

by the colonists. It was not uncommon for European colonists to murder Natives by mass hangings, roasting them on spits, burning them in groups at the stake or hacking children into pieces to be used as dog food. For entertainment, some placed bets on who could slice a live Native man in two, cut off his head or disembowel him in one blow. The colonists also performed inhuman acts of cruelty and murder on Native babies that I won't even get into here.

16

If Columbus truly regarded the first people as "in God" then I would hate to see how he behaved during Sunday mass. To suggest that he was reverent of the people is to ignore that, from day one, Native people were often regarded as soulless chattel to be murdered and enslaved in the interest of European profit. When it comes to the Columbus myth, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar and sometimes people just get lost and think they're in India. Case closed.

So if there is no historical basis for the *in Dios* theory and many Native people find the term "Indian" offensive, why do so many Native people call themselves "Indian"? One answer is there is a sentimental attachment to the use of the word. It's a term that many older Natives have always used and just continue to use. It also persists through the act of reclaiming a pejorative name, much the same way that African Americans claim they are reclaiming the "n word." Finally, the word "Indian" holds a lot of legal and political weight that makes it difficult to abandon the term outright. The primary reason for its continuation in Canada can be attributed to the infamous Indian Act.

The Indian Act

Anyone who has ever read a newspaper or watched a news story about Natives in Canada has probably heard of the Indian Act,

"an Act respecting Indians" (although I think that "respecting Indians" part is a bit misleading). The Indian Act was passed like a painful kidney stone in 1876, and confirms the Canadian government's full control over "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians" under the Constitution Act of 1867. The Act defines who can legally call oneself an "Indian" and establishes the legal rights and restrictions that Indians are subject to. In other words, the Indian Act was designed to tell Indian people what they *can* do, but mostly what they *can't* do.

On the plus side, the Indian Act also affirms that Indian rights are beyond legal challenge since they are entrenched in the Constitution Act of 1982. That "beyond legal challenge" part is why the Native community is reluctant to abandon the Indian Act altogether. There is also a fear in the Native community that changing the name "Indian" to something more PC may result in the dissolving of those rights attached to "Indians." If that sounds like Indians just being paranoid then you've obviously never spent five minutes with a policy lawyer when he is dissecting legalese.

Recently, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development changed its name to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, but the term "Indian" is still in the department's legal name and is still the legal term used in the Canadian constitution and federal statutes. Regardless of whether you use the word "Indian" or not, intent is everything, and if you're the type of person who snarls when you call someone an Indian and then spits on the ground, it's probably a good sign that you're not the type who can get away with using the word "Indian" in any circumstance.

17

Aboriginal

Put simply, Aboriginal is a blanket word that refers to three groups