

# Introduction

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There should be positive recognition by everyone of the unique contributions of Indian culture to Canadian life.

– The Red Paper<sup>1</sup>

It is easier to make people cry than it is to make them laugh. This is a truism in theatre, and there are equivalent truisms in other sectors of society. In the academic sector, for instance, it might be said that it is easier to deconstruct the old than it is to construct the new. In policy development and implementation one might say something similar: it is easier to focus on past failures than it is to meet current needs. In other words, often a focus on the negative seems sharper than a vision of the positive. *Hidden in Plain Sight, Volume 2*, seeks to help change this situation.

During the late 1990s the government of Canada became increasingly interested in what was termed *social cohesion*. Members of the Social Cohesion Research Network identified and pursued at least two lines of investigation, one focusing on the negative concept of *fault lines* and the other on the positive notion of *what binds people together*. The purpose of the first and second volumes of *Hidden in Plain Sight* is to focus on the positive contributions that Aboriginal peoples have brought to Canadian society. In so doing, it becomes evident that Aboriginal contributions help to bind together Canadian society, regardless of the numerous fault lines that have been created between Aboriginal peoples and Canada in history, policy, and circumstance.

Stories that have been told about the relationship of North America's early European immigrants to its original inhabitants often include a theme of *reciprocity*. Many Indigenous groups claim that reciprocity is one of several core cultural values and is foundational to the continuance of human life. The concept of reciprocity has been found to be common to every culture and manifests the ethical underpinnings of the informal

exchange of goods and labour within a society. It is the basis of most non-market economies.

At least three forms of reciprocity are discussed in cultural anthropology. *Generalized reciprocity* is said to be much the same as uninhibited sharing or giving. It provides the giver a sense of satisfaction and the social closeness that is fostered by gift giving. *Symmetrical reciprocity* occurs when someone gives something to someone else with the expectation of a fair and tangible return at some undefined future date. This expectation of repayment is based on a moderate degree of trust. It is also controlled through social consequence; 'moochers,' those who expect gifts but who never give one in return, are soon recognized and find it increasingly difficult to receive favours. *Negative reciprocity*, more commonly known as barter, is an informal system of exchange that can involve a minimum amount of trust and a maximum degree of social distance, which is to say that even strangers can barter. In non-industrial societies this form of reciprocity was used to establish friendly relations between or among different groups. It is often just a first step in the development of a long-term relationship.

In the study of ethics and world religions, reciprocity is recognizable through the phrase *the golden rule*. A key element for people attempting to live by this rule is to treat all people, not just members of his or her in-group, with consideration and respect. This formalized approach to relationships has been found to be a common principle in most religions throughout the world, and it is common within traditional Aboriginal spirituality and practices.

One of the most striking examples of a formalized system of reciprocity among Aboriginal peoples is the potlatch. The potlatch is a highly complex event that has been practised for thousands of years and is most commonly associated with the First Nations located on the Pacific Northwest coast of Canada and the United States. It usually involves a ceremony that is used to celebrate rites of passages, such as births, puberty, weddings, and funerals, and to honour the deceased. While potlatch practices vary among nations, communities, and individuals, they generally involve music, dance, feasting, theatrics, and spiritual ceremonies.

The potlatch involves exchanges in the economic, political, and social realms. Through it the relations within and between clans, villages, and nations, as well as with the spiritual world, are observed, and they are reinforced by the redistribution of wealth. From a purely instrumental perspective, the potlatch has been used to raise the status of a community or a family. In these cultures, unlike the European preference, status is not determined by possession of resources; rather, status is earned by *giving away* resources, which leads to reciprocity when prominent guests hold their

own potlatch. Holding a potlatch is a means of enhancing one's reputation and validating social rank; prestige increases with the generosity evidenced in the potlatch in terms of the value of the goods given away. At the urging of missionaries and government agents the potlatch was made illegal in Canada in 1884<sup>2</sup> and a few years later in the United States. The missionaries claimed that the potlatch was 'demonic' and 'satanic,' and the government agents considered it to be wasteful, unproductive, and injurious. As was often the case in these situations, the potlatch continued to be practised outside of the gaze of Europeans. In effect, it went underground. While there are recorded instances of the potlatch going 'wild,' in the sense that the hosts 'bankrupted' themselves or that the goods were destroyed following the ceremony, this more negative side to the potlatch is considered to be rare. What was more likely the case is that the ban resulted from a misunderstanding on the part of Europeans about the potlatch. One can easily imagine the confusion that was felt when a nascent capitalistic world view based on the accumulation of goods was confronted by a world view based on generosity, reciprocity, and distribution.

The potlatch ban was lifted in Canada in 1951, sixteen years after the United States had lifted its ban. Leading up to this decision were numerous petitions to the Canadian government to remove the law prohibiting a custom that is now seen to be no worse than Christmas; the latter has roots in the pre-Christian pagan communities of northern Europe and also emphasizes gift giving. It was fortunate that the ban on potlatch was lifted because it helped restore millennia of cultural practice, a practice that provides an alternate perspective on the world and the ways in which different peoples can interact and live well together. Rather than being limited to a capitalist vision of a world founded on negative reciprocity or barter (that is, involving a minimum of trust and a maximum of social distance), the potlatch can be taken as a symbol of both symmetrical and generalized reciprocity (that is, gift giving with or without expectations of a tangible return at some undefined date). This reciprocity is the sort of activity that binds different communities together. It has a world view based on greater levels of trust, sharing, and social closeness. It is one that assumes and tries to live by the golden rule.

The potlatch is not perfect, to be sure. Some commentators might point out that it emanated from the rank-ordered societies on the northwest coast and had as one of its principal purposes the recognition and reinforcement of social gradations within communities. Such commentators might, thus, find the potlatch to be a curious choice for a controlling metaphor in the twenty-first century. This aspect of the potlatch is not our focus. It would indeed be utopian if there were no form of social stratification in human

societies. This book and its writers recognize that the relations between Aboriginal Canadians and mainstream society are, indeed, unequal; there are class structures and social stratification in Canada that are maintained by political, social, economic, cultural, and other interests. Nevertheless, we still believe that all persons in any society espousing democracy have the potential to contribute and make a difference.

For this reason, the potlatch can be seen as a metaphor to convey the purpose of the *Hidden in Plain Sight* volumes. It helps to place in context, for example, the stories we tell about ourselves and the ways in which those stories may or may not conflict. It puts into perspective the interplay between the stories about fault lines and the experiences that help to bind peoples together. It demonstrates the reciprocity that is a key element in human and social interaction, even across hierarchies. The potlatch informs us that sharing makes the diverse community of Canada stronger, potentially more cohesive, more viable, and more effective in innovating to meet the coming challenges of the twenty-first century. It also points to the issues of inequality that need to be addressed as Canadian society moves forward.

### The Production Process

The origin of this book took place in 1999 when the editors decided to break away from the entrenched impression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada as poor, problem ridden, and unable to adapt to contemporary society. We wanted to help the country take a step in the direction of raising Aboriginals' social position in Canada, by putting a spotlight on both their historical and their current contributions to Canadian society. The *Hidden in Plain Sight* books show Aboriginal peoples in a more positive light. We offer you a new story.

As editors, we were overwhelmed at many points in the creation of these books. The first instance was the response to our call for papers. The initial call yielded approximately fifty submissions from writers across Canada. The quantity of papers and the variety of topics were too numerous for just one book. We knew we had enough quality material for at least two books. The subjects of the papers we received ranged from the influence of Aboriginal peoples on everyday matters, like furniture design and dog breeding, to the contribution of the ironworkers who built many American skyscrapers.

It was not our intention to be overly sentimental or romantic about the Aboriginal peoples' impact on Canadian society. We did not have to be. We were able to amass a strong collection of papers that clearly articulated evidence of Aboriginal peoples' contribution to Canadian society, while adher-

ing to the demands of academic culture. Our manuscripts have undergone the blind peer review process that is the basis of academic publishing. Telling the Aboriginal story does not have to be divorced from academic rigour.

*Hidden in Plain Sight: Volume 1*

In the first volume a wide array of authors explored seven categories including treaties, arts and media, literature, justice, culture and identity, sports, the military, and an overview. Its contributors included Gerald McMaster, curator of the Aboriginal exhibit at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC; his article explored the contributions of contemporary Aboriginal artists to the Canadian art world. Humorist and writer Drew Hayden Taylor highlighted the *permitted humour* within the Aboriginal community and the uniqueness of the Aboriginal sense of humour. Leading Aboriginal justice researcher Carole LaPrairie investigated the involvement of Aboriginal people in the Canadian justice system. Media scholar Valerie Alia looked at the significance of naming in the Inuit culture. In the sports world, Métis author and the curator of the Plains exhibit at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, Morgan Baillargeon, explored the involvement of Aboriginals in rodeos. Treaties and Aboriginal government relations between the end of the Second World War and the new millennium were the topic of Michael Cassidy's paper. Bruce W. Hodgins and Bryan Poirier wrote about the canoe and the kayak and their link to Canadian identity and culture.

The profiles included in *Hidden in Plain Sight: Volume 1* included actor and politician Chief Dan George, a sixth-generation chief of the Squamish First Nation of Burrard Inlet, British Columbia, from 1951 to 1963; he turned to acting in the late 1960s when he played Old Lodge Skins in *Little Big Man*, which starred Dustin Hoffman. The man called the father of Ojibwa art, Norval Morrisseau, was also profiled; his artistic style and impressive body of work have gained him the reputation as being one of the most accomplished painters in Canadian history. Also included was a short biography on Jeannette Armstrong, an accomplished writer, publisher, and civil rights activist; since beginning work at the En'owkin Centre in 1978, she has become one of the most influential writers in contemporary Aboriginal literature. Theytus Books, an Aboriginal-owned and -operated publishing house, is also located at the centre.

Volume 1 was released by University of Toronto Press in the summer of 2005, and it was enthusiastically received by the public. In our quest to distribute this book as widely as possible it was sent to all schools located on Indian reserves, to friendship centres across Canada, and to government departments. The first book launch was held at the International Indigenous

Librarian Conference in Regina, Saskatchewan, in September. A second was held at the Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec, in October, which was attended by approximately one hundred and fifty authors, government officials, and members of the Aboriginal community.

*Hidden in Plain Sight: Volume 2*

As mentioned earlier, Aboriginal people have made a variety of contributions to many aspects of everyday life, and *Hidden in Plain Sight: Volume 2* continues the story of these contributions. In five parts, the book contains articles and profiles of accomplished Aboriginal individuals. The mix of modern and historical topics includes economic and community development, the environment, education, politics and northern power, and arts and culture. Volume 2 concludes with an overview of the post-colonial situation in Canada.

The first section addresses the topic of economic and community development and covers well over a century of Aboriginal contributions. R. Wesley Heber's work, covering the early fur trade, serves to document the vital role that Aboriginal people played in sustaining Canada's fledgling economy, and the origins of a reciprocal partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Continuing past Confederation, Frank Tough offers a historical analysis of Aboriginal labour in northern Manitoba from 1870 to 1915. Carrying the story of Aboriginal contributions to Canada's economy on into the twentieth century, freelance writer Edwinna von Baeyer discusses the invaluable role played by generations of Mohawk high steelworkers as they built the modern cityscapes of Canada and the United States; in the same historical vein, Leanna Parker explores labour relations in the Rupertsland fur trade.

The second section of the book deals with Aboriginal influence on Canadian environmental policy. The impact of Aboriginal people on northern Canadian mining practices is told by Gérard Duhaime, Nick Bernard, and Andrée Caron. Looking further south, the second article, by Rob Van Wynsberghe, Sean Edwards, Dean Jacobs, and Feruza Abdjalieva, examines the issue of environmental policy affecting the people of Walpole Island.

The third section, 'Education,' examines an issue that is often surrounded by negativity in the Aboriginal context. Education has long been heralded as a necessary component of Aboriginal well-being, but the topic also serves to bring back memories of negative experiences during the shameful period of residential schools. In this book, however, the positive influences that Aboriginal people have had on education and Canadian thought are

explored. The first article, by Jo-ann Archibald, discusses the way in which the teaching practices of British Columbia elders have been incorporated into school curricula in the form of 'Storywork.' Not only have Aboriginal contributions affected methods of learning, but they have also had a decisive impact on how Canadians, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, think. For example, Douglas Rabb and Georges Sioui explore the Aboriginal influence on Canadian philosophy and identity, respectively. In this section Andrew Nurse and David Smith detail the impact of Aboriginal oral history and mapping on Canadian historiography and geography.

Of all the sections in the book, the fourth, on politics and northern power, is arguably the most pertinent to current Aboriginal issues in Canada. Laurie Meijer Drees tackles the issue of recent Aboriginal contributions to Canadian politics and government in her article 'White Paper / Red Paper: Aboriginal Contributions to Canadian Politics and Government.' Then we find ourselves above the treeline and into the land of the North where P. Whitney Lackenbauer delves into the issue of Canadian sovereignty and the vital contributions made by members of the Canadian Rangers, a largely Aboriginal military force dedicated to serving and protecting Canada's North.

Finally, the fifth section explores the magnificent contributions that Aboriginal people in Canada have made to the arts and culture and the ways in which those contributions have positively affected Canada's international prestige. Beginning with the urban renewal catalysed by Aboriginal culture, William Shead documents the history of Winnipeg's Aboriginal Centre. Building on this, architect Wanda Dalla Costa details the contributions of Aboriginal culture, noting how Aboriginal art and history have fused with steel, rock, wood, and glass to produce inherently Canadian architecture found across the nation; such edifices include the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver; the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec; and the Seabird Island School in Agassiz, British Columbia. Next, Brian Wright-McLeod explores the contributions of Aboriginal musical artists who have taken Canada, and the world, by storm.

Once again, the profiles of prominent Aboriginal people in this book have been completed by Cora Voyageur's sociology students at the University of Calgary. They portray an array of contemporary and historical Aboriginal individuals who continue to build on previous contributions by undertaking new and innovative projects. In the section on economic and community development we profile John Charles Bernard, an Aboriginal information technology expert; Dave Tuccaro, founder of the National Aboriginal Business Association; the late James (Ed) Williams, developer of self-sustaining

economies in his community; and Dorothy Grant, a Haida fashion designer who creates ‘wearable art.’

Profiled in the section on the environment are Cindy Kenny-Gilday, an environmental activist working in the Northwest Territories who was nominated for a Nobel Prize for her work in exposing the environmental disaster caused by uranium mining near the village of Deline, otherwise known as the Village of Widows; Matthew Coon Come, a well-known politician and activist; and Nellie Cournoyea, a community activist and politician who strove to gain a viable deal for northern Aboriginal people.

In the section on education we profile the late educator and historical writer Olive Dickason; Verna Kirkness, a pioneer in advancing Aboriginal education; and Marlene Brant Castellano, who made significant contributions that led to the establishment of Native studies as a discipline in Canadian universities. We also include profiles of Buffy Sainte-Marie, who is an educator as well as an internationally recognized musician; Malcolm King, a professor of medicine and a champion for Aboriginal health; and Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaq educator well known for her work in revitalizing the Mi'kmaq language.

In the section on Aboriginal political contributions and northern power we profile such individuals as Thelma Chalifoux, a contemporary Métis politician who was a member of the Canadian Senate; and Elijah Harper, well known for his role in the Meech Lake Accord. In considering the North, we profile Paul Okalik, the first premier of Nunavut; Susan Aglukark, singer and songwriter; and Rosemarie Kuptana, politician, broadcaster, and writer.

Continuing with Aboriginal contributions to the arts and culture, we offer profiles of Robbie Robertson, the creator of pop music classics like *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down* and *The Weight*; Tantoo Cardinal, a well known actress who has starred in many notable productions; Alex Janvier, a Dene Suline artist and educator; Gil Cardinal, a Métis film-maker, director, and producer; Maria Campbell, one of Canada's best-known Métis authors; and Alanis Obomsawin, a documentary film-maker and activist. In the conclusion our final profile is politician Georges Erasmus.

As the chapters and profiles in both volumes of *Hidden in Plain Sight* show, the contributions made by Aboriginal peoples to Canadian identity and culture must not be overlooked like so many blades of grass. Each element making up both the literal and figurative environments that encircle us is essential to our individual and collective well-being. One of the basic tenets of many Aboriginal philosophies, regardless of location, is the interconnection of all things that surround us. This perspective underscores the importance of relationship, generosity, and reciprocity. It also emphasizes

consideration and respect for all living beings. What we, the editors and the many authors who have contributed to these volumes, hope to bring to light are precisely these sorts of interconnections and relationships. It is never too late to recognize that the ever-present contributions of Canada's Aboriginal peoples help to ensure the viability and health of the Canadian social environment. We must recognize that together we are stronger than when we are apart. It is never too late to recognize the relationships that bind us together.

## Notes

- 1 The Red Paper, Indian Association of Alberta, Citizens Plus (Edmonton: Indian Association of Alberta, 1970), 5.
- 2 An Act Further to Amend 'The Indian Act, 1880,' S.C. 1984 (47 Vict), c. 27, s.3.

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