

Cultural Expression

*Culture . . . is dynamic, grounded in ethics and values that provide a practical guide and a moral compass enabling people to adapt to changing circumstances. The traditional wisdom at the core of this culture may transcend time and circumstance, but the way it is applied differs from one situation to another. It is the role of the family—that is, the extended network of kin and community—to demonstrate how traditional teachings are applied in everyday life.—1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.*¹

Culture is a guide and a moral compass, as the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples states. Aboriginal cultures are rooted in an enduring relationship with the land; beliefs and values held by Aboriginal peoples reflect their unique world views, in which all of life is seen holistically. This is the way people expressed their cultures in the past. The elements of what we classify today as “the Arts” were part of the whole cultural fabric, integrating social, political, spiritual, and economic realms. The forces of colonialism, as discussed in the previous chapters, severely disrupted many aspects of cultural expression, particularly the oppressive policies which attempted to force all First Nations people to abandon their languages and their ceremonial practices.

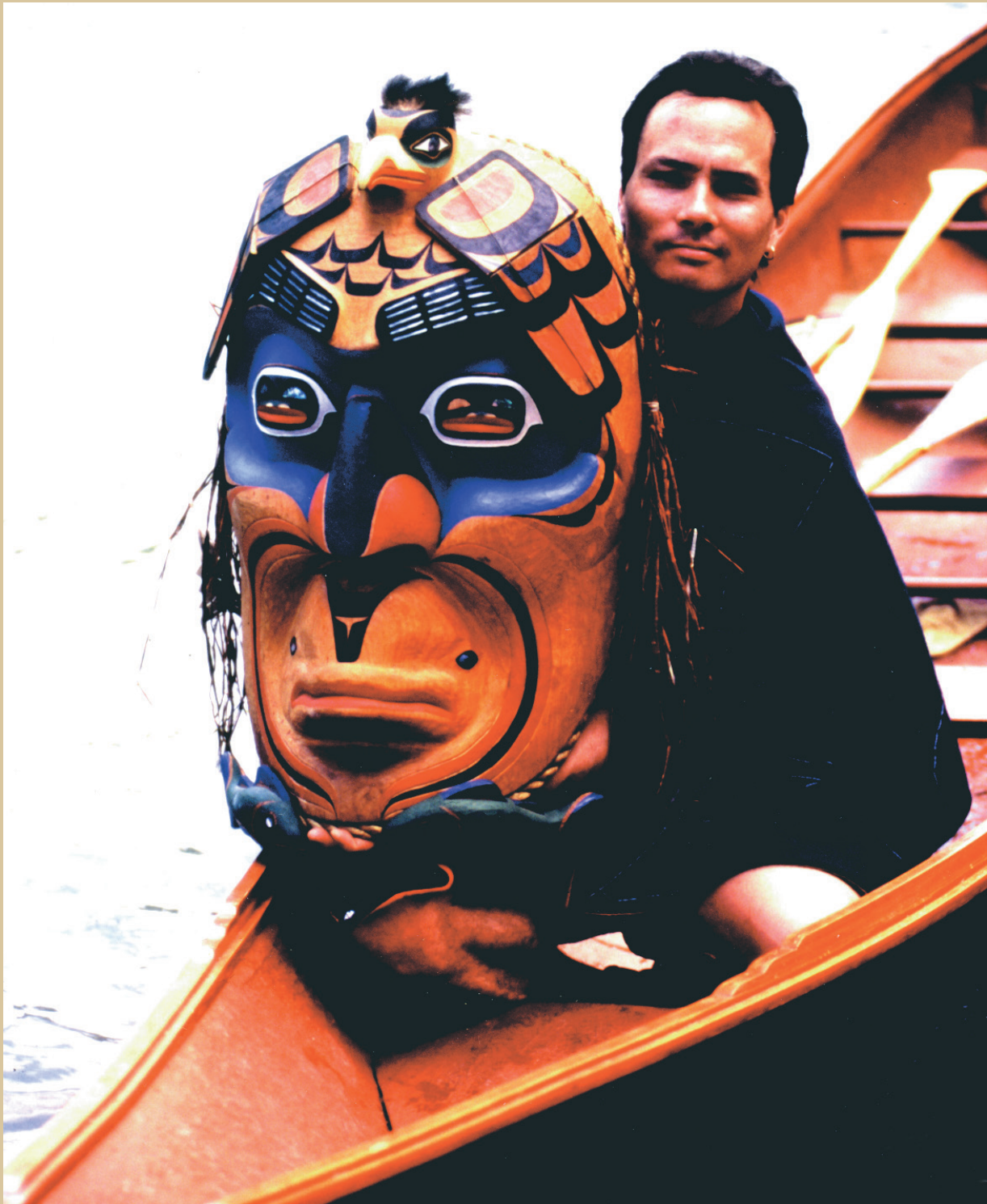
Today cultural expression is often a means of reasserting Aboriginal identity. By examining the wisdom of the past, Aboriginal artists in contemporary society are able to bring into focus their own cultural beliefs and values and express them both for their own people and for the wider Canadian society.

Part Four focusses on cultural expression through word and image. Chapter 14 looks at the importance of oral tradition in its many aspects, from storytelling to political oratory. The modern extension of the spoken word is the written word, and this is discussed in Chapter 15 through an examination of First Nations literature. The issue of cultural appropriation in literature is also considered.

Images are often the most distinctive way in which an individual or a group expresses culture to the outside world. The visual arts are explored in Chapter 16, including a look at the traditional art forms of the interior and the coastal First Nations, and the impact that governmental policies had on their execution. Additionally this chapter discusses the contemporary resurgence of the visual arts, which plays a role in rebuilding the identity of First Nations communities and also offers significant career opportunities for Aboriginal artists.

Canadian society has in the past frequently stereotyped and misrepresented Aboriginal people in the media through ignorance and racism. These issues are studied in Chapter 17, which presents a variety of ways that Aboriginal people have been (and still continue to be) represented in print, advertising, and museums. The chapter concludes with some highlights of positive cultural initiatives, featuring the achievements of a number of prominent Aboriginal people.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples calls for a renewed relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples built upon the principles of mutual recognition, mutual respect, sharing, and mutual responsibility. Dynamic, rich, and diverse expressions of the vitality and legitimacy of First Nations and Métis cultures are important for building mutual understanding in Canadian society.



David Neel, a Kwakwaka'wakw artist, dancing his Keeper of the Animals mask on the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy, in 1998. The mask is a representation of the endangered species of the world.

Oral Traditions

For countless centuries First Nations knowledge, traditions, and cultures have been passed from one generation to another in stories and narratives, as well as through songs, dances, and ceremonial artifacts. Before Europeans arrived in B.C., First Nations had oral cultures; their languages had no written form. The oral tradition was integrated into every facet of life and was the basis of the education system. The education system in an oral tradition society is very precise and procedural: the information is taught to the next generation exactly as it was taught to the one before. Stories are used because they are easier to remember: you learn by listening closely and remembering. The oral tradition passed on the spiritual beliefs of the people and the lineage of families. It recorded ownership of property and territory, political issues, legal proceedings, and survival skills. The oral tradition also mapped the geography of an area, and it recorded history.

This chapter introduces some aspects of the oral tradition, a tradition that varies from nation to nation. Drawing on examples from many First Nations, it looks at songs, stories of origins, Trickster stories, family narratives, and formal oratory. All of these aspects of oral traditions continue to be an essential part of First Nations cultures in B.C. today. Although today First Nations knowledge is often recorded in printed form, the oral tradition has a profound significance for First Nations people, expressing who they are in the world.

Stories and Narratives

Stories and narratives have many elements in common but can be distinguished from each other. Stories — often creation stories—are set long ago in a mythical age; these stories communicate the moral traditions and knowledge of a people while telling of the origins of the landscape and the human and animal inhabitants of the land. Such stories are often told in a performance setting and may be accompanied by songs and dances that extend their meaning. Narratives meet a more concrete need and pass along specific skills and knowledge or record oral history. Formal oratory is another form of the oral tradition.

It is important to remember that the phrase “oral tradition” does not have a single meaning but is expressed in rich traditions that vary from nation to nation. Each First Nation gives its own oral tradition a name in its own language. For example:

- the Okanagan Nations use *cepcaptikwl* to pass historical narratives from generation to generation; these narratives are owned by the Okanagan Nations as a whole.
- the Wet’suwet’en call their historical narratives *kungax*; *kungax* are owned by the hereditary chiefs and clans of the Wet’suwet’en.
- the Gitksan’s narratives are called *adaawk*; they are owned by individuals, clans, and family groups.
- the Stó:lō have *sxwoxwiyám* (stories) and *Sqwélqwel* (narratives); the first are stories from the ancient past and the second are more contemporary stories.



- the Nlaka'pamux have two prominent types of oral traditions, *speta'kl* and *spilaxem*. The *speta'kl* (also spelled *sptakwelh*) are stories that refer to events from the mythological age. They include creation stories, stories of the Transformers such as Coyote, and stories of characters such as Muskrat, Beaver, and Black Bear who also walked and talked in human form. The *spilaxem* (also spelled *spilaxam*) are non-creation stories such as hunting stories, news stories, and personal narratives.

Each nation has its own traditions and procedures for its stories, and how they are to be told. In some cases, individuals, families, or clans own the stories

First Nations people still use storytelling to teach skills. Here Gwen Point and Helen Joe of the Stó:lō Nation are working with cedar bark, a traditional skill that has been passed down through many generations.

and narratives, while in other cases, certain stories can be told by anyone. To repeat a First Nations story, one needs to determine who is the owner of the story and whether it is available to be retold. Permission must be obtained before a story is passed along.

Once a spoken story has been committed to print, it becomes static. The printed form of a story from the oral tradition is sometimes referred to as “oral literature.” It is no longer strictly oral.

Songs of the Nisga'a

Historically among the Nisga'a, family histories and lineages, prime hunting and fishing locations, songs of love and loss, lullabies, and ancient tales of victories and defeats with rival tribes were passed down orally through songs from generation to generation. When successive waves of smallpox and measles killed

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Jessie Gurney

Jessie Gurney is an Elder and a granddaughter of Txalahaet, who sang some of the traditional Nisga'a songs that were recorded in 1927. When she heard a CD of her grandfather singing, she said she was deeply moved. She waited for almost eight decades to hear this music—music that her own grandfather would not let her hear.

I remember he took us children up to his fishing and hunting rounds, up the Nass. I heard him singing to himself, in Nisga'a, in the woods. I can still remember his voice. I wanted to know that song, the words, how to sing it. But he told me now he was a Christian; the priests had told him not to pass our songs on to the children and grandchildren.

Then another time I heard him at his smokehouse, where he was making salmon. He was singing another song, early, early in the morning. He was happy. I sneaked up behind. I was listening. But he found me and scolded me never to do that again. He said the priests made him promise not to teach those songs to us.

That was a terrible thing. It really, really hurt me. I hate that the preachers here then did that to him—told him not to teach us the olden ways. They just wanted to strip that away, like even the [ceremonial] clothes that he wore. What kind of Christian is that—to say his songs were a sin? ¹

half the population between 1860 and 1890, many of the oldest and best “songcatchers” died before they could pass on their musical heritage.

In 1927 two outsiders, Marius Barbeau, an ethnologist, and Ernest MacMillan, an esteemed musician, visited the area northeast of Prince Rupert to record the songs of the Nisga'a Nation using an Edison wax cylinder recording machine. Two elderly Nass River chiefs, Txalahaet (also known as Frank Bolton) and Pahl (Charles Barton) sang dozens of songs, some learned from their great-grandfathers. The songs contained elaborate lyrics, complex polyrhythms, and often enchanting melodies.

For seven decades the wax recordings were buried in the basement of the Canadian Museum of Civilization. Only a small fraction were ever transcribed into music because of the technical and financial challenges involved. Recently the National Library purchased a custom-made “Archeophone” that can instantly convert wax cylinder records into digital data. Perfect copies can then be stored on computers, duplicated as CDs, and made publicly available.

In 2002 the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the National Library restored and transferred to CD two songs from Barbeau's Nass River wax cylinder recordings. They were then played for some of the descendants of the Aboriginal singers, seventy-five years after they were recorded. The ancestral songs are as sacred to the Nisga'a as old hymns are to Christians. Many First Nations people want their songs restored to them, so that young people can relearn their history and culture.

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Sonny McHalsie

Yewal Sí:yá:m (respected community leader) Albert “Sonny” McHalsie of Shxw’ōwhámél.

Archaeologists tell us that we have been here for at least 9,000 years. Our Elders tell us we have been here since time immemorial. They also tell us through sxwox̱wiyám̱x (stories and legends) that many of our resources were at one time our ancestors. Many of our people have stories about a particular resource which at one time may have been their own people. For instance, people at a village near Hope claim the sturgeon as their ancestor; others from a village near Chilliwack and Agassiz claim the mountain goat as their ancestor. One legend common to all Stó:lō tells the story of the origin of the cedar tree. It goes like this: At one time there was a very good man who was always helping others. He was always sharing whatever he had. When X̱eX̱’a:ls (the transformers) saw this they transformed him into a cedar tree so he would always continue helping the people. And so to this day he continues to give and share many things with the people—cedar roots for baskets, bark for clothing, and wood for shelter.

So our resources are more than just resources, they are our extended family. They are our ancestors, our shxweli (spirit or life force). Our shxweli includes our



parents, grandparents, great grandparents, cedar tree, salmon, sturgeon and transformer rocks . . . Our Elders tell us that everything has a spirit. So when we use a resource, like a sturgeon or cedar tree, we have to thank our ancestors who were transformed into these things. We don't like to think that our ancestors came over the Bering Land Bridge. We have always been here. ²

In the Time of the Transformers

Many of the traditional stories from the First Nations oral traditions are set in an ancient time long ago, in the time of the Transformers. These stories transmit moral truths, cultural knowledge, and standards of

human behaviour from one generation to the next. They may bring the landscape to life for listeners by explaining how certain natural features such as large rocks, river whirlpools, or islands came to be. They may explain the origins of people and communities. Or they may tell how certain plants or animals came to be and explain how the people of an area came to have

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Bill Reid's Sculpture: The Raven and the First Men

First Nations artists have always been storytellers in their own right, giving solid form to the spoken word through weaving, painting, and carving. Contemporary artists blend the past and the present to create powerful works which preserve the ancient stories. Here, Haida artist Bill Reid has created a masterpiece of sculpture to capture the wonder and vigour of a Haida story telling about the origin of people.

According to Haida legend, the Raven found himself alone one day on the Rose Spit beach on Haida Gwaii. Suddenly he saw an extraordinary clamshell at his feet and protruding from it were a number of small human beings. The Raven coaxed them to leave the shell to join him in his wonderful world. Some were hesitant at first, but eventually, overcome by curiosity, they emerged from the partly open giant clamshell to become the first Haida.

■ The Raven and the First Men, by Haida artist Bill Reid, was commissioned by the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in 1983.



a special relationship with the resources of their land, such as the salmon, the mountain goat, or the moose.

Until the Transformers came, the world was different—chaotic, disorganized, and filled with monsters. Animals and human beings shared many of the same characteristics, such as the ability to speak. As they travelled through the land, the Transformers changed things until they became as they are today. The Transformers changed the monsters and other beings from this age into the physical features or plants and animals that we find in today's world. On the west coast, the Transformer character in traditional stories is Raven. In the interior of B.C., Coyote plays that role.

While many First Nations stories describe the origins of things, they are not the same as European “creation stories.” In European creation stories, first there is nothing and the story tells how the world came to be made out of nothingness. In First Nations stories, there is no sense of nothingness preceding what there is now. There is always something that came before. Even when “first people” are referred to, it is with the knowledge that they are only the first because some catastrophe wiped out the people who were there before. This is consistent with the First Nations world view, which sees creation as a continuous flow of time. First Nations origin stories emphasize the continuity of existence, and do not break it into separate pieces.

The Trickster

Transformer characters in First Nations stories can also be tricksters. The trickster is a special, often very witty and humorous character that demonstrates the opposite characteristics to those that are valued in human beings. Through his actions, he shows people the consequences of acting in an unacceptable manner. In a reverse way, the trickster is a moral, ethical, and philosophical teacher. Stories featuring the trickster often teach a moral lesson. The trickster often also plays a creator role in stories, but he is also a liar, a cheat, lazy, and lustful.

The trickster is ageless, genderless (although in English the trickster is usually called “he”), and free of any stereotypes. He can take on the form of a human, an animal, or even the shape of an inanimate object such as a rock, stick, or tree. Having supernatural powers, the trickster is not constricted by human limitations, and those same supernatural powers allow him to explain the creation of places, traditional spiritual rituals and meanings, hunting and fishing rituals, symbolic objects, coming-of-age ceremonies, and the recordings of important dates and events to his people.

The trickster links human beings to the animal world. In First Nations stories, people usually appear in the world after the mythical period where animals were like people. First Nations are able to maintain a respectful and holistic relationship with the natural environment because the animals came first and humans learned from them. In this way, First Nations people see animals as relatives or forefathers who once talked and walked the earth like we do. The trickster

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Don Fiddler

Our stories are not just about birds or animals. The stories point to human capacity and frailty. The stories encode the psychology of a people. The Raven or Coyote as Trickster speaks to the human element, that part of ourselves which has the capacity for good and evil. Stories are about the circumstances that link us to the world and make us what we are. In storytelling each of the characters and their interaction is a metaphor and symbol of how we relate to ourselves, loved ones and community ... Storytelling then relates to many levels layered in meaning pertaining to human behaviour. ³

CASE STUDY

Two Trickster Stories

Among British Columbia First Nations, there are two main trickster characters, Coyote and Raven. Coyote is the trickster in stories from the interior. The first story below is from the Okanagan people. Raven is the trickster of the coast, but he is also a Transformer. The second story here is from the Nuxalk people of the Bella Coola Valley. It was told here by Joshua Moody.

These stories have been recorded in printed form in English. They were meant to be recited orally in the mother tongue of their people, the Okanagan and the Nuxalk. Consider what may have been lost by translating these stories and recording them in a static printed form.

Why the Flint-Rock Cannot Fight Back

Sto-Way'-Na—Flint—was rich and powerful. His lodge was toward the sunrise. It was guarded by Scur-hein—Crane. He was the watcher. He watched from the top of a lone tree. When anybody approached, Crane would call out and warn Flint, and Flint would come out of his lodge and meet the visitor.

There was an open flat in front of the lodge. Flint met all his visitors there. Warriors and hunters came and bought flint for arrow-points and spear-heads. They paid Flint big prices for the privilege of chipping off the hard stone. Some who needed flint for their weapons were poor and could not buy. These poor persons Flint turned away.

Coyote heard about Flint and, as he wanted some arrow-points, he asked his squas-tenk' to help him. Squas-tenk' refused.

"Hurry, do what I ask, or I will throw you away and let the rain wash you—wash you cold," said Coyote, and then the power gave him three rocks that were harder than the flint-rock. It also gave him a little dog that had only one ear. But this ear was sharp, like a knife; it was a knife-ear.

Then to his wife, Mole, Coyote said: "Go and make your underground trails in the flat where Sto-way'-na lives. When you have finished and see me talking with him, show yourself so we can see you."

Then Coyote set out for Flint's lodge. As he got near it, he had his power make a fog to cover the land, and thick fog spread over everything. Crane, the watcher, up in the lone tree, could not see Coyote. He did not know that Coyote was around.

Coyote climbed the tree and took Crane from his high perch and broke his neck. Crane had no time to cry out. Then Coyote went on to Flint's lodge. He was almost there when Flint's dog, Grizzly Bear, jumped out of the lodge and ran toward him.

Coyote was not scared, and he yelled at Flint: "Stop your grizzly bear dog! Stop him, or my dog will kill him."

That amused Flint, who was looking through the doorway. He saw that Coyote's one-eared dog was very small, hardly a mouthful for Grizzly Bear. Flint came out of his lodge. He was laughing.

"Sin-ka-lip', you better take your dog away. My Grizzly Bear will eat him up."

"No, stop your dog," repeated Coyote. "One-Ear is bad!"

"Hah!" laughed Flint. "No dog can hurt my Grizzly Bear!"

So, without more talk, Coyote sent One-Ear at Grizzly Bear, who opened his mouth wide. The little dog went right ahead and jumped straight into Grizzly Bear's mouth, and kept on going. He went clear through Grizzly Bear. His sharp knife-ear cut Flint's dog wide open.

"See!" Coyote said. "I told you that One-Ear was bad. He can kill anything."

About that time Mole appeared at the far edge of the flat. She was dressed in skins that were painted red, and she looked very handsome.

"My friend," Coyote spoke to Flint, "see that woman over there. Let us run a race. The one who gets to her first shall take her for his wife." Flint was willing. So they raced. They ran toward Mole. She pretended to be digging spit-lum (bitter-root). She had made tunnels all through the flat, and they were a bother to Flint. He kept stepping into them and falling, and every time he fell Coyote would jump over him, and shout: "Eh! Ha-yea! My friend, what is wrong?"

Flint was heavy, and slow in picking himself up. Sometimes Coyote jumped over him twice before he could get up. When they got to where Mole was standing, she changed herself into a real mole and skipped into one of her tunnels. Then Coyote began to hit Flint with the squas-tenk' rocks. At each blow they scaled off big flakes of flint.

Flint also tried to catch Coyote, but every few steps he stumbled into one of Mole's tunnels, and he grew weaker and weaker. Coyote kept striking him with the medicine-rocks. At last all of the monster's body was chipped away. Only the heart was left. Then Flint died.

Coyote picked up the heart and threw it across the flat. There it is today. It is a hill standing there. Much flint is found there.

The pieces of Flint's body which were scattered around on the flat were gathered up by Coyote and thrown all over the earth for warriors and hunters to use.

That done, Coyote said: "Sto-way'-na, you are a person no more. From this sun you are only dead stone!"

And this is why the flint-rock is senseless and cannot fight back when chipped for arrow-heads. Coyote made it so before the New People came. ⁴

Origin Myth of Snutali

In the beginning of time Alquntam created the forefathers of all mankind in his house above and then asked each in what form he wished to go to earth. A number of bird and animal cloaks were hanging on the walls of the house, and each was invited to take his choice. One whose name was Kaliakis chose the raven. When he had donned the garment he became a raven. Slowly he circled down from above in long spirals, carrying with him his two younger brothers and a sister, all in raven form, as a bird carries its young. He set down the two small brothers on the top of a flat mountain near Snutali where he told them to remain, adding:

"I am going to the east but will return."

He brought back some abalone-shells, which he set down near the diminutive ravens, saying:

"Stay here, I am going to the west but will return."

This time he brought back with him some copper, that flashed in the sun.

Kaliakis and his two brothers now assumed human form and sent their raven cloaks floating back to the land above. This was what happened to all the bird and animal forms used by the first people. The three descended the mountain and built their house by the Bella Coola River at the spot now known as Snutali. Kaliakis had brought with him a mountain goat, which, when set at liberty, bred with great rapidity, so that these first Snutali people subsisted largely on goat flesh, the provision made for them by Alquntam. In some inexplicable manner it appears that the supernatural hunter Twalatlit, whose other name is Lelemkila, "The One Who Throws Down [Goats]," had come with this group. Kaliakis had such success in hunting that he was able to give a potlatch and bestow valuable presents of goat meat, goat grease, and woollen blankets. At this ceremony he took for himself the sisaok name, Laltalam-dimut, "The Copper One," because when returning from the west the raven had covered himself with copper, so that it seemed as if he were made of it.

During his lifetime, though whether before or after his potlatch, it is impossible to state, Kaliakis determined to obtain light for mankind, as at that time it was all semi-darkness, faintly illuminated by what resembled pale moonlight. He remembered that he had seen the sun in Alquntam's house, enclosed in a kind of sack, and he determined to steal it. So he again assumed the form of a raven and flew back aloft. Without allowing himself to be seen, he changed himself into a grain of dust and placed himself in a

cup from which Alquntam's daughter, Sixman-a, was about to drink. Noticing the speck of dirt, she blew it away. Then he changed to a hemlock needle, floating on the surface of the liquid, but she lifted it off. Undiscouraged, Raven became mud which she drank down, enabling him to enter her body. Sixman-a was greatly surprised to find herself pregnant, and so was her father. In course of time a boy was born, really Raven, though she knew it not. He grew with phenomenal rapidity, and within a few weeks was crawling around on the floor and, like a spoilt child, crying for playthings. Whatever his mother or grandmother gave him, he threw aside after a few minutes and cried the more; he was a fractious child. Looking up, Raven pretended to notice for the first time the sun, dimly gleaming from within its container as it hung from the roof of his grandfather's house. He cried and cried, almost choking himself; nothing would satisfy him, so at last his indulgent grandfather gave him the shining object though he was careful to pad the floor with soft bark. The happy child rolled the dimly glowing ball around on the soft covering for some time, but when the door was opened, he crawled outside with it, burst the container against the door-post, assumed raven form once more, and flew away, croaking derisively. Thus human beings received the boon of sunlight. Raven flew back to earth and again became Kaliakis. ⁵

serves as one of these lost relatives educating his relations about the mythical period of long ago.

The trickster stories are often very funny. No one wants to be laughed at like the trickster so the stories act in a proactive, powerful way to prevent wrongdoing and uphold the law. A person in error can save face by listening to the story, learning a lesson, yet not being singled out for wrongdoing.

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Harry Robinson



Harry Robinson was a highly respected storyteller from the Interior Salish people. Harry was born in 1900 and learned storytelling in the Okanagan language from his grandmother and other oldtimers. In later years, when more and more of his listeners understood only English, Harry became a skilled storyteller in English. Beginning in 1977, over a twelve-year period, an ethnographer named Wendy Wickwire tape-recorded over 100 stories told by Harry. Selected stories were later published in two books: *Write it on Your Heart: The Epic World of an Okanagan Storyteller*, from which the following is a short excerpt, and *Nature Power*. Harry's stories were transcribed as he told them; they are set in short lines that mirror as closely as possible his rhythms of speech. Harry died in 1990.

Oral Narratives

Oral narratives focus more on transmitting skills, news, and history than on cultural values. Stories that help young people learn skills and knowledge, stories that record family histories, and stories that record the history of communities are all examples of oral narratives. Of course, in addition to transmitting

Fur Traders

*They tell the Indian to get fur.
Put in trap and get fur.
Then they buy that and trade 'em.
They trade, you know.
They cheating the Indian at that time.*

*See the gun?
See this gun here?
See?
They put this gun,
They stand 'em on the ground like that.
Well, the gun is higher.
In those days the gun is long.*

*And he stand that gun.
Then they pile the hides from the ground.
Build 'em right up even with the gun.*

"All right, you take the gun. I take the hides."

*And the gun, it was only about \$30.
And then the hide, it was about \$900.*

*See?
They traded that way.
That was wrong.⁶*

information, narratives, like creation and trickster stories, aim to entertain.

The narratives that record the history of B.C.'s First Nations have become very important in establishing Aboriginal title to a nation's territories. Until recently, such narratives had not been accorded importance in the Euro-Canadian legal system. However, in the Supreme Court of Canada decision in the *Delgamuukw* case, the judge ruled that First Nations oral history must be accepted as evidence and given due weight in legal decisions. This ruling set an

important precedent for future court cases involving First Nations and caused Euro-Canadians to reassess the nature and significance of historical narratives.

Oral narratives have not been used as evidence in the writing of B.C. history either until recently. Today, however, historians of the Canadian West are beginning to use First Nations' traditional accounts of events to give a more balanced history of this province. When

Appellant

In law, an appellant is a person who appeals a decision to a higher court.

ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS

Delgamuukw v. The Queen

This extract is from the ruling by Supreme Court Judge Lamer in the *Delgamuukw v. The Queen* case. In this case, the chiefs of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en sued British Columbia for the right to their traditional territories. Although the lower court judge, Justice McEachern, refused to accept the oral histories of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en, Judge Lamer overruled him in the superior court.

[T]he Gitksan Houses have an "adaawk" which is a collection of sacred oral tradition about their ancestors, histories and territories. The Wet'suwet'en each have a "kungax" which is a spiritual song or dance or performance which ties them to their land. Both of these were entered as evidence on behalf of the appellants.

This appeal requires us to . . . adapt the laws of evidence so that the aboriginal perspective on their practices, customs and traditions and on their relationship with the land, are given due weight by the courts. In practical terms, this requires the courts to come to terms with the oral histories of aboriginal societies, which, for many aboriginal nations, are the only record of their past. . . . [I]n the case of title [and] pre-sovereignty occupation, those histories play a crucial role in the litigation of aboriginal rights.

Many features of oral histories would count against both their admissibility and their weight as evidence of prior events in a court

that took a traditional approach to the rules of evidence. The most fundamental of these is their broad social role not only "as a repository of historical knowledge for a culture" but also as an expression of "the values and mores of [that] culture" . . . The difficulty with these features of oral histories is that they are tangential to the ultimate purpose of the fact-finding process at trial—the determination of the historical truth. Another feature of oral histories which creates difficulty is that they largely consist of out-of-court statements, passed on through an unbroken chain across the generations of a particular aboriginal nation to the present day. These out-of-court statements are admitted for their truth and therefore conflict with the general rule against the admissibility of hearsay.

Notwithstanding the challenges created by the use of oral histories as proof of historical facts, the laws of evidence must be adapted in order that this type of evidence can be accommodated and placed on an equal footing with the types of historical evidence that courts are familiar with, which largely consists of historical documents. . . . [G]iven that most aboriginal societies "did not keep written records," the failure to do so would "impose an impossible burden of proof" on aboriginal peoples.⁷

CASE STUDY

Simon Fraser Meets the Nlaka'pamux

The following extracts show the oral recording by the Nlaka'pamux of explorer Simon Fraser's arrival at present-day Lytton, compared to Simon Fraser's own journal entries. Notice that some of the same events are referred to but they are interpreted very differently in the two accounts. Fraser's written version has usually been used as the primary source for reporting on this historical event.

The Encounter with Simon Fraser, as told by Elder Annie York

When Simon Fraser came down, of course the Lytton Indians were the first ones that viewed him. They seen this man—the Lytton Indians seen this man coming down in a canoe with his party.

Chief Sexpinhemx, he soon spotted it, and he says, "That's what my wife foretold, that that man is coming to this area." So he said to the Indians, "You Indians must never touch him, you musn't hurt him. See that white handkerchief what he has on his head?" He had a white handkerchief tied around as a band, and he's the headman in the canoe.

And when Sexpinhemx's servants spotted Simon Fraser, he camped down there somewhere around the other side of Cisco [Siska], somewhere around there somewhere—and that's where he forgot his axe, his little hatchet. Simon Fraser forgot his little hatchet. But Sexpinhemx said to his servants, "You boys must make it. You must run after that canoe and you must catch up to him and give him his axe." So they did—they caught up to him and gave him his axe.

Sexpinhemx told his men, "You must keep on going to Spuzzum and send the word down there that you must never hurt that man. That's the man of the Sun—he's the son of the Sun." So these Indians came

along and came to Spuzzum and they spread the news all around.

But my grandmother, my own grandmother, she was ten years old, and they lived down there, on the other side of Spuzzum Creek, right at the mouth, and there were several others. Paul Yugla [Yoala] was there too, and several other Indians were there. And this special man came in a canoe, and when they seen him they knew who he was. That was the man that was foretold to come along.

And they welcomed him, and they had a little dog. The Indians had fish broiled by their summer campfire in the spring. It was in springtime, and they had this camp fire. They were broiling their fish and they offered Simon Fraser the fish. He didn't like the fish. He kept pointing at the dog, this little dog. The Indians couldn't understand why he kept pointing at this little dog. He wanted the dog. Anyways, they gave him the dog—and what do you think he did with the dog? He killed the dog and ate it. That's what he had for supper, but the Indians didn't like that very much.

The next morning they cooked the fish for him. Then he took part of the fish and the chief came. Then they had their pipe—the pipe was always used. The chief flew his flag and ordered all his tribe, "You must never beat this new man." Because that was their traditional way of living. So Palak, he ordered all his people, "You must never hurt this man. You must welcome him."

And so they did and he stayed for a few days, down there by the cottonwood tree. There's a big cottonwood down there by Spuzzum Creek at the mouth, and that's where the camp was. And our great-grandmother was there, and our grandmother was ten years old, and she told us this story.

There was a special woman, she was related to our grandmother. This special woman, she was an entertainer—she was a singer and she was asked to sing this special song when Simon Fraser was leaving. So they had a sort of prayer, a special prayer for him, that he must be saved in his voyage drifting down the Fraser River. They warned him about Battleship Island. They told him that one of the rapids was very fierce. They told him in a way that he could understand. They pointed, and they did this to the water [she gestures, indicating the roughness of the water]. They made it rough and told him, "That's where he's going to go through." These people that was with Simon Fraser, they understood that it was rough.

So when he was leaving they had this party, and this lady singing a special song—a traditional song for him. So anyway, she sang this song, and Simon Fraser, when he was leaving, he seemed so sad over it. He had tears in his eyes when he was drifting away in his canoe, and this lady who sings the song, she says:

We'll meet again when the leaves are turning red and yellow. When our chief asks us to pray, we'll pray for you when the sun rises—and when the sun rises, we'll bow our heads towards it and we'll pray for you; and when our Chief takes his pipe and smokes his pipe, the smoke will drift down the river to follow you, and our prayers will descend with you and will accompany you; and when all the trees sway along the beach, the green leaves and the green boughs and all the emerald greens will sway around you and the silvery circle—the eddy, the pool—and you'll be safe when you go through this channel. And when we're in the woods, in the forest, we'll always pray for you, and our prayers will always remain with you, and all our

tribes from Spuzzum will always pray for you to return, and one day your flag will fly over us.

That's Chief Palak's farewell to Simon Fraser; and this lady, she's singing that song on behalf of Chief Palak.

Simon Fraser, when he first came here, of course this was the last of the Thompson Indians right here. And when he went over there—the Indians have a traditional way of guiding a person—so when he was leaving, they gave him blessings, and when he went through Yale and all the way down nobody done no harm to him. He was safe all the way through. I don't know how the chief found out that he was safe. He went and he told all of his people, and they prayed for him again and they sent their prayers to him.

The Indians took him as the son of the Sun. Well, you see, the Indians always thought the White people came from the Sun, and they revered the White people that way. I don't know why, but that's the way they used to look at it—in the beginning, anyway.⁸

The Account from Simon Fraser's Journal

June 19, 1808

At 8 A.M. set out, divided as yesterday. A mile below, the natives ferried us over a large rapid river [the Stein River]. I obtained, for an awl, a passage to the next village, a distance of three miles through strong rapids. The others who went by land met some of the Indians on the way who were happy to see them. This was the village of the Chief who had left us in the morning. We were told here that the road a head was very bad, and consequently we should meet with much difficulty for most part of the way.

The Indians of this village may be about four hundred souls and some of them appear very old; they live

among mountains, and enjoy pure air, seem cleanly inclined, and make use of wholesome food. We observed several European articles among them, viz. a copper Tea Kettle, a brass camp kettle, a strip of common blanket, and cloathing [sic] such as the Cree women wear. These things, we supposed, were brought from our settlements beyond the Mountains. Indeed the Indians made us understand as much.

After having remained some time in this village, the principal chief invited us over the river. We crossed, and He received us at the water side, where, assisted by several others, he took me by the arms and conducted me in a moment up the hill to the camp where his people were sitting in rows, to the number of twelve hundred; and I had to shake hands with all of them. Then the Great Chief made a long harangue, in course of which he pointed to the sun, to the four quarters of the world and then to us, and then he introduced his father, who was old and blind, and was carried by another man, who also made a harangue of some length. The old [blind] man was placed near us, and with some emotion often stretched out both his hands in order to feel ours.

The Hacamaugh [Thompson Indian] nation are different both in language and manners from their neighbours the Askettels [Askettihs; Lillooets]. They have many chiefs and great men, appear to be good orators, for their manner of delivery is extremely handsome. We had every reason to be thankful for our reception at this place; the Indians shewed us every possible attention and supplied our wants as much as they could. We had salmon, berries, oil and roots in abundance, and our men had six dogs. Our tent was pitched near the camp, and we enjoyed peace and security during our stay.

June 20

The Indians sung and danced all night. Some of our men, who went to see them, were much amused. With some difficulty we obtained two wooden canoes; the Indians, however, made no price, but accepted our offers. Shortly after a tumult arose in the camp. I was writing in the tent; hearing the noise, I went to the door and observed an elderly man running towards me, but [he] was stopped by some of the others who were making a loud noise. I enquired into the cause; they crowded around me. They [the] chief spoke and all was quiet. I, then, learned that Mr. Quesnel having walked in the direction of a canoe that was some distance on the beach, the Old man in question, who was the owner, thought he was going to lose it.

This affray over, we prepared for our departure. The Chief pointed out three elderly men who were to accompany us to the next station. In the mean time, I was presented with berries, roots and oil in abundance. Notwithstanding these tokens of friendship, the impression, which the late disturbance made on my mind, still remained. However kind savages may appear, I know that it is not in their nature to be sincere in their professions to strangers. The respect and attention, which we generally experience, proceed, perhaps, from an idea that we are superior beings, who are not to be overcome; at any rate, it is certain the less familiar we are with one another the better for us.⁹

oral traditions are written down as part of historical documents, they become oral history.

Family Narratives

Family narratives are one special type of story that records the history and traditions of a family. These are stories told within the family, and they concern family members and their skills and experiences. They may describe the participation of family members in community events like hunting, fishing, basket weaving, cooking, sewing, or feasts, or they may describe special skills a family member has in order to pass them along from generation to generation. Each story helps listeners place themselves and their family within a particular context of time and place.

Teaching Stories

The oral tradition is one of the most lasting and effective ways of educating First Nations children. The children learn how to act and behave through trickster stories. Through creation stories, they learn where they came from, and through family narratives they learn about their family's history. Older First Nations members teach the younger generation through stories that reflect people's experience. Some stories have specific purposes, and some transmit cultural knowledge in a more general way.

Learning in an oral setting is quite different from learning with a printed text to refer to. When knowledge is transmitted orally, you have to listen to the procedure and remember it. Imagine how difficult

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Shirley Sterling

This narrative by Shirley Sterling tells how she learned to make a fish weir from her mother.

In January of 1987 I asked my mother, Sophie, to help me build a Salish fish trap as a project for a night course on the Native peoples of British Columbia. As we walked around the chicken-house to gather red willow for the project, my mother started to tell me about how her grand-aunt Yetko had shown her how to build the trap when my mother was about six or eight years old. They were down at the Coldwater River one day gathering plants and making "spetsin" or twine. Sophie showed me how you take some strings from the plant and roll it on your knee to twirl it into twine. Then Sophie said Yetko thought it would be nice to have fresh trout for supper. She gathered red willow and started to make the fish trap right there. My mother watched for a while, then she began to hold sticks in place so Yetko could tie them. As they worked together, Yetko explained what she was doing, how she was doing it, and why she was doing it a certain way. She explained where it was best to place the trap so that fish would go into it, and how to hide the trap from the fisheries people who were patrolling the rivers and breaking up the

traps. They went up to Yetko's house and told her she was not allowed to make fish traps anymore.

At one point in the building of the fish trap, I stopped to watch my mother. As she was chopping the willow sticks and tying them together with black baling twine she was remembering Yetko and the day at the river gathering twine. My mother was chuckling at something Yetko said or did.

"Oh, she was a nice old lady," said Mum.

"How many fish traps have you made, Mum?" I asked.

"Two," she said.

"I mean in your entire lifetime?"

"Well," she said. "This one and the one I made with Yetko."

"You mean you remembered how to make a fish trap from that one time when you were a little girl and Yetko showed you? That's like sixty-five years ago!" I was thinking, wow, sixty-five years later, she remembered! ¹⁰

this is compared to modern life where things can be written down and referred to again and again.

The following are several examples of teaching stories.

- A master carver teaches his son or an apprentice how to carve a canoe out of a cedar tree. Each carver has his own unique way of carving because he was taught by a certain teacher. The son starts to learn to be a carver when he is very young. At first, all he does is watch and listen. The carver leads his son through the whole process slowly and methodically. The son is only taught a small part at a time. He is disciplined if he makes a mistake. He must practice until he has learned the skills. The master carver may have some songs
- that he sings while he carves. These songs are his and will be passed down to the next carver. The new carver is allowed to make his own canoe only after he has satisfied the master carver he can do it correctly.
- A grandmother sings her granddaughter a song. The song tells about the creation of their family. The grandmother has begun the process of teaching her granddaughter the family history. She will be the family historian (other First Nations call it the Oral Recorder). Throughout her life, the granddaughter will listen to stories, songs, and narratives repeatedly. She will listen until she can tell the stories word for word from memory. If she cannot remember the stories perfectly, she

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Jerry Eneas

This family narrative records one family's line of descent. It is told by Jerry Eneas, and was passed on to him by his mother, Sarah Bone McCraige.

Our great grandfather is Jim and his Indian name is Shwee-yaut-kin. He was mauled by a grizzly bear at Methow Valley during the year of 1867 or close to that year. The date of birth of Shwee-yaut-kin is unknown. The Methow Valley is in the north central area of Washington State of U.S.A.

Our great grandmother is Quin-ho-pet-sa. The date of birth and the date of death of Quin-ho-pet-sa is unknown.

After her first husband, Shwee-yaut-kin, Jim, died at the Methow Valley, Quin-ho-pet-sa was alone without a husband for about seven years. This is a respect to the death of Shwee-yaut-kin, Jim. After the time of seven years come to pass, the younger brother of Shwee-yaut-kin, Jim, and his name is Hila-ka-hun, go to Quin-ho-pet-sa, proposed for marriage.

When one young Indian man dies, it is an obligation of the brother to care for the wife and sons and daughters of the deceased young Indian man. This is a custom of some tribes of North America.

Hila-ka-hun and Quin-ho-pet-sa were united as husband and wife during the year of 1874. Hila-ka-hun and Quin-ho-pet-sa bore a son and his name is Ed, Hila-ka-hun. The date of birth and the date of death Hila-ka-hun is unknown.

Our great uncle, Ed, Hila-ka-hun died on April 15, 1961. Ed was about 86 years old at the time of his death. He was buried in the Indian cemetery near Nespelem, Washington.

Our grandfather is Narcisse Bone, Jim. During the early years of his life, from the childhood years to the young manhood years, Narcisse had a visitation from the Ten Wolves in the wilderness during the time of his vision quest. The Ten Wolves is the Indian mystic power of Narcisse Bone Jim. The Ten Wolves will chase prey, like the moose, the elk, the deer and kill the prey. The Ten Wolves will eat the meat from the carcass until all the meat is eaten and there is only "Bone" left of the carcass. And so, Narcisse Bone Jim got the Indian name "Bone" from what his Indian power, the Ten Wolves, can do in the wilderness.

Narcisse is the son of Shwee-yaut-kin, Jim and Quin-ho-pet-sa. He was seven years old when his father, Shwee-yaut-kin, Jim, was mauled and killed by a grizzly bear at Methow Valley.

Narcisse Bone Jim, was born during the year of 1860 or close to that year. He died on the day of June 1, 1924. Narcisse was about 65 years old at the time of his death and was buried on the Penticton Indian reserve British Columbia.¹¹

may be thought of as a liar. She must be accurate in her telling because she is the family book, so to speak. She is responsible for all the knowledge of the family. She is taught the family lineage, she knows the stories that tell about important events in the family's history, and she knows how family members got their names. If a family member, clan member, tribal member, or anyone else wants to know anything about her family, they will ask her.

- Hunters are hunting in the woods. There are no maps so they navigate by stars, landmarks, and waterways. Each of these landmarks has stories that describe the place, meaning, and the name of it. The hunters were taught by an older generation of hunters how to navigate in their territory. The stories also paint an outline of the borders of their

territories. The hunters know exactly where their territory begins and ends. They are taught to find game in their territory in different seasons. Once they have found game, the strategies of killing the game are also taught to them. The ritual that they go through has been taught to them orally. How they harvest the meat has been taught to them orally.

Oratory

Oratory plays a special role within First Nations culture. Oratory is the art of delivering a formal speech in a public place. It requires training and gives the speaker great dignity and respect. Many First Nations use a special form of language for such speeches. An orator's speaking reflects not only on him or herself,

but also on the people for whom he or she is speaking. The ability to state your position in a respectful way is important, particularly if you are speaking in opposition to someone else. First Nations people believe respect is a two-way street; this is reflected throughout their oral traditions.

First Nations people who use formal oratory are trained to do so. It is a great honour to speak for a family, clan, house, or tribe. The speaker, not wanting to misstate the position of the people, spends time listening to them. The art of listening in an oral society is very important. Listening to the people you are going to speak for, carefully preparing your speech, and being respectful to your audience are all part of the First Nations oral tradition.

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

A Nlaka'pamux Teaching Story

In this Nlaka'pamux teaching story, a boy is raised without knowing who he is, not knowing his family or where he came from. Shamed at being called a slave, he finds his family, assisted by the short-tailed mouse.

The Owl and the Boy

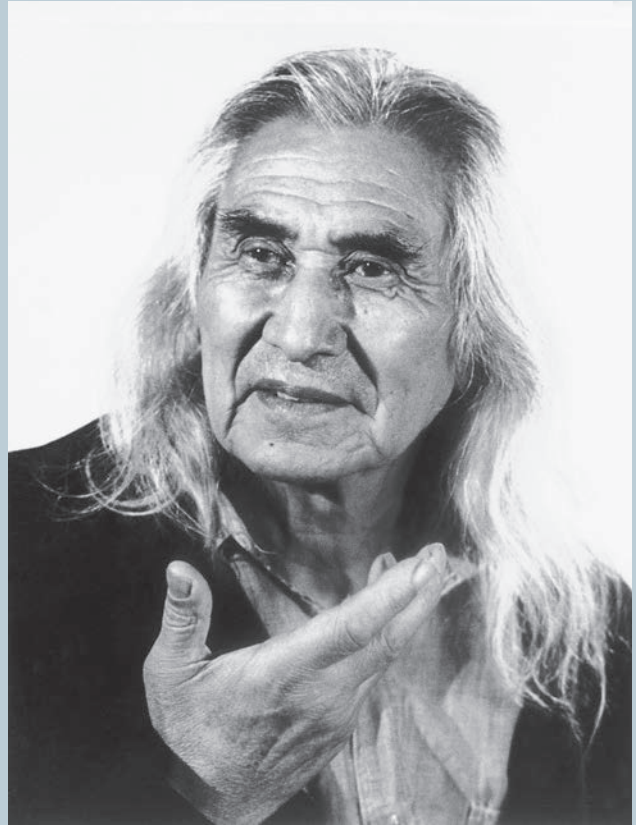
Formerly the Owl was a great hunter. At one time some people who were hunting happened to camp near his haunts in the mountains. They were accompanied by a boy continually making a noise and crying, causing them much annoyance. One evening his parents, intending to make him quiet said, "Owl, come and take him." That night Owl came and took him away. He reared him, and the boy eventually became like the Owl himself, a celebrated hunter. One day while hunting the boy heard the Owl shouting tci tem uL En ca'ut ("Go, towards my slave"), which he was calling to the deer. He felt very much ashamed and offended, and therefore repaired to the Short-tailed Mouse for advice. She told him, "The Owl is not your father: he stole you from your parents. Go back to your own country and people." She told him how and where to find his people, so he left the Owl and went back, taking up his abode with his own friends. ¹²

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Chief Dan George's Confederation Lament

Chief Dan George of the Burrard Indian Band in North Vancouver was a very gifted speaker. His speaking ability earned him several roles in Hollywood films and, more importantly, the respect of his peers. In this famous speech made in 1967, when Canada celebrated its first one hundred years, Chief Dan George critiqued that century from a First Nations perspective. This speech was made at the Empire Stadium in Vancouver, July 1st, 1967.

How long have I known you—Oh Canada? A hundred years? Yes—a hundred years—and many many years more. Today, when you celebrate your hundred years Oh Canada—I am sad for all the Indian people throughout the land. For I have known you when your forests were mine. When they gave me food and my clothing. I have known you—in your brooks and rivers—where your fish splashed and danced in the sun, and whose waters said “Come and eat of my abundance.” I have known you in the freedom of your winds and my spirit like your winds—once roamed this good land. But in the long hundred years since—the white man came—I have seen my spirit disappear just like the salmon as they mysteriously go out to sea. The white man's strange ways and customs—I could not understand—thrust down upon me until I could no longer breathe. When I fought to protect my home and my land—I was called a savage. When I neither understood nor welcomed this new way of life—I was called lazy. When I tried to rule my people—I was stripped of my authority. My nation was ignored in your history text books. We were less important in the history of Canada than the buffalo that roamed the plains. I was ridiculed in your plays and motion pictures—and when I drank your firewater—I got drunk—very, very drunk—and I forgot. Oh Canada—how can I celebrate with you this Centennial Year—this hundred years? Shall I thank you for the reserves that are left me of my beautiful forests? Shall I thank you for the canned fish of my river? Shall I thank you for the loss of my pride and authority—even amongst my own people? For the lack of my will to fight back? Shall I thank you for my defeat? NO—I must forget



what is past and gone. Oh God in Heaven—give me the courage of the olden chief. Let me wrestle with my surroundings. Let me once again as in the days of old—dominate my environment. Let me humbly accept this new culture and through it rise up and go on. Oh God—like the Thunderbird of old—we shall rise again out of the sea—we shall grasp the instruments of the white man's success—his education, his skill—and with these new tools I shall spirit my race into the proudest segment of your society; and before I follow the great chiefs that have gone before us—I shall see these things come to pass. I shall see our young braves and our chiefs sitting [in] the house of Law and Government—ruling and being ruled by the knowledge and freedom of our great land. So shall we shatter the barriers of our isolation. So shall the next hundred years be the greatest in the proud history of our tribes and nations.

PROFILE

Shirley Sterling

Shirley Sterling, whose Nlaka'pamux name is Seepeetza, was the first Nlaka'pamux person to earn a PhD. For her degree, she wrote a thesis titled "The Grandmother Stories: Oral Tradition and the Transmission of Culture." Shirley is also the author of the prize-winning children's book, *My Name is Seepeetza*, which is about her residential school experience. Shirley is currently working on a collection of stories with her sisters, and is compiling a collection of Elders' stories for publication. She has taught at the University of British Columbia in both the creative writing department and the Faculty of Education, and has served as the student co-ordinator for the Ts'kel (Golden Eagle) program.

Q: Do you consider yourself a storyteller?

A: Yes, I consider myself a storyteller in training and more importantly an oral traditionalist or "tradition bearer." I carry the traditions in my memory and pass them on by word of mouth.

Q: How much traditional content is in these stories?

A: It depends on the listener and the context.

Q: Are the stories in your thesis your own?

A: The stories in my thesis "came to me naturally." In other words I did not go interview people to obtain them. I did interview family Elders but not for the dissertation, for our family history on videocassette. Some of them were told to me only and were never repeated again. Since my mother, my cultural professor, had her stroke on Easter Monday it is unlikely that some of the stories in my thesis will come up again through her. Since I am the only one who knows some maybe I own them on behalf of my family. It would be my responsibility then to pass those stories on to the next generation of my family line. (Thank you for reminding me through these questions!)

Q: You wrote a children's novel, *My Name Is Seepeetza*, about the residential schools. Did it end up being what you started?

A: Do you mean did the process of writing about the residential school give closure to the experience? I think

it was one in a series of experiences. Remembering and articulating the experience was only the beginning. People reading the story is step two and does not necessarily include me. Answering questions about it and helping survivors in their healing process is another step.

Q: Your dissertation was based on the oral tradition and education curriculum?

A: My thesis topic was oral tradition; my area of specialization was curriculum and instruction.

Q: What part of the oral tradition did you look at?

A: I explored two types of oral tradition; *spetaki*, or creation stories, and *spilaxem*, narratives.

Q: What was the purpose of this study?

A: The purpose was to examine how they survived and through transmission provide pedagogies, philosophies, histories, and healing.

Q: Are you an oral recorder?

A: I am not an oral recorder. My sister Deanna is the family historian.

Q: What does the oral tradition mean to you?

A: Oral tradition gives me a connection to my ancestors and to my descendants and locates me within my culture group. It provides a philosophy of living and a world view, training me to live successfully and happily in my Nlaka'pamux society.

Q: As an educator, do you think that the oral tradition should be taught to the next generation?

A: As an educator I think Nlaka'pamux children need access to every Nlaka'pamux oral tradition that exists, and non-Nlaka'pamux children need access to some of the stories. The Nlaka'pamux Elders should be consulted before any of the *spetaki* are told. The *spetaki* should be told only by the tradition bearers, orally. Written stories and *spilaxem* may be told at any time for the benefit of all learners.

Q: Should our languages be taught to us along with the oral tradition?

A: Yes, we have the right to learn our first languages.

Q: What effect does telling the stories in English have on the oral tradition?

A: The stories are not the same in English. Children need to be taught to listen to the traditions properly. In Finland they teach their oral traditions and through them children learn to be proud of their culture and history. I think we can do that here also.

Q: Do you see the oral tradition as something from the past or as an ever-growing thing of the present?

A: Living traditions grow and change, yes.

Q: Do you think all the oral tradition should be written down?

A: It depends on the tradition bearers. Some Elders have asked educated non-First Nations people to write their stories down because they were afraid they would be lost when they died. They wanted their descendants to have access to the stories. Now there are many First Nations people who can do the same but with a better approach. They will, for instance, include the names of the storytellers and explain the context in which the story was written.

Q: To someone that does not understand the oral tradition, how would you explain it?

A: Oral tradition is a strength to us. Oral traditions make us laugh and heal us. They inform us of our heroes and our traditional activities. They connect us to our ancestors, our lands, our friends. They teach us to live successfully within our cultural groups, in harmony with nature. They inform us of the moral parameters we must not cross. The Elder tradition-bearers are Canada's national treasures.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The oral tradition is a rich, complex, and varied tradition that continues to be vitally important to many First Nations people. Each First Nation gives its own oral tradition a name in its own language, some of which were introduced in this chapter. As we have seen, stories, narratives, songs, and oratory are all integral parts of the oral tradition.

Elders have a respected place in their communities because they can pass on the oral tradition from previous generations. In recent years, many First Nations have taken steps to record stories from Elders, usually by tape recording and then transcribing the stories into writing. Once in print, these stories are no longer purely oral, but they may be referred to as oral literature. Shirley Sterling is a Nlaka'pamux woman who has collected stories from Elders. She summarizes the importance of the oral traditions by saying: "They connect us to our ancestors, our lands, our friends. They teach us to live successfully within our cultural groups, in harmony with nature. They inform us of the moral parameters we must not cross."

First Nations Literature

First Nations people became “part of” literature when the European explorers who first came to the shores of Vancouver Island wrote about them in captains’ logs and sailors’ journals. Subsequently, fur traders from the Hudson Bay Company and missionaries wrote about First Nations people in their journals and letters, as did miners of the gold rush era. After Confederation, government-appointed Indian Agents communicated to Ottawa about First Nations, and over many decades anthropologists collected and disseminated information on First Nations cultures.

All of these materials were written from a Eurocentric point of view, with little understanding of First Nations’ cultures. In the early years after contact, First Nations people had no knowledge of the material written about them and, consequently, no control over what was written or how it was used. Historically, and still today, non-First Nations writers have written about First Nations people, creating stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings. In recent years, well-intentioned academics who are knowledgeable and supportive of Aboriginal people’s political and cultural aspirations have established themselves as “Native Studies experts.” While much of their work has analytical value, it cannot express Aboriginal cultures and world views, nor can it express Aboriginal people’s perspective on their lived experience.

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, First Nations authors have developed a distinct body of literature written in their own Aboriginal voice. After years of marginalization and lack of access to publishers, First Nations writers in B.C. and throughout Canada are being published and

recognized for the significant contribution they make to world literature. This has been accomplished in part by having First Nations editors and publishers take control over the work of First Nations writers. More recently, both literary and mainstream publishers have begun allowing First Nations people to “tell their own story.”

Historical Overview

Beginning in the 1800s, anthropologists such as Franz Boas and James Teit collected stories from the oral traditions of First Nations people in British Columbia. Although they sometimes used First Nations people to collect material for their compilations, they published these oral narratives without permission from the First Nations who owned the stories. The *Mythology of the Bella Coola Indians*, published by Boas in 1898, and *Mythology of the Thompson Indians*, published by Teit in 1912, are examples of traditional First Nations literature published by anthropologists.

Métis poet Pauline Johnson, who was born on the Six Nations reserve in Ontario but lived in Vancouver during the later part of her life, published a collection of Aboriginal origin myths, *Legends of Vancouver*, in 1911. These stories were told to her by Chief Joe Capilano of the Squamish Nation, and this book was one of several “as-told-to” accounts of traditional literature that became popular.

Christine Quintasket (1888–1936), an Interior Salish woman who lived in what is now Washington state, is known as the first Native American woman to publish a novel. In 1927 she published *Co-Ge-We-A, The Half-Blood*, using the pen name Mourning Dove. She went on to write two other books: *Coyote Stories*,

published in 1933, and *Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography* (edited by Jay Miller and re-issued in 1990).

Quintasket experienced things like the roundup of the last buffalo, which was the subject of her first book. She also attended a residential school that attempted to take her mother tongue of Okanagan from her. Her writing reflects the upheaval that First Nations communities were in at the time. Towards the end of her life she became a strong advocate for First Nations rights and justice.

One criticism of Quintasket's writing is that it was strongly influenced by non-First Nations editors, who insisted she write for a popular audience. Nonetheless, she made an important contribution to First Nations literature.

The first collection of stories published by an Aboriginal person in B.C. appeared in 1967: *Son of Raven, Son of Deer*, by George Clutesi. Clutesi was a Nuu-chah-nulth, born in 1905 in Port Alberni and educated in a reserve school. He worked for 20 years as a pile driver and took up drawing and writing while recovering from an injury. He went on to write *Potlatch* in 1969 and *Stand Tall, My Son* in 1990, and became a lecturer who taught Native culture and wrote textbooks for Canadian schools. Clutesi won the British Columbia Centennial Award in 1959, the Canada Centennial Medal in 1967, and the Order of Canada in 1973.

Chief James Sewid, a Kwakwaka'wakw leader who played a key role in encouraging the revival of the potlatch and traditional arts, wrote an autobiography titled *Guests Never Leave Hungry*, which was published in 1969. His account was edited by James Spradley, and was one of numerous life histories by First Nations people written in collaboration with non-First Nations writers. Other examples of this genre are *The Days of Augusta* (1973) by Secwepemc elder Mary Augusta Tappage, written with Jean Speare, and Chief Dan George's *My Heart Soars* (1974). This

genre of co-authored books is still getting published; a contemporary example is the 1988 book *Stoney Creek Woman: Sai'k'uu Ts'eke*, the story of Mary John as told to Bridget Moran.

Issues in First Nations Publishing

Publishing is the process of taking written material and making it available to the public in the form of a book, magazine, newspaper, newsletter, journal, or on the world wide web. By signing a contract, a publishing company acquires the right to edit and publish material by an author in return for paying the author a fee or royalty. Because publishing companies in Canada have been predominantly controlled by Euro-Canadians, Aboriginal writers have often encountered difficulty in getting published. For many years publishers gave preference to non-Aboriginal people writing about First Nations, which led to inaccurate and sometimes racist portrayals of First Nations cultures and communities. When First Nations writers did get published by mainstream publishers, they often had to give up control over the content and the grammatical structure of their writing.

In the past few decades First Nations writers have struggled for editorial control over what is published about First Nations. In some cases they have found that publishing with small presses, rather than mainstream publishers, has allowed them more editorial control. However, it has also meant that their books often did not get reviewed in major newspapers and did not reach a wide readership. Some First Nations writers have chosen to publish only with an Aboriginal publisher; in B.C. there is only one, Theytus Books. Recently, First Nations writers such as Thomas King, Tomson Highway, and Eden Robinson have been published by mainstream publishers, and their work has been widely and positively reviewed. This marks a new era in First Nations literature.

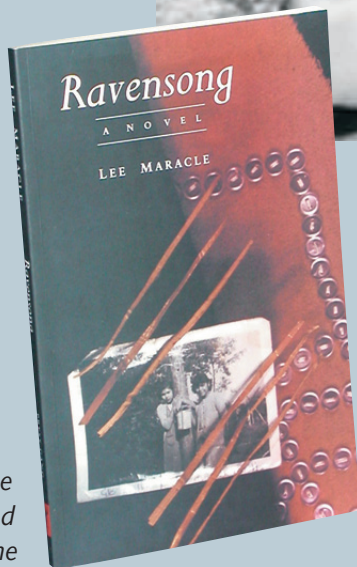
FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Lee Maracle

Lee Maracle is a gifted orator and an acclaimed First Nations writer and poet who has taught writing at the En'owkin International School of Writing and at Canadian and U.S. universities. The following is the opening passage from her novel *Ravensong*.

From the depths of the sound Raven sang a deep wind song, melancholy green. Above, the water layered itself in stacks of still green, dark to light. The sound of Raven spiralled out from its small beginning in larger and larger concentric circles, gaining volume as it passed each successive layer of green. The song echoed the rolling motion of earth's centre, filtering itself through the last layer to reach outward to earth's shoreline above the deep. Wind changed direction, blowing the song toward cedar. Cedar picked up the tune, repeated the refrain, each lacy branch bending to echo ravensong. Cloud, seduced by the rustling of cedar, moved sensually to shore. The depth of the song intensified with the high-pitched refrain of cedar. Cloud rushed faster to the sound's centre. Cloud crashed on the hillside while Raven began to weep.

Below cedar a small girl sat. She watched for some time the wind playing with cloud. Above, she felt the presence of song in the movement of cedar's branches. She surrendered to movement, allowing the sound to spiral her into reverie. Her



The cover art on Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* is by First Nations artist Marianne Nicholson.

body began to float. Everything non-physical inside her sped up. The song played about with the images inside. She stared blankly at some indefinable spot while the river became the sea, the shoreline shifted to beach she couldn't remember seeing, the little houses of today faded. In their place stood the bighouses of the past. Carved double-headed sea serpents guarded the entrance to the village of wolf clan.¹

Contemporary Aboriginal Literature in B.C.

In the 1970s, Aboriginal people started to write their own accounts of their history and place in Canadian society. Among this new era of authors were Lee Maracle (Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel, 1975); Howard Adams (Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View, 1975); and Maria Campbell (Halfbreed, 1973).

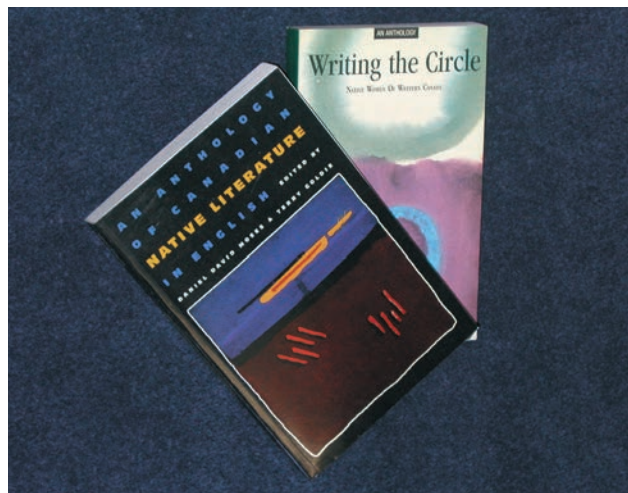
In the 1980s First Nations women writing about their lives began to get published. Among them were Jeannette Armstrong (Slash, 1985); Beatrice Culleton (In Search of April Raintree, 1983); Lee Maracle (I Am Woman, 1988); Joan Crate (Breathing Water, 1989); and Ruby Slipperjack (Honour the Sun, 1989). These and many other First Nations writers developed unique narrative voices influenced by such things as oral tradition, metaphors with traditional cultural meanings, and characters with transformational powers that shift through time periods. Writers such as Jeannette Armstrong and Lee Maracle sometimes use “rez” language, a non-standard form of English that follows the rhythms and patterns of speech in their



■ Métis poets Gregory Scofield and Marilyn Dumont, along with Okanagan poet and fiction writer Jeannette Armstrong, published acclaimed books of poetry in the 1990s.

First Nations communities. Because they are writing for First Nations people, they use language and grammar that is familiar to their primary audience.

In 1990 the En'owkin Center published the first issue of the journal *Gatherings*, which offered a sampling of current Aboriginal literature. *Gatherings* continues to be published each year, offering many First Nations writers their first opportunity to get published. During the 1990s a number of non-First Nations presses began to publish First Nations writers, achieving wider distribution and critical acclaim for First Nations books. Among the First Nations authors published during the 1990s were Shirley Sterling, Lee Maracle, Richard Van Camp, Jeannette Armstrong, and Gerry William. Two compilations of an Okanagan Elder's oral storytelling were also published around this time: Harry Robinson's *Write it on Your Heart* (1989) and *Nature Power* (1992). Annie York wrote *They Write Their Dream on the Rock Forever* (1993), and Darwin Hanna and Mamie Henry edited *Our Tellings: Interior Salish Stories of the Nla7kapmx People* (1995). This collection of oral narratives is particularly important because it was compiled and analyzed by Nlaka'pamux people and gives voice



■ Two anthologies of First Nations literature, both published by university presses in 1992, illustrate that the academic world had become interested in First Nations literature.

PROFILE

Eden Robinson

Eden Robinson is Heiltsuk on her mother's side and Haisla on her father's side. She grew up in Haisla territory near Kitamaat, B.C. She now lives in Toronto and is a full-time writer. Her sister, Carla Robinson, is a CBC news anchor.

Eden has a BFA in creative writing from the University of Victoria and a MFA in creative writing from the University of British Columbia. Her first book, *Traplines*, won the Winifred Holtby Prize for best first book published in the Commonwealth. The New York Times selected *Traplines* as an "Editor's Choice" and a notable book of the year.

Her latest book, *Monkey Beach*, represents a real success story for First Nations creative writers. Eden was nominated for both the Giller Book Prize and the Governor General's Award, the highest awards in Canadian literature. *Monkey Beach* won the Ethel Wilson fiction prize in 2001.

Q: Tell me about your experience in high school. Were you part of a First Nations community at your high school? Were you a good student? When did you know that you wanted to go to university?

A: The village (short for "Kitamaat Village," the Haisla reserve 11 km from the townsite) had an elementary school, but once you reached high school, you had very few options. High school in Kitimat meant going to Mount Elizabeth Secondary School.

There was a mix of different cultures—Portuguese, Italian, Swedish, etc.—because Alcan Aluminum hired people from outside of Canada. The Natives mostly hung out together, and I had a tight circle of cousins.

Throughout high school, I was completely focused on becoming an astronaut, and only switched to writing when NASA started using shuttles, which I found less romantic.

I was sulky, surly, and moody. Dressed in black a lot. Stayed in my room and wrote sad poetry. Come to think of it, I think I was doomed to be a writer.

Q: Tell me about your experience at the University of Victoria and with the creative writing department. Was there a First Nations community?

A: The university was a shock. Victoria was a shock. It



Eden Robinson's widely acclaimed books illustrate what a significant contribution First Nations writers are making to world literature.

was hard getting used to the noise and smell and people. There was a Native student group on campus, but their interests were primarily political and I was more interested in being social.

At the time, there were no other Native students in the department and sometimes it felt awkward. Most of the time, I was just trying to keep my grades decent so I could move on to the next level of fiction workshops.

Q: What was your experience like at UBC, getting a Master's degree in Fine Arts?

A: At UBC, I felt like I was coming into my own style, and I was lucky enough to find a mentor. The creative writing department had a few Natives, but they were in poetry and film studies. My mother's family is from Bella Bella, and most of them have moved down to Vancouver, so it was easier than UVic in that I had a stronger support network.

Q: What did you learn about your culture at these institutions? Did these universities have faculty to teach

you a First Nations writing style?

A: None of them taught anything about Haisla or Heiltsuk cultures. The courses I took were general and academic—treaty history, art history, etc. Mostly they taught me that we need more Native non-fiction writers.

My mentor was great. He was open to different styles of writing. Some of the profs weren't open to any style but their own, and you had to write like them or get bad grades. Having taught creative writing now, I can see how hard it is not to impose your own style on your students, but I also appreciate the profs I had who could reach beyond themselves.

Q: What makes your work First Nations writing? What makes your writing different from non-First Nations writing?

A: I don't know what makes my writing First Nations. I know I write with my own bent, and I hope that someone reading my writing can tell that it's mine just by my style. I'm interested in writing about families, the dynamics of families, and some of these dynamics are unique to First Nations cultures, and more specifically, to Haisla and Heiltsuk cultures.

Q: Does your writing connect at all with the oral tradition of the Haisla and Heiltsuk people?

A: Oral stories have fluid, impermanent construction techniques as opposed to written traditions, which are fixed, static. Melding the two is tricky, and the risk you run when translating from one medium to another is that it is very easy to kill the magic and wonder of a story. A moving oral story can sound hokey when it's written. A lovely written piece can be dull and confusing when told out loud.

Q: Can you give an example of hearing stories told when you were younger that might illustrate this?

A: Take any creation myth. Listen to a storyteller, or several storytellers, and notice how the story's movement changes from telling to telling, from audience to audience. When the same creation myth is written down, inevitably there will be some aspects that are left out to fit the written medium. The written version will be taken as the true version, and all the other versions tend to die out, or be compared unfavourably against the written version.

Q: Would you recommend going to the En'owkin International School of Writing for a First Nations writer as opposed to going to university?

A: University compresses the writing apprenticeship from about a ten-year period to a four-year period. You can learn writing on your own, but it takes longer. On the other hand, you really are your own boss and you follow your interests.

Those interested in going to university for writing should do their research. Some universities have a strong practical bent—UVic and Simon Fraser teach you how to survive on your writing skills, but UBC is completely focused on writing. Richard Van Camp said he thoroughly enjoyed En'owkin, and I'd say if he's an example of their teaching, the school must be very good.

I think if I had a chance to do it over, I'd do what Richard did, and spend the first two years at En'owkin and then spend two years at Simon Fraser. The more writing schools you go to, the better. You are exposed to more styles and have a broader range of choices.

Q: What advice would you have for a Grade 12 First Nations student who aspired to be a writer?

A: Write. All the advice and support in the world is useless if you don't put your butt in the chair and write. Don't worry about spelling and grammar—those come in time—just write about what you are interested in.

Your passion is your best guide. If you're enthusiastic about something, it shows through in your writing.

Q: Do you think there is anything unique about your family that led both you and your sister Carla to become "famous" in your own ways?

A: All of us—my brother, my sister, and myself—had an enormous pool of support to draw on. Even more important than material goods, we had encouragement to follow our ambitions without regard for the limitations of racism, poverty, etc. We were always told if you want something, then work for it, live it, breathe it. You hope success comes, but in the end it doesn't matter. Dream big dreams and let them fill your life with passion.

to Elders' cultural knowledge that is valuable to younger First Nations people. The editors described the purpose of the collection as "to take charge of our own cultural revitalization."

Also during the 1990s, a number of Métis writers and poets living in B.C. published books with literary presses, including Marilyn Dumont, Joanne Arnott, Marie Annharte Baker, and Gregory Scofield. After having won widespread recognition for several books of poetry, Scofield went on to publish an autobiography, *Thunder Through My Veins*.

First Nations scholars also re-wrote B.C. history. Douglas Cardinal and Jeannette Armstrong co-authored *The Native Creative Process* (1991), and a number of editors working with the Okanagan Indian Education Resource Society wrote *We Get Our Living Like Milk from the Land* (1994), which tells a different

history of the Okanagan people. Bill Cohen edited *Stories and Images About What the Horse Has Done for Us* (1998), which challenges the Euro-Canadian view that the horse came over with the Spanish. Joanne Drake-Terry wrote *Same as Yesterday* (1989), which describes the Stl'atl'imx's history since first contact.

Several First Nations accounts of residential school experiences in B.C. have been published, including a recent collection edited by Agness Jack, titled *Behind Closed Doors: Stories from the Kamloops Indian Residential School*. In 2001 the first anthology of Métis drama was published, *DraMétis: Three Métis Plays*.

Cultural Appropriation

To appropriate something is to take possession of it, especially unlawfully, for oneself. In Canada, since the mid-1980s, the term cultural appropriation has

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Speaking on Cultural Appropriation

Jeannette Armstrong

Jeannette Armstrong is the author of the novels *Slash* and *Whispering in Shadows*. She has also published a book of poetry, *Breath Tracks*, and several books for children, as well as co-editing numerous anthologies. She has publicly spoken about cultural appropriation.

We as Native writers suffer because of the kind of cultural imperialism that's taking place when non-Native people speak about Native ceremony and Native thinking, Native thought, Native lifestyle, Native world view and speak as though they know what they are speaking about. That's appropriation of culture because no one can experience and know what I know and experience or what my grandmother knows or what Lee [Maracle] knows and feels, and she can speak with her own voice and so can I and so could my grandmother. ²

Lee Maracle

The truth is that yesterday, my grandmother and I thought little of such things as copyright, royalties and exploitation. We were a desperate people facing extinction whose first consideration was the land, along with the laws and sacred ways of our people that would protect the land from the fate this country had destined for us. Under duress, we parted with our stories in the hope that in the wake of our annihilation, our land would survive intact. We have survived. Not only did we survive but we speak our own language, understand our ways and write in English. To continue appropriating our stories and misusing them in the name of 'freedom of imagination' is just so much racism. My old typewriter and I sit in my bedroom where the magic of Trickster lives. We object to the theft of our stories and the distortion of our lives. Those who would hide behind the lie of censorship to justify thievery and dishonesty don't hold the same terror for us. Raven and I will have the last laugh. ³

referred primarily to non-Aboriginal writers using First Nations' beliefs, customs, ceremonies, and sacred stories without permission, incorporating them into their work in ways they were not intended to be used. For example, W.P. Kinsella, a Euro-Canadian author of short stories and novels, writes about characters who live on a fictional Indian reserve. His writing stereo-types contemporary First Nations people. He

writes as if he understands First Nations culture and has the authority to write about it, when in fact he does not. Readers who don't have personal experience of First Nations cultures may believe that books by self-defined "white experts" give accurate portrayals of First Nations culture. The misinformation and distortion in such books perpetuates stereotypes. Another problem is that if there are more books about

CASE STUDY

En'owkin International School of Writing

The En'owkin Center is located on the Penticton Indian reserve in the Okanagan region of B.C. It houses Theytus Books, the En'owkin International School of Writing, and the facilities for the En'owkin Fine Arts certificate program. The En'owkin Center has graduated 150 students with certificates. It is housed in a beautifully crafted building and provides a wonderful space for young First Nations writers to hone their writing skills.

The En'owkin International School of Writing (EISW) started up after the acquisition of Theytus Books by the En'owkin Center. The school's mandate is to teach First Nations people to use their "Native voice" in storytelling and creative writing. "We wanted to promote Aboriginal rights and articulate people in promoting these ideas," says Don Fiddler, executive director of the En'owkin Center. "The school also allows the students to write freely to develop these tools. Once their voices are developed, we (Theytus) hope we can publish them."

The En'owkin International School of Writing awards the Indigenous Fine Arts Certificate jointly with the University of Victoria. What was the Native Indian Creative Writing Certificate was expanded to include more fine arts. "The next logical step was to promote Indigenous arts, language, and culture. We took this step

by expanding the certificate program to include these elements. Students can now take classes to expand their abilities in these arts and not just be limited to creative writing," says Don Fiddler. "In the promotion of Indigenous rights, the arts have to evolve along with everything else." First Nations communities have a great need for this type of education.

Jeannette Armstrong is the director of the En'owkin International School of Writing. She is an educator and an accomplished writer who has had several books published. She is also an artist and sculptor and has taught in the Indigenous Fine Arts certificate program.

Jeannette is traditionally trained in the ways of the Okanagan Nation. She brings this perspective to the classroom every day. She explains that westernized schools teach First Nations people how to survive in Canadian society, but First Nations people also have a responsibility to learn their traditional ways. The En'owkin Center is a venue where First Nations people can develop their narrative voices while learning the ways of their people.

Q: What would you say to an aspiring First Peoples writer?

A: I would say that it isn't about English, it isn't about grammar, it isn't about

getting these right. It is about the story and the need for the story to be told. If you are thinking about correcting technicalities then you are not writing.

Q: How do you think this can be best taught to the First Peoples students? Does it have to be taught by First Peoples instructors?

A: I think only First Nations or First Peoples, I prefer to use that word, can deliver indigenous perspectives or First Peoples perspectives. I don't think a non-First Nations person can deliver that, though they can deliver education, and I think I have to really take a hard line on that.

At the En'owkin International School of Writing First Nations instructors teach First Nations students, allowing them to develop their creative minds for themselves and for others.

First Nations written by non-Aboriginal writers than there are books by First Nations writers, the real voices get drowned.

Today many First Nations writers believe that any non-First Nations person who uses First Nations' materials and knowledge from an authoritarian position, without their permission and for personal gain, is guilty of appropriation. With the number of First Nations writers, storytellers, poets, and

playwrights producing work in Canada today, First Nations people believe there is no justification for writers outside the culture appropriating First Nations themes and issues. This does not mean that white writers should not have First Nations characters in their fiction but that they should not interpret or evaluate the spiritual beliefs of First Nations cultures without specific approval from the people to whom those beliefs belong.

MÉTIS VOICES

Marilyn Dumont

Marilyn Dumont, a descendant of Gabriel Dumont, is originally from northeastern Alberta but currently lives and writes in Vancouver. She has a MFA from the University of B.C. and has published two books of poetry, as well as contributing to many anthologies. The following poem is from her first book, *A Really Good Brown Girl*.

Letter to Sir John A. Macdonald

*Dear John: I'm still here and halfbreed,
after all these years
you're dead, funny thing,
that railway you wanted so badly,
there was talk a year ago
of shutting it down
and part of it was shut down,
the dayliner at least,
'from sea to shining sea,'
and you know, John,
after all the shuffling us around to suit the settlers,
we're still here and Metis.*

*We're still here
after Meech Lake and
one no-good-for-nothin-Indian
holdin-up-the-train,
stalling the 'Cabin syllables /Nouns of settlement,
/...steel syntax [and] /The long sentence of its
exploitation' (')*

*and John, that goddamned railroad never made
this a great nation,
cause the railway shut down
and this country is still quarreling over unity,
and Riel is dead
but he just keeps coming back
in all the Bill Wilsons yet to speak out of turn or
favour
because you know as well as I
that we were railroaded
by some steel tracks that didn't last
and some settlers who wouldn't settle
and it's funny we're still here and calling ourselves
halfbreed. ⁴*

(') F. R. Scott, "Laurentian Shield."

CASE STUDY

Theytus Books

Theytus Books started in Nanaimo under the direction of Randy Fred, of the Alberni Native band. After publishing just four books, the publishing house ran into funding problems. Randy Fred had a choice to either declare bankruptcy or find another First Nations organization to take over the business.

At that time Randy had been in the process of negotiating to publish material from the Okanagan Indian Curriculum Project (OICP). The OICP mandate was to write curriculum material to bring more “Aboriginal voice” into the education system. By having First Nations authors write curriculum, First Nations could gain more control over what was taught to their children. Don Fiddler explained: “The OICP had been looking into venues to publish their own materials. They saw taking over Theytus Books as a wonderful opportunity.”

The Okanagan Tribal Council, representing six bands, wanted to buy the press, but not on its own. The Nicola Valley Indian Administration, representing five bands, was approached and, after several months of negotiating, the two organizations decided to buy 50% each of Theytus Books. The deal that brought Theytus Books to Penticton also brought Randy Fred, who retained a position as manager.

Over the next few years Theytus concentrated on publishing the curriculum materials of the OICP. These materials were primarily for Grades K–12; some adult education materials were also published. The OICP completed its project and now the Okanagan Learning Institute continues to do work in developing educational curriculum.

Greg Young-Ing has been the Managing Editor of Theytus Books for over ten years. Greg is from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation in Manitoba. He is an accomplished writer, photographer, and editor who has been published on numerous occasions. Greg’s thesis for his Master of Publishing degree at Simon Fraser University created a template for a style guide for publishing and editing First Nations material. The style guide includes guidelines to present First Nations in a respectful manner. Greg describes the impetus for this project: “In the course of doing editorial work at Theytus, I was constantly encountering editorial problems that had to do specifically with Aboriginal subject matter and text written by Aboriginal people, and a lot of that comes from the fact that there is a 500-year plus history of writing in English about Aboriginal people that was undertaken without any consultation or input from Aboriginal people. A lot of assumptions, terminology, ways of talking about Aboriginal people, terms with heavy baggage, terms that are inappropriate have been practised over the last 500 years, and now that Aboriginal writers are starting to write in English in the past 25–30 years, we were just encountering editorial problems. I have come across hundreds and hundreds of editorial problems and inconsistencies in the text about Aboriginal people and in editing manuscripts at Theytus, so we really needed to have a style guide.”

At Theytus Books, Greg works under the directors of the En’owkin Center. “Theytus Books is all Aboriginal owned and staffed, and publishes only Aboriginal authors. We are trying to

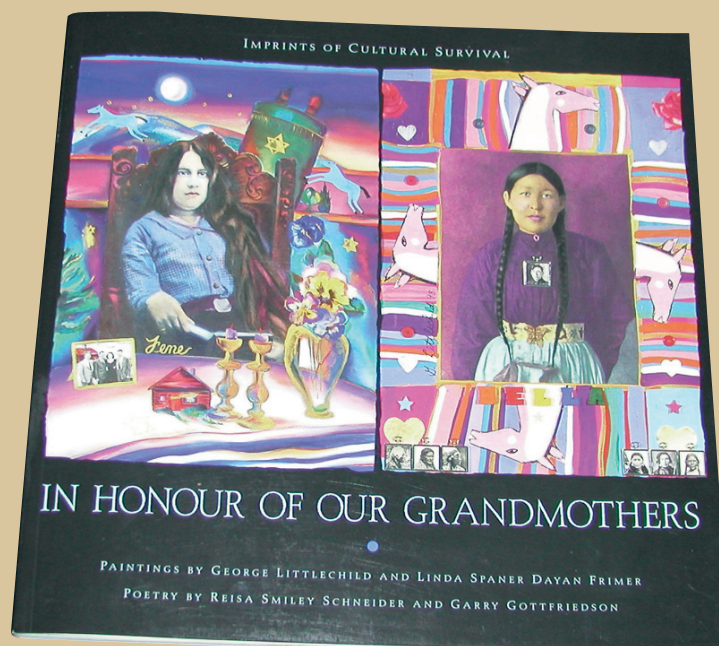
promote the Aboriginal voice, develop and nurture Aboriginal authors and Aboriginal literatures, and promote Aboriginal perspectives on issues. We are up to doing ten books a year and that’s the most we can handle. There are 500–600 books published every year by Canadian publishers, so in terms of demographic ratio, Aboriginal people are underrepresented.”

Theytus is a Salishan word that means “preserving for the sake of handing down.” The name was chosen to symbolize the goal of documenting Aboriginal cultures and world views through books. Theytus has published between 90 and 95 books over the last 20 years. The best-selling book is *Slash*, Jeannette Armstrong’s first novel, which came out in 1985. It has sold over 13,000 copies, qualifying it as a Canadian bestseller. In the first ten years Theytus was primarily a regional publishing company, selling books in B.C. and a little bit in Alberta; in the second decade it expanded and became more of a national Aboriginal publisher.

Theytus Books is in the same building as the En’owkin Center but they are distinct, separate entities. Greg explains: “The idea behind that was that the writing school would nurture the emerging Aboriginal authors and give them the skill and inspiration and the instruction that they need to write. The authors could be published through Theytus if they obtained a certain level of skill in their writing. We also publish an annual journal of literature called *Gatherings*. We would give them the

Continued

In Honour of our Grandmothers is a magnificent full-colour book of artwork and poetry published by Theytus Books. The art on the cover is by Linda Spaner Dayan Frimer (left) and George Littlechild. Littlechild is a member of the Plains Cree Nation and is internationally acclaimed as an artist.



opportunity to get published through Gatherings and build up their confidence. Theytus has published probably about 100 students in the Gatherings journal, many of them published for the first time. In terms of individual books by authors, Theytus has published books by two of the students so far. Seven other students from the writing school have gone on to publish individual books with other presses."

Greg outlines the fundamental reasons for having a First Nations publisher: "I think the ideal situation for promoting Aboriginal voices is to have Aboriginal editors and publishers working with the literature and with the authors. A lot of Aboriginal authors have had experiences with non-Aboriginal editors and publishers that have tried to

water down their work or tried to change it and over-edited it because they don't understand the gist behind the literature. I think the most culturally authentic way to express the Aboriginal voice is to have Aboriginal editing and publishing."

He outlines what kinds of manuscripts Theytus is interested in: "In terms of our literature, we are looking for something that is breaking new ground in the emerging discipline of Aboriginal literatures. We're looking for new ideas, new subject matter, new content, something that breaks the rules a bit, that's a little bit on the edge. In terms of our non-fiction, we have a philosophical mandate that we sort of lean toward the hard line on Aboriginal rights and title and any other Aboriginal issues. Basically our political philosophy is that we don't

believe in selling out any part of our rights, our land. We believe in getting compensated for any of the damages that have been done to First Nations people, so that's sort of the philosophy that we are promoting, and we are not really on any philosophical level with certain sectors of the Aboriginal community who believe in compromising and trying to work with government, taking a little less just to get some sort of agreement."

CHAPTER SUMMARY

For the first hundred and fifty years after contact, First Nations people were “written about” by Europeans and Euro-Canadians. They had no control over what was written about them or how it was used, and often the written records were not accurate. Because of the attempts by the federal government to “take the Indian out of Indians” by forcing First Nations children into residential schools, almost no books by First Nations people were published until the middle of the twentieth century. George Clutesi’s *Son of Raven, Son of Deer* was a groundbreaking book of short stories published in 1967. From the

1970s to the present, there has been a flourishing of literature by First Nations and Métis writers in B.C. The En’owkin International School of Writing and Theytus Books have had an important role in fostering a distinctive Aboriginal voice in literature. Today, B.C. Aboriginal writers such as Lee Maracle, Gregory Scofield, Jeannette Armstrong, and Eden Robinson are respected and valued for their contribution to world literature. First Nations writers are claiming their right to tell their own stories. They are the experts on First Nations voice.

First Nations Visual and Decorative Arts

First Nations art is rooted in a spiritual relationship with the natural world. In traditional First Nations cultures, artistic expression was not a distinct discipline as it has become in many cultures today. It was integrated into the daily and spiritual life of the people. Among First Nations, art is part of the fabric of life, finding expression in utilitarian objects of daily life and in sacred objects of ritual and religion.

Historically, much of the art throughout B.C. was based on shamanism. The visual form was a way to communicate with supernatural or spiritual worlds, or to try to bring balance and harmony between the natural world and the human world. Visual art is also

an important way for people to identify their ancestors and acknowledge their history, as well as displaying wealth or status with treasured objects such as totem poles or button blankets.

Today First Nations artists embrace both their traditional cultures and their particular artistic vision in contemporary society. They create art for their people to use in feasts and ceremonial ways, but they also create works of beauty for collectors to purchase. Some artists follow the rules and forms of artists before them, creating finely crafted baskets, robes, or masks. Others take the ancient forms and transform them into something unique to our time. But whatever they



■ If you look at a carved box as a utilitarian object that tells something about the life of the user, you might call it an artifact. If you also appreciate its beauty, its form, and design, you will call it art.

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

Hahl Yee, Doreen Jensen, Gitxsan artist

Hahl Yee, Doreen Jensen, is a Gitxsan carver who belongs to the House of Geel of the Fireweed Clan from Kispiox on the Skeena River. She was trained in the traditions of her family and clan through the oral tradition. She learned the history of the Gitxsan people, and understood the songs, dances and art forms that expressed it. She describes herself as a traditional Gitxsan artist, which comprises many roles: “teacher, historian, community organizer, mother, grandmother and political activist as well as visual artist.”

As a young adult Jensen committed herself to working for a better understanding of First Nations people through their art. She was a founding member of the 'Ksan Association that operates the 'Ksan Historical Village and Museum and the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art. Her influence has spread far beyond the shores of the Skeena River, however. In 1983, she curated “Robes of Power: Totem Poles on Cloth,” a major exhibition at the UBC Museum of Anthropology that displayed the beauty and significance of the ceremonial robes sometimes known as button blankets. She also co-wrote the accompanying book.

In 1992, the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas, Doreen Jensen was invited to speak at the opening of an exhibit at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull, Quebec, called “Indigena: Perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on Five Hundred Years.” Here is an excerpt of her talk, which describes art history from a First Nations point of view.

In my language, there is no word for “Art.” This is not because we are devoid of Art, but because Art is so powerfully integrated with all aspects of life, we are replete with it. For the sake of brevity and clarity, I will use the word “Art” tonight.

This exhibition and forum, “Indigena,” asks us to reflect on the impact of European colonization on indigenous cultures. In my talk, I'd like to offer a different perspective. I would like to remind you of the Art that the Europeans found when they arrived in our country.

The Europeans found Art everywhere. In hundreds of flourishing, vital cultures, Art was fully integrated with daily life. They saw dwellings painted with abstract Art that was to inspire generations of European painters. Ceremonial robes were intricately woven Art that heralded the wearers' identity and privilege in the community. Utilitarian objects, including food vessels, storage containers, and clothing, were powerfully formed and decorated with the finest, most significant Art.

Each nation had its theatre, music, and choreography. The first Europeans found hundreds of languages in use—not dialects but languages. And in every language, our Artists created philosophical argument and sacred ceremony, political discourse, fiction, and poetry.

The Europeans saw Earth Art and large-scale environmental Art projects. From the East to the West Coast, what were later called petroglyphs and pictographs recorded our histories. My own earliest memories of Art are of the tall sculptures that told the long histories of my people. These tall sculptures are called “totem poles,” like the ones you see here in the Great Hall of the Museum of Civilization.

When the Europeans arrived, they found Aboriginal Artists creating beauty, culture, and historical memory. Art built bridges between human life and the natural world. Art mediated between material and spiritual concerns. Art stimulated our individuality, making us alert and alive. It affirmed our cultural identities.

I say all this to honour our cultural accomplishments. As Aboriginal Artists, we need to reclaim our own identities, through our work, our heritage and our future. We don't need any longer to live within others' definitions of who and what we are. We need to put aside titles that have been imposed on our creativity—titles that serve the needs of other people. For too long our Art has been situated in the realm of anthropology by a discourse that validates only white Artists.

Continued



■ A traditional Haida blanket. First Nations women have kept this artform alive.

Today there are many Art forms of the First Nations which are still not being recognized. Think of the exquisite sea grass baskets from the West Coast of Vancouver Island, the quill work and moose hair tufting Arts of the people east of the Rockies, and ceremonial robes, woven and appliqued, throughout North America. Not surprisingly, these exquisite works of Art are mainly done by women.

Art can be a universal language which helps us bridge the gaps between our different cultures. But attitudes towards Art reveal racism. The first Europeans called our Art "primitive" and "vulgar." Today, people of European origin call our Art "craft" and "artifact."

Our elders have nurtured the important cultural traditions against tremendous odds. It is time for us to sit still, and let these powerful, precious teachings come to us. Our elders bequeathed us a great legacy of communication through the Arts.¹

produce, First Nations artists continue to explore the creative energy and the meaning that inspired the great artists of old.

What Is Art?

There are two ways that people have classified the treasured objects of First Nations societies. Some, especially in the early years of European contact, identified them as artifacts, examples of the material culture that were more likely to be considered crafts. In more recent years, they have been considered works of art.

But what do we mean when we say something is a work of art? First comes skill. An artist trains and practises to learn the rules of the art form and control over the material he or she is using. An artist is a master of the material. Second is the aesthetic quality of the work, the visual impact it makes and what draws our eye to it. A third feature of art is the way the viewer looks at it and interprets it.

A common theme runs through the visual arts of the First Nations of British Columbia, the human relationship with the natural world. However, this relationship has been interpreted in very different ways. For example, the visual arts of the interior were shaped by the flexible and highly mobile nature of their societies. Interior First Nations did not produce large quantities of objects because their lifestyle demanded that their art be light and portable. Therefore art was usually applied to utilitarian objects or to personal adornment. These objects were often discarded when they were no longer useful. Important articles belonging to people of rank were frequently burned at their burial.

Different styles of textile arts were developed throughout the province, including basketry with cedar bark and spruce roots, Cowichan weaving using dog hair, and blankets made of goat hair in Coast Salish regions.

The Northwest Coast culture, which involved less migration, evolved a highly developed and

sophisticated art form, resulting in many hundreds of individual works which were passed from generation to generation. Many of these were an integral part of the central gathering of the society, the potlatch, where they were worn or used by dancers. After contact these artworks were collected by European or North American collectors and removed to museums or private homes. It is estimated that there are as many as 300,000 individual Northwest Coast items in museums worldwide.

Stone Art and Sculpture

The earliest art we know in British Columbia, stone art, is full of mystery. Why did people paint figures on stone bluffs? Why did they carve animal shapes on rocks at the water's edge? Despite our ignorance, we sense that the ancient artists were communicating with the cosmos.

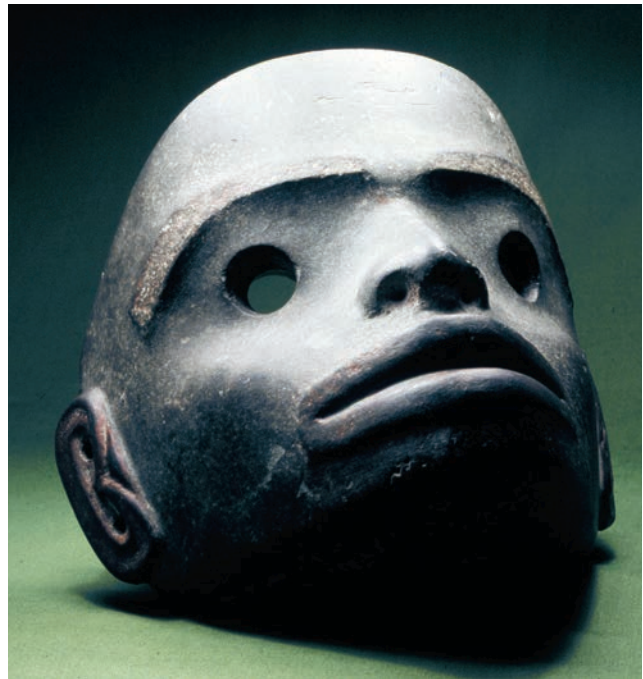
Stone is an ancient medium for art. Because it does not decay, pieces of stone art are the oldest form of artistic expression found in British Columbia. Stone tools have been recovered dating back 10,000 years, and stone objects from the last 5,000 years show remarkable sophistication in function and design. Stone was used to create a wide range of decorated objects, both practical and ceremonial. Stones were sculpted into mortars, bowls, and different types of hammers and clubs, as well as into ceremonial articles. The creation of a refined article from stone required great skill, strength, patience, and an artistic purpose. Various techniques were used to shape and smooth the stone. Using another piece of stone, artists controlled

Aesthetics

Aesthetics refers to the beauty of a piece of art, apart from its practical use. It is determined in part by its style, design, and skill of production.

Artifact

Simply defined, artifact (also spelled artefact) means an object made by humans. However, its connotation gives the sense of an object from the past, often dug up by archaeologists.



Tsimshian Twin Stone Masks. These remarkable masks, made of basalt, were both collected in Tsimshian territory in the nineteenth century. The seeing mask fits perfectly inside the unseeing one. Both measure 23 cm across. The mask with closed eyes was collected at Kitkatla in 1879 by Indian Commissioner I. W. Powell. It is now in the Canadian Museum of Civilization. The second mask was probably collected at Metlakatla, and is now in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. The lips, ears, and eyebrows of the second mask have traces of red paint. There are holes at the back to attach straps so it can be worn. Inside was a wooden harness that could support the mask on the wearer's head.

the direction, force, and manner in which they hit the stone to flake off pieces, peck or drill a hole, or grind the surface. Techniques were also developed to saw through some types of stone.

Rock Paintings

Rock was used as a canvas throughout most of the province, although no rock paintings have been found in the Peace River region. The southern interior has the highest concentration of painted images on rock walls, known as pictographs. Some areas have particularly large collections, such as the Stein Valley, Seton Creek on the Fraser River, and the South Okanagan and Similkameen areas near Oliver and between Hedley and Princeton. Most rock paintings are found along the shores of lakes or along river banks, often as high as eight metres above the water. Generally, the rock

artists chose granite rock as their canvas, although other types are also found. Usually the images are painted on rock faces, but some are on single boulders.

The rock artists knew how to make paints that have lasted hundreds of years while exposed to the weather. Today, we do not understand how they made such long-lasting paint. The pigments, we know, were made of minerals. The most common colour, red, is from a material called ochre, which contains a high quantity of iron mixed with clay. Ochres can come in different hues, including reds, browns, and yellows. Black was made from charcoal or soot. Other colours found less commonly in pictographs are green, white, and yellow.

Red pigment could be made through a process of baking yellow ochre. Disks of a paste made from ochre were baked in a fire. The resulting red pigment



■ This pictograph, located between Terrace and Prince Rupert, informed Skeena River travellers they were entering the trading territory of a Tsimshian chief.

was crushed into powder, which could be mixed with other ingredients. Sometimes pieces of rock containing large amounts of iron could be used to draw with, like chalk.

Rock Carvings

Etchings carved into rocks, called petroglyphs, are generally found along the coast on beaches or on river banks. They can be simple images, with pecked holes representing a face. Many, however, are complex and show what look like animals or supernatural creatures. Often these designs use the characteristic shapes of Northwest Coast art, such as the ovoid. Some places have a large collection of images. Near Bella Coola there is a cluster of over 100 carvings, while at Gitga'at on Douglas Channel there are more than 200 images. One of the most unique sites is at Clo-ose, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Amongst the dozens of

images on a rocky promontory are a number of sailing ships, and a person riding a horse. These post-contact engravings show a connection between relatively recent artists and the rock artists of long ago.



■ One of many petroglyphs near Bella Coola.

Visual Arts of the Interior

The traditional lifestyle of most of B.C.'s interior First Nations people demanded flexibility and ease of travel. People could only carry the articles they needed for survival: their clothing, tools, daily utensils, and weapons. These items were made with great skill and decorated in ways that reflected the people and the land. The messages carried by this artistic expression are for the most part lost to time. However, there is no doubt that the art of the interior people carried messages to the human world and the spiritual world.

Clothing

Clothing was the most vital form of personal adornment. A person's clothing communicated his or her place in society and displayed the skill of the woman who created it and the wearer's status and wealth. The quality of the skins and the decorations of quills, beads, and shells showed a man's skill as a hunter, his wealth, and his trading abilities. Many people, especially high-ranking men, had special "dress" clothes that were only used for meeting delegates from other nations.

Clothing was the supreme expression of skill and artistry for women, as they played the principal role in its creation. They tanned the hides, sewed the garments, and decorated them. Most clothing in the interior was made from the skins of deer, moose, and caribou, with some even made from salmon skin. In the southern interior, women also wove

garments of sophisticated design from natural fibres made from Indian hemp, cedar, sagebrush, and willow. Wool and hair were spun into thread that was woven into blankets and robes.

Skins were usually painted with natural paints made from plants and clay in a palette of reds, browns, greens, and blues. They were decorated with bone, porcupine quills, feathers, beads, and shells. Interior people traded for shells like dentalium and abalone from the coast to add value and status to their clothing. After European contact, manufactured beads made a colourful addition to decoration on clothing such as jackets, gloves, and moccasins.

Clothing was more than just protection from the elements or a display of social status. It had a spiritual dimension and was thought of as part of the person who wore it. To Athapascan people, clothing was said



■ A Nlaka'pamux young woman's dress. Traditionally such decorated clothing had a spiritual dimension that is not understood today.

to be like a “second skin.” It could take on qualities of the owner, and could even be manipulated in ways that could cause good or evil. Wearing the clothing of another person was sometimes believed to transfer the qualities of the owner to the new wearer.

The full meaning of the art displayed on clothing is not understood today. However, there are suggestions that at least sometimes it was intended to please the natural or spiritual worlds as well as fellow humans. For instance, one characteristic design element involves outlining in red ochre areas such as sleeves, hemlines, and seams. Among the Nlaka’pamux these were sometimes called “earth lines.” They were painted over joins or openings to bring protection and good luck.

Personal Adornment

Decorating the face by painting or tattooing was a sign of beauty or of status. Face painting was more common among men than women. Black and red were the main colours used. Tattooing was also common, though women were more often tattooed than men. The tattoos were made using a needle made from a porcupine quill or a thin, sharp bone. The needle pulled a fine sinew thread coated with charcoal under the skin to leave a mark. Men frequently had parts of their body such as their arms tattooed as a protection to keep them strong and healthy.

■ Three drums photographed by James Teit in 1915. The symbolism on the drum on the right is mentioned in Nlaka’pamux oral narratives.

A great deal of attention was paid to the hair, especially by men. It was arranged and decorated with feathers and dentalium shells. High-ranking Dakelh men were known to have worn ceremonial wigs made of materials such as human hair, sea lion whiskers, and dentalium. Other personal adornments worn by both men and women included pendants and ornaments worn in piercings in the nose or the ears.

Engraving and Painting

A common and very ancient style of design involved engraving patterns into horn and bone. The designs were highlighted by rubbing red ochre or charcoal into them. The execution of the engraving was very controlled and precise. Parallel lines were evenly spaced, and often areas were filled with detailed cross-hatching. Generally the patterns were geometric and non-representational. Some, however, appear to have been symbolic representations of the natural or spiritual worlds. The meaning of the engraved designs is not known today. Many items of daily use were decorated with engravings, such as arm



bands, bowls, clubs, scrapers, spoons, and tump-line spreaders. Others, including shamans' pendants and special drinking tubes used by girls when they reached puberty, suggest that the designs had important meanings.

Painting is also a very old technique. As we have seen above, clothing and the body were frequently painted. So were many other items. Often the design was composed of lines and dots, although stylized designs were also used. Frequently wood and skin articles were painted in this way. Some of these suggest a religious or spiritual significance. For instance, tents were often painted with a band of red ochre, which may have been a form of protection. In other cases, red designs were put on the bow of a canoe or the front points of snowshoes to aid the traveller to find the right way and travel safely.

The arrival of the fur traders brought new materials. Among many other adaptations, the people of the interior cultures who had horses developed special decorative arts centred on the gear and clothing used with horses.

Northwest Coast Art

The concepts and materials used in Northwest Coast art are similar in all the cultures of the coast, yet each has distinctive styles. The artistic traditions of the Northwest Coast can be categorized by region. The northern region includes the Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian, Gitksan, Nisga'a and Haisla

■ Ancestral crest figures such as killer whales, bears, wolves, eagles, and thunderbirds show a person's lineage and were traditionally represented on totem poles, housefront paintings, talking sticks, and other objects. This totem is from Kispiox.

nations. The central region includes the Nuxalk, Heiltsuk, Nuuchahnulth and Kwakwaka'wakw nations. The southern region consists of the Salishan-speaking groups (Coast Salish people).

Making the supernatural world visible was one of the two main purposes of traditional Northwest Coast art. The carvings, paintings, ceremonial objects, and costumes were fully integrated with the arts of theatre, dance, and song. The second main purpose was to validate the social system.



At feasts and potlatches, masks, bowls, chests, and numerous other objects reflected the ancestry and status of the hosts. Certain essential design elements of Northwest Coast art have been identified by historian Bill Holm, including the formline, the ovoid, and the U-shape. These shapes can be used to create a naturalistic representation of a creature, or an abstract form. The same design concepts are used in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional art, but they vary from region to region.

The Impact of Colonization

Colonization took a heavy toll on Northwest Coast art. Disease killed many artists, so there were fewer people to pass on traditional knowledge, and fewer people to learn it. As well, the influence of Christianity caused some people to stop using ceremonial objects. In the western European world view of the day, objects such as totem poles and masks were viewed as heathen, pagan, or even sinful. Hand-in-hand with these beliefs was the anti-potlatch law of 1884, which outlawed the central institution of the Northwest Coast society and thereby the most important use of its art. Shamanism, called “witchcraft” by the government and church, was also made illegal. People went to jail for participating in events their ancestors had practised for centuries. Some people, trying to cope with the effects of disease and European settlement, with its new economy and values, pulled down their totem poles and sold their ceremonial objects. Often the people who purchased them were the same missionaries and governments that had outlawed them.

Without a reason for its creation, Northwest Coast art went into decline. But it did not disappear. It transformed itself, went underground, or simply

lay dormant. There were always artists, however, who continued the form. The purposes for the art changed. While some people, such as the Kwakwaka'wakw and Coast Salish, continue to use ceremonial art, the majority of the new works in the twentieth century were created for sale to outsiders, for the curio and collector's market.

Haida artists maintained the art through their unique access to argillite, the soft stone available in only one location on Haida Gwaii. One of the most well-known and prolific artists was Charles Edenshaw, who lived from about 1839 to 1920. His carvings in silver, argillite, wood, horn, and bone and his paintings on spruce-root basketry are acknowledged as being among the best Haida art ever produced. A number of other master artists worked at the same time as Edenshaw, including John Cross, Gwaytíhl, Tom Price, and John Robson.

Kwakwaka'wakw chiefs who defied the anti-potlatch law continued to keep ceremonial art alive, and maintained the role of the artist in their communities. Three artists remembered as influential cultural leaders were Charlie James (about 1868–1938), his stepson Mungo Martin (about 1881–1962), and Willie Seaweed (1873–1967).

These were the carvers, but much of the art that was traditionally in the realm of women's work, such as weaving and basketry, was kept alive by scores of women, most of whom are anonymous now. To earn money for their families, they wove cedar baskets and other crafts to sell on the streets of Vancouver and other cities.

As Rena Point Bolton states in the National Film Board film *Hands of History*:

It's safe to say that the women were the ones who kept our crafts alive during those years when we were not supposed to be doing them at all, when the potlatch was banned. It included anything that was made by Native people.

Formline

Identified as an essential element in Northwest Coast art, the formline is a continuous flowing line that outlines the creature being represented.

Museums and galleries played a role in the resurgence of Northwest Coast art in the 1950s and '60s by commissioning the restoration or recreation of a number of the old totem poles and the creation of new ones. Probably the most notable artist in this regard is Mungo Martin (right), a Kwakwaka'wakw carver who, in 1947, was put in charge of restoring totem poles at the University of British Columbia. Later he worked at the Royal British Columbia Museum, the provincial museum in Victoria, where he recreated a traditional longhouse and carved over two dozen totem poles. They still stand in Totem Park today.

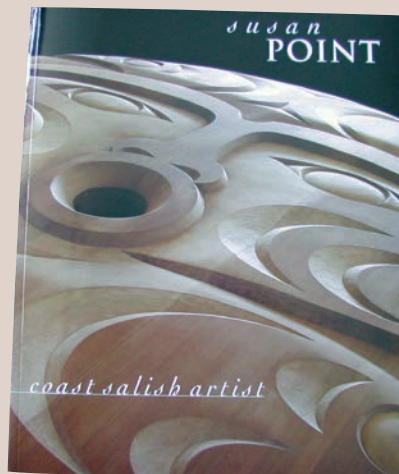


PROFILE

Susan Point

Susan Point is an artist from Musqueam ("People of the Grass"), one of the Coast Salish nations at the mouth of the Fraser River. She began her career in the 1980s, first taking a jewellery-making course and then working as a printmaker. Early on she adapted Coast Salish designs to non-traditional mediums such as glass and bronze. She also extended her designs to an architectural scale, and her exceptional artistry led to commissions of large-scale sculptures for public buildings. Among many others, there are major murals by Point at the Vancouver International Airport, house posts at the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia, and a wall installation at Langara College in Vancouver. She is noted for her exploration of the spindle whorl, a wheel-like tool for spinning wool. These ancient tools have unique designs on them, and Point uses them for inspiration in her art.

Susan Point is internationally recognized for her visionary and innovative style of Coast Salish art. Using old designs and forms as inspiration, she creates stunning new images in a range of materials from bronze to cedar to glass and cast iron. The acclaim her work has received



The range of Susan Point's artistic accomplishments is portrayed in a beautifully illustrated book. One of the foundations of her art is the spindle whorl design shown on the book cover.

has contributed to a resurgence of Coast Salish art and has made her a role model for other First Nations women artists in British Columbia. A recent book, *Susan Point: Coast Salish Artist*, provides a context for her work and showcases over sixty full-colour reproductions of jewellery, prints, paintings, and monumental pieces.

Resurgence

In the 1940s the world began to take a different look at Northwest Coast art. Non-native artists and critics began to see the art—which was for the most part stored away in museums—as “fine art.” Exhibitions were held and colourfully illustrated books were published.

After World War II, many aspects of life for First Nations people slowly began to improve. They were finally granted the right to vote provincially in 1949, though not until 1960 federally. The anti-potlatch law was dropped from the Indian Act in 1951. Gradually, First Nations people began to regain a positive sense of identity. Along with this came a new study of, and appreciation for, the art of their ancestors.

Another important milestone in the growth of Northwest Coast art was the publication in 1965 of *Northwest Coast Indian Art: An Analysis of Form*.

Bill Holm, a Seattle academic, undertook the first close analysis of the styles used by the artists of the masterpieces housed in museums. He identified the elements that the art is based on, and developed the terms that are still used by Northwest Coast artists today.

In the 1960s, a new expression of Northwest Coast art exploded on the scene, using a Western medium. The medium was the serigraph, or print, whereby multiple copies of a design can be created. One of the first artists to make silkscreen prints was Tony Hunt, grandson and student of Mungo Martin. Today, printmaking is an important and often lucrative part of a Northwest Coast artist's career.

In the last thirty years the demand for Northwest Coast art has continued to grow. It is internationally acclaimed as one of the finest art forms in the world. Individuals and corporations throughout the world

PROFILE

Dorothy Grant

Dorothy Grant is a Kaigani Haida of the Raven clan from the Brown Bear house of Howkan. She is a fashion designer and traditional Haida artist who apprenticed with Haida Elder Florence Edenshaw-Davidson. Her garments, ceremonial button blankets, and spruce root hats are treasured as expressions of Haida living culture and may be found in art collections throughout the world.

Dorothy Grant has been at the forefront of the Aboriginal design industry since the early 1980s. Her strong connection to her people's past and her First Nations identity are the driving forces behind her fashion labels *Feastwear* and the *Dorothy Grant* label. Describing the *Feastwear* design and logo, Dorothy Grant says: “*Feastwear* embodies the philosophy of being proud of who you are and where you come from. The *Feastwear Hands* logo represents the ancestral knowledge and memory that guide me in



■ Dorothy Grant, wearing one of her own designs.

bringing the art of my people to a world stage.”²

Fashion art by Dorothy Grant is now on exhibit at the National Gallery of Canada, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Smithsonian Institute in the U.S., and in public and private collections in many other countries.

In 1994 the artist opened the *Dorothy Grant Boutique* in Vancouver, which now also sells via the internet at www.dorothygrant.com. In 1999 she was awarded a National Aboriginal Achievement Award in the Business and Commerce category.

CASE STUDY

'Ksan Historical Village and the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art

The 'Ksan Historical Village and Museum sits on an ancient Gitx̱san village site at the junction of the Skeena and Bulkley rivers near Hazelton in north central B.C. Since the 1960s it has been a focal point for the renewal and preservation of Northwest Coast art and culture. As the home of the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art, it has become one of the most influential forces in revitalizing the Northwest Coast art form in the north. Many of today's most successful artists were trained at the school, and as they have moved on to train others, the influence is ever-expanding.

The historical village began as a B.C. Centennial project in 1958, although plans had been emerging since the 1940s. Its goal was to protect and preserve the priceless but aging carvings and other pieces of Gitx̱san art and material culture. A new museum in a longhouse-style building was opened on the shores of the Skeena River in downtown Hazelton to preserve the art and culture of the Gitx̱san.

The Skeena Treasure House was opened in 1959. This name was chosen by one of the founding members, Smoigyet

Hanmuuxw, Chief Jeffrey Johnson. He felt that to call the building a museum would suggest that the objects displayed there were lifeless, unused artifacts from the past. This was not the case, however, as they were vital elements in Gitx̱san society, being the regalia, masks, rattles, and other items used at feasts. The

Skeena Treasure House quickly became a success. At that time there were few outlets for First Nations artists to sell their arts and crafts. Visitors came from far away to study the rich art of the Gitx̱san and their neighbours. By the late 1960s, the organizers realized larger facilities were needed.



■ The 'Ksan Historical Village near Hazelton is an excellent model of how a community can provide economic opportunities for its people and foster a better understanding of First Nations cultures as living and vital.

A new vision was born. Instead of one building, a whole village would be created. Many groups worked together to raise the large sum of money needed to complete the project. The Gitanmaax Band donated over fifty acres of land along the river nearby to build a campground, which is still operated by the band. The original Skeena Treasure House was moved to the new site to form the core of a recreation of a Gitx̱san winter village. 'Ksan was officially opened in 1970. Today it houses a museum, gift shop, performance space, and most importantly a school for training First Nations artists.

Visitors leave the parking lot, pass between two entrance totem poles, and walk down a forested pathway to the recreated village. There they see seven longhouses built in a line facing the river. Totem poles stand in front of the buildings, and other structures including a smoke house, a grave house, and a food cache complete the village setting.

The first two buildings house the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art. First is the House of Carving, and next door the Silkscreen Studio. *Wilp tokx*, The House of Eating, is next, where visitors can sample traditional Gitx̱san food. *Wilp Gisk'aast* (Fireweed House), the Treasure House, is the original museum building which today displays the regalia or ceremonial clothing worn by high-ranking people at a feast. *Wilp Lax Gibuu* (Wolf House), the Feast House, explains the Gitx̱san *yukw* or feast. In the summer, it serves as the theatre for the 'Ksan Performing Arts Group for

their performances of "Breath of Our Grandfathers." The last house is *Wilp Lax See'l* (Frog House), The House of the Distant Past, which shows how Gitx̱san people lived before contact.

'Ksan is an example of community cooperation. It is managed by the 'Ksan Association, a non-profit society made up of Gitx̱san and non-Gitx̱san members. The Board of Directors has eight volunteer members and three permanent staff who manage the facility. During the summer, seasonal employment is available.

The mandate of the 'Ksan Association is twofold: to demonstrate the richness of Gitx̱san culture and heritage and to create and promote economic opportunities for First Nations people of the Upper Skeena area. To meet this mandate the Association provides a storage and display facility through the museum and a store where newly created art pieces can be sold. In recent years the storefront has been extended to include an on-line store.

The other side of 'Ksan's operation is working with artists. Not only can local artists use the workshop space on site, but they can receive training at the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art. This is a unique training program that offers a four-year course to promising First Nations artists. It teaches the foundations of Northwest Coast design, tool-making, carving, and silkscreen printmaking.

The final element of 'Ksan ties all of its work together. This is the 'Ksan Performing Arts Group, which acts as an

ambassador for 'Ksan and the Gitx̱san nation by presenting the ancient songs and dances. The group originated in the late 1960s, organized by Doreen Jensen and Polly Sargent, a member of the Hazelton community (and the town's mayor for many years). They worked long hours with Elders from Kispiox and Kitseygyukla to study and learn the traditional songs and dances, and to create the performance called "Breath of Our Grandfathers." The songs and dances, which of course are the hereditary rights of the House Groups, have been loaned to the performers in order to increase understanding and appreciation of Gitx̱san culture. The regalia worn by the dancers and the props used in their performances are all created by artists studying in the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art.

commission artists to carve totem poles, while the masks and other carvings of the most famous artists command high prices and are also found in collections worldwide.

Where carving ceremonial objects was once the domain of men, today many women also find expression in carving. One of the first was Ellen Neel (1916–1966), a Kwakwaka'wakw artist who carved model poles and created unique scarves. Two contemporary leaders in breaking traditional roles are Frieda Diesing and Doreen Jensen, both of whom were among the first students at the Gitanmaax School of Northwest Coast Indian Art at 'Ksan.

Traditional women's arts such as weaving are also recognized as art forms today. One of the few men in the field is Tsimshian artist William White, who creates and teaches the techniques of cedar bark weaving and the complex forms of the Chilkat blanket and the Raven's tail blanket. Going beyond traditional forms, First Nations fashion designers are using Northwest Coast art to inspire the style and decoration of modern clothing. One of the leading designers is Dorothy Grant.

Art in the Community and the World

The revival of Northwest Coast art began with a focus on markets outside the local community. Today, however, artists have greater opportunities for creating art for their local communities, for the ceremonial purposes for which the art was originally intended. Not only has there been a resurgence in the art, but also in the cultural practices such as potlatches and feasts which incorporate the art. Totem poles are being erected in villages, the number of dance groups is increasing, and large canoe gatherings are being held in coastal communities. These and other gatherings require artists to create new works, be they drums, headdresses, masks, paddles, or clothing. There has

been a notable growth in demand for the ceremonial robes, also known as button blankets. Each dancer, performer, or speaker requires an elaborate blanket which displays his or her clan or crest. When worn en masse, they create an impressive scene which portrays the power of the revitalization of Northwest Coast art through the twentieth century.

There are venues throughout the province where First Nations artists sell their work. One popular outlet is at powwows that are held across the province during summer months. Many artists travel the powwow circuit, selling jewellery, prints, masks, and other art works to First Nations people from near and far. Large cities such as Vancouver and Victoria have commercial galleries as well as museums and public galleries with gift shops. Well-established artists such as Susan Point and Roy Henry Vickers have their own galleries, while others sell out of their studios and via the internet.

Cultural centres operated by First Nations groups offer unique experiences for visitors by recreating traditional villages with cultural demonstrations, restaurants to sample the food, and gift shops. Among them are the Secwepemc Museum and Heritage Park on the Kamloops reserve and the Cowichan Native Village near Duncan, on Vancouver Island. The oldest such centre is 'Ksan Historical Village near Hazelton, in northern B.C.

Revival of the Great Canoes

One of the single most exciting artistic revivals in recent years has been the return of the great canoes to the Northwest Coast. For the Kwakwaka'wakw, the Haida, the Coast Salish, the Tsimshian, the Nuuchahnulth, the Tlingit, and other coastal groups, the canoe was traditionally their primary mode of transportation, essential for fishing, gathering food, and trading. But the canoe was also a spiritual vessel that was the object of great respect.

Since 1986 a number of milestone “paddles” and canoe gatherings have taken place, including a group



■ The revival of the canoe is partly attributed to Haida master carver Bill Reid and several other prominent carvers who built the fifty-foot Loo Taas ("Wave Eater") canoe in 1985–1986.

FIRST NATIONS VOICES

David Neel, Kwakwaka'wakw

David Neel, whose family is from Fort Rupert, comes from a long line of traditional artists. He is a photographer, writer, and visual artist who built his own 25-foot cedar canoe in 1994. He is also the author of the book *The Great Canoes: Reviving a Northwest Coast Tradition*, a beautiful visual and literary account of the revival of the great canoes, from which the following is an excerpt.

The canoe is today, as it has always been, much more than just a boat. The legends of the Pacific Coast Nations tell of the time of the great flood, when the people tied their canoes together side by side. As the waters rose, the people took a stout cedar rope and attached their canoes to a mountaintop. Here they waited until the waters receded, and they were saved. Today, in its renaissance, the canoe carries the knowledge of a millennia-old culture as well as the dreams and aspirations of a younger generation. It is a vessel of knowledge, symbolizing the cultural regeneration of many nations as they struggle to retain and rebuild following a period of systematic oppression and of rapid social and technological change. The great canoe has come back from the abyss a vital symbol for First

Nations. Once a mode of transport, allowing our people to fish, gather food, trade and travel, it has evolved into a healing vessel, deeply affecting all those who come into contact with it. Young people particularly benefit from learning the way of the canoe.

The canoe is a metaphor for community; in the canoe, as in any community, everyone must work together. Paddling or "pulling" as a crew over miles of water requires respect for one another and a commitment to working together, as the old people did. All facets of the contemporary canoe experience—planning, building, fund-raising, practising, travelling—combine to make our communities strong and vital in the old ways . . .

Like Haida artist Bill Reid, I believe the traditional canoe to be the basis for Northwest Coast design and sculptural principles. The canoe's form, the way each line flows and interacts, follows the same principles as those employed when carving a mask or painting a housefront . . . Contained within the canoe is the essence of our artform, as well as the combined knowledge of our old people, transported into this period of our history for us to breathe life into once again.³

of Heiltsuk people paddling from Bella Bella to the world's fair (Expo 86) in Vancouver. In preparation for a "Paddle to Seattle" in 1989, many First Nations communities in B.C. and Washington built canoes and started paddling for the first time in a century. The Seattle gathering spawned the Qatuwas Festival in Bella Bella in 1993, where an estimated 2,000 people attended a week-long gathering. In the Kwakwaka

language of the Heiltsuk Nation, Qatuwas means "people gathered together in one place." The canoe gatherings bring First Nations people from many locations together to visit, sing, dance, and share their cultures. They are evidence of First Nations people regaining their strength and cultures in a very visible and celebratory way.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

For First Nations people visual art has traditionally been integrated into all aspects of life. The earliest examples of artistic expression in British Columbia are found in stone art, in the form of rock carvings, rock paintings, and sculptural figures created from stone. First Nations cultures from the interior expressed their spiritual beliefs and their connection with the land through adorning their bodies and their clothing. The more structured societies of the coast gave rise to highly evolved artistic traditions that include masks and monumental arts such as totem poles and house fronts.

One of the impacts of colonization was a decline in artistic expression, partly through diseases that killed many Elders and also by the banning of the potlatch. Nonetheless, ceremonial art and other forms of artistic expression were kept alive by both men and women in First Nations communities.

In the past fifty years there has been a resurgence of First Nations art, and a new appreciation of it by artists

and collectors from around the world. Included in this revival is a return to building ocean-going canoes and hosting ceremonial "paddles" and gatherings that bring coastal First Nations communities together.

Today, many established artists find careers in their work, and many are transforming the traditional styles into modern contexts. Cultural centres, such as the 'Ksan Historical Village, provide important venues for First Nations artists to sell their work to wide audiences, while community events such as powwows give other artists opportunities to share their art with their own people.

Today, the art of First Nations in British Columbia is renowned around the world. It is recognized as one of the most sophisticated of art forms. Canada's foremost cultural museum, the Canadian Museum of Civilization, celebrates the significance of Northwest Coast art in the large display that greets visitors, called the Grand Hall.

Beyond Stereotypes: The Portrayal of First Nations People

From the earliest days of European contact, First Nations cultures have been described in simplistic and stereotyped ways. When early explorers and traders, with predominantly British roots, encountered ways of life that were unfamiliar to them, they viewed First Nations people as “less than” and “other.” The newcomers assumed a sense of superiority and described First Nations people in negative terms such as lazy, ignorant, or savage. From these beginnings, stereotypes of First Nations people became ingrained in Canadian society and were perpetuated for generations, passed on through popular culture.

Some myths about First Nations people still exist in the popular culture of mainstream North American society. One is that they make up one homogenous group; that is, they all have the same history, customs, and beliefs. Another is that their ancestors all wore feather headdresses, carried tomahawks, and lived in tipis. A third is that they are people of the past, that

anything identifiable as Aboriginal culture belongs to the past, or if it is practised today it is out of a romantic attachment to the past.

None of these statements is true, and none refers to real people. The statements refer to some notion of “Indian” created by a society that consciously or subconsciously marginalized First Nations people.

Today, First Nations people in many fields are challenging the stereotypes and offering honest, thoughtful reflections of their cultures. As discussed in previous chapters, First Nations writers and artists have begun to achieve recognition for their unique contributions to literature and art. This chapter will examine other ways in which First Nations people are celebrating distinguished achievers and role models.

Stereotypes in the Media

In the past, First Nations people were often anonymous when represented in the media. Newspaper reports

ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS

Prince Rupert *Empire*

This newspaper article illustrates how First Nations people were so often represented anonymously. It also shows the underlying beliefs about segregation of the races. Why didn't the reporter simply write about the drowning of five men, or a party of ten men?

Prince Rupert *Empire*, September 21, 1907

FIVE MEN DROWNED IN THE SKEENA

Word reached here on Thursday of the drowning of three white men and two Indians in Skeena River at Red Rock Rapids. A party of seven white men and three Indians left Hazelton on Wednesday in a canoe. At Red Rock rapids the canoe struck a rock and capsized. All clung to the canoe, and when it drifted near the bank, three men and two Indians attempted to reach the land, but failed and were drowned. The others clung to the canoe and after drifting for an hour were picked up by a canoe that happened along. The white men drowned were E. Williams, James Dibble, and James Munro. James Dibble was one of the owners of mining property in the Babine range that was bonded in July to James Cronin for \$40,000. No further particulars could be obtained at Prince Rupert, owing to the telegraph wires being down between Aberdeen and Hazelton. Had there been a steamboat on the Skeena these men would not have lost their lives. Canoe navigation is too dangerous with unexperienced travelers as passengers.

almost always identified non-Aboriginal people in a news story, but left Aboriginal people nameless. In a similar way, First Nations people are often anonymous when shown in pictures in books or magazines. So often the picture caption only refers to “A group of Indians.” The writers did not attempt to research the names of First Nations people they reported on.

There were some exceptions to the anonymity of First Nations people in the newspapers. If they were involved in a crime, their names were usually mentioned. This fits into the stereotypical image of First Nations people as savages. This notion was popularized in the nineteenth century with the proliferation of what are called “captivity narratives.” These have similar plots in which a young damsel is captured by a horde of savage, ferocious “Indians.” She is usually rescued by a dashing young soldier. These

novels, with lurid titles and images on their covers, fuelled and perpetuated a stereotype of First Nations people.

We can see how this genre of writing influenced the telling of the history of First Nations in British Columbia. The “Wild West” style of adventure which occurred in the history of the United States was not part of B.C.’s history. Some writers in the past, however, tried to appeal to consumers’ appetites for this type of writing when they recounted tales of violent encounters between First Nations and the newcomers. As in the example shown here, “The Defiance of Ot-chee-wun,” the language used to describe the First Nations “renegades” is sensational and exaggerated, without any attempt to analyze the realities of the events. When it came to official colonial violence, however, such as the destruction of the village in this example, the language is understated.

ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS

The Defiance of Ot-chee-wun

Chief Ot-chee-wun had only contempt for the whites. His Lamalchi warriors in their great canoes stalked unsuspecting settlers among the peaceful Gulf Islands—and boasted of the number they killed.

Lamalchi Bay, Kuper Island, is a pleasant place. There is nothing to indicate that it was once the home of a dreaded band of piratical Indians that required the entire resources of the North Pacific fleet to disperse them.

In 1863 Ot-chee-wun was a proud and haughty chief. His rule over the Lamalchi warriors was unquestioned. They were a fierce and resourceful tribe who were frequently at war with the Penelakuts, another Cowichan tribe that shared the island with them. From their lair they kept watch upon canoes and other craft in Stuart and Trincomali Channels and exacted such tribute as circumstances permitted. This form of piracy was not confined to the canoes of natives. Many white men and their boats

vanished in the labyrinth of waters about the Gulf Islands and only Lamalchi braves could tell what had happened to them.

James Douglas sent the Royal Navy to bring the chief Acheewun [Ot-chee-wun] to justice. The gunboat *Forward* was sent to Kuper Island. Acheewun had built a strong defensive bastion. Here, the captain of the *Forward* describes how he carried out orders:

“The chief answered that he would not come and he was not afraid of us,” Lascelles wrote. “At the end of the appointed time I hauled down the flag and fired into the village, which they deserted immediately and opened a very sharp fire of musketry from the two points at the entrance of the bay. I regret to say that one boy, Charles F. Glidden, was killed, being shot through the head whilst acting as powder-man at the pivot gun. Though the boat was hit in several places we sustained no other injury. The firing lasted about half an hour, when having thrown a few shells into the woods and knocked the village down, as much as possible, I went to Chemainus Bay for the night.”¹

Images of the Culture

Many people in the 1800s and early 1900s believed that First Nations cultures would soon be extinct, or at least assimilated into mainstream society. They were motivated to record for posterity their understanding of the people and their customs. Some people collected the objects of the material culture (“Indian artifacts”) and put them in museums or sold them to private collectors. Anthropologists collected stories and descriptions of customs and techniques. While these collectors did preserve the treasures of the past, they also helped to freeze the mainstream perception of First Nations cultures in antiquity.

Edward Curtis was such a man. A Seattle photographer, he set out to photograph First Nations people in traditional clothing from as many tribes as he could. Between 1907 and 1930 he produced twenty books of pictures, depicting people from Alaska to the southern United States. He took many pictures in British Columbia.

He also made what was probably the first film about First Nations people in Canada at Fort Rupert on northern Vancouver Island in 1914. In the *Land of the Headhunters* supposedly represented Kwakwaka'wakw people in a romantic love story, complete with an evil witch doctor, a love affair, and of course, a battle. It was a plot that movie-goers would relate to. It hardly mattered that Kwakwaka'wakw people were not headhunters, nor that the movie made little reference to them. The title was designed to attract an audience who believed the myths about Indians.

The movie depicts Kwakwaka'wakw life before contact, and shows Kwakwaka'wakw people dressed in cedar bark clothing and travelling in canoes. As a record of Kwakwaka'wakw

material culture, the film is valuable. But the plot and the action imposed by Curtis only reinforce how audiences expected to see “Indians” portrayed—as superstitious and barbaric.

Curtis and others were trying to capture the culture frozen in time. Museums displayed “Indian artifacts” in display cases, often with little interpretation. They reinforced the idea that First Nations cultures were of the past and static.

Marketing

If you learned everything you know about First Nations people from the movies (and many people do), you would learn that all Aboriginal people live on the Prairies, usually not far from a settler's ranch. You would learn they all ride horses. Even so, you might learn that these horse-riding Prairie people also made totem poles and probably danced around them, whooping away.

You would also learn that First Nations people only live in the past. Very few appear in modern times.



■ This billboard welcomed travellers to Fort St. John, suggesting that oil and gas rigs are as culturally significant as totem poles are to First Nations people.

Of course you would learn that most of them were savages and attacked white men whenever they had the opportunity. Those who weren't savages were noble, stoic sidekicks like Tonto. You would learn that most Natives have long braided hair, high cheekbones, and pronounced noses—or as close as the non-First Nations actors could come to looking that way.

It is estimated that Hollywood made more than 3,000 “Cowboy and Indian” movies. It's no wonder that they have had such an effect on popular culture. Seeing the same images and symbols over and over, even if they are false, reinforces the way people see First Nations and embeds it in the culture. More than that, these movies repeatedly show flat, one-

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“That's My Dinner on Display”

Gloria Jean Frank, a historian and teacher, reflects on her experiences as a guide in the Royal British Columbia Museum.

“Mmm. That's my dinner on display,” I say, as we approach the display case labelled “Technology, Food Quest/Coast, Processing” at the beginning of the “pre-contact” section of the exhibit. The case contains fishing items as well as what appear to be dried, split salmon, dried clams, and other traditional foods. “But First Nations people still fish,” I explain to my group, “and they continue even now to process fish in ways similar to those displayed here.” Kitty-corner to this display case is another, featuring more traditional fishing items. A whaling tool has been removed from this case for a special whaling exhibit downstairs, according to the notes on a label that stands in its place: “Artifact Temporarily Removed.” “Ooo! That sounds ominous,” I exclaim to my listeners, as I ponder its transfer to a new location.

*Acting as a guide through the First Peoples exhibit made me realize my ability to convey a different view of First Nations history and cultures. I felt impassioned in the museum setting. I wanted to argue that First Nations peoples are not dead but still live in the here and now. I reflected on a statement by Deborah Doxtator, a Mohawk historian/museologist who curated the 1989 exhibit *Fluffs and Feathers: An Exhibit on the Symbols of Indianness* at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario. “Real ‘Indianness,’” she explains, “was represented in museums as all those traditions and technologies that anthropologists deemed to be existent before the coming of the*

European. To see change or European influence in the construction of an object was to see loss of culture, acculturation. As a result, exhibits about Native cultures were invariably labeled in the past tense.” I felt a need to offer some explanations during my tour so that our cultural heritage would not be seen as dead, reducible to “objects temporarily removed,” or, worse still, displayed permanently in glass cases.

The museum's role in representing First Nations cultures has a history that is now more than a century old. It is a history embedded within colonialism. As the recent Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples notes, “we simply cannot understand the depth of these issues or make sense of the current debate without a solid grasp of the shared history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on this continent.” This report views the past as more than an academic problem.

[. . .]

My group suddenly finds itself surrounded by a series of larger-than-life Edward Curtis photomurals. Our RBCM [Royal B.C. Museum] guidebook describes these as “glimpses of early Native life.” My eyes fixate on those words, and I nervously ask myself, “Where do I fit into this picture? What constitutes being Koo us (Nuu-chah-nulth for First Nations ‘people’)? Am I truly rooted in First Nations culture?” Maybe not. I realize that certain parts of the First Peoples exhibit make me feel uneasy about my own identity.

*As my group arrives at the next part of the exhibit, I draw their attention to the notice: “You Are Now Entering the Second Part of This Gallery . . . The Coming of the White People.” A short clip from Edward Curtis's 1914 film, *In the Land of the**

dimensional characters. There are few portrayals of realistic humans, characters with emotions, humour, and depth. The diversity of First Nations societies is ignored.

Along with such misrepresentation in films, symbols and images from First Nations cultures have often been appropriated by the dominant society.

Head Hunters (retitled, in 1924, *In the Land of the War Canoes*), immediately catches our attention. Anthropologist James Clifford has commented on the effects of Curtis's film in this exhibit. He found the images of traditional canoes with masked dancers in the bows "mesmerizing" in their display of familiar masks and canoes in motion. While the masks and canoes are mesmerizing, the real story behind the moving images is hidden from view. I convey this to my group.

Apparently, while staging this contrived dramatic production, Edward Curtis actually had a house built for the film, used the same stretch of beach repeatedly, had over twenty-one masks made, and had all of the male actors shave off their mustaches for fear that White audiences would not see them as authentic "Indians." Word has it that he became so frustrated with his Kwakwaka'wakw "actors" for not performing one scene "properly" that he actually "dressed-up" in costume and performed the scene himself. Because I knew these details about the film, I could not take it seriously.

As I watch other viewers transfixed by the film, I am tempted to blurt out the underlying story; instead, I convey this detail only to my group. It annoys me to think that Curtis may have shrieked impatiently, "You don't know how to behave like an Indian. Get out of that blessed costume and let me show you how to be you." Hmph . . . Indeed, I do well enough on my own, Edward Curtis, but thank you anyway.²

For example, First Nations names have been used for everything from sports teams to transnational corporations. When corporations such as Mohawk Oil Company or Sundance B&B use First Nations names and cultural symbols without having any connection to a First Nation, the effect is to denigrate First Nations cultures.



■ An early example of Euro-Canadian entrepreneurs using "Indian" symbols to promote products, in this case salmon. That the "Indian" pictured here does not resemble any First Nations culture on the West Coast didn't deter the company from capitalizing on the notion that no fish could be fresher than that caught by "Indians" using spears.

Symbols and images from First Nations culture, especially totem poles and images in pseudo-Northwest Coast style design, have been used throughout B.C.'s history to promote the province, especially to tourists. Since the 1920s, a large number of public buildings, hotels, parks, and shopping malls in B.C. have featured totem poles. A Haida pole welcomes people entering Canada at the Peace Arch border crossing south of Vancouver, and, in the 1960s, the province erected a series of poles along highways and at ferry terminals from Victoria to Prince Rupert—all in the interests of encouraging tourism. In the mid-1980s, Duncan, a small town on southern Vancouver Island, declared itself the "City of Totem Poles" and commissioned a group of totem poles; it has since become a major tourist destination.

CASE STUDY

Marketing the Imaginary Indian

The following excerpt from *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*, by Daniel Francis, illustrates how non-Aboriginal society has historically used images of First Nations cultures to market products. There are many contemporary examples, especially with reference to marketing spiritual and healing practices.

In 1929, when Buffalo Child Long Lance was living in New York, the B.F. Goodrich Company introduced a new type of canvas running shoe. The "Chief Long Lance Shoe" was modelled on an Indian moccasin and endorsed by Long Lance in an extensive advertising campaign. "In our primitive life, nothing was more important than our feet," Long Lance is quoted as saying in one magazine advertisement. "I wonder if the white race would not be sturdier if they took better care of their feet in

childhood—by wearing shoes that allow free exercise of the foot and leg muscles." As part of the publicity for the new sneakers, Goodrich published a booklet, How to Talk in Indian Sign Language, featuring photographs of a bare-chested Long Lance, in breechcloth and headband, manipulating his hands.

B.F. Goodrich wished to associate its shoes with speed, strength and durability. There was no better way to do this than to associate them with the Indian, known for his ability to run like the wind for hours at a time. Of course, shoes were not the first products to be marketed with the help of the Indian image. The association of Indians and products was a venerable one, going back at least to the travelling medicine shows of the late eighteenth

century, in which potions and elixirs were peddled on the strength of their connection with Indian healing practices. The first decades of the twentieth century saw the appearance of dozens and dozens of products which tried to find favour with consumers by identifying with the Indian: Pocahontas perfume, Red Indian motor oil, Iroquois beer, Squaw Brand canned vegetables—the list goes on and on. For some products, the Indian was used as an all-purpose symbol of Canada. For others the Indian image was used to associate a product with the out-of-doors, or with strength and courage, or with the simple innocence of nature.³

First Nations Cultural Initiatives

Whether in films, books, visual art, or other aspects of culture, for many years the prevailing perspective was non-First Nations people speaking on behalf of First Nations. For example, white novelists have written about First Nations people as if they could accurately portray their voice, and non-First Nations artists have appropriated artistic traditions that belong to First Nations. Today, most people acknowledge the importance of First Nations determining the use of their own artistic traditions. The movements to return cultural possessions, the launch of the Aboriginal

Peoples Television Network, and the celebration of career achievements with National Aboriginal Achievement Awards are examples of cultural initiatives First Nations people are undertaking.

Returning cultural possessions

When the federal government sanctioned the arrest of forty-five people following a large potlatch at Village Island in December 1921, ceremonial regalia including coppers, masks, rattles, and whistles were gathered up by the Indian Agent in Alert Bay. The artifacts were sent to Ottawa, where the collection was divided between the Victoria Memorial Museum (now the

National Museum of Man in Ottawa) and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Some objects were set aside for the personal collection of Duncan Campbell Scott, then Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, and some were sent to a private collector in New York

City. The first efforts to repatriate these objects were started in the late 1960s. A few years later the board of Trustees of the National Museums Corporation agreed to return that part of the potlatch collection held by the National Museum of Man, on the condition that

museums would be constructed to house the collection. In 1979, the Kwakiutl Museum was completed in Cape Mudge, and in 1980, the U'Mista Cultural Centre at Alert Bay was opened. Each received approximately half of the repatriated Kwakwaka'wakw objects.

The Nisga'a Nation, in its landmark treaty, also successfully negotiated with the



Members of the Haida Repatriation Committee working at the Royal BC Museum in Victoria in 2000.

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Jeannette Armstrong

I am a real advocate of intellectual sovereignty, the reason being that I am a traditional keeper of knowledge. I really understand and really underpin the importance of our knowledge being subverted or being hijacked into the western framework, losing its potency or losing the power of it being able to contribute to the world, which really creatively needs to have as much intelligence and intellectual liaising to get out of the situation that it is in. I think indigenous people have a significant amount of power to give to that, and without educational institutions supporting that inquiry and that research and that academic level amongst ourselves, we could very easily neutralize and lose the knowledge that's there. Then it doesn't have a chance of becoming what it could be, it doesn't have a chance of being something new to contribute to the world.

I think the artists and the writers are at the forefront of creating—they are a vanguard of intellectual sovereignty. I really believe that in any culture, writers and artists are the vanguard, almost you could say the protectors of academic thought and philosophical underpinnings. They are also the vanguard of change as well; the change agent always come from the intelligentsia and so without an academic support and underpinning of that we don't have that opportunity, we are always marginalized, we are always colonized and we are always speaking from a colonized position rather than from a liberated position, rather than from a sovereign position. So we are always reacting to rather than speaking solely from a sovereign position, in any area of knowledge . . . I really believe in deconstruction of our political reality through literature.

PROFILE

An interview with Evan Adams

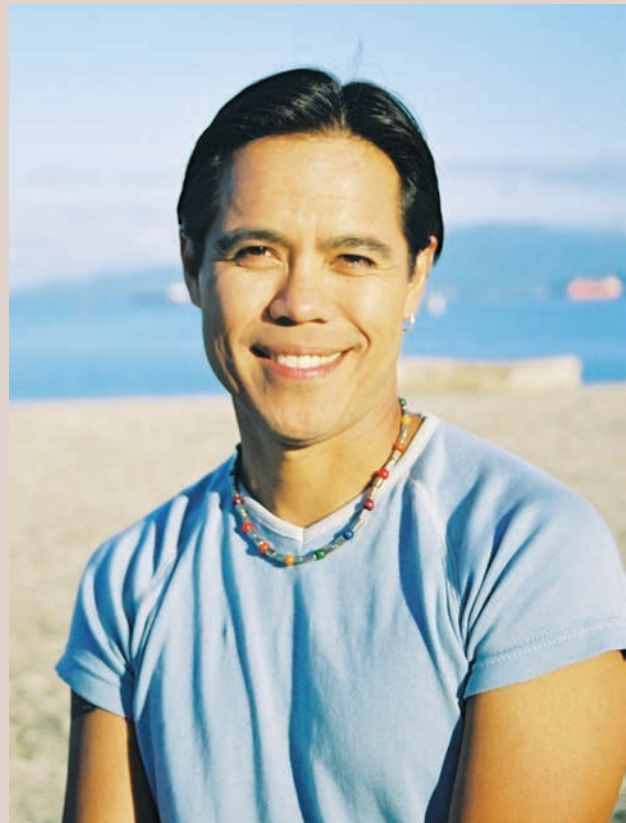
Evan Adams is Coast Salish. He has pursued dual careers, as a doctor (currently at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver) and an actor. In 1998 he starred in *Smoke Signals*, the first movie written by, directed by, and starring First Nations people. Recently he has collaborated with First Nations writer and director Sherman Alexie on a second film, *The Business of Fancydancing*. A third film is planned. This interview was done in 2000.

Q: Looking at First Nations images in Canadian history, what do you see? I'm thinking here of photographs, newspapers, scholarly journals, films, and books.

A: My first thought is, "What images?" We are underrepresented in official history. By omission, we are relegated to the status of "poor cousin" to the two "official" founding nations of Canada, the English and the French. It is ridiculous not to portray Aboriginal people in their rightful place historically. Our millennia of presence here, and our very land itself bought us a unique position as a founding nation in Canada. We directly helped make this country so great today.

Q: Have the images of First Nations people improved in the recent past from these historical images?

A: The images of First Nations people have improved, but they are still troublesome. Historic images—when they show us at all—portray us in the romantic past tense: wearing furs, going about a hunter-gatherer existence, naive—as if we had only just made First Contact. We are seldom portrayed in dynamic flux—evolving and changing from the moment we first laid eyes on white people. Today, we are no longer portrayed as the "Noble Savage." Now popular media like to present us as "social problems," as peoples who are not adjusting to modern demands or who are in social disintegration. Realistically, images say more about who has made the images than who



is in the image. To me, the contemporary and historical images of us tell me that the dominant culture still believes we are maladjusted artifacts—footnotes from Canada's glorious (and constructed) pioneer past—who have become, through time and their own inadequacies, social burdens on the rest of Canada. My sense from popular media is that they think they know better than we do how we should live our lives, and they basically wish we would just go away.

Q: You have heard the saying "Out of sight, out of mind." Do you think that First Nations are left out of popular media just for this reason, or do you think that First Nations are not being left out of popular media?

A: I think we need more First Nations journalists. I don't expect anyone other than us to make our lives better or to represent our voice; we have to do it ourselves. I do not expect someone else to right the wrongs of yesteryear. For instance, certain people have resented or ignored my peoples' well-being for the past 200 years. Why would I

suddenly expect those same people to take as good care of my mother as I would? Are today's history writers going to represent our contemporary First Nations reality to our children, or are we? We have to do it, of course.

Q: How do you see First Nations images in "popular culture" media today?

A: Popular media? I think of Hollywood when I think of "pop culture." I'm not naive. Pop culture is not about education, representation, visibility, or intelligence. Therefore I do not expect pop culture to reflect my complexity back to me. And what a surprise, it doesn't. Indians in pop culture are portrayed as strong, spiritual, keepers of the earth, and downright stoic—comic book—but everybody is "comic book" in popular culture. I don't give it much mind.

Q: Do you think First Nations images developed in the movie *Smoke Signals* improve on these images?

A: I think so. At least Sherman Alexie (the writer) and Chris Eyre (the director) attempted to subvert some of the weird, popular notions of who we are as First Nations people. Victor and Thomas, the film's two leads, argue incessantly about what it means to be an Indian. For First Nations audiences, it is a chance to finally hear someone talk about what it all means. It is an important discussion. "Identity" is one of the great existentialist journeys that all First Nations cultures have identified as being formative, and the audience gets to make this epic journey with the characters. Popular images are a bare shadow in comparison to these new depictions.

Q: Have you read Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, which the movie *Smoke Signals* is based on? What images of First Nations do you see created by these short stories? Why are they positive or negative for First Nations people?

A: I read those stories long before I was ever cast as Thomas in *Smoke Signals*. I absolutely fell in love with those characters. Have you ever fallen in love? I was in love with Thomas like that. I absolutely needed to play that role. I needed to use everything I had ever learned as an actor to bring that lovely role to life. Thomas embodied, metaphorically, all the pain and hardship my ancestors had suffered so that I could be here today. The images in Sherman Alexie's work, both in his book and in the

film, are both positive and negative. That is one of the responsibilities of the historian and/or the artist—to paint an accurate picture, warts and all. Indians are not perfect and should never be portrayed as such.

Q: Do you think these images are portrayed better in the movie *Smoke Signals* or in the book?

A: I would not compare them—it is like comparing apples and oranges. Both stand on their own as good pieces of work in their genres. I don't think one deserves "life" over the other.

Q: You are reported as saying: "It was so frustrating watching a movie like *Dances with Wolves* because Kevin Costner was always in the foreground and the Indians, whose story it was and who were more interesting, were blurs in the background." Could you explain what movies like *Dances with Wolves* do for images of First Nations and how movies like *Smoke Signals* do something else?

A: Hollywood movies almost always have a white protagonist/hero. I am not interested in that anymore. I am more interested in seeing something like my grandmother's life on the screen. When I was watching *Dances with Wolves*, I kept wanting to see past Kevin Costner and see what Tantoo Cardinal was doing. I wanted to see what the Indians were doing, not what the two white leads were thinking and feeling. I already knew that they were going to live happily ever after and their children would inherit the earth. Instead, I wanted to know what Tantoo was going to do as she found out that her people's time on this green Earth was in jeopardy. Now that's interesting! Kevin Costner is great, but he is not nearly as interesting as my grandmother.

Q: You said about your role in *Smoke Signals*: "I tried hard to make Thomas the kind of Indian my grandmother would have been proud of, but whom I never get to be." Could you explain the image your grandmother would be proud of?

A: Indians have different ideas about what it is to be a good person. The dominant culture pays attention to people who are thin, cool, sexy, well-dressed, smart-mouthed. My grandmother thought a person should be brave, loyal, funny, and, above all else, kind. I worry that

Continued

younger First Nations people will never know old-time Indians like I did—regal and wise. I'm worried that young First Nations women want to be Madonna, and not like their Aunt Sarah. The dominant culture values knowledge; we value wisdom. They value power; we value respect. We value a strong individual and they adore long legs and "attitude." I didn't want Thomas (my character in *Smoke Signals*) to be cool; I wanted him to do the right thing.

Q: You have said: "I think it is essential that movies about Indians have an authentic voice." Can you explain this statement?

A: I remember a woman friend of mine saying, "Thank goodness women can speak for themselves." She was referring to the fact that, for a long time, women seldom constructed popular images of themselves. Portraits of women used to be largely by men. Even though some men created wonderful images of women, many did not. Thus, "thank goodness" there are now women to speak their own realities. I would much rather hear from a woman about her experiences as a woman than from a man who has no idea what it is to be a woman. Ditto for First Nations people.

Q: In previous interviews, you have said that both acting and being a medical doctor are "healing." Can you explain how these two activities are healing to the images of First Nations people?

A: When I played Thomas in *Smoke Signals*, I really wanted to capture an old-time Indian for future generations to see. In 100 years, there won't be people around like I knew. The Indians when I was growing up were so warm and kind, and had these gorgeous accents, and such a strange and lovely demeanour, that I wanted to capture that magic forever. Images of ourselves are extremely important in developing our self-concept and self-esteem as we grow up. I wanted people to feel the love and pride I have for old-time Indians, and to feel pride in themselves after watching *Smoke Signals*. An honest, thoughtful reflection of yourself can also be healing. Art can be healing—just as healing as medicine a doctor gives you.

Q: What do you think about the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network? Do you think this network produces a more positive image of First Nations people? You have done work with this network in the past. How do you see the network's portrayal of First Nations people so far? Has the network reached its potential? Or do you think we will see strides of improvement in the future?

A: APTN is only just beginning to find its voice. It has created some wonderful programming already, but it has only just got into the producing end of things (instead of just being a broadcaster). They/we will only get better. I am so happy that we can turn on the TV though and see ourselves as we are. I did not think I would ever get to see it, you know, First Nations people on TV. When I was a little boy, that was unthinkable. Look at us now, Baby!

Q: For me, the most healing word is "hope." "Hope" allows people to dream. It is from these dreams that we come alive. If images and truths in society are constructed, as many contemporary scholars argue, then what can you say about "deconstructing" First Nations images of the past and constructing new images of First Nations people to give people hope?

A: I have seldom seen the vibrancy, complexity, or tenacity of my ancestors in the static poses of yesteryear, only the unimaginative limitations of the (non-Aboriginal) photographers' eyes. I am not really interested in deconstructing those outdated ideas of who we are, they're so laden with judgement and almost wholly without perceptual or historic value. I/we have a responsibility to leave behind images that speak our reality, tell our truth. I want my children to see magic when they look at us in images.

Q: How do you think that the things you are doing in your life are changing First Nations images?

A: I understand that we all put forward images. Mine are literal images—film, TV, literature. We are also putting forward personal images of ourselves when we meet people in real life. I know that my presence in a hospital or university or someone's living room speaks volumes about us. We are here, we are getting somewhere, and we are defining ourselves.

Canadian and British Columbia governments for the return of specific artifacts. The Royal British Columbia Museum and the Canadian Museum of Civilization were ordered to return about 300 artifacts to the Nisga'a. The Nisga'a Nation is now using "moral suasion" to press for the return of other artifacts still held by institutions and private collectors. The Haida Repatriation Committee has also successfully lobbied for the return of cultural treasures. Furthermore, some First Nations have brought back and reburied skeletal remains that were removed by archeologists. This is a lengthy and ongoing process.

Aboriginal Peoples Television Network

The launch of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) in September 1999 represents a significant milestone: for the first time in broadcast history, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people have the opportunity to share their stories with the rest of the world on a national television network dedicated to Aboriginal programming. Through documentaries, news magazines, dramas, entertainment specials, children's series, cooking shows, and education programs, APTN offers a window into the remarkably diverse worlds of indigenous people in Canada and throughout the world. It also offers an unprecedented opportunity for Aboriginal producers, directors, actors, writers, and media professionals to create innovative and relevant programming. More than 70 per cent of APTN's programming originates in Canada, with 60 per cent broadcast in English, 15 per cent in French, and 25 per cent in a variety of Aboriginal languages. When it was launched, APTN became available to over 8 million homes throughout Canada via cable television, direct-to-home, and wireless service viewers.

Moral suasion

Persuasion as opposed to force. Appealing to a person's moral sense.

CASE STUDY

National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation is a nationally registered charitable organization created in 1985 by Mohawk conductor and composer John Kim Bell. Its mandate has evolved over the years and it now focusses its energies in three areas: educational programs, production of the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards, and Blueprint for the Future, a series of Aboriginal youth career fairs. With the establishment of the newly created Aboriginal Veterans Scholarship Trust, the foundation will provide Aboriginal youth with the opportunity to pursue a university education in the arts, business, and sciences.

National Aboriginal Achievement Awards (NAAA)

The NAAA was established in 1993 to pay tribute to the United Nations International Year of the World's Indigenous People. The NAAA is an awards system recognizing career achievements by Aboriginal people in diverse occupations. In total 14 awards are presented annually: 12 to occupational achievers, one to a lifetime achiever, and one to a young achiever who receives a \$10,000 prize to further his or her education.

The awards were created as a way to build self-esteem and pride for the Aboriginal community and to provide role models for Aboriginal youth. For the general public, the awards reveal the capabilities and aspirations of Aboriginal people in a new and powerful light. They serve to inform this audience of the strides that can be made when an individual has the discipline, drive, and determination to accomplish his or her goals. The awards are bestowed to individuals of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis heritage who have reached a significant level of achievement in their occupations. The awards ceremony is broadcast on CBC television, and has

Continued

enjoyed audiences in excess of 2 million viewers. Since the awards began in 1994, 126 remarkable individuals have been recognized.

Among B.C. First Nations recipients of National Aboriginal Achievement awards are the following:

Freda Diesing,

award for Arts and Culture in 2002.



Master artist, carver, and educator Freda Diesing was one of a handful of artists responsible for the revival of Northwest Coast art and culture that began in the 1960s. In 1980 Diesing's work was included in the groundbreaking exhibition, "Legacy—Tradition and Innovation in Northwest Coast Indian Art," which was assembled by the Royal British Columbian Museum and later toured to other countries, showcasing her culture's art and history to the world. Haida Elder Freda Diesing died in 2002.

Mary Thomas,

award for the Environment in 2001.



Over a lifetime, Mary Thomas has been an environmentalist and educator advocating conservation, preservation, and awareness of the relevance of the traditional ways in preserving the health of the land and its people. She helped to found the Salmon River Watershed restoration project and has worked to create the Ecocultural Centre at Salmon Arm, B.C. In the 1970s she founded the Central Okanagan Interior Friendship Centre. Over the past ten years she has been using her traditional knowledge to document Secwepemc plant knowledge. In 1977 she became the first Aboriginal person in North America to receive the Indigenous Conservationist of the Year award from the Seacology Foundation.

Dolly Watts,

award for Business and Commerce in 2001.

A member of the Gitksan First Nation, Dolly Watts is the owner-operator of Liliget Feast House and Catering in Vancouver. This first-class restaurant offers traditional wild game and seafood, served in long wooden bowls carved from cedar and alder. While at university, Watts established a small bannock stand called Grandma's Bannock. From this she developed a catering business, Just Like Grandma's Bannock. Liliget Feast House opened in 1995, and its revenues have increased each year. Watts has developed an international reputation and is often a speaker on Aboriginal cuisine. She also co-founded the Aboriginal Business Club, which provides a forum for sharing successful business strategies.





Fred House,
award for Community Development in
2001.

A tireless advocate for Non-Status Indians and Métis, Fred House helped ensure that the rights of his people were enshrined in the constitution when it was repatriated in 1982. In the 1970s he served as President of the B.C. Association of Non-Status Indians, and he formed Coyote Credit Union, which provides small business loans and investments for Aboriginal business people. He fought long and hard for access to social housing for Métis and Non-Status Indians in B.C., and he established a province-wide network of court workers to assist Aboriginal people before the courts.

Chief Simon Baker (Khot-La-cha), award for Heritage and Spirituality in 2000.

Chief Simon Baker, whose Squamish name is Khot-La-cha or “Man with a big heart,” served as an ambassador for his people, lecturing nationally and internationally. He was a longshoreman on the Vancouver waterfront for forty years, working his way up to Superintendent at Canadian Stevedoring. As a youth during the 1930s he was a star lacrosse player for the North Shore Indians Lacrosse Club, where he became known as “Cannonball Baker.” His contributions to lacrosse earned him a place in the B.C. Sports Hall of Fame.

For over thirty years Chief Baker was a band councillor of the Squamish Nation, serving ten of those years as



Chairman. He started the first Indian Club of Vancouver as well as the Capilano Indian Community Club. Throughout his life he generously volunteered his time to many organizations and lectured

to countless classes. His community designated him “Chief for Lifetime,” and he was also made an Honorary Chief of the Sechelt Nation and an Honorary Lifetime Member of the Native Brotherhood of B.C.

Chief Baker's autobiography, *Khot-La-cha*, was co-written with Verna Kirkness and published in 1994.

The Honourable Judge Steven Point,
award for Law and Justice in 2001.

A leader of profound vision, Steven Point was first elected chief of the Skowkale First Nation when he was just 23 years old. After serving for 7 years he was accepted into the Faculty of Law at UBC and completed his degree, specializing in criminal and constitutional law. He established his own law firm and practised criminal and Native law for Stó:lō bands in Chilliwack. In 1991 he became the director of the Native Law Program at UBC. Subsequently he returned to work for the Stó:lō Nation and was appointed the Chief's Representative at the Stó:lō Government House and the chief spokesman for 21 Stó:lō Nation bands. In 1999 he was appointed to the bench (as a judge) and asked to serve in Prince Rupert and northwestern British Columbia.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

From the earliest days of European contact, the newcomers viewed First Nations people as less “civilized” than themselves. Explorers and traders did not recognize the diversity and complexity of the First Nations cultures they encountered, and they lacked respect for the people whose territories they invaded. By the time immigrant settlers came to British Columbia, images of “savage Indians” were already commonplace. Journalists often wrote inflammatory accounts of interactions between First Nations people and law enforcement officers, focussing on the peaceful settlers and the “warlike Indians.”

During the 1800s and early 1900s, many works of art were removed from First Nations communities

and sold to museums and private collectors. As well, anthropologists collected stories from the oral tradition and photographers documented traditional First Nations clothing. Images from those times became engrained in popular culture, including in films that distorted and misrepresented cultural realities. The fact that First Nations cultural expressions have continued to change and remain dynamic has not been widely understood. In recent years, however, First Nations artists, writers, actors, and filmmakers have been producing their own images and telling their own truth. With initiatives such as the National Aboriginal Achievement Awards, First Nations communities are charting a new course in the twenty-first century.

Throwing the Baby Eagle Out of the Nest

by John Borrows

As First Nations peoples we still have some distance to go to be free from the oppression we live under. While it is true that our sovereignty has not been extinguished¹ and that partial victories have occurred to facilitate our existing powers of self-determination,² much remains to be done.³ The politics and laws of Canada continue to contribute to our devastation.⁴ We can and must persist in our critique of Colonialism, but we cannot rely on Canada alone to give us more power. Power comes from within and, though we continue to struggle for an explicit recognition of our rights, we cannot expect that the most important victories we achieve will be from any other source but ourselves.⁵

When I first started as a professor at University of British Columbia Law School I had an interesting dream which brought this to my attention. I had just recently moved to B.C. from Ontario to be the director of the First Nations Law Program. I am Anishinabe and though I really liked my work, I did not feel at home. I missed my feelings and knowledge of the land and the connections that I have with friends and family. In this context my dream occurred early one morning just before I woke up, so I remembered it very clearly as I went about my day's activities. It is not my Vision Quest dream so I have the liberty of sharing it with you. I believe that the dream has something remarkably important to say about justice and healing within our communities. The dream unfolded in the following way.

I returned home to my reserve⁶ to visit with my mother and to relax and enjoy the peace I have when I am there. One of the first things I did was to visit with my Auntie Norma and have supper with her.

When we were finished our meal we decided to drive down to the lake and take in its beauty. As we were getting close to the water I noticed that there was a small island just off the shore with a large pine tree growing on it. One of the limbs of the giant extended over the water towards the shore, and on the limb was a man. I was perplexed as to what he would be doing there and I eventually noticed that he had his hands in a bundle of sticks on the branch.

When we stopped the car and got out I realized that the man's hands were in an eagle's nest. I called out to him to stop. As I did this he lifted a baby eaglet from inside its home and perched it on the side of the nest. My shouting had attracted attention and people started gathering on the shore to see what was happening. At this point I ran through the knee deep water to get to the tree to attempt to prevent him from harming the bird. As I reached the trunk he cast the small life over the side of the nest and into the water where it drowned in the depth below. This made me quite upset so I climbed the tree to restrain him. Just before I could reach him he set another baby on the side of the nest, rested it there for a second, and then cast it over the side too. At this point I was able to stop the man from further harming the nest and we came down out of the tree.

When I got to the bottom there were by then a considerable number of people circling the shore watching the proceedings. No one had moved or said anything. From the midst of the crowd a Band Constable stepped forward and stated that he was arresting me for disturbing the peace. I started to protest and said: "I'm trying to help. Don't you remember me; I just came home to visit my Auntie Nor—." He interrupted me and said: "Oh yeah, now

I know you, you're John. I heard you were having supper at Norma's place tonight—now I remember. You are free to go." My dream ended and I woke up. I boarded a plane an hour and a half later and travelled to an isolated community on the central coast of B.C., accessible only by float plane and boat. There I had an experience which reinforced what I learned as I was sleeping, which I will return to in a moment.

Before I do this though I want to pause and ask, what does this dream-story teach about justice and healing? It probably teaches more than I understand right now as there seem to be levels of symbolism which I continually discover. The first thought that occurred to me was that I could not do anything of significance to help my people if I did not remain known to my community. I must constantly keep my association and attention focussed on the every day experience of my people if I am going to be able to do anything helpful. My people are not only the Anishinabe and my home reserve, but the First Nation communities I participated with in British Columbia. I believe that my dream contains this general lesson that others could consider. We must be careful not to become detached from our community in our attempts to assert our interests before the wider Canadian public.⁷ If we do, we run the risk I saw in my dream that people will not accept our actions even when our deeds are well intentioned and right. This is an incredibly heavy burden to bear as it requires much greater effort, but it seems to be most in keeping with our structure as First Nations.

The second lesson I garnered from the dream was that there are some people in our own communities who are casting the power of our future away, "over the side of our nest." This is done in different ways. Children are being abused and taken away from us.⁸ Women are being violated, assaulted and excluded from community participation.⁹ Community factions are encouraged and "rivals" are destructively isolated

from political, economic and social influence.¹⁰ Language is employed which does not respect the convictions and feelings of others and offends the vision that our grandmothers and grandfathers preserved for us.¹¹ Some people mis-characterize the words and intentions of others in order to make their own arguments appear stronger and more persuasive. Realizing these pathologies were in my communities, after my dream I had to honestly ask myself: am I also the man in the nest? Do I, by what I write and teach, cast our future away? I believe these questions could be beneficially pondered by others as well.

Finally, the dream taught me about what is happening in our communities when we as leaders and academics speak about justice. Figuratively speaking, our people generally stand at the edge of the issues and watch.¹² While Oka encouragingly illustrated that people will take action if pushed beyond measure, for the most part we witness silent watchfulness as rhetoric, politics and philosophy become increasingly disconnected from the actions and understanding of people "at home."¹³ Participation in healing then occurs at a distance, through the media, with little active involvement from those whom it will most personally affect. This observation is not meant to diminish the accomplishments of those who have tirelessly worked to advance our powers; we would not even have the encumbered sovereignty we possess if it were not for them. I merely want to stress that I must add to my future actions a greater degree of our people's understanding and participation. People need to be more directly involved and feel justice move from within, and they need to be more intimately caught up in the events taking place around them. I recognize that this is difficult when there are so many pressing contemporary issues which make it hard to look up from today's needs and participate in the vision of tomorrow. Again, this is a hard task to accomplish but once again seems to be the one most in line with our requirements as Nations today.

The lure of political power, personal influence, money, tenure, self-satisfaction and other forms of acquisitiveness make these lessons all the more difficult to learn and follow. I admit that the dream was directed to me and therefore I am the one that must most directly heed its lessons. If others can benefit from the dream in working for the restoration of balance within our communities, in the spirit of sharing I leave it with you to think about.

Meditations on my dream were reinforced by a subsequent experience which I alluded to earlier. Six hours after waking I was in the Kwagiulth village of Kingcome Inlet, home of approximately eighty Tsawataineuk people. I spent three days visiting with members of the community and at the end of my time there I was taken to their Ceremonial Big House. It was an eighty- or ninety-year-old structure with beautiful house posts and carvings. It was a place to be respected. My host explained the representations that the engravings depict and he told me the stories of their origins with visible pride. However, as he was going around the room he stopped at one pole and showed me where someone had taken an axe to the figure and partially defaced it. With a note of shame he said to me, as I remember it: "This is what our people have done in the day of their sadness. Some of us forgot who we were and turned against that which would most help us remember. Our people are beginning to recall their power, but this pole stands as a reminder that we must never again forget."

When he finished his tour I thought of the lesson of casting baby eaglets over the side of a nest.

There is still much to be written and said in legal and political discourse to persuade others that First Nations have a presently existing, inherent power of self-government. At the same time there is much more we can be doing within our communities to reconstruct and recapture the full dignity and liberty that flows from being the Sovereign First Nations

of this land. These efforts would be enhanced and more likely to succeed if more responsibility and participation is exercised by a widening circle of First Nations people. It is the best way to ensure that our children will become grandmothers and grandfathers so that when they get old, they too can become eagles.

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Adze A tool for cutting away the surface of wood, like an axe with an arched blade at right angles to the handle.

Aesthetics Aesthetics refers to the beauty of a piece of art, apart from its practical use. It is determined in part by its style, design, and skill of production.

Anachronistic Old-fashioned or out of date; out of harmony with its period.

Appellant In law, an appellant is a person who appeals a decision to a higher court.

Appropriate (v) To appropriate something is to take possession of it, usually unlawfully or without authority.

Artifact Simply defined, artifact (also spelled artefact) means an object made by humans. However, its connotation gives the sense of an object from the past, often dug up by archaeologists.

Band There are two ways you may see the term band used. People who study traditional First Nations of B.C. often refer to an extended family group as a band. A band was identified with a certain geographical area. Today, however, a band refers to a group of people living in a community on an Indian reserve. The band council administers the affairs of the band, in a similar way that a city council operates the business of a city or town.

Boreal forest Boreal means northern. The boreal forest is an evergreen forest growing in sub-Arctic regions and the cold temperate regions of the northern hemisphere. It forms a ring around the globe, crossing North America, Europe, and Asia. The boreal forest is a harsh environment, for plants and animals as well as people.

Cantilevered A cantilevered bridge is built with beams projecting out from the banks and supported by girders.

Capitalism Capitalism is an economic system in which private wealth or capital is invested to produce and distribute goods at a profit. In order to accumulate wealth, owners hire labour to produce the goods. Market forces determine production and distribution.

Colony A colony is a country or territory occupied and ruled by another country. A colony has an elected local government but is subject to the laws of the parent country.

Constitution Act, 1982 This legislation describes the basic principles on which the government of Canada bases its laws. Before 1982, the Canadian constitution was contained in the British North America Act (now called the Constitution Act, 1867), and any changes to the constitution had to be made in the Parliament of Great Britain. Now Canada has complete control of its constitution.

Elder A person whose wisdom about spirituality, culture, and life is recognized. First Nations people and communities seek the advice and assistance of Elders in various areas of traditional as well as contemporary issues. As a sign of respect for First Nations Elders, the term is often capitalized.

Enfranchisement Enfranchisement gives people the right to vote in elections. For First Nations people, however, it

has meant more than this. Until 1949 provincially, and 1960 federally, First Nations people could only vote if they relinquished their Indian status. This meant cutting themselves off in many ways from their reserve community.

Extended family The term extended family usually refers to a large family group of several generations who live and work together. Often it will include several siblings and their families living with parents and perhaps grandparents.

Fiduciary responsibility Fiduciary comes from the Latin word for trust. Fiduciary responsibility is the position of trust given to the government to act in the best interests of First Nations people. It cannot act against First Nations' interests but must preserve and protect Aboriginal rights. It must justify government regulations and laws that interfere with Aboriginal rights.

First Nation A community of Aboriginal people who identify themselves as a distinct cultural group and who are the descendants of the original inhabitants of the land that is now known as British Columbia. Each First Nation has a name for itself, such as the Stó:lō Nation.

Formline Identified as an essential element in Northwest Coast art, the formline is a continuous flowing line that outlines the creature being represented.

Genealogical Tracing family descent from an ancestor.

Gunwale The upper edge of the side of a boat or ship. The name comes from when guns were supported there.

Hegemony The predominant influence of one group or power over others, especially when it involves coercion, as in colonialism. The beliefs and values of the dominant group appear to be universal.

Intertidal zone An area which is under water at high tide and exposed at low tide.

Lahal Also known as slahal, bone game, or stick game, it is a game of chance played by many First Nations of British Columbia. Two bones are hidden behind the back or beneath a cloth. One is marked, the other is plain. The player brings his closed hands forward, a bone in each one. A player from the opposite side tries to guess which hand has the unmarked piece. Special sticks are used to keep score. If a player guesses wrong, he or she gives one of the sticks to the hider's side.

Material culture Material culture refers to objects that are made and used by a group of people. As a field of study, it includes the techniques for making objects, how they were used, and how they connected with the daily lives and beliefs of the people.

Medium of exchange A medium of exchange is something that people agree has a value and can be used to exchange goods and services. It allows people to trade without the limitations of bartering. Today money is the most common medium of exchange.

Métis sash The Métis sash was traditionally made with a finger-weaving technique used by First Nations of Ontario. This method had long been used to make clothing and useful objects such as tumplines out of plant fibres, and

was adapted to use wool after European contact. The governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan have created the Order of the Sash, which recognizes the achievements of Métis individuals.

Michif Michif is the language of the Métis, developed during the beginning of Métis culture. It blends ancestral languages to create a new language. There are several dialects. The most well known combines Cree, French, and English. Other dialects incorporate other First Nations languages such as Ojibwa, Salteaux, and Assiniboine. Today Michif is considered an endangered language because there are fewer than 1,000 speakers, most of them in the Prairie provinces and neighbouring American states.

Moral suasion Persuasion as opposed to force. Appealing to a person's moral sense.

Muskeg A swamp or bog, consisting of a mixture of water and partially decomposed vegetation, often covered by a layer of sphagnum or other mosses.

Obsidian Obsidian is a volcanic glass, prized for its ability to be honed to an extremely sharp edge. It was used for knives, arrowheads, and other tools. Each obsidian source is unique so scientists can identify the source of an artifact wherever it is found. Today it is sometimes used as the blade for a surgeon's scalpel.

Oolichan The oolichan (also spelled eulachon) is a small fish important for its oil. It spends adulthood in the ocean and returns to fresh water to spawn in the early spring. It was the first harvest of the year for the First Nations after the winter supplies had been exhausted.

Patrilineal Based on kinship with the father or descent through the male line.

Precedent A precedent is a similar event or action that occurred earlier; a previous case or legal decision taken as a guide for subsequent cases or as a justification for subsequent situations.

Pre-empt Pre-empting (known elsewhere as homesteading) was the main form of land settlement by immigrants in North America. In Canada, British subjects were given 160 acres of land free, as long as they cleared the land and started farming on it. During the Douglas administration, First Nations people were encouraged to pre-empt land, but after Douglas left, the laws were changed to forbid First Nations people from pre-empting.

Protocol The rules, formalities, etc. of any procedure or group; formality and etiquette observed on state occasions.

Resource-use unit The resource-use unit is the basic group which has stewardship over the resources in a particular territory. First Nations express this in different ways. For some it may be a family grouping; for others it may be a broader social organization such as a house group.

Restitution Restitution is an act of restoring something lost or stolen to its proper owner. It also means compensation for an injury.

Royal assent In Canada, the U.K., and other Commonwealth countries, royal assent is the formal consent of the sovereign or his or her representative to a bill passed by Parliament.

Scrip Scrip, or Land Scrip, is a certificate issued to Manitoba Métis families entitling them to 240 acres or money for the purchase of land, issued in compensation for lands lost by the Métis after the Northwest Rebellion.

Seasonal round Also known as the annual round, this term refers to the pattern of movement from one resource gathering area to another. Resources became available at different times of the year in different locations, so people moved from place to place on a cycle that was followed each year. The seasonal availability of resources determined the living patterns of the people. Spring, summer, and fall saw them moving to a variety of resource areas while during the harsher winters they gathered in winter villages. The abundance of resources also determined how often people moved. In areas that had a greater abundance and variety, people could stay in one location for longer than in areas where resources were scarcer.

Sovereignty Sovereignty refers to supreme power or authority over a land or state; the power of self-government, with independence from outside control; autonomy; freedom from outside interference and the right to self-government.

Stewardship Stewardship is the care and management of the local resources. It implies a responsibility to respect and protect the resources in return for using them.

Title Title is a legal term that means the right to the possession of land or property. "Aboriginal title" is based on Aboriginal people's long-standing use and occupancy of the land as descendants of the original inhabitants of North America.

Trade union A trade union, also known as a labour union, is an organized association of workers formed to protect and further their rights and interests and to bargain collectively with employers on issues such as working conditions and wages.

Treaty A treaty is a formal agreement between two groups, usually sovereign bodies or nations. Historically treaties with First Nations in Canada were agreements between the government and the First Nations to clear land of Aboriginal title so the land could be used for settlement, resource extraction, or transportation routes like railways. Certain payments and benefits were traded in exchange for clear title to the lands. In negotiating treaties, the government acknowledges the title of First Nations to their lands.

Tribal council A tribal council is an organization of Aboriginal communities that have joined together to achieve greater social, political, and economic strength than they wield individually.

Watershed All the land drained by a particular river or lake; a drainage basin.

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Part One Introduction

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2. Keith Thor Carlson, *You Are Asked To Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History*. Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1997, p. 54. Used with permission of the Stó:lō Nation.
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8. A summary of results of the Treaty Negotiations Referendum is available from Elections B.C. at www.elections.bc.ca/referendum/questions.html.

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4. Marilyn Dumont, *A Really Good Brown Girl*. London, Ont: Brick Books, 1996, p. 52. Used with permission of Brick Books.

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3. Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992, pp. 173–174. Used with permission of Arsenal Pulp Press.

Epilogue

This article was first published in *Justice as Healing*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1996), Native Law Centre, University of Saskatchewan. It is reprinted here with permission of the author.

1. See Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Partners in Confederation: Aboriginal Peoples, Self-Government and the Constitution* (Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1993).
2. See Kathy Brock, “The Politics of Aboriginal Self-Government: A Canadian Paradox” (1991) 34 *Canadian Public Administration*, 272.
3. For the most recent review of statistical measures of the impoverished conditions within First Nations see Statistics Canada, *1991 Aboriginal People’s Survey* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1993).
4. For an accessible and well-written description of the problematic application of Canadian law and policy to First Nations see, generally, A.C. Hamilton and C.M. Sinclair, *The Justice System and Aboriginal People: Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Queen’s Printer, 1991).
5. “As we begin to start to understand ourselves again as a people, as we start to deal with our own ceremonies, our own traditions, our own songs, I believe we will again identify for ourselves what is the true source of authority for all peoples.” Gordon Peters, Ontario Region Chief, Chiefs of Ontario in Frank Cassidy (ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Determination* (Lantzville: Oolichan Books, 1991).
6. Neyaashiinigiiming, or Cape Croker Indian reserve, on the southwestern shores of Georgian Bay in what is now Southern Ontario.
7. One of my Nation’s teachers wrote about the importance of attachment: “There are four orders in creation. First is the physical world, second, the plant world; third, the animal; last the human world. All four parts so intertwined that they make up one life and one whole existence. With less than the four orders of life and being incomplete, and unintelligible. No one portion is self-sufficient or complete, rather each derives its meaning from and fulfills its functions and purpose within the context of the whole of creation.” Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage* (Toronto: McClelland and Steward, 1976) at 21.
8. See Lavina White and Eva Jacobs, Report of the Aboriginal Committee, Community Panel Family and Children’s Service Legislation Review in British Columbia: *Liberating Our Children—Liberating Our Nations* (Victoria: Ministry of Social Services, October, 1992).
9. See *Voices of Aboriginal Women: Aboriginal Women Speak Out About Violence* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development and the Native Women’s Association of Canada, 1991).
10. To examine this occurrence under the new registration procedure of the Indian Act, see *The Impacts of the 1985 Amendments to the Indian Act* (Bill C-31): I) *Aboriginal Inquiry* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs, 1990).
11. I have purposely chosen not to give any citations to the abuse and disrespectful language employed in some circles. I have done this because I might be a poor judge of the motivation and effect of people’s words. While I have definitely read and felt the bite of such language I want to give others the benefit of the doubt in why they said certain things and how they were said. I have also restrained from the citation here out of consideration for those who have unknowingly used such tactics and in the hopes that many people might examine their own talk and writings. Such introspections might be hindered if specific individuals were identified.
12. Many people I spoke to did not feel they had sufficient information to make an informed decision. For a statistical compilation of low voter participation rates in the referendum in Status Indian Communities see *Referendum 92: Official Voting Results* (Ottawa: Chief Electoral Officer, 1992).
13. See Menno Bolt, *Surviving as Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), especially his chapter on leadership at 117–166.

Photo Credits

The following abbreviations are used in identifying the source of photos:

BCA	British Columbia Archives, Victoria
NAAA	National Aboriginal Achievement Awards, Ottawa
PEP	Pacific Educational Press, Vancouver
RBCM	Royal British Columbia Museum, Victoria
UBCIC	Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, Vancouver/Kamloops
UBC/MOA	UBC Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver

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(C-09639); 115: BCA (H-07279); RBCM (PN 7587); 118: BCA (I-33176); RBCM (PN 12454).

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B.C. First Nations Studies documents the history and cultures of First Nations and Métis people in British Columbia from before the arrival of Europeans to the present. It examines the historical foundations of contemporary issues and illustrates how First Nations cultures have adapted to changing world events and environments. Aboriginal people's contributions to British Columbia and Canada are highlighted, and important leaders and role models are profiled.



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