

# Indigenous Writes

A GUIDE TO FIRST NATIONS,  
MÉTIS & INUIT ISSUES IN CANADA

**CHELSEA VOWEL**





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& Inuit Issues in Canada





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& Inuit Issues in Canada

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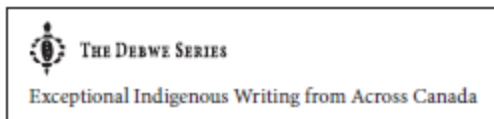
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*Dedicated to ninâpêm, José Tomás Díaz Valenzuela, kisâkhitin mistahi.*



# Contents

kinanâskomitinâwâw/Acknowledgments *xi*

## INTRODUCTION: HOW TO READ THIS BOOK 1

### PART 1. THE TERMINOLOGY OF RELATIONSHIPS 5

1. Just Don't Call Us Late for Supper 7  
*Names for Indigenous Peoples*
2. Settling on a Name 14  
*Names for Non-Indigenous Canadians*

### PART 2. CULTURE AND IDENTITY 23

3. Got Status? 25  
*Indian Status in Canada*
4. You're Métis? Which of Your Parents Is an Indian? 36  
*Métis Identity*
5. Feel the Inukness 55  
*Inuit Identity*
6. Hunter-Gatherers or Trapper-Harvesters? 60  
*Why Some Terms Matter*
7. Allowably Indigenous: To Ptarmigan or Not to Ptarmigan 67  
*When Indigeneity Is Transgressive*
8. Caught in the Crossfire of Blood-Quantum Reasoning 73  
*Popular Notions of Indigenous Purity*

9. What Is Cultural Appropriation? 80  
*Respecting Cultural Boundaries*
10. Check the Tag on That “Indian” Story 92  
*How to Find Authentic Indigenous Stories*
11. Icewine, Roquefort Cheese, and the Navajo Nation 100  
*Indigenous Use of Intellectual Property Laws*
12. All My Queer Relations 106  
*Language, Culture, and Two-Spirit Identity*

**PART 3. MYTH-BUSTING 115**

13. The Myth of Progress 117
14. The Myth of the Level Playing Field 124
15. The Myth of Taxation 135
16. The Myth of Free Housing 143
17. The Myth of the Drunken Indian 151
18. The Myth of the Wandering Nomad 160
19. The Myth of Authenticity 165

**PART 4. STATE VIOLENCE 169**

20. Monster 171  
*The Residential-School Legacy*
21. Our Stolen Generations 181  
*The Sixties and Millennial Scoops*
22. Human Flagpoles 191  
*Inuit Relocation*
23. From Hunters to Farmers 206  
*Indigenous Farming on the Prairies*

24.	Dirty Water, Dirty Secrets	213
	<i>Drinking Water in First Nations Communities</i>	
25.	No Justice, No Peace	223
	<i>The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples</i>	
<b>PART 5. LAND, LEARNING, LAW, AND TREATIES 233</b>		
26.	Rights? What Rights?	235
	<i>Doctrines of Colonialism</i>	
27.	Treaty Talk	243
	<i>The Evolution of Treaty-Making in Canada</i>	
28.	The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same	252
	<i>Numbered Treaties and Modern Treaty-Making</i>	
29.	Why Don't First Nations Just Leave the Reserve?	260
	<i>Reserves Are Not the Problem</i>	
30.	White Paper, What Paper?	268
	<i>More Attempts to Assimilate Indigenous Peoples</i>	
31.	Our Children, Our Schools	276
	<i>Fighting for Control Over Indigenous Education</i>	
	Index	285
	Image Credits	291
	About the Debwe Series	292





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absolutely vital. I was doing a very poor job of this, so having Shauna step in was a huge reason this book actually got completed.

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# Introduction

## *How to Read This Book*

After teaching in the Northwest Territories and Alberta for a few years, I applied to law school at the University of Alberta. Education has always been my passion, but I felt I needed additional skills to be able to better understand and articulate some of the problems I was dealing with on a daily basis in the classroom. I wanted to be able to advocate more effectively for my students – most of whom are Indigenous – and I wanted to know how to go about making institutional changes. I thought studying law would give me insights I lacked.

I was right, but the most valuable education I received was not the one I'd been expecting.

I began law school in 2006. To say it was difficult is an understatement. Oh, it wasn't the crushing workload or the competitive peers, and it wasn't even studying law while raising two daughters. It was the world-view that informed every course. I thought I was prepared for this – after all, I had spent 17 years in the Canadian system of education. I had forced myself to read all the great European philosophers, and I thought I already understood the world-view. Yet, as I squirmed uncomfortably through each Property Law session, it dawned on me that although I had been exposed to these ideas before, they had never been laid before me so clearly and concretely – and boy, were they different from the way I had been raised to see the world!

I didn't know how to process any of this until, one day, I went to get a pint with a couple of classmates. It sounds like the beginning of a joke: "A Métis, a Liberal, and a Conservative walk into a bar...." Well, they actually were members of these political parties and were the first people I'd ever met who knew that much about Canadian politics. By now, I've mythologized these conversations because they had such a profound impact on me, but, at the time, it was just three people debating topics they'd learned in class.

This was an opportunity to sit down with people who were my friends and who had very clear yet different political beliefs from my own. We weren't out to prove each other wrong or "win" anything. We were trying to understand and be understood. We wanted to leave these conversations as friends. Our discussions about Indigenous issues were unlike anything I'd ever experienced before because they were *respectful*. There were times when emotions ran high because the issues we were discussing were challenging, and very personal. When you are talking about the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada, it is very difficult for the conversation not to get personal if you live on these lands. Nonetheless, despite the fact we had very deep political differences – and I mean Mariana Trench-sized differences – all three of us managed to really listen to what the others were saying, and to be truly heard in return. For me, these conversations were life changing and are the part of my legal education I value the most.

We did not come out of those conversations in full agreement – and in many situations we had to agree to disagree – but we did come out of them with a deeper understanding of one another's concerns and beliefs.

Those conversations are the reason this book exists. Each one of the pieces presented here is written as though you and I are sitting down together having a discussion. Obviously, the conversation is one-sided (as I am trying to present my point of view to you), but always, in the back of my mind, I am speaking to friends. Sometimes, I invoke the counterarguments or questions I was actually presented with or that I have had in subsequent conversations with others. They are not the only counterarguments or questions that are possible, but when I present them it is because I believe they are questions many people have on these topics. I am not trying to put words in your mouth, and I am certainly not trying to represent Liberal or Conservative viewpoints; I do not claim to understand the political ideologies involved well enough to do that. I am trying to make myself understood, and it is entirely up to you to evaluate this information as you will.

My writing will not always be received as polite – I warn you now. I am indeed impatient with certain claims, and I have been battling the same stereotypes for nearly two decades. This can wear on a person. Sometimes, I am going to be straight-out sarcastic and brusque. It is extremely important readers of this book remind themselves we probably do not know one another in real life – what I am saying, dismissing, or getting a little snarky about is not something personal to you, the reader. Instead, I am reacting to wider social beliefs. Basically, this is not about you as a person. It can't be, because, as I pointed out, we are strangers. If you start to get the eerie feeling that I am peering out from these pages and fixing you with an

accusatory stare, go back and see if I've actually named you. From time to time, I *will* name names, so if yours is not there, you can relax. More significantly, if you need me to always be polite in order to read what I've written here, please ask yourself whether my tone is more important than learning about these issues. I do try my best to keep things light, but these topics are not easy ones, and I am genuinely trying to communicate with you.

The writings in this book are divided into five broad, interrelated themes: the terminology of relationships; culture and identity; myth-busting; state violence; and land, learning, law, and treaties. Each chapter is meant to stand on its own, and I have made it a priority to provide readers with as many additional resources as possible on each topic.

In fact, I worked as hard on the endnotes as I did on some of the chapters for three reasons: (1) I wanted to make sure to acknowledge my learning has been aided by many brilliant people, and this book would not have been possible without all they have thought about, tried, and shared. That I am able to articulate any of what is in this book is a result of my interaction with those minds. (2) I want you to be able to pull out a chapter you are interested in and have the full sources cited even if they refer to things mentioned in other chapters. (3) I want you to have a curated list of books and websites to explore as you wish. This book should only be the beginning of your exploration of these topics.

I want this book to spark further conversations in your home, in the classroom, and in community groups. Sometimes, emotions are going to run high; that is an inevitable part of these vital conversations. When we remind ourselves we are speaking to other human beings who have families, who face diverse challenges, and who have diverse aspirations for a better life, it becomes easier to process those emotions. What we cannot do is pretend the subject matter is anything but difficult. Sometimes, we will simply have to agree to disagree. At the end of the day, we are all still going to have to figure out how to relate to one another. We begin that process by understanding the fundamental issues.



## PART 1

# *The Terminology of Relationships*







# 1

## Just Don't Call Us Late for Supper

### *Names for Indigenous Peoples*

Any discussion needs a certain number of terms that can be understood by all participants; otherwise, communication ends up even messier than usual. I've read a lot of books about Indigenous peoples, and it seems every single one spends some time explaining which term the author will use in the rest of the text, and why he or she chose that particular term. I've tried avoiding that sort of thing when talking to people, but it absolutely always comes up.

I find it somewhat easier to start with a list of what you should definitely *not* be calling us – a little housecleaning of the mind, if you will. Surprisingly, there are a great number of people who still think the use of some of these terms is up for debate, but I would sincerely like to help you avoid unintentionally putting your foot in your mouth. So, between us, let's just agree the following words are never okay to call Indigenous peoples:

- savage
- red Indian
- redskin
- primitive
- half-breed
- squaw/brave/buck/papoose

This is not an exhaustive list, and there are plenty of other slurs we do not need to mention that are obviously unacceptable. I do not intend to spend any time discussing how the above terms might *not* be offensive, because engaging in a philosophical sidebar about whether words have inherent meaning tends to end in recitals of

*Jabberwocky*;<sup>1</sup> before you know it, you've wasted half the night trying to translate it into Cree, yet again. Or, so I've heard.

A lot of people who would like to talk about Indigenous issues honestly do not want to cause offence, and get very stressed out about the proper terms; so, it is in the interest of lowering those people's blood pressure that I'm now going to discuss various terms in use out there.

First, there is no across-the-board agreement on a term. The fact that all Indigenous peoples have not settled on one term really seems to bother some people. I would like those people to take a deep breath, and chill out. *It's okay*. Names are linked to identity, and notions of identity are fluid.

For example, did you have a cute nickname when you were a young child? I did. My parents called me "Goose Girl." Twenty-five or so years later, if my employer called me "Goose Girl," it would be awkward at best. There are terms of endearment that my friends and family call me that would sound very strange coming out of the mouth of someone I just met.

When meeting new people, we tend to err on the side of formality to avoid giving a poor first impression. So it is with identifiers for Indigenous peoples. Terms change; they evolve. What was a good term 20 years ago might be inappropriate now, or it has been worn out through constant repetition – like every hit song you used to love but can no longer stand to listen to. There is also an issue of terms becoming co-opted and changed by government, industry, or by pundits searching for new ways to take potshots at us. Sometimes, a term is abandoned because it has become so loaded that using it suggests tacit agreement to some bizarre external interpretation of who Indigenous peoples are.

Indigenous peoples are incredibly diverse; there are all sorts of internal arguments about which terms are best, what they actually mean, why people should reject this and that, and so on. What I'm okay with you calling *me* might really annoy someone else. If you were hoping this chapter was going to help you avoid that completely, I want to be upfront with the fact that you will leave disappointed. Be aware: no matter how safe you think a term is, someone somewhere might get upset if you call them that. No one can give you a magical pass so you never have to re-examine the terms you are using – not even your Native friend.

Be prepared to listen to what people have to say about the term you use, and to respect what they suggest you call them instead. This is surprisingly easy to do, and goes a very long way in keeping the dialogue useful. I mean, it would be a bit off to deliberately keep calling someone "Susie" when she's asked you to call her "Susan," right?

Here are some of the names in use:

- Indian
- NDN
- Aboriginal
- Indigenous
- Native
- First Nations
- Inuit
- Métis
- Native American (more in the United States than in Canada)
- the name of a particular nation (Cree, Ojibway, Chipewyan, and so on)
- the name of a particular nation in that nation's original language (nêhiyaw,<sup>2</sup> Anishinaabe, Dene sųłiné, and so on)

Notice that I always capitalize the various terms used to describe Indigenous peoples. This is deliberate; the terms are proper nouns and adjectives referring to specific groups. “To capitalize or not to capitalize” ends up being a heated debate at times, but I feel it is a measure of respect to always capitalize our names when writing in English. This is my rule of thumb: if I can swap out “Indigenous” with “Canadian” (which is always capitalized), then I use the big *I*. I also capitalize names for non-Indigenous peoples throughout this book.

The term *Indian* is probably the most contentious. There are a couple of theories about where the term originated,<sup>3</sup> but that's not the point. In Canada, *Indian* continues to have legal connotations, and there is still an *Indian Act*<sup>4</sup>; so you'll see it used officially, as well as colloquially. There is also a long history of this term being used pejoratively – two good reasons why it doesn't sit well with everyone.

However, it is also a term that is often used internally. Please note this does not mean it's always okay for others to use the term. I tend to suggest that avoiding this term is probably for the best, unless someone is specifically referencing the *Indian Act*. There is a level of sarcasm and challenge often associated with its internal use that is easy to miss, and most likely cannot be replicated. If you are interested in avoiding giving offence, this term is one you might want to drop from your vocabulary.

*NDN* is a term of more recent origin, in heavy use via social media. This shorthand term has no official meaning and is very informal. If you say it aloud it just sounds like *Indian*, so its use really only makes sense in text-based situations. *NDN* is more of a self-identifier than anything.

I know *Native American* is very popular in the U.S., and it is still in use as a way of self-identifying among some older people here in Canada. It's a weird thing to hear in our Canadian context, though; and *Native Canadian* is just silly.<sup>5</sup> *American Indian* is another term that is very rarely used in Canada outside of references to the American Indian Movement (AIM).

*Aboriginal* (never *aborigine*) is a term of fairly recent origin, being adopted officially in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, to refer generally to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.<sup>6</sup> It has become the most common official term used here in Canada. I now tend to use this term only within its legal context because, although it is not offensive per se, its use is incredibly generic and made increasingly obnoxious by overuse – once again, like a hit song you can no longer stand to hear. If you use this term, please try to remember it is not a proper noun. Do not, for example, refer to people as *Aboriginals*, but rather as *Aboriginal peoples*. Also, please avoid the possessive. Referring to Indigenous peoples as Canada's *Aboriginals* is likely to cause an embarrassed silence.

*Indigenous* tends to have international connotations, referring to Indigenous peoples throughout the world rather than being country-specific.<sup>7</sup> It can be both a legal and colloquial term; like *Aboriginal*, it includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. At this moment, it is my favourite term to use and will be my go-to throughout this book. It is possible that in five years I will look back at my use of this term with shame, but future me can just hush because present me doesn't really have a better word. An added bonus is that it is almost impossible to accidentally use this term as a proper noun. *Indigenouses* doesn't exactly roll off the tongue, does it?

Throughout this book, I use the term *Indigenous* to refer specifically to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit living in what is now called Canada. By using it this way, I do not intend to deny indigeneity to those who are indigenous to other places in the world. When I say *non-Indigenous* in this book, I mean only “not-Indigenous-to-this-place-called-Canada.”

You might also wonder why I keep saying Indigenous *peoples* instead of Indigenous *people*; after all, isn't *people* already plural? Many epic nonphysical battles were fought for the inclusion of that *s* on the end of *people*, and I'm going to honour the sweat and tears that put it there. It speaks to the incredible diversity of Indigenous peoples as hundreds of culturally and linguistically distinct groups, rather than one homogenous whole. It also speaks to the kind of pedantry I will not be successful in confining to this chapter – my apologies in advance.

*Native* is another tricky term. For some people it refers only to First Nations, and for others (myself included) it's another catchall term, but a much more informal one

than *Aboriginal* or *Indigenous*. I don't want to suggest this is an internal term that can never be used by non-Indigenous peoples, but it does have some historically pejorative connotations that you may wish to avoid (e.g., *going native*). Many people also contest this use of the term because they want to employ it as well (e.g., native of Alberta, native to Canada). Many Indigenous peoples use the term and are okay with it, but it's a bit like *Indian* in that you are more likely to step on toes if you go throwing it around.

Now for some more specific, yet still quite general, terms. *First Nations* refers to that group of people officially known as Indians under the *Indian Act*, and does not include Inuit or Métis peoples. Because many First Nations people share similar issues – related to reserves, status, and so forth – it's a good general term for a very diverse group of Indigenous peoples.

*Inuit* has pretty well replaced *Eskimo* in regular parlance here in Canada, and using *Eskimo* here is probably going to get you dirty looks. *Eskimo* is still a term used in Alaska, however, because it includes both Iñupiat and Yupik peoples while Inuit does not. Thus, *Eskimo* did not make it onto my “never say this” list. Just make sure you're in Alaska when you're saying it.

*Métis* is a term that is not as common in the U.S. as it is in Canada, although there are absolutely Métis people there. In terms of official recognition, however, it is a uniquely Canadian name. There is a chapter in this book that delves into Métis identity in great detail; but, for now, just be aware the Métis are also an Indigenous people.

These are some of the terms being used right now, so pick your poison.

Notice I did not suggest the term *Canadian* at any point. This is a deliberate exclusion. Many Indigenous peoples do not identify as Canadian because, at no point, did they or their ancestors consent to becoming Canadian. The issue is much more complex than this, of course, but it is important to be aware of the situation. Some Indigenous peoples have no problem identifying as *Canadian*, so this is not an across-the-board rejection of the term; just something to think about.

If you want to move beyond general terms, and I definitely encourage that, the learning curve can be a bit steep at first. Over the years, various groups of Europeans used their own names for Indigenous peoples; sometimes, a single group of people can be known by two, or three, or more different names! If you aren't aware that a number of different terms refer to the same group of people, it can be incredibly difficult to sort out. If you were to sit down and make a list of all the different names every Indigenous group in Canada has been given by Europeans (sometimes based on bastardized versions of the names *other* Indigenous peoples called them), you would have a substantial and basically unusable document.

For example, the Algonquin are an Anishinaabe people related to the Odawa and Ojibwe. Over the years, they have been called Attenkins,<sup>8</sup> Algoumequins,<sup>9</sup> Alincongins,<sup>10</sup> and at least a dozen other variations that are not immediately recognizable as referring to the same people. To muddy the waters even further, Indigenous peoples are sometimes grouped linguistically (according to languages). For example, the Algonquin are classed by linguists as being part of the Algonquian language group that includes about 30 languages, such as Blackfoot, Cree, and Mi'kmaq! Such a slight spelling difference, but beware these linguistic groupings because they collapse extremely different cultures into one linguistic category.

Then, you have names that sound similar but refer to very different peoples, like the Chipewyan (Dene sųłíné) and the Chippewa (another name for Ojibwe), which are two very distinct groups.

There are often multiple names in use. One person can call herself Assiniboine, Stoney, Nakota Sioux, Stone Sioux, Asinipwât, Nakoda or Nakota, and Îyârhe Nakoda – all names that have been used for the same group of people. In addition to the group name, people will also identify themselves by which community they come from; in this case, it could be the Alexis Nakota-Sioux Nation in Alberta. Many of our communities have undergone name changes, too; so, depending on what generation you are in, you may use different names for the same community!

The names are going to continue to change. Many Indigenous communities have discarded their European-language names for Indigenous place names. The eastern James Bay Cree communities in Quebec were each known by an English and a French name, and have officially renamed almost all of their communities in Cree. One community, now Whapmagoostui in Cree, is still known by many as Great Whale River or Poste-de-la-Baleine. There is a sizeable Inuit population there, as well, so the community is also named Kuujjuaraapik. You can see how this can quickly get confusing for people who are not familiar with the history of the area.

Do not despair! No one can be expected to know all of the different names for every single people and community across Canada. A really powerful and beautiful start would be to simply learn the names in use, both historic and contemporary, for the Indigenous peoples in the area where you live. Much as place names are changing (or reverting), the names we call ourselves are changing, as well, and the trend is to use the name we originally called ourselves in our languages. If you get confused, don't be scared to ask! You just might get an interesting history lesson of the area you are in, because names are so inextricably linked to that history.

I hope this helps. My intention is not to simplify the issue, but rather to make people more aware of how complex and, sometimes, confusing names can be. More important, we now have some terms we can work with as we explore these issues together.

#### NOTES

1. Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1980; New York: Vintage Books, 1980), <http://www76.pair.com/keithlim/jabberwocky/poem/hofstadter.html>. I could spend hours discussing how a successful translation of Lewis Carroll's nonsense poem, *Jabberwocky*, into an Indigenous language would herald a kind of linguistic health I aspire to. On the difficulties of translating this poem into other languages, see Hofstadter.
2. I will not be capitalizing Cree words throughout this book. I used a standardized written Cree and, within this system, words are never capitalized. Although this book is in English, I want to respect nêhiyawêwin conventions as much as possible.
3. Straight Dope Science Advisory Board, "The Straight Dope: Does 'Indian' Derive from Columbus's Description of Native Americans as 'una Gente in Dios'?" *The Straight Dope*, last modified October 25, 2001, accessed December 2, 2013, <http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/1966/does-indian-derive-from-columbuss-description-of-native-americans-as-una-gente-in-dios>. Here, you will find a great discussion of the various possible origins of the term *Indian*.
4. *Indian Act*, RSC, 1985, c.I-5.
5. Robert Sawyer, *Hominids* (New York: Tor, 2003). I think Robert Sawyer uses the term *Native Canadians* in all his books because it is more familiar to his readers in the United States than First Nations would be. Don't worry, Robert, I'm still a fan!
6. *Constitution Act, 1982*, schedule B of *Canada Act, 1982* (UK), c 11, s 35.
7. United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly*, October 2, 2007, A/RES/61/295, accessed December 1, 2012, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/471355a82.html>.
8. Clinton, Vol. 6 in *New York Documents of Colonial History* (1855), 276.
9. Samuel de Champlain, chap. 2 in *Oeuvres* (1870), 8.
10. Nicolls, Vol. 2 in *New York Documents of Colonial History* (1853), 147.

# 2

## Settling on a Name

### *Names for Non-Indigenous Canadians*

This book is very much about relationships – historical, contemporary, and future relationships. Unfortunately, the historical and contemporary relationships between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada have, at times, been very strained. In order to form healthier and more positive relationships into the future, there needs to be dialogue between all peoples living on these lands.

Dialogue requires terminology we can use to name one another, so we can recognize how certain events impacted/impact us differently, as well as what we have in common as diverse peoples. The previous chapter was all about the multitude of terms and names that are used to speak about Indigenous peoples. Those terms shift and change over time, and will continue to do so, but it seems obvious having a vocabulary we can use is absolutely necessary if we wish to have a discussion about Indigenous issues.

There are terms to choose from when speaking of the wide range of non-European peoples who have immigrated to Canada over successive generations; terms that have official status, as well as terms preferred by these communities themselves. Terms related to identity among non-European populations have shifted and changed with time and also require checking to find out which terms are acceptable right now.<sup>1</sup>

There are really no sanctioned and widely accepted terms with which to refer to “the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority” in a generalized sense comparable to the term *Indigenous peoples* or any of the generalized labels for other non-Indigenous peoples. In great part, this is due to the fact that the majority tends to have the power to sanction and widely accept terms, and does not really have much cause to refer to itself.

When I cast about for a term to use to refer to “the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority,” I do



so because it makes no sense to ignore the fact that these peoples exist. Naming these peoples is just as important as naming Indigenous peoples if we are going to talk about how the past informs the present.

Can you sense my hesitancy here to pick a name? Perhaps this will help to clarify why that hesitation exists; take a gander at some of the terms that do get used to name “the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority”:

- White
- non-Native, non-Aboriginal, non-Indigenous
- European
- settler, settler colonials

First off, there aren’t many terms to choose from, and the second bullet lists terms that are based entirely on a “not-this” dichotomy, which almost always rubs people the wrong way as they are inherently exclusionary.

It is fairly easy to come up with reasons why all of these terms fail to be properly descriptive and shouldn’t be used. I once had someone explain it to me like this: she said, “When I try to find a word to refer to you with, I’m just naming you. When you call me White, or a non-Native settler, you’re blaming me for something I didn’t do. Right away we’re at odds.”

I get that. I really do. However, I’m not actually trying to put us at odds, and using a term is not inherently about blame. What I’m trying to do is talk about us in a wider context than the first person and second person singular. We all need terms to use, or we cannot have a discussion. Terms are what I’m looking for, not offensive labels.

Unfortunately, when I ask for terms preferred by “the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority,” I almost always receive names that blend these peoples in with everyone else. Now, that is perfectly fine in many situations, but when specificity is required, it is unhelpful.

For example, I’ve been asked to just say “Canadian,” but Canadian is a category of citizenship and is so general as to be useless when we’re trying to understand the history of this country. Canadian as a national identity did not exist until hundreds of years after contact. While this term works for contemporary discussions of all non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada, it does not help us discuss the particular situation of those who are descended from the original European settlers here.<sup>2</sup> While some people do argue that people living today have no connection to those first

Europeans in the 15th and 16th centuries, we cannot escape our history so easily. The social and political systems that currently exist in Canada are a direct result of the European-based cultures that first arrived in the Americas all those centuries ago.

Some people do prefer *non-Native*, *non-Aboriginal*, or *non-Indigenous*, but again these terms include everyone who is not-us. This can be useful when centring the conversation on Indigenous peoples, and these terms will show up at times throughout this book. However, sometimes we need to talk about our history and our present in ways that highlight how the differences between the many groups of peoples living in Canada have actual impacts on our lives. I mean, really, having that discussion is the whole reason I've written this book. I want to find some common ground, but not by pretending our differences are irrelevant.

For the most part, when I do need to refer specifically to "the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority," I've decided on the term *settler*. I feel it is the most accurate relational term and helps to keep the conversation more focused than the term *White*.

The history of the category of White is a powerful and complex one, and although it is still very much officially recognized,<sup>3</sup> it seems to invite more argument than any other term. I do not agree that *White* is a pejorative term or that it can be equated with racist terms for other groups because, frankly, there is no history of systemic oppression that has been enforced against people included in the category of White in Canadian history. However, give and take is needed. In the last chapter, I asked us to agree not to use certain terms. In my experience, the term *White* bothers many people, so, in the spirit of give and take, I will use a different term as much as possible. This is not an attempt to avoid naming Whiteness as a system of power and privilege; I will still be speaking to that very much as we go.

I pointed out that I feel *settler* is a relational term, rather than a racial category, which is another way in which it is more useful. Since I have chosen this term, I suppose I do need to explain what it means, or at least what I am using it to mean. For me, it is a shortened version of *settler colonialism*. Settler colonialism is a concept that has recently begun to be explored in-depth,<sup>4</sup> and it essentially refers to the deliberate physical occupation of land as a method of asserting ownership over land and resources.<sup>5</sup> The original settlers were of various European origins, and they brought with them their laws and customs, which they then applied to Indigenous peoples and later to all peoples who have come to Canada from non-settler backgrounds. This does not refer only to those European people with sociopolitical power, but also to those of lower classes who settled here to seek economic opportunity.

The term *settler* has also been used to refer to people who continue to move to Canada and settle here. This is often done to highlight the fact that settlement, as a facet of colonialism, continues. In that way, it is a useful term, but it also obscures the way in which colonialism outside of Canada has created conditions that have given many peoples little choice but to seek homes elsewhere – including in Canada. Like European-descended peoples of the lower classes, who were more pawns than power-brokers in the early years of colonization in Canada and the United States, non-European peoples displaced by colonization in their own lands are folded into the settlement process when they arrive here – even as they are often denied equal social privileges. However, non-European migrants do not have the power to bring with them their laws and customs, which they then apply to the rest of the peoples living in Canada – no matter what some alarmists like to claim. The dominant sociopolitical structures in place remain European in origin and, as Indigenous peoples are well aware, they are not so easy to change.

While a strong argument can be made that non-European-descended peoples who come to live in Canada are also settlers, I am going to eschew the term here in favour of *non-Black people of colour*. This term will not be completely satisfactory either, because some non-European peoples are also able to access Whiteness, but it is a heck of a lot better than the term *newcomers*, which completely erases the history of communities that have existed in Canada for hundreds of years.

I want to be very clear that the term *settler* does not, and can never, refer to the descendants of Africans who were kidnapped and sold into chattel slavery.<sup>6</sup> Black people, removed and cut off from their own indigenous lands – literally stripped of their humanity and redefined legally as property – could not be agents of settlement. The fact that slavery has been abolished does not change this history. Although Black people are not all indigenous to the Americas, the Americas are home to the descendants of enslaved African peoples.<sup>7</sup>

We are left with three broad, unsatisfactory, but possibly usable categories: settlers (the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the European-descended sociopolitical majority), non-Black persons of colour (hereafter, non-Black POC), and Black people. These categories will be used when necessary to point out the different ways in which peoples experience power and/or oppression in Canada. When I am referring to all peoples who are non-Indigenous to the Americas, of any background living in these lands today, I will use the term *Canadians*. However, the fact that this book focuses most of its attention on colonial structures of power means we don't get to explore Indigenous/Black/non-Black POC relationships in great detail.

If this is boring the pants off you, please put them back on if you are reading this in public, and be comforted by the fact that this conversation is going to get more interesting soon. I promise. I just want to make one more point before moving on to more excellent discussions.

Frank Wilderson III points out that it is too simplistic to think of oppression in binaries: settler versus Indigenous, settler versus Black, or settler versus everyone else.<sup>8</sup> The complexities involved become more obvious when one considers that Indigenous is not really a racial category; there are many mixed-race Indians.

These oppressions can overlap, and this is important to understand in the context of settler colonialism. Just as it is true that Indigenous peoples can participate in anti-Black racism, and reinforce oppressive structures based on that racism, it is also true that other non-Indigenous peoples can buy into and reinforce settler colonialism by supporting the occupation of land and exploitation of resources as a method to achieving greater civil and social equality. Reinforcing anti-Black racism or settler colonialism does not undo the marginalization faced in other aspects of life, but the complexity of the relationships between all peoples living here is something we cannot lose sight of.

The point is it's messy, complicated, and I'm not going to solve it in this chapter; all I want is to highlight the fact that just as terms are needed to refer to Indigenous peoples, terms are also needed to refer to settlers. I'm not trying to be a jerk here; I just can't keep using really long descriptive sentences to dance around calling people "settlers." I do have a lot to say about power, names, and who gets to decide who is called what, but to be honest, even I'm bored at this point. The only reason I brought up this unsatisfying conversation was to reiterate what I said in the Introduction. I am not trying to be deliberately provocative, and I mean no disrespect when I use the term *settler*. I cannot prove this to be true, so it has to be taken on faith, and read in that light.

I decided I wanted to round this section out with something much more interesting: terms Indigenous peoples have in their own languages for non-Indigenous peoples!

Not all Indigenous peoples have names for Black and non-Black POC. It seems to depend on how much contact there was between these groups before serious language decline began. Some of the names that do exist replicate 19th-century racial essentialism, referring to skin colour (such as the Cree word *kaskitêwiyâs* or the Lakota term *hásapa*, both of which mean "black flesh/skin"). In Ojibwe, the word for Black person is *wâ'shithewe*, which literally translates as "black person."<sup>9</sup> In Hupa, the term is *mining'-liwhin*, which means "black faces."

In the eastern Arctic, Inuit describe Black people as “portagee” or “portugee,” which one linguist believes is a variation of *Portuguese*, so used because of contact between Inuit and whalers from Cape Verde.<sup>10</sup> Other names are more traditionally descriptive, referring to observed characteristics. Where I am from in Alberta, a Chinese person is called “sêkipatwâw,” which means “s/he has braids.” This gives you a fairly good idea of when this name began to be applied to describe the appearance of early male Chinese migrants.<sup>11</sup> Another name is *apihkês*, which actually means “spider.” I have been told this refers to weaving skill. Southeast Asians are sometimes referred to as “nêhiyahkân,” which means “Cree-like” or “almost Cree.”

Indigenous languages, like all living languages, are capable of growth and change. Radmilla Cody is Black and Indigenous, and a former Miss Navajo Nation winner.<sup>12</sup> The Diné (Navajo) word for a Black person is *Nakai ?izhini*, which like previous terms listed here, basically just translates to “black.” Radmilla has often discussed how this name was used to tease her when she was growing up.<sup>13</sup> She sought out a fluent speaker to find a name for Black people that would be more respectful. That speaker used the word *Naahilii/Nahilii*, and its meaning is broken down like this: “Na(a) – Those who have come across; hil – dark, calm, have overcome, persevered, and we have come to like; ii – oneness.”<sup>14</sup>

Some might question why another word is needed, if one already exists. As Jihan Gearon puts it:

Think about this: A young Black and Navajo girl or boy has been teased with the word *Nakai ?izhini*. It makes them feel bad when they hear it. Still, when they introduce themselves in Navajo, they have to use that very word to describe themselves. I don’t think it’s a stretch to worry about that little girl or boy’s self image. Furthermore, while our other clans have histories and stories and songs and characteristics and responsibilities associated with them, this word identifies us as a color only.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast, every Indigenous person has a name, and sometimes a few different names, for settlers. After all, contact with European-descended peoples is something we have all experienced. These names tend to be descriptive of some trait or characteristic witnessed by Indigenous peoples back around contact. Sometimes, people can’t really remember the actual etymology of the word, or have created a folk etymology that makes sense now and is widely understood as its origin, but may not be. Sometimes, an already existing word from a language used by Europeans has been Creecized or Anishinaabecized.

I recently did a roundup on Twitter asking for Indigenous names for settlers. Many of these words I had heard before, but hadn’t heard all their understood

meanings before. Any misunderstanding of what was shared with me is my own; I apologize if I have made any mistakes with spelling or translation. I obviously do not speak all of these languages, and this is all anecdotal.

I'll start with one of my traditional languages, which is Plains Cree (nêhiyawêwin). On the Plains, we often call settlers "môniyaw." The origin of this term is hotly contested. Some believe it is a Creecization of the French pronunciation of Montreal, where so many Europeans were travelling from. Others believe it is a way of saying "not me" or "not Cree" in our language. These are not the only theories. I am not going to pretend to have the authority to claim any theory above another.

The Cree on the Plains also use the word *wêmistikosiw* to refer to French people specifically, and it describes the big wooden boats they came on. The Cree farther east often use this term for all settlers – French or not.

Where I'm from, people from the United States are generally called "kihci-môhkomân," which means "great knives" and refers to the sabres that soldiers used to wear. It probably would have been a name for the British originally, and some Cree might still use it that way.

Our cousins, the Anishinaabe, have a language very related to Cree and have words similar to the ones above. One of the most common terms I've seen them use though is *Zhaaganaash*. It has been explained to me that this word refers to people of dubious character, while another explanation I've seen is that it has the same root as an Anishinaabemowin word meaning "to put something outside"; so it means "outsider," without any negative shading.

Interestingly enough, some Cree people use the word *sâkênâs*, which, despite the different spelling, sounds very similar to *Zhaaganaash* when spoken. It also does not have the nicest connotation. A number of times I have heard people say that this word originally comes from *sassenach* in Gaelic (possibly Scottish Gaelic brought over by Orcadians). It is said that this word may have been a name for the Saxon, and was later applied to the English, developing an unsavoury connotation.

Jumping to the West Coast, I was told the Nl'kapamux, who are part of the Interior Salish, say "sheme," which is the colour of a drowned person. The Halq'eméylem (Stó:lō) say "xwelitem," which means "hungry people," while the Sechelt use a similar word, *xwa'lat'en*, to refer to White people. Again, I cannot be sure of the true etymology of these words, only what people believe them to mean.

The Mohawk say "ose'ronni," which I've seen translated as just "other people" who are non-Indigenous, but also as "delicate white flower people."

I was told that among the Inuit of Ikaluktutiak (Cambridge Bay) *kapluunak* or *kabloonak* is used to mean "bushy eyebrows," but I am very uncertain of the correct spelling. In Nunavut and Nunavik (northern Quebec), the word *qallunaat*

is generally used to refer to non-Inuit. Sheila Watt-Cloutier explains that this term is derived from *qallunaq*, and that it “describes the bones on which the eyebrows sit, which protrude more on white people than on Inuit.”<sup>16</sup>

In Nimiipuutimpt (Nez Pierce), settlers are called “soyapos,” which was translated to mean “the crowned ones” because of the hats they wore.

The Blackfoot have a trickster character named “Napi,” and I was told that because he was a bit wild and unpredictable, settlers became known as “napikwan.”

The Lakota called cavalry soldiers “míla hanska,” which means “long knives.” This seems like a pretty common description among Indigenous peoples! Another term is *wašicu*, often translated as “takes all the fat” or greedy, and has variations of use among the Lakota/Dakota/Nakota.

Of course, this is only a *tiny* slice of the many terms for Black, non-Black POC, and settlers, both neutral and not-so-neutral, that exist in our languages. If none of the English terms I listed above are suitable to you, I would certainly invite you to find out whose Indigenous territory you live in, in order to identify a word in their language that feels more appropriate. As well, it is always good to remember our languages are not frozen in time, and new terms can be created.

Although this entire section is focused on terminology, I have no desire to get overly hung up on specific words, because there are much more interesting topics to explore. So, let’s get to it!

## NOTES

1. To reiterate what I said in chapter 1, when I use the term *non-Indigenous* in this book, I mean people who are not Indigenous to what is now called Canada. I think it is incredibly important to recognize that many people currently living in Canada are Indigenous to other areas.
2. Many Indigenous peoples do not consider themselves Canadians for reasons that will be described in fuller detail later on in this book. While some have no problem with the term, it is best not to assume that *Canadian* can apply to every person living in this country.
3. Government of Canada. Census (2006), [http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb-bmdi/pub/instrument/3901\\_Q2\\_V3-eng.pdf](http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb-bmdi/pub/instrument/3901_Q2_V3-eng.pdf). The 2006 long-form census, for example, allowed participants to identify as: White, Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, Aboriginal, or other.
4. If you are interested in exploring academic discussions of settler colonialism, you should check out the journal *Settler Colonial Studies*: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rset20>.
5. Eve Tuck, and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 4–7, <http://decolonization.org/index.php/des/article/view/18630>.
6. Tiffany Jeannette King, “In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies, Space and Settler Colonialism” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 2013), <http://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/>



1903/14525/King\_umd\_0117E\_14499.pdf;jsessionid=F60781D31F860A28832010DD5D67A9D3?sequence=1. I freely admit I did not understand this distinction until fairly recently, though it now seems obvious. For more in-depth exploration of the relationship between slavery and colonialism, and the way in which Black people are impacted by settler colonialism, consult the source above.

7. What it means for the Americas to be the home of the descendants of enslaved Africans is not something that has been very well articulated within Native Studies yet. It is something that will hopefully receive more attention academically, as well as on the ground, through strengthening Black and Indigenous relationships. Here is a piece that addresses this: Eve Tuck, Allison Guess, and Hannah Sultan, "Not Nowhere: Collaborating on Selfsame Land," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society* (2014): <https://decolonization.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/notnowhere-pdf.pdf>.

For more information on Black Indians, chattel slavery among some Native American peoples, as well as successful Indigenous/Black resistance to slavery: Arica L. Coleman, *That the Blood Stay Pure: African Americans, Native Americans and the Predicament of Race and Identity in Virginia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* (New York: Atheneum, 1986); Barbara Krauthamer, *Black Slaves, Indian Masters: Slavery, Emancipation and Citizenship in the Native American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Clifford A. Weslager, *Delaware's Forgotten Folk: The Story of the Moors and Nanticokes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); J. B. Bird, "Rebellion: John Horse and Black Seminoles, the First Black Rebels to Beat American Slavery," <http://johnhorse.com/>; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

8. Frank Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black: Cinema and Structures of US Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
9. This translation was shared with me by Johnnie Jae, cofounder of A Tribe Called Geek, described as "Indigenerdity for the Geeks at the Powwow." You should check out their work! <http://atribecalledgeek.com/>.
10. Kenn Harper, "Portagee: The Inuktitut Word for Black Person," [http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674taissumani\\_feb.\\_1](http://www.nunatsiaqonline.ca/stories/article/65674taissumani_feb._1).
11. "Chinese-Canadians and First Nations: 150 Years of Shared Experiences," <http://www.chinese-firstnations-relations.ca/bibliography.html>. Here, you will find an excellent bibliography of resources on Chinese-First Nations relationships, particularly in British Columbia.
12. "Black, Red and Proud," [http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2011/02/black\\_and\\_native\\_american\\_an\\_interview\\_with\\_radmilla\\_cody.1.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2011/02/black_and_native_american_an_interview_with_radmilla_cody.1.html). This is an interview with Radmilla Cody describing the backlash she experienced as a Black and Indigenous person, when she ran for Miss Navajo Nation.
13. "Offerings to the Holy People: Former Miss Navajo Radmilla Cody takes speaking tour to Berkeley," <http://navajotimes.com/entertainment/2012/0312/032312rad.php>.
14. "Radmilla Cody: biography," <http://radmillacody.net/biography.html>.
15. "Black History Month in Indian Country," <http://lastrealindians.com/black-history-month-in-indian-country/>.
16. Sheila Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold: One Woman's Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic and the Whole Planet* (Toronto: Penguin, 2015), 4.



# Index

*Bold page numbers indicate photos*

## A

Aboriginal as identifier, 10, 27. *See also*  
Indigenous peoples

Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF), 156–157,  
172–173

Aboriginal law, 252–258

âcimowina, 97

adoption, 181–187

African-Canadians, 17

agriculture, 206–211

alcoholism, 151–157

allowably Indigenous, 68, 71–72

American Indian, 10

Andersen, Chris, 47–48

assimilation

economic cost of, 131–132

by legal means, 128–129, 226

and reserves, 266

as tried and failed policy, 226, 229–230

and White Paper, 269

*Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, 55, 56

âtayôhkêwina, 96–97

Atleo, Shawn, 278

## B

Baffin Island, 192

band housing, 147–148

band membership, 31–32

*Before Tomorrow*, 56

Bianchi, Ed, 243, 250n3

Bill C-3, 31, 32

Bill C-31, 28–30, 32

Bill C-33, 278

Bill S-8, 219

Black, Conrad, 118

Black people, 17, 18–19, 67, 213

Blackstock, Cindy, 184

blood myths, 44

blood quantum, 77–78

Borrows, John, 243, 249n1

Bouchard, Gérard, 45

buckskin curtain, 270

Burnside, Neegan, 218–219, 220

## C

Cairn, Alan C., 229

Calihoo, Angelique, **40**

Callihoo, Louis Kwarakwante, 40

Callingbull, Ashley, 119

Calls to Action, 175–178

Canada, Government of

and agriculture, 208–211

and benefit of Indigenous policies, 207–208

and child welfare system, 182–187

and funding of Indigenous education,  
277–278

impact of *Daniels v. Canada* on, 49–51

and Indigenous housing, 144–149

and Inuit, 56–57, 191–193, 202–204

and section 91 of *Constitution Act*, 48–49

and sovereignty claims in Arctic, 193, 203

underfunding of Indigenous programs,  
184–187

view of hunting v. trapping to, 62, 65  
 and water security, 214–220  
 and White Paper of 1969, 268–270, 271  
 Canadian as identifier, 11, 15–16  
 Canadian history, 119–122  
 Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT), 184  
 Canadian Mortgage and Housing Agency  
 (CMHC), 147–148  
 Cardinal, Harold, 270  
 Cheyenne, 74, 75–76  
 child-welfare system, 181–187  
 Chinese, 19  
 Chrétien, Jean, 268, 269  
 Citizens Plus, 270  
 civilization, 161–164  
 Clark, Gordon, 125, 126, 130  
 Cody, Radmilla, 19  
 colonialism  
   described, 16–17  
   detailed in TRC report, 174  
   doctrines, 235–240  
   effect on Indigenous women and Two-Spirit  
     individuals, 109–113  
   and fake Indigenous stories, 94  
   and Indigenous alcoholism, 152, 155–156  
   and non-Indigenous self identifying as Métis,  
     46, 47, 54n29  
   as tried and failed policy, 219–220, 227  
 commodification of culture, 68, 69, 70  
*Constitution Act, 1867*, 48–49, 49–51, 144  
*Constitution Act, 1982*, 27, 248–249  
 Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada,  
   147–148  
 Cree, 62–64, 108–109  
 Cree Trapper Association (CTA), 62–64  
*Crossfire* (Kress), 74, 75–76  
 cultural appropriation, 80–90  
 cultural genocide, 173–174, 183  
 culture  
   appropriation of, 80–90  
   commodification, 68, 69, 70  
   as defining aspect of Indigenous peoples,  
     77–78  
   and language, 106–108  
   and reserves, 265–266  
   transgressive, 68–72  
 culture shock, 68

## D

*Daniels v. Canada*, 28, 48, 49–51  
 David, Christina, 69–70, 71  
 De Lint, Charles, 74–75  
 decolonization, 47, 108, 111. *See also* colonialism  
*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 255  
 Denommé, Danica, 118  
 Devon Island, 192–193  
 Dhillon, Baltej Singh, 87  
 Diabo, Russ, 256  
 Doctrine of Cession, 239  
 Doctrine of Conquest, 238–239  
 Doctrine of Discovery, 235–236  
 Doctrine of Occupation, 236–237  
 dog slaughter, 193–202  
 drinking water, 213–220  
 Dubuc, Yvan, 44  
 Dupuis, Roy, 44, 45

## E

eagle feathers, 83  
 education, 171–173, 175–178, 276–281  
 enfranchisement, 28  
 Erasmus, George, 230n1  
 Eskimo as identifier, 11. *See also* Inuit  
 Etsy (website), 103–104  
 Europeans, 243–248

## F

*A Fair Country; Telling Truths about Canada*  
 (Saul), 43  
 fakes, 89, 92–96, 102–104  
 farming, 206–211  
 federal government. *See* Canada, Government of  
 First Nations as identifier, 11. *See also*  
   Indigenous peoples  
 First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, 184  
 First Nations Market Housing Fund, 146–147  
*First Nations Property Ownership Initiative Act*  
 (FNPOA), 271–274  
 Flaherty, Joseph, 58n1  
 Flaherty, Robert, 58n1  
 Flanagan, Tom, 273–274  
 Fontaine, Tina, 185  
 Fraser, Sheila, 184  
 Freedom Schools, 279–280  
 fur trapping, 61–64

## G

Galley, Valerie, 183  
Gearon, Jihan, 19  
geisha, 87–88  
genericization, 102  
Graham, Billy, 93  
Grant, Cuthbert, 239  
Great Law of Peace, 244  
Greater Production Campaign, 209–211

## H

Harper government, 146–147, 219, 271, 278  
Haudenosaunee, 245–246  
Hawthorn Report, 268–269, 270  
headresses, 84  
historic trauma transmission, 172  
housing, 143–149, 187  
Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), 192, 239  
*Humans* (Sawyer), 161–162  
hunting, 60–65, 166, 266

## I

icewine, 100–101  
Indian as identifier, 9. *See also* Indigenous peoples  
*Indian Act*  
    administration of Aboriginal communities, 265  
    and alcohol, 156  
    and Bill C-31, 28–30  
    and farming, 208, 209  
    and housing, 146  
    impact on Indigenous women and Two-Spirit individuals, 112–113  
    and reserves, 263  
    and status, 26, 28  
    and treaty-making, 252, 254  
    and White Paper, 269  
Indian Affairs  
    and alcohol, 156  
    and blood quantum, 77  
    and farming, 206, 207, 210  
    and housing, 146, 148  
    and Indian roll, 27, 34n7  
    and Indigenous education, 277  
    and Inuit relocation, 192  
    and reserves, 264

    and taxes, 138, 141  
    on treaties, 239, 248, 253  
    and water security, 216, 217, 218  
    and White Paper, 268–270  
*Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990*, 103  
Indigenous peoples (*See also* colonialism; Inuit; Métis; myths; treaties/treaty-making)  
    accommodation of in liberal democracy, 130–132  
    and child-welfare system, 181–187  
    connection to the land, 70–71, 72  
    cultural appropriation of, 80–90  
    culture as defining aspect of, 77–78  
    education, 276–281  
    effect of colonialism on, 109–113  
    explanation of status of, 25–34  
    faked stories of, 92–96  
    farming, 206–211  
    future relationship with non-Indigenous Canadians, 224–230  
    history of treaty-making with Europeans, 243–248  
    housing, 143–149, 187  
    hunting, 60–65, 266  
    and language, 65, 266  
    literary genres, 96–98  
    media representation of, 88–89, 117–119  
    misappropriation of trademark, 101–102, 103–104  
    names used by for non-Indigenous peoples, 18–21  
    non-Indigenous misidentifying as, 44  
    portrayal in science fiction, 160–162  
    reclaiming history, 121–122  
    and reserves, 32–33, 248, 260–266  
    and residential schools, 171–173  
    and Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 172, 191–192, 203, 223–230  
    stereotyped portrayals, 73–76, 78, 110, 151–157  
    taxation exemption, 135–142  
    and technology, 75–76, 165–167  
    terms of address for, 7–13  
    and transgressive culture, 68–72  
    Two-Spirit individuals, 108–113  
    water security, 214–220  
intellectual property litigation, 100–104

Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement (IMHA),  
42–43, 52n15, 166

*Into the West* (tv series), 173

## Inuit

identity and facts about, 55–58  
importance of hunting to, 60–61  
and *Indian Act*, 28  
in Montreal, 71  
names for Black people, 19  
names for settlers, 20–21  
relocation of, 191–193, 202–204  
stories, 95–96  
on use of as term of address, 11

Inuit Nunangat, 56–57

Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ), 60–61

Inukjuak, 202–203

Ipellie, Alooook, 60

## J

James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement  
(JBNQA), 62–63

Japanese symbols, 87–88

Johnson, Anguti, 55

*The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, 56

Jules, Manny, 271, 273

## K

KAIROS, 177, 250n3

Kalluak, Mark, 96

Kaskaskia, 53n27

kaswentha, 245

Khelsilem, 110

Kimelman, Edwin C., 183

*Kiskisik Awasisak* report, 185–187

Klassen, Karin, 117–118

Klein, Ralph, 42, 166

Kress, Nancy, 74, 75–76, 78

Kunuk, Zacharias, 55–56

## L

ladder theory, 163

land owning, 247–248, 261–266

language, 65, 106–108, 266

Lee, Erica Violet, 174

Lewis, Brian, 101–102

liberalism, 127–132

Litigation Management and Resolution Branch  
(LMRB), 253

loaded terms, 8

Loyer, Louis Divertissant, 40

## M

Macdonnell, Miles, 239

maiko, 87–88

Makivik Corporation, 193–194

Manitoba Indian Brotherhood (MIB), 183

Manuel, Arthur, 271

Maori symbols, 85–86

Maracle, Brian, 156

market-based housing, 145–147

McIvor, Sharon, 31

McNickle, Lettia, 87

media, 88–89, 117–119

membership, 26, 31–32

metabolization of alcohol, 152–154

Metcalfe, Jessica, 103

## Métis

author's attempt to describe her heritage,

36–37, 39, 40–41

definition, 39, 41–42, 47–48, 50

as farmers, 206–207

and federal government, 214

history of, 39–40

impact of *Daniels v. Canada* on, 49–51

and *Indian Act*, 28

Interim Métis Harvesting Agreement, 42–43,  
52n15, 166

non-Indigenous misidentifying as, 42–47

organizations misidentifying as, 46–47, 53n27  
as racial and sociopolitical identity, 37–39,  
40–41

symbols of, 84–85

on use of as term of address, 11

use of to mean mixed culture, 43, 52n16

*Métis in Space* (podcast), 79n8

Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA), 42–43

Métissage, 44–45

Mi'kmaq, 280

Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK), 280

millennial scoop, 184–187

Ministerial Loan Guarantees, 146–147, 263

Mohawk Kahnawake, 139, 280

Montreal, 71

Morgan, Cora, 185

Morissette, Réjean, 118

- Morris Mirror*, 117, 118  
multiculturalism, 67, 129  
Murdoch-Flowers, Joseph, 174  
myths  
    of authenticity, 165–167  
    of drunken Indian, 151–157  
    of free housing, 143–149  
    of level playing field, 124–128, 133  
    of nomadism, 162–164  
    of progress, 119–122  
    that Indigenous peoples don't pay taxes, 135–142
- N  
*Nanaimo Daily News*, 117, 118  
Native American, 10  
Native as identifier, 10–11. *See also* Indigenous peoples  
Native Youth Sexual Health Network (NYSHN), 111  
Navajo, 101–102, 103–104  
NDN as identifier, 9  
Neskantaga First Nation, 216  
Newman, Dwight, 131  
non-Black people of colour, 17  
non-Indigenous Canadians (*See also* Canada, Government of; settlers)  
    experience with child-welfare, 184–186  
    and farming, 209–211  
    future relationship with Indigenous peoples, 224–230  
    identifying as Métis, 42–47  
    and Indigenous culture, 69–71  
    terms used to describe, 14–21  
nonprofit social housing, 147–148  
non-status Indians, 27, 28, 49–51  
Numbered Treaties, 208, 211n3, 239–240, 252–255  
Nunavik, 202–203
- O  
Oilavvaq, Becky, 55  
Oliver, Frank, 264  
Olsen, Don, 117  
Ontario Native Women's Association, 219
- P  
Pasternak, Shiri, 243  
point-of-sale exemptions, 139–140  
Poliquin, Carole, 44  
Powley Test, 41–42, 50, 51, 166
- Q  
Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), 193–194  
Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC), 194–196, 203–204  
qimmijjaqtauniq, 193–202  
Quebec, 44–45, 118, 139
- R  
racism, 18, 44. *See also* colonialism  
RCAP (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples), 172, 191–192, 203, 223–230  
RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police), 193–202  
Red River diaspora, 39–40  
Reese, Debbie, 98  
registered Indians, 27–28  
relocation of Inuit, 191–193, 202–204  
reserves, 32–33, 248, 260–266  
residential schools, 171–173  
Roquefort cheese, 101  
Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), 193–202  
Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 172, 191–192, 203, 223–230
- S  
sacred things, 85  
saimaqatigiingniq, 203–204  
sari as symbol, 86  
Saul, John Ralston, 43, 52n16  
Sawyer, Robert J., 73–74, 160–162  
*Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* (Anderson and Robertson), 119  
self-identification, 44, 50  
Selkirk Settlement, 239  
Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 217–218  
settlers (*See also* Canada, Government of; Europeans; non-Indigenous Canadians)  
    and alcohol, 155–156  
    colonialism of, 16–17  
    and cultural appropriation, 86–87  
    and cultural mainstream, 68, 69  
    Indigenous names for, 19–21  
    and trademark law, 104

shelter allowances, 148  
 Simmons, Dan, 160  
 Simpson, Jeffrey, 127, 130–131  
 Sixties Scoop, 117–118, 181–183  
 slavery, 236  
 slurs, 7–8, 10, 11, 20  
 social media, 88–89  
 spirituality, 266  
 status Indians, 25–34, 49, 161  
 Steeves, Gord, 152  
 Stelmach, Ed, 166  
 stereotypes, 73–76, 78, 110, 151–157  
 stories, fake, 92–96  
 substance abuse, 187  
 Supreme Court of Canada  
     in colonialist arguments, 237  
     *Daniels v. Canada*, 28, 48, 49–51  
     *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 255  
     and Indigenous taxation, 141  
     and Inuit, 192  
     Keewatin case, 242n22  
     moose hunting case, 41  
     *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*,  
         124–126, 130–131  
 surrender clauses, 254–258  
*Svaha* (De Lint), 74–75  
 Sweetgrass, Chief, 207

T

Tagaq, Tanya, 58n1  
 taxation exemption, 135–142  
 technology, 75–76, 165–167  
 terra nullius, 236–237  
 Todd, Zoe, 174  
 trademark litigation, 100–104  
 tradition, 165–167  
 treaties/treaty-making  
     claims of, 252–258  
     and *Constitution Act*, 248–249  
     history of in Canada, 243–248  
     and *Indian Act*, 252, 254  
     modern, 254–258  
     numbered treaties, 208, 211n3, 239–240,  
         252–255  
     and status, 33  
     and surrender clauses, 254–258  
     and trapping, 62

Treaty 6, 211n3  
 Treaty 8, 62  
 Treaty 11, 254  
 treaty Indians, 33  
 tribal sovereignty, 79n6  
 A Tribe Called Red, 75, 79n7  
 Trudeau, Justin, 175, 281n6  
 Trudeau, Pierre, 271  
 trusts, 262–263  
 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of  
     Canada (TRC), 172, 173–177, 178  
*Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, 124–126,  
     130–131  
 Turcotte, Reed, 117  
 two wolves story, 92–93  
 Two-Row Wampum, 245  
 Two-Spirit individuals, 108–113

## U

unilineal theory, 163  
*Unipkaaqtuat Arvianit: Traditional Stories from  
     Arviat* (Kalluak), 95–96  
 United States, 77, 103, 120, 213  
 University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'i  
     nistameyimâkanak Blue Quills (UnBQ),  
     280  
*Unsettling Canada* (Manuel), 271  
 Urban Outfitters, 101–102

## V

Valcourt, Bernard, 278  
 Veevee, Pauloosie, 194  
 Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA), 100

## W

Walker, Katherine, 151–152  
 water security, 213–220  
 White as identifier, 16, 67  
 White Paper of 1969, 268–270, 271  
 World War I, 209

## X

Xerox, 102

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