hands-on experiences with fishing tools and a visit to the drying rack exhibit.

### Greenheart Canopy Walkway Tours, UBC Botanical Garden

<http://www.botanicalgarden.ubc.ca/canopy-walkway>

- ESL tours available on Indigenous plants and traditional uses

### **Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site, Steveston**

<http://gulfofgeorgiacannery.com/brochure>

- “Salmon People: Coast Salish Fishing” tour
- Contact Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society: 604.664.9009

### **Klahowya Village, Stanley Park (summertime)**

<http://www.aboriginalbc.com/klahowya-village>

- Craft workshops
- Carving demonstrations
- Artists’ marketplace
- Storytelling and walking tour
- Live cultural performance
- Traditional food tastings

### **Museum of Anthropology**

<http://moa.ubc.ca/visit/guided-tours.php>

- The largest collection of First Nations art and historical everyday objects
- ESL tours of their exhibitions, which are sometimes on Aboriginal themes
- Check for current tours. Ongoing tour of totem poles and carving shed available called “The Pole Walk”
- Past MOA tours include: “Cedar: The Roots Speak,” “Potlatch,” and “Dancers of Damelahamid”
- Highlight: Bill Reid’s sculpture *The Raven and First Men*

### **Museum of Vancouver**

<http://www.museumofvancouver.ca/family-education/educators/english-learners>

- Large collection of First Nations objects
- ESL tours of their exhibitions, some of

which are on Aboriginal themes

- Check for current tours
- Past MOV tours include: “Cedar and Sealskin”

### **Musqueam Cultural Education Resource Centre and Gallery**

<http://www.musqueam.bc.ca/musqueam-cultural-centre-gallery>

- Sharing of Musqueam culture from the Musqueam perspective
- Historic cultural objects
- Contemporary arts
- Self-guided and guided educational tours open to the public

### **Richmond Museum Society**

<http://www.richmond.ca/culture/sites/museum/schoolprograms.htm>

- *Musqueam: People of the River Grass* Education Kit available for ESL classrooms

### **Squamish-Lil’wat Cultural Centre, Whistler**

<http://www.aboriginalbc.com/squamish-lilwat-cultural-centre>

- Tours of the museum and exhibits
- Singing and drumming performances
- Multimedia presentations
- Craft workshops
- Aboriginal cuisine
- Film theatre
- Forest walk

### Vancouver Art Gallery

<http://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca>

- Collection of artwork by contemporary First Nations artists
- Often has exhibits featuring First Nations artists

### UBC Farm

<http://ubcfarm.ubc.ca/teaching-learning/childrens-learning-garden>

- ESL tours on Aboriginal food use
- Occasionally offers Edible Plant Walking Tour
- UBC Farm also hosts the [Intergenerational Garden Project](#) in which urban Aboriginal youth and Elders work together to manage a garden at the farm

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## Annual Events

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There are many annual Aboriginal events in Vancouver that are open to the public. Check their websites for the details. Vancouver Community College hosts a community events calendar where you can find Aboriginal events: <http://www.vcc.ca/aboriginal-events>

### Hobiye Nisga'a New Year Celebration (End of January/beginning of February)

<http://www.tsamiks.com>

- PNE Forum
- Free Admission

### Talking Stick Festival (February)

<http://fullcircle.ca/talking-stick-festival-overview>

- Annual city-wide two-week celebration at the end of February
- Aboriginal traditions of music, dance and storytelling in a contemporary and entertaining way

### 8,000 Sacred Drums Ceremony (March, Equinox)

<http://allevents.in/vancouver/8000-drums-global-ceremony-for-earth-healing/108717709146445>

- Free event open to families and the general public
- Originating in Mexico, this drumming event is held around the world to celebrate the earth
- All drums and rattles welcomed to participate

### National Aboriginal Day (June 21st)

<http://www.bcnationalaboriginalday.com>

- All welcome at free Trout Lake Park festivities
- Pancake Breakfast at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre
- Friendship Walk
- Stage with entertainment
- Teepee Village with activities for children and pow wow dancing with drum group
- Arts & Crafts Fair
- Resource Fair
- Community 5km Run and Walk

### **Squamish Nation Annual Powwow (July)**

<http://www.squamish.net/events>

- Family event open to the public
- Salmon BBQ
- Arts and Crafts

### **Tsleil-Waututh Cultural Arts Festival (August)**

<http://www.twnation.ca/en/Band and Community/TWN Cultural Arts Festival 2012.aspx>

- Annual day-long festival
- Music and dance performances
- Scavenger hunt
- Demonstrations of ancient technologies
- Guided trips in traditional-style canoes by Takaya Tours
- Traditional foods

### **DTES “Honoring Our Elders” Pow Wow (September)**

<http://www.dtespowwow.ca>

- Free event open to families and the general public
- Annual outdoor cultural celebration featuring traditional drumming, singing and dancing
- Public honoring of community elders from all nationalities
- Informational booths on Aboriginal community services
- Traditional Feast

### **National Aboriginal Veterans Day (November)**

- Free event open to families and the general public
- Annual community march/parade held mid-November
- Presentations made in honour of Aboriginal war veterans at Vancouver’s Victory Square Cenotaph
- Traditional Feast

### **Vancouver Indigenous Media Arts Festival (VIMAF) (November)**

<http://vimaf.com>

- Annual Film Festival
- Public events

### **DTES Smudge Ceremony - Varies**

- Free event open to families and the general public
- Annual traditional cleansing ceremony of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside
- Multicultural march/parade lead by four representatives from the four directions (human races)





## Chapter 12

# Truth and Reconciliation

### 12.1. YEAR OF RECONCILIATION IN VANCOUVER

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) is a national project to document the experiences of survivors, families, and communities affected by Indian Residential Schools and to teach all Canadians about what happened in them.

In September 2013, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada held a week-long national event in Vancouver that included many initiatives. The University of British Columbia, the largest university in the province, suspended classes on the first day of the event so that members of the university community could attend, and many schools throughout the city brought students to the event's Education Day.

Many other initiatives worked to place the TRC event in a larger context of efforts towards improved relations between Aboriginal people and other Canadians.

Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson and City Council declared June 21, 2013 to June 20, 2014 the Year of Reconciliation in the City of Vancouver.

### 12.2. OTHER ACTIVITIES IN VANCOUVER

In partnership with Reconciliation Canada, the City of Vancouver recognized the Year of Reconciliation to help people to mend the past, share understanding of the history shaping the experiences of Aboriginal people, and create a legacy for meaningful change in society.

The City acknowledged the harm of the Indian Residential School system, and drew attention to the process of reconciliation and healing.

### **12.3. THE WALK FOR RECONCILIATION**

On September 22, 2013 close to 75,000 Vancouverites braved the wind and rain to participate in a historic walk throughout downtown Vancouver. The event was hosted by Reconciliation Canada to mark the end of Reconciliation Week. The week began with a welcoming All Nations Canoe gathering, followed by four days of storytelling during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's BC National Event. People from all walks of life came together in an expression of unity with the Aboriginal community.

### **12.4. ABOUT RECONCILIATION CANADA**

Reconciliation Canada is a local non-profit organization established as a collaborative effort between the [Indian Residential Schools Survivors Society](#) and [Tides Canada Initiatives Society](#). Reconciliation Canada is led by Chief Robert Joseph.

### **12.5. TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) is a five-year project created in 2007. It is part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, meaning it grew out of a class action lawsuit against the Canadian government. The TRC was inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa.

The TRC has two goals. The first is to document the experiences of all survivors, families, and communities personally affected by Indian Residential Schools. This includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis former Indian Residential School students, their families, communities, the Churches, former school employees, Government and other Canadians. The second is to teach all Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools.



Walk for Reconciliation,  
September 22, 2013.  
Courtesy of Reconciliation  
Canada.

Crowd at False Creek for the  
All Nations Canoe Gathering,  
September 17, 2013. Courtesy  
of Reconciliation Canada.

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# Year of Reconciliation Proclamation

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## **WHEREAS**

*Since time began, the First Peoples of this land cared for the well-being of land, waters and people;*

## **and WHEREAS**

*This care was not reciprocated with the advent of European colonization. Grave injustices were perpetrated on Aboriginal peoples, from the devastating smallpox epidemic to crowding great nations from their large territories onto small reserves. But the most tragic injustice was the abduction of children from their families for their involuntary placement in “residential schools.”*

## **and WHEREAS**

*From the 1870s through until 1996, governments removed more than 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families. These children suffered cultural alienation and severe physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Estimates are that over 40% died while in the custody of the government.*

## **and WHEREAS**

*This harm has extended to all communities, Aboriginal peoples and all Canadians, and has extended over time, with the ongoing impact of residential schools felt throughout the generations.*

## **and WHEREAS**

*The aspirations of Aboriginal peoples are not so different from any other peoples, with the one exception that a majority believe their children will not have the same opportunity to realize their dreams because of the bitter legacies left from the residential school system.*

## **and WHEREAS**

*There is only one path moving forward, a path shared by people of all cultures. Reconciliation is an opportunity for all Canadians — within Vancouver and beyond — to witness the process of reconciliation and healing, and advance with a greater shared understanding of the historical impacts that have shaped the experiences of Aboriginal people to date;*

## **and WHEREAS**

*The City of Vancouver is embracing reconciliation through a year-long effort that seeks to heal from the past and build new relationships between Aboriginal peoples and all Vancouverites, built on a foundation of openness, dignity, understanding and hope.*

## **and WHEREAS**

*Through the process of reconciliation we have the promise of building a common future, a future in which all of Vancouver’s children — no matter what their cultural background — have an equal opportunity to achieve their dreams and contribute to the common aspiration for a just and sustainable world.*

## **Now, therefore,**

*I, Gregor Robertson, Mayor of Vancouver, take the extraordinary measure of declaring June 21, 2013 to June 20, 2014 the Year of Reconciliation in the City of Vancouver.”*

The TRC pursues truth by gathering people's stories and statements, researching government records, and providing public education.

The TRC sees reconciliation as an ongoing individual and collective process.

### Some projects include:

- Creating a national Indian Residential School research centre. This centre will be hosted in Winnipeg by the [University of Manitoba](#).
- Holding seven national events in different cities to gather testimony and educate people. One of these was held in Vancouver [September 16-22, 2013](#).
- Supporting local community healing and commemoration events. Commemoration helps people remember an important person or event in the past.
- Creating commemoration projects.
- Gathering suggestions about reconciliation, healing, and commemoration.

The work of the TRC is not just about documenting a particularly difficult part of Aboriginal history in Canada. It is rooted in the belief that telling the truth about our common history gives us a much better starting point in building a better future. By ending the silences under which Aboriginal people have suffered for many decades, the TRC opens the possibility that we may all come to see each other and our different histories more clearly, and be able to work together in a better way to resolve issues that have long divided us. It is the beginning of a new kind of hope.

### 12.6. FURTHER RESOURCES

- [City of Vancouver Year of Reconciliation](#)
- [Reconciliation Canada](#)
- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#)



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Walk for Reconciliation,  
September 22, 2013.  
Courtesy of Reconciliation  
Canada.

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Dr. Bernice King's Keynote  
Speech, September 22, 2013.  
Courtesy of Reconciliation  
Canada.

## Chapter 13

# Glossary

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## A

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### **Aboriginal (adj)**

First peoples who have lived in a place or country from the earliest times or from a time before colonists.<sup>1</sup> Canada recognizes three distinct groups of Aboriginal people: **First Nations**, **Métis**, and **Inuit**.<sup>2</sup> Capitalizing “Aboriginal” is a sign of respect to the peoples you are writing about. It means a special political status, like the adjectives “Canadian” or “American.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Aboriginal rights and title (n.)**

The entitlement or right to own, manage and use<sup>4</sup> traditional lands and resources. Aboriginal title and rights are based on continuous, non-stop occupation and use. These rights are inherent, which means nobody can take them away. The right to fish and the right to hunt are examples of Aboriginal rights.<sup>5</sup>

### **Assimilate (v.), assimilation (n.)**

If people are assimilated, they become part of another group by adopting its culture, and often by losing their own.<sup>6</sup>

### **Band or Indian Band (n.)**

A group of **status First Nations** people whose membership is defined by the Canadian Government. A band does not always include an entire **First Nation**. Each band has to have an elected council and **chief**. Band is a legal term established by the *Indian Act*.<sup>7</sup>

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## C

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### **Chief (n.)**

The leader of a group of people such as a First Nation or band. A Chief may be an elected official under the Indian Act, or a hereditary or recognized leader in a traditional system in a community.

### **Colonize (v.), Colonization (n.)**

“Colonization: *the encroachment upon, and subjugation of, one group by a more powerful group, usually for the purpose of exploiting the less powerful group’s resources. The term colonization is often used in reference to the treatment by the Canadian government of Aboriginal peoples and their subsequent loss of resources, land, self-determination, family ties, and culture.*”<sup>8</sup>

### **Constitution (n.)**

In Canada, it is the highest law, first written in 1867.

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## E

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### **Elder (n.)**

An older person who is very knowledgeable about the history, values and teachings of his or her own culture. He or she is a role model and teacher to all members of the community.<sup>9</sup>

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## F

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### **First Nation (n.)**

A group of First Peoples in what is now Canada who are united by language and culture. There are over 614 First Nations across Canada and they have many different languages and cultures. First

Nations people are **Aboriginal** people who do not identify as **Inuit** or **Métis**. “**First Peoples**” is another term that is similar to First Nations.

“First Nation” can refer to a **band**, a **reserve-based** community, or a larger tribal grouping and the **status Indians** who live in them. For example, the Stó:lō Nation (which consists of several bands),<sup>10</sup> or the Tsleil-Waututh Nation (formerly the Burrard Band). A First Nation is a “self-determined political unit of the Aboriginal community that has the power to negotiate, on a government-to-government basis, with the province and Canada.”<sup>11</sup>

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## I

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### **Indian (n.), Indian status (n.)**

A First Nations person who is governed by the *Indian Act*. Who is an “Indian” is defined by the Canadian government, and changes over time. This word should not be used except as a legal term.

### **Indian Act (n.)**

Federal legislation that governs First Nations people with “**Indian status**” and their lives.<sup>12</sup>

### **Indian Residential School (n.)**

Schools for Aboriginal children paid for by the federal government and run by the churches in Canada. For over 100 years, Aboriginal people were forced to send their children to these schools to live, and sometimes to die. The last school closed in 1996.

### **Indigenous (adj.)**

First peoples anywhere in the world. Some people prefer “Indigenous” over “Aboriginal.”

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**Inuit (n., adj.)**

Aboriginal people who have lived in the Arctic land and waters of the north of what is now Canada for centuries.

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**L**

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**Land claim (n.)**

A First Nation's legal demand for control over their traditional territory. The Federal Government calls modern **treaties** "Comprehensive Land Claims."

**Local First Nation (n.)**

A First Nation on whose traditional territory you are living or visiting.

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**M**

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**Métis (n., adj.)**

Aboriginal people who are of mixed Aboriginal and European heritage. Some reserve the word Métis for descendants of specific historic communities.

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**P**

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**Potlatch (n.)**

A formal ceremony used by First Nations on the northwest coast of North America. It is part of traditional education, celebration, and government.<sup>13</sup>

**Protocol (n.)**

A system of rules about the correct way to behave on an official occasion.

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**R**

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**Reserve (n.)**

"Land that has been set apart by the Federal government for the use and benefit of an Indian band."<sup>14</sup>

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**S**

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**Self-determination (n.)**

The right of a people or nation to govern themselves and to choose the type of government they want.<sup>15</sup> The ability of a people to determine their own political, economic and cultural futures *independent of external interference*.<sup>16</sup>

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**T**

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**Time immemorial (n.)**

The beginning.<sup>17</sup>

**Tradition (n.), traditional (adj.)**

A way of doing things that has existed for a long time, especially when it is passed down from parents or grandparents to children.<sup>18</sup>

**Traditional territory (n.)**

Land that a First Nation has lived on or used since **time immemorial**. They have a primary sacred, cultural and economic connection to this land.<sup>19</sup>

**Treaty (n.)**

A formal written agreement between two governments that names the rights and responsibilities of the governments that signed it.<sup>20</sup>



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## U

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### Unceded land (n.)

Land that Aboriginal people have not given up or signed away through a treaty.

### Urban Aboriginal people (n.)

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples from all across Canada who live in cities.

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# Acknowledgements

This *Guide* is a collaborative effort of many people and organizations.

Kory Wilson, Director of Aboriginal Education & Community Engagement at Vancouver Community College, has guided the research and writing of this *Guide*. Kory is from Musgamagw Tsawataineuk and Laich-Kwil-Tach nations, both of which are part of the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nation. Her knowledge, understanding and commitment have ensured the successful completion of this *Guide*. Her co-researcher/writer Jane Henderson has provided essential support to the project throughout. We are grateful to the both of them for this collaborative work and to Vancouver Community College for their in-kind contribution.

We thank the staff of the Vancouver Public Library for their contributions to this project.

We are indebted to the Vancouver Dialogues Working Group which proposed the idea of gathering more information for newcomers and subsequently developed an initial outline for the *Guide*: Professor Linc Kesler, Dan Guinan, Susan Tatoosh, Henry Yu, Richard Vedan, Wade Grant, Elder Larry Grant, Michael Yu, Gabriel George, Damara Jacobs, Jill Baird, Zool Suleman, Brenda Lorenz and Anne Olsen. We also thank the Welcoming Communities Working Group for their support: Dan Guinan, Brenda Lorenz, Jocelyne Hamel, Dale Hunter, Jane Li, Wade Grant and Susan Tatoosh.

Many people have contributed in the development of the Guide. We particularly want to thank Wade Grant, Chris Lewis, Leah George-Wilson, Linc Kesler, Dan Guinan, Susan Tatoosh, Ginger Gosnell-Myers and the City's Corporate Communications for providing comments on drafts of the Guide. John Moreau and staff at the City web operations supported the posting and launch of the *Guide*.

Finally, we would like to thank the Provincial Immigration Integration Branch for their generous funding support to make this project possible.

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