Finding a Way to the Heart

Feminist Writings on Aboriginal and Women's History in Canada

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Multicultural Bands on the Northern Plains and the Notion of "Tribal" Histories

Robert Alexander Innes

AS AN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT IN HISTORY at the University of Toronto, I enrolled in a fourth-year seminar course in Aboriginal history taught by Sylvia Van Kirk. I was eager to be in a course that focused entirely on Aboriginal people, and this was the only one offered by the department that fit the bill. I was also somewhat excited by the prospect of taking a course from a professor whose work I had actually read ("Women in Between" had been assigned in a Canadian history class that I had taken a couple years earlier). My excitement was justified—Professor Van Kirk's course was as thought-provoking as it was challenging. At one point, she explained that her approach to Aboriginal history was to place herself in her subjects' shoes and try to ascertain the motivations behind their actions—she wanted to access the Aboriginal perspective(s). As someone who regularly sought to write on Aboriginal topics, I had probably been doing just that; however, this approach had never before been clearly articulated to me. Since taking Professor Van Kirk's course, accessing the motivations and perspectives of Aboriginal people has explicitly guided my scholarly research.

While I was a history major as an undergraduate student, I am not a historian. The discussion I raise in this paper emerged from my dissertation research in American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona. In that work, I explored the importance of family ties to contemporary Cowessess First Nation, of which I am a member. Nearly 80 percent of Cowessess members live off-reserve. A sig-

nificant number left the reserve as early as the 1940s and 1950s, many in search of employment. Women who left subsequently lost their Indian status upon marrying non-status Indians. As a result, there are numerous Cowessess members who have never lived on the reserve. There also many who were not status Indians or band members until the 1985 amendments to the *Indian Act*. The overall response of Cowessess band members to previous disconnected members has been favourable. This is notable because it stands in contrast to frequent news reports of hostility by other First Nations band members towards newly reinstated members. The basis of my research, then, was to ascertain what motivated Cowessess people's positive response to new and disconnected members.

I argued that contemporary Cowessess band members have retained portions of their traditional kinship practices. Historically, kinship practices were fluid, flexible, and inclusive. At the time that Chief Cowessess signed Treaty Four in 1874, his was a multicultural band comprising five major groups—the Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine, Métis, and English Halfbreeds—although individuals from other cultural groups were also part of the band. One of my first tasks was to learn how Cowessess and other bands became multicultural. In my examination of the secondary literature, I discovered that the existence of multicultural bands in Saskatchewan was not reflected in the historical and anthropological interpretations. Scholars, I found, emphasized tribal histories that highlighted intertribal contact and relations, yet with distinct tribal boundaries.

A few authors, such as Susan Sharrock and Patricia Albers, have examined multicultural groups, but not to a degree that helps explain the multicultural nature of the Cowessess band.[1] Sharrock discussed the ethnogenesis of the Cree/Assiniboine, and Albers outlined the merger and alliance of the Cree, Saulteaux, and Assiniboine. However, there is no evidence that the Cowessess band developed a singular distinctive culture. Sharrock's and Albers' conclusions also fail to explain how the Métis, a group supposedly culturally and racially distinct from First Nations, became incorporated into bands.

It seemed to me that the tribal history approach masked the importance that kinship played in band formation and maintenance. The tribal historical approach has been useful for understanding general historical trends of specific cultural and linguistic groups, and provides the context for multicultural bands. In contrast to the fluidity of bands, according to Sharrock, "the membership composition of each tribe or aggregation of bands has been equated with the members of an ethnic unit, with the speakers of an interintelligible language, with territorial

corresidents, and with a society comprising the carriers of practitioners of a particular culture."[2] Tribes were culturally and politically bound entities.

Extrapolating band-level relations from those at the tribal level has presented a distorted view of Aboriginal societies. As a doctoral student, Neal McLeod, a member of the James Smith First Nation (located just south of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan), wanted to write a history of the Plains Cree. He soon realized, however, that his project would not be as straightforward as he first thought:

> I had always assumed that my Reserve, James Smith, was a part of the "Plains Cree nation" because that is how my family identified. ... However, as I began to talk to various old people from my Reserve, I became very aware of the contingency the label "Plains Cree" had for my band. I became aware of the ambiguous genealogies that permeated my own family tree, as well as the narrative ironies that emerged when one tried to create a "national" discourse. In addition to the discovery of my own family tree, I became increasingly aware that the situation of James Smith was widespread, and the assertion of a pure, essentialized "Cree" identity (or even a Plains Cree identity) was extremely misleading and limiting.[3]

McLeod came to realize that the people on his reserve, like many in Saskatchewan, were of mixed ancestry. He found that the "reserve system solidified, localized and indeed simplified the linguistic diversity [and therefore the cultural diversity] which once existed in Western Canada."[4] McLeod discovered that members of James Smith were descendants of Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Métis, and Dene people. The tribal-specific approach fails to explain the existence of multicultural bands such as Cowessess and James Smith in the pre-treaty period. Contrary to the tribal view, most Aboriginal bands in the northern plains of Saskatchewan were kin-based and multicultural. Plains Cree, Saulteaux (also known as Chippewa or Western/Plains Ojibwe/Ojibwa), Assiniboine, and Métis individuals shared similar cultural kinship practices that allowed them to integrate others into their bands.

To be clear, multicultural bands like Cowessess did not develop a singular hybridized culture, but rather were able to maintain multiple cultures. This is not to suggest that cultural sharing did not occur, but because there were significant numbers from various cultures within the bands, these individuals were not forced to acculturate to another group. A few examples from Cowessess provide insight into its multicultural nature. In 1914, anthropologist Alanson Skinner published an article that described clan systems amongst the Saulteaux of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. During his visit to Cowessess, a band member

informed Skinner that the Saulteaux members of the reserve belonged to one of two clans: Blue Jay or Eagle.[5] Thirty years after settling on the reserve, then, the Saulteaux members of Cowessess band were still known to belong to clans. However, the Plains Cree members of the band did not belong to these clans, a foreign concept in their society. Secondly, Skinner also collected a series of Plains Cree trickster/transformer stories;[6] he published these stories as being Plains Cree in origin, but noted that some were collected from Saulteaux members and were about the Saulteaux trickster/transformer. Finally, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some cultural sharing occurred between Plains Cree and Saulteaux band members. One band elder once told me that many of the older people (like my grandfather) spoke a "half-breed Cree" language. This language was not, as I had assumed, a mixture of Cree and English or Cree and French, but rather a mixture of Cree and Saulteaux. Although this elder could understand the language, she did not consider it her language, for she was Assiniboine. Individual band members spoke, or at least understood, more than one language—a number of band members also spoke Michif, the Métis language—and Plains Cree and Saulteaux members maintained their own trickster/transformer stories, which is illustrative of the band's multiculturalism.

Individuals from various cultures were able to coexist in the same band because they shared fairly similar cultural attributes—one such central cultural trait was the way in which kinship was practised. The underlying argument presented in this paper, then, is that the scholarly focus on tribal affiliation ignores the importance of kinship ties as the central unifying factor for Aboriginal groups on the northern plains. Group formation, I contend, was played out at a band level, not a tribal level.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first critiques the use of the term "tribe" put forth by scholars since the 1960s. This is followed by an application of the critique to the standard histories of northern plains people. These histories continue to present tribal histories, which overshadow the role of bands as the primary political and social unit in which northern plains people organized themselves; this, in turn, influences how contemporary Aboriginal groups are viewed. The third section explores the ways that scholars have discussed Métis distinctiveness in comparison with First Nations groups, and argues that these discussions have obscured the close relations between Métis and Plains Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux. Scholars and politicians have created and perpetuated a racialized view of the Métis that acts to ignore their kinship links and cultural similarities with First Nations people. J.R. Miller has chal-

lenged researchers to think beyond the artificial differences between the two groups: "investigators of both Indian and Metis history topics really must ask themselves how much longer they are willing to allow obsolete statutory distinctions that were developed in Ottawa in pursuit of bureaucratic convenience and economy to shape their research strategies."[7]

That the term "tribe" is problematic is not a new notion; Morton Fried was the first to point out certain flaws. As summarized by Sharrock, Fried identified two important shortcomings of the term: "1) the validity of tribe as a general stage or level of sociopolitical integration is questionable; and 2) tribe, by non-specific definitions, cannot be correlated completely with any extant or historically well documented, bounded sociocultural unit."[8] For Sharrock, the non-specific definitions of "tribe" are problematic because of "the confounded idea that a tribe is at one and the same time, an ethnic unit, a linguistic unit, a territorial corresidence unit, a cultural unit and societal unit. ... Seldom are these units discretely bounded and correlative in membership composition."[9] Albers also questions the use of the term "tribe" and highlights the importance of kinship:

> The historical situation of the Plains Cree, Assiniboine and the Ojibwa did not conform to typical tribal models where territories were divided, claimed and defended by discrete ethnic groups, nor did it fit descriptions in which political allegiances were defined primarily in exclusive ethnic terms. Ethnicity in the generic and highly abstract sense of a "tribal" name did not always function as marker of geopolitical boundaries. Given a pluralistic pattern of land use and alliance making, most of their ethnic categories did not have a high level of salience or any a priori power to organize and distribute people across geographic space. What appears to have been more important in defining the geopolitics of access to land, labor and resources were social ties based on ties of kinship and sodality in their varied metaphoric extensions and expressions.[10]

However, as mentioned above, Albers does not give serious consideration to how Métis fit within this group dynamic. For Ray Fogelson, "tribe" is an inaccurate reflection of Aboriginal societies, and so he prefers the term "community":[11] "[the] idea of communities is preferable to the idea of tribes, since tribes are politico-legal entities rather than direct face-to-face interactive social groups. Furthermore, in aboriginal and neo-aboriginal times there were very few true tribes, in the sense of institutions with clear lines of political authority, chiefs,

councils, and strict membership criteria. ... Tribes were not primordial polities but institutions created to facilitate interactions with states."[12]

Regna Darnell further asserts "that 'tribe' is a highly suspect and thoroughly ethnocentric category, particularly when applied to nomadic hunter-gatherer traditions."[13] Theodore Binnema identifies a particular problem with employing the notion of tribe when studying group relations: "By focusing on a single group such as Crees, the Kutenais, or the Crow, we risk overlooking the important network of relationships that existed between ethnic groups."[14] For most Aboriginal people in general (and Plains Cree, Assiniboine, Saulteaux, and Métis specifically), the network of kinship relations was more important than ethnicity for group identity formation.

By the early 1800s, the Cree, Assiniboine, Saulteaux, and Métis bands were making their presence felt on the northern plains. Social, political, military, and economic alliances among bands from these four groups gave them an advantage in asserting their interests in a highly competitive region. Alliances based on kinship were facilitated by similar social organizations that allowed for incorporation of individuals from other cultural groups. All four groups operated as sets of linked bands, which were politically autonomous units lacking tribal level political organization.[15] For example, in 1937 anthropologist David Rodnick described the historic Assiniboine social and political structure, highlighting the role that kinship played in group formation and maintenance:

> The band was the political unit in Assiniboine life. It was autonomous in nature and completely sovereign. Individual affiliation within the band was loose, since it was relatively simple to form new bands, or for an individual to leave one and join another. An individual called himself a member of the band in which his parents had lived at the time of his birth. Upon marriage he could either elect to remain in his own or else join the band of his wife's people. Due to the fact that such affiliation was not too infrequently changed, the members of a band were normally related to one another.[16]

The Plains Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux bands all followed the Dakota-type kinship system, in which a person's kinship role determined their responsibility to others.[17] A dominant part of this structure was the provision for marriages. The cross/parallel and arranged systems formed the basis of marriages for many Aboriginal groups. Peers and Brown describe the cross/parallel system as: "the children of one's father's brother or mother's sister (i.e. of same-sex siblings); cross cousins are the children of one's father's sister and mother's brother

(i.e. of siblings of different sex). Concomitantly, all relatives of one's own generation were grouped either as siblings/parallel cousins (for whom the term was the same); or else they were cross cousins, and potential sweethearts and mates."[18]

Opposite sex cross cousins were eligible, but not exclusive, marriage partners. While people were not confined to marrying their cross cousins, they were freed from the taboos and responsibilities imposed on opposite-sex siblings. By contrast, parallel cousins treated each other as siblings and were therefore compelled to follow social taboos that strictly forbade marriage. Parallel cousins were also obliged to fulfill supportive roles for each other—roles that were not the primary responsibility of cross cousins.[19] Anthropologists, however, have not commented on how cross/parallel cousin regulations applied (if at all) to second cousins.

Arranged marriages were an important component of the Dakota-type kinship system. These marriages occurred either through mutual agreement between parents or by purchase, whereby the groom's family bestowed large amounts of gifts on the prospective bride's family.[20] Arranged marriages allowed bands to create political, economic, and social alliances with other cultural groups, including Europeans.[21] Multicultural, kinship-based bands were part of a strategy to ensure survival. Albers states that "widening the range of contacts and resources to which local groups had access was a sensible strategy for accommodating the rapid political, economic and demographic changes taking place in their midst."[22] Kinship alliances between Aboriginal groups accomplished the same objective as it did in the fur trade. Van Kirk describes the function of kinship in the fur trade: "from the Aboriginal point of view, cross-cultural unions were a way of integrating the Euro-Canadian stranger into Native kinship networks and enmeshing him in the reciprocal responsibilities that this entailed."[23]

The notion that tribal boundaries were concrete has been facilitated by the way scholars have described kinship patterns.[24] These writers acknowledge that traditional kinship made an individual's acceptance as a new band member a relatively easy process. For example, David G. Mandelbaum states that for Plains Cree bands "any person who lived in the encampment for some time and who traveled with the group soon came to be known as one of its members."[25] Most new members could trace a kinship link to someone in the band, but this was not always the case. In situations where there were no kinship ties, "marriage into the band usually furnished an immigrant with the social alliances necessary for adjustment to the course of communal life. Thus the numbers of each band were constantly augmented by recruits from other bands of Plains Cree, or from other tribes."[26] Mandelbaum recognizes that members of other "tribes"

were incorporated into Plains Cree bands, but the implication of this was that these outside tribal members became acculturated to the Plains Cree culture, which ensured that the latter's cultural boundaries were maintained. The result of these scholars' treatment of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal peoples has been to essentialize their identities and blur their multicultural composition.

While some scholars have challenged the notion of the term "tribe," others have continued to describe the inter-group relations at a tribal level. An example of this approach has been used to describe relations between the Saulteaux and Assiniboine. According to Laura Peers and Harold Hickerson, the Saulteaux were on good terms with the Cree, but their relations with the Assiniboine were somewhat more tenuous.[27] They suggest that the cause of the less favourable relations between the Saulteaux and the Assiniboine was competition for depleted resources in the region. Peers supports her position by quoting from the autobiography of John Tanner, an American who had been kidnapped by the Shawnee from his Ohio home as an adolescent in 1792 and was later adopted into an Odawa family. Tanner wrote that the Saulteaux saw the Assiniboine as filthy and brutal, and that "something of our dislike may perhaps be attributed to the habitually unfriendly feeling exists among the Ojibbeways" toward the Assiniboine.[28] Peers also cited the explorers Lewis and Clark, who stated in 1804 that there was a partial state of war existing between the Saulteaux and Assiniboine.[29] Yet by the turn of the century Tanner and his family were living with Cree and Assiniboine in the Pembina Mountain region. Interestingly, Hickerson states that the Cree were not happy with the Saulteaux's westward expansion, an aspect of their relations that Peers ignores to perhaps better highlight the closeness of the two groups. Even though the Cree were not happy with the Saulteaux presence Hickerson nevertheless notes that the three groups set out together to fight the Sioux.[30] That scholars have often used inter-band relations as examples of inter-tribal relations perhaps helps to explain this seemingly contradictory evidence.

Evidence of warfare of any kind between the Saulteaux and the Assiniboine is rather sketchy. For example, the Lewis and Clark reference to a partial war used by Peers is vague. Lewis and Clark provided lists of characteristics of various First Nations groups of the northern plains, and stated that the Red Lake, Pembina, and Portage la Prairie Saulteaux warred with the "Sioux (or Darcotas *(and partially with the Assiniboine)*."[31] They referred twice in the same manner to conflicts between the Saulteaux and Sioux but, despite providing detailed descriptions of battles between other groups in their journal, made no reference to any actual conflicts between the Saulteaux and Assiniboine.[32] That the Sau

teaux and Assiniboine continued joint economic, military, and social activities at a time when they were supposed to be close to war suggests that their relations were more peaceful than usually described. This is not to suggest that there were no tensions, but rather that any tensions probably occurred at a band level and were not strong enough to result in violence at a tribal level.

There is much more evidence to indicate that the Saulteaux and Assiniboine had a very close relationship. For example, in the late 1790s Tanner and his family arrived in Red River from Michilimackinac, and later met with many Cree and Assiniboine. He described the experience with the Cree and Assiniboine: "we were at length joined by four lodges of Crees. These people are the relations of the Ojibbeways and Ottawwaws, but their language is somewhat different so as not to be readily understood. Their country borders upon that of the Assiniboins, or Stone Roasters; and though they are not relations, nor natural allies, they are sometimes at peace, and are more or less intermixed with each other."[33]

In 1804, some 300 Saulteaux and Assiniboine warriors left Red River to Pembina in search of Sioux.[34] The following year, the Saulteaux travelled with the Assiniboine and Cree to Mandan villages to trade for horses. The Saulteaux also acquired horses from the Assiniboine by trading their medicine. Of the Assiniboine, Tanner wrote that "so many Ojibbways and Crees now live among them that they are most commonly able to understand something of the Ojibbway language."[35] That the nature of the inter-group relations was a band consideration—not a tribal one—is highlighted by Tanner's description of one Cree band's threat of violence against his family "on the account of some old quarrel [that they had] with a band of Ojibbways."[36] This threat of violence by one Cree band against a Saulteaux band highlights the political autonomy of the bands. As Hickerson and Peers outline, the Cree and the Saulteaux had a long-lasting relationship, but this does not mean that periodic conflicts between individual bands did not occur. David Rodnick points out that occasional conflicts occurred even between similar cultural groups. He explains that among the Assiniboine, "inter-band feuds of momentary duration took place occasionally. These, however, were conflicts between two large families, rather than actual band affairs."[37] Tanner's experience with that particular Cree band is a clear indication that tensions occurred between bands, but this did not equate to tribal conflict, a notion that scholars have ignored.

The history of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal people during the 1870s and 1880s is commonly portrayed as the history of the Plains Cree.[38] Although the Saulteaux, Assiniboine, and Métis are present in these and other histories, scholars have usually placed them in the background, subordinate to roles played by Plains Cree. For example, Sarah Carter emphasizes the Plains Cree in her study: "Plains Cree bands in the district covered by Treaty Four, concluded in 1874, are the focus of this study. They lived west of the Saulteaux of the parkland and included Saulteaux, Assiniboine, and mixed-bloods among their number."[39] While Carter acknowledges bands comprised of members from other cultural groups, they are nevertheless portrayed as essentially Plains Cree.

This picture painted by historians is somewhat misleading because the designation Plains Cree often masks a reality of multiculturalism among the bands, especially given that many of the prominent chiefs of this period were of mixed ancestry. For example, Little Pine's mother was Blackfoot and his father was Plains Cree.[40] According to Hugh Dempsey, Poundmaker was the son of an Assiniboine man and a Métis woman who had been adopted by Blackfoot Chief Crowfoot.[41] Chief Big Bear's father is considered to have been a renowned Ojibwe medicine man named Black Powder, who was originally from Ontario and the chief of a mixed Cree and Saulteaux band. The exact ethnicity of Big Bear's mother is not known.[42] Piapot, leader of the Young Dogs, was Cree-Assiniboine.[43] According to Doug Cuthand, Sweet Grass, one of the leading spokesmen in the Treaty Six negotiations, was Gros Ventre, and his mother, according to Allan Turner, was a Crow woman.[44] Pasqua was Plains Cree, but he was also chief of a predominantly Saulteaux band.[45] Although most scholars have been aware of the mixed ancestry of these chiefs, they have usually presented most of them as essentially Plains Cree, ignoring both their multicultural background and that of the bands that they led.

Scholars have also gone to great lengths to emphasize the differences and tensions between Métis and First Nations. John Milloy, for example, points to Plains Cree frustrations with Métis buffalo hunting practices. He cites fur trader John McLean, who noted that the Plains Cree responded to incursions into their hunting territory by attacking small groups of Métis and lighting massive prairie fires to dissuade them from utilizing their hunting territory.[46] Peers contends that the "Métis hunts continued to deplete the dwindling bison herds, and, under such conditions, decades-old resentment against them escalated into real hostility."[47] She also states that the Saulteaux presence in large mixed encampments was not resented in the same way that the presence of the Métis was because the Saulteaux "used and indeed emphasized their kinship with the plain [*sic*] Cree to gain access to the bison."[48] According to Greg Camp, the European cultural influence of the Métis caused friction between them and the Saulteaux

in the Turtle Mountain region.[49] Although the Turtle Mountain Chippewa had complained to fur traders and American officials about Métis hunting practices, they had become economically and socially intertwined with the Métis. Nonetheless, Camp states that "the mixed-blood presence south of the [American] border was no less a threat to the food supply of the full-bloods."[50]

Describing relations between the Assiniboine, Plains Cree, Saulteaux, and Métis in the Cypress Hills, Sharrock cites fur trader Isaac Cowie, who mentioned a combined encampment of these group, where the "Indians kept the Métis under constant surveillance, besides subjecting them to many other 'annoyances.'"[51] This action was apparently due to a level of distrust that the other groups had for Métis hunting practices. In describing the relations between these groups, Sharrock states, "based on documentable degrees of interrelatedness, the Assiniboine were most closely interrelated with the Cree-Assiniboine [a new distinct ethnic group that emerged from the interaction of the Cree and Assiniboine], and the Cree with the Saulteaux. The united Assiniboine and Cree-Assiniboine acted as a unit in opposition to the Cree and Saulteaux forces, and the entire northeastern plains grouping acted in opposition to the half-blood Métis."[52]

Sharrock's assessment appears to have been influenced by Cowie's own negative view of the Cree-Assiniboine, known as the Young Dogs. Cowie had had some unpleasant interactions with some Cree-Assiniboine and placed them in contrast to other groups. He wrote, "The Young-Dogs might be most fittingly expressed by calling them the sons of the female canine."[53] In discussing the factors that led to the creation of a distinct Cree-Assiniboine culture, Sharrock outlines the problems with tribal categories, but by privileging Cowie's views in describing the interactions between the Cree-Assiniboine band and other bands, she reifies the very tribal boundaries that she seeks to challenge. Her descriptions disregard the fact that most of the other bands at Cypress Hills were culturally mixed groups, even though they may not have developed a hybridized culture like the Young Dogs. The problem, it appears, is that Sharrock considered bands to be monocultural, not multicultural. This misconception led her to discuss the differences both among First Nations groups as well as between Métis and First Nations groups.

The emphasis on tension between Métis and First Nations' groups belies the fact that these groups were closely related, and is underscored by the actual level of conflict that existed in comparison to other Aboriginal groups. That the Plains Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux fought many battles against other First Nations is well documented. Although there may be references to conflict

between the Plains Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux and the Métis, there are no actual accounts of any battles. This suggests that the Plains Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux treated the Métis differently than, say, how they treated the Blackfoot, where stolen horses could spark a violent response. The Plains Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux were concerned about Métis buffalo hunting practices, but they attempted to settle the situation by expressing their concerns to fur traders, keeping the Métis under surveillance and subjecting them to "annoyances," or lighting prairie fires. Considering the central importance of the buffalo to their own economic, social, and spiritual well-being, it is surprising that there are no accounts of the Plains Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux waging war on the Métis. At most, there were only small attacks.

The close relations between First Nations and Métis people meant that Plains Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux bands were unwilling to wage war against the Métis, even though the latter were infringing on an important social and economic resource. These ties help to explain why there were Métis who fought alongside their First Nations relatives in battles against other First Nations groups. The level of tension and the different treatment—vis-à-vis other Aboriginal groups—between Plains Cree, Assiniboine, Saulteaux, and Métis has been glossed over by scholars, whose work has unjustifiably emphasized differences between First Nations and Métis. Any tension that occurred between Métis bands and the Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux bands does not appear to have been any more significant than tensions that occurred between the bands of these First Nations.

The reason for the lack of warfare is likely to have been due to kinship ties between the groups. The close relation between First Nations and Métis is highlighted by the degree of intermarriage. As noted earlier, Chief Poundmaker's mother is reputed to have been Métis. This was not a lone example; Chief Little Bone, or Michel Cardinal, was of Saulteaux/Métis ancestry, and had many wives who were either Saulteaux or Métis, or both.[54] Chief Gabriel Cote, or the Pigeon, was the son of a Saulteaux mother and Métis man.[55] Heather Devine suggests that Chief Cowessess may have been Marcel Desjarlais, who was of Saulteaux and Métis ancestry.[56] The father of another Cowessess chief, Louis O'Soup, was named Michel Cardinal.[57] Although the Métis had developed a separate culture, it contained enough common points that they were able to marry into these bands without any significant disruptions to either group.

The close relations and similar cultural features between the Métis and Plains Cree, Assiniboine, and Saulteaux is illustrated both by the fact that many bands

contained Métis members as well as the chiefs' desire to have Métis included in the treaties. During Treaty Four negotiations in 1874, for example, Chief Kamooses (also spelled Kanooses) requested that the Métis be included in the treaty.[58] Two years later, at the Treaty Six negotiations, Chief Mistawasis also requested that his Métis relatives be included in the treaty.[59] In 1881 in the Cypress Hills, Chiefs Lucky Man and Little Pine made similar requests.[60] That same year, the governor-general—the Marquis of Lorne—visited the Northwest Territories and met with First Nations leaders at Fort Qu'Appelle. The spokesperson for the assembled chiefs was Louis O'Soup. Among the list of grievance O'Soup presented to Lorne was a request that the Métis be included in the treaties.[61] Even after the government refused to enter into treaty negotiations with the Métis, many simply joined their relatives in bands that had been recognized as Indian. This would not have been possible were they not closely linked by kinship and culture.

There can be little doubt that the presence of the Métis has added a certain complexity to intra-Aboriginal relations. This complexity has been due in no small part to outsiders' attempts to understand the impact of the racial make-up of the Métis. Since the 1970s, scholars have purported to understand the Métis by concentrating on their cultural rather than racial attributes, the practice of earlier scholars.[62] Nonetheless, the notion of race is still embedded in discussions about Métis people. That is to say, scholars have implicitly categorized Métis as a racial category distinct from First Nations people. For example, Métis are frequently described as cultural brokers, cultural mediators, or bicultural because of their ability to straddle First Nation and European cultures. However, First Nations were also cultural brokers, cultural mediators, and were bicultural or even multicultural. There were many First Nations people and groups who, to varying degrees, acculturated themselves to various European practices and values. These individuals or communities, however, have not usually been viewed as cultural mediators in the same way as have the Métis. The difference is that historical and contemporary outsiders have viewed the Métis and First Nations through racialized lenses.

For many years, scholars' myopic view of the Red River Métis has worked to reinforce the static nature of Métis cultural expression.[63] Although recent scholars of Métis history are beginning to look "beyond Red River" and provide new views of Métis history, many tend to have simply replaced Red River Métis with Plains Métis as representing the prototypical Métis.[64] As Brenda Macdougall states in her study of Île à la Crosse Métis in northern Saskatchewan, "it would seem that Red River myopia has given way to a Plains—whether Canadian or

American—myopia that still constrains our ability to recognize the diversity of the Métis experience in Canada. It is an unwillingness to acknowledge that the ethnogenesis of a new people was dynamic, occurring in different regions at different times as the fur trade expanded and contracted."[65] As a result, the undertaking of massive buffalo hunts, acceptance of Roman Catholicism, French language usage, the wearing of a combination of European and First Nations clothing, and other markers are viewed as cultural standards for all Métis. The presence of such a dominant expression of Métis culture has made it difficult to acknowledge the possibility that a diverse range of Métis cultural forms exists.

The scholarly discussion of the existence of proto-Métis bands also heightens the racial and cultural differences between Métis and First Nations groups. John Foster has identified the processes, later expanded upon by Heather Devine, that allowed mixed ancestry people to move from "proto-Métis" into "full-blown Métis" identities.[66] He asserts that the relationships between European fur traders and First Nations men played a crucial role in this process. Foster claims that the development of a Métis identity occurred in a two-stage process involving independent traders—usually of French origin and known as freemen or, as Foster labels them, outsider adult males. The first stage saw the outsider adult male marry into an Indian band and develop a close relationship with the adult male members of the band and other outsider adult males. After becoming sufficiently assimilated into the band's social and political culture, the freemen would establish their own bands with their Indian wives and children. Foster attributes the ethos of the adult French Canadian males as the motivating factor for leaving their wives' bands and establishing their own. This ethos among French men "emphasized the necessity of being a man of consequence in one's own eyes and in the eyes of one's fellows"—that is, other adult French Canadian males.[67] In this milieu, outsider adult males were characterized as having a large degree of assertiveness, apparently in contrast to First Nations men.

These bands, as Foster and Devine have argued, were proto-Métis—that is, they were still too Indian, yet not European enough to be considered truly Métis. The argument runs that after two or three generations of adopting and adapting European cultural influences with those of First Nations' culture, these proto-Métis developed new expressions that were different than either parent cultures—they became a "new nation."[68]

The flaw in this thinking, however, is that when First Nations groups adopted and adapted European culture, they were not considered anything less than First Nations. Indeed, First Nations' cultures have changed—the difference, however,

is that there is an implicit racial component when discussing the Métis that is absent when discussing First Nations' cultural change. The concept of proto-Métis is predicated on the interpretation that there have always been significant differences between Métis and First Nations cultures. It is built on the assumption that the Red River Métis culture is the only Métis culture and those Métis groups who exhibited a higher level of First Nations cultural characteristics than European must therefore not be Métis. This denies not only the diversity of cultural expressions, but any possibility that Métis culture has the ability to change in response to temporal and spatial factors in the same way as First Nations' groups. Depending on the location and period, various Métis groups responded differently to external factors, which means that more than one kind of Métis culture must have emerged.

One challenge to the race-based theories of ethnogenesis is to view the freemen not as "Indianized Frenchmen," as Ruth Swan states, but as actual Métis.[69] Historians do not consider the freemen to be Aboriginal because they were Europeans. However, upon marrying into First Nations bands the freemen became sufficiently culturally competent to gain the confidence of their bands. If they were unable to demonstrate an ability to secure the physical and cultural survival of their wives and children, it is unlikely that the freemen's new relatives would have allowed them to form their own bands. The freemen would have been immersed in First Nations culture, but they would not have expunged their French cultural heritage—they would have become bicultural. They would have passed to their children aspects of their French culture, but they also would have transmitted the cultural norms of their First Nations in-laws to ensure that their children could operate successfully within this social and cultural environment.

While the French freemen brought both their French culture and acquired First Nations cultural knowledge into their marriages, First Nations women continued to pass on their own cultural knowledge to their children. Macdougall describes the role that women had in the development of Métis culture: "as Aboriginal women married outsider adult male fur traders, they brought to their marriages attitudes and beliefs—indeed, a worldview—about family and social life that influenced the creation of a Métis socio-cultural identity. Furthermore, that these families lived in the lands of their maternal relatives and, as was the case of the Île à la Crosse Métis and spoke the languages of those maternal cultures certainly shaped their worldview."[70] Macdougall further states, "far removed from emerging centres of Red River and non-Native settlement, in regions such as northwestern Saskatchewan the reality was that family life, and in particular

these female-centred family networks," were central to the advent of Métis culture.[71] It was the women's kinship links that enabled new bands to be established, and it was the maintenance of these links that allowed the bands to survive. By highlighting the role of Aboriginal women, Macdougall not only challenges the emphasis placed on the French freemen, but also sheds light onto the importance that First Nations cultural practices had in Métis cultural development. The weight given to Métis European-ness has unfairly overshadowed First Nations culture in the emerging Métis culture. I suggest that this overshadowing is due to the scholarly tendency to view Aboriginal people at a tribal level—not a band level—and to view the Métis in racial terms instead of cultural terms.

By viewing these new Métis groups from a band-level perspective instead of a tribal level, it becomes apparent that they were culturally different from their parent band because of the bicultural nature of the freemen and, to a lesser extent, their First Nations wives. This cultural difference between the new Métis and First Nations bands may not have been as great as it would become in later years, when some Métis groups underwent significant cultural change. Certainly, this does not mean that all freemen would have been Métis; however, acknowledging the "Métis-ness" of the freemen eliminates the issue of race when discussing Métis culture and allows for change, adaptation, and a range in Métis cultural expression. Viewing Métis from a band perspective also challenges the notion that Métis cultural expressions differed greatly from those of First Nations. Realizing this, perhaps, helps to explain continued political, military, economic, and social alliances between these groups.

Nicole St-Onge has recently suggested that scholars have overlooked Métis/Saulteaux relations during the mid-nineteenth century in St. Paul des Saulteaux, located on the western edge of the Red River colony.[72] St-Onge states that scholars since the early 1980s have accepted the notion that the Métis "had endogamous tendencies by the early and mid nineteenth century with men occasionally bringing native-Indian wives into the community and Métis women also occasionally incorporating Euro-Canadians, white merchants and voyageurs in the fold."[73] However, her examination of church and census records shows that, in contrast to previous research, there was actually a high rate of intermarriage between the two groups. The prominence of a notion of Métis endogamy emphasizes the cultural differences between the Métis and Saulteaux and other First Nations groups. This difference is epitomized by the (mis)characterization of buffalo hunting as belonging to the Métis and fishing, trapping, tapping for syrup, and salt making as to the domain of the Saulteaux. However, as St-Onge

points out, Métis women who married Saulteaux men became involved in Saulteaux economic activities. The intermixing of these two groups "indicates that, prior to 1870, ethnic identities were fluid, relational and situational."[74] The Métis and Saulteaux shared sufficient cultural kinship practices to allow for the incorporation of new members: "given the practices of incorporation and inclusiveness of both the Métis and Saulteaux, there was no reason or necessity in the course of their lives for residents of the Northwest to limit themselves to one identity. If mechanisms existed in both Métis and Saulteaux communities to incorporate European outsiders into extensive family networks, it was all the easier for people already closely allied to merge with either or both communities as circumstances dictated."[75]

St-Onge reminds us that First Nations and Métis groups had the social mechanisms to integrate Europeans into their groups, yet the idea that First Nations and Métis could join each other's group has not been considered. Scholars simply have not recognized that the two groups shared similar cultural kinship understandings. However, as St-Onge states, an "initial conclusion advanced here is that converging histories, economic pursuits and kinship ties were blurring the ethnic distinction between the Métis and their close allies, the Ojibwa-Saulteaux, and perhaps others, as the nineteenth century progressed."[76] Scholars' inability to see the cultural similarities is due to a tendency to highlight the cultural differences between First Nations and Métis people. That tendency itself has been fuelled by an implicitly racial view of these groups. St-Onge's findings, then, are significant because they help to explain how Métis individuals could be incorporated into bands and even become leaders.

The legal status of Métis, as Miller has noted, has guided the scholarly agenda and popular conceptions of the Métis. The Métis as a group did not sign treaties with the Canadian government nor are they considered Indian under the *Indian Act*. As a result, the Métis fall under a different legal classification than do First Nations. Unlike First Nations, the Métis are the responsibility of provincial governments. In recent years, there have been legal arguments put forth that the Métis should be considered Indians under Section 91(24) of the Canadian Constitution.[77] However, this argument is greatly undermined because outsiders have viewed the Métis as "not Indian," regardless of close relations or cultural similarities, for over two centuries. Some First Nations people continue to hold the view that Métis are "not Indian"; from this perspective, it follows that Indians are more culturally Aboriginal than Métis and therefore have a stronger claim to Aboriginal rights, thus raising the issue of cultural authenticity. For some First

Nations leaders and First Nations people of Métis ancestry, then, acknowledging the close relationship with the Métis or Métis ancestry could be viewed as detrimental in terms of rights and entitlements. These contemporary tensions are similar to the historic tensions, for access to resources is the central issue.

This is not to suggest that no First Nations leaders have acknowledged their ties to the Métis. In September 2007, for example, comments by Richard John, the former chief of One Arrow First Nation, illustrate that the close ties between First Nations and Métis have not been forgotten by some contemporary First Nations. According to Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, the Métis forced Chief One Arrow and other First Nations to participate in armed conflict against the Canadian government at Batoche during the 1885 Resistance.[78] According to John's family history, however, Chief One Arrow willingly joined the conflict. John notes, "There are friendships [between residents of One Arrow and the neighbouring Métis at Batoche] right through to this day. We help each other and it has been that way from prior to 1885."[79]

What is the implication of viewing Aboriginal groups from a band perspective rather than a tribal perspective? Should scholars discard tribal terms completely? There is agreement among some ethnohistorians that tribal designations are a European construction and were applied to Aboriginal groups somewhat haphazardly.[80] Abandoning tribal categories would not only be difficult, it may not even be desirable. Plains Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine, and Métis cultural groups did exist; while they shared many similarities, there were undeniable cultural traits that differentiated them. It was these cultural differences that made the bands and the individuals in the bands multicultural. Even individuals who were not of mixed ancestry were multicultural. It will not be an easy task to ascertain how many bands were multicultural, or, if they were, to what degree they were multicultural. In addition, given the colonial imposition of the outsider's definition, many contemporary Aboriginal people have, as McLeod notes, "essentialized" their cultural identities. For many Aboriginal people, cultural affiliation is vital.

However, contemporary kinship patterns—at least among Cowessess people and likely for other First Nations as well—ensure that band members' collective identity survives. Cowessess people's attitudes are shaped within the context of family/kinship connections, not by externally defined tribal or cultural affiliations. A person's family name places that person within the familial reserve context. This is not to claim that cultural affiliation is totally ignored, but rather that it is not the primary identifier that connects people—certainly not in the way that family/kinship does. For Cowessess people, family/kinship ties are of greater importance

to identity than place of residence, gender, cultural affiliation, or notions of race. To outsiders, members may say that they are Plains Cree or Saulteaux, but what is really important is to which families they are related. This kinship pattern is historically based and it is what most historians have not fully articulated.

The concept of tribe, with its well-defined cultural boundaries, and the notion of Métis as a culturally and racially distinct group from First Nations does not explain the multicultural composition of many Saskatchewan First Nations. The role and function of kinship practices, however, provide a greater understanding of Saskatchewan First Nations, and help to explain the motivation of historic intra-Aboriginal relations in the northern plains.

Notes

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2 Sharrock, "Crees, Cree-Assiniboines, and Assiniboines," 95.

3 Neal McLeod, "Plains Cree Identity: Borderlands, Ambiguous Genealogies and Narrative Irony," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 20, 2 (2000): 437–454.

4 Ibid., 441.

5 Alanson Skinner, "The Cultural Position of the Plains Ojibway," *American Anthropologist* 16, 2 (1914): 314–318.

6 Alanson Skinner, "Plains Cree Tales," *Journal of American Folklore* 29, 113 (1916): 341–367.

7 J.R. Miller, "From Riel to the Metis," *Canadian Historical Review* 96, 1 (1988): 19.

8 Sharrock, "Cree, Cree-Assiniboine, and Assiniboines," 97.

9 Ibid.

10 Albers, "Changing Patterns on Ethnicity," 91.

11 Raymond D. Fogelson, "Perspectives on Native American Identity," in *Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Russell Thornton (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 51.

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14 Theodore Binnema, *Common Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 12.

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16 Rodnick, "Political Structure," 408.

17 See, for example, Patricia Albers, "The Plains Ojibwa," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 13, Part 1*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2001), 652–660; Raymond DeMallie and David Reed Miller, "The Assiniboine," in *Handbook of North American Indians, Vol. 13, Part 1*, ed. Raymond DeMallie (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute, 2001), 572–582; Robert Lowie, "The Assiniboine," in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. IV, Part 1* (New York, 1909); Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree*; Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, Laura Peers and Jennifer S.H. Brown, "There is No End to Relationshi

Among the Indians: Ojibwa Families and Kinship in Historical Perspective," *The History of the Family: An International Quarterly* 4, 4 (1999): 529–555.

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20 Raymond DeMallie, "Kinship and Biology in Sioux Culture," in *North American Indian Anthropology: Essays on Society and Culture*, eds. Raymond J. DeMallie and Alfonso Ortiz (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 108–124.

21 Albers, "Symbiosis, Merger, and War"; Jennifer S.H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980); Sharrock, "Cree, Cree-Assiniboine, and Assiniboines"; Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670–1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983); Bruce White, "'Give Us a Little Milk': The Social and Cultural Significance of Gift Giving in the Lake Superior Fur Trade," in *Rendezvous: Selected Papers of the Fourth North American Fur Trade Conference*, ed. Thomas S. Buckley (St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota, 1984), 185–196; Bruce White, "The Woman Who Married a Beaver: Trade Patterns and Gender Roles in the Ojibwa fur trade," in *Expression in Canadian Native Studies*, eds. Ron. F. Laliberte et al. (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan Extension Press, 2000), 178–121.

22 Albers, "Changing Patterns on Ethnicity," 114.

23 Sylvia Van Kirk, "'Marrying-In' to 'Marrying-Out': Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal Marriage in Colonial Canada," *Frontiers* 23, 3 (2002): 4.

24 See, for example, Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree*; and Peers and Brown, "No End to Relationship."

25 Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree*, 105–106.

26 Ibid., 106.

27 Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*; Harold Hickerson, "The Genesis of a Trading Post Band: The Pembina Chippewa," *Ethnohistory* 3, 4 (1956): 289–345.

28 John Tanner, *The Falcon: A Narrative of the Captivity and Adventures of John Tanner* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 38.

29 Ibid., 44.

30 Hickerson, "The Genesis of a Trading Post Band," 310.

31 Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Lewis and Clark Journals: An American Epic of Discovery: The Abridgment of the Definitive Nebraska Edition Meriwether Lewis, William Clark, and Members of the Corps of Discovery* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 441–443. Emphasis in original.

32 Ibid., 305, 317.

33 Tanner, *The Falcon*, 31.

34 Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 9.

35 Ibid., 132.

36 Ibid., 79.

37 Rodnick, "Political Structure," 409.

38 For example, see Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill/Queen's University Press, 1990); John Tobias, "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879–1885," in *Out of the Background: Readings on Canadian Native History*, eds. Robin Fisher and Kenneth Coates (1982; reprint, Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd, 1998), 150-176; Michel Hogue, "Disputing the Medicine Line: The Plains Cree and the Canadian-American Border, 1876–1885," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 52 (2002): 2–17; and Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Ties That Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies of the Prairies* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1994). Although the focus of the articles by Tobias and Hogue is Plains Cree and Pettipas' book examines prairie First Nations' responses to government religious suppression, many of the bands and individuals whom they discuss were of mixed ancestry. For example, Pettipas' second chapter, "The Ties That Bind: The Plains Cree," places the Plains Cree at the centre of her examination.

39 Carter, *Lost Harvest*, 45.

40 John Tobias, "Payipwat," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=41111&query=Payipwat.

41 Hugh Dempsey, "P_tikwahanapiw_yin (Poundmaker)," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ShowBio.asp?BioId=39905&query=Poundmaker.

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47 Peers, *The Ojibwa of Western Canada*, 186.

48 Ibid., 187.

49 Greg Camp, "The Turtle Mountain Plains-Chippewa and Métis, 1797–1935" (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 1987), 42.

50 Ibid., 75.

51 Sharrock, "Cree, Cree-Assiniboine, and Assiniboines," 113.

52 Ibid., 114.

53 Cited in Sharrock, "Cree, Cree-Assiniboine, and Assiniboines," 113.

54 Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves*, 120.

55 John Tobias, cited in Lawrence Barkwell and Lyle N. Longclaws, "History of the Plains-Ojibway and the Waywayseecapo First Nation" (unpublished manuscript, 1996), 95–96.

56 Devine, *The People Who Own Themselves*, 132.

57 Sarah Carter, "O'Soup, Louis," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, http://www.biographi.ca/EN/ ShowBio.asp?BioId=41754&query=cowessess.

58 Alexander Morris, *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-west Territories Including the Negotiations on Which They Were Based* (Belfords, Clarke and Co., 1880; reprint, Toronto: Prospero Books, 1991), 119.

59 Ibid., 222.

60 Hogue, "Disputing the Medicine Line," 10.

61 Carter, "O'Soup, Louis."

62 See, for example, Brown, *Strangers in Blood*; Jennifer S.H. Brown, "Woman as Centre and Symbol in the Emergence of Métis Communities," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 3 (1983): 39–46; Olive Dickason, "From 'One Nation' in the Northeast to 'New Nation' in the Northwest: A Look at the Emergence of the Métis," in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, eds. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985), 19–36; John Foster, "Some Questions and Perspectives on the Problem of Métis Roots," in *The New Peoples*, eds. Peterson and Brown, 73–91; John Foster, "The Origins of the Mixed Bloods in the Canadian West," in *Essays on Western History: In Honour of Lewis Gwynne Thomas*, ed. Lewis H. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976), 71–80; Harriet Gorham, "Families of Mixed Descent in the Western Great Lakes Region," in *Native People, Native Lands: Canadian Indians, Inuit and Métis*, ed. Brian A. Cox (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1988), 37–55; Jacqueline Peterson, "Prelude to Red River: A Social Portrait of the Great Lake Métis," *Ethnohistory* 25, 1 (1978): 41–67; Jacqueline Peterson, "Ethnogenesis: Settlement and Growth of a 'New People,'" *Journal of Indian Culture and Research* 6, 2 (1982): 23–64; Jacqueline Peterson, "Many Roads to Red River: Métis Genesis in the Great Lakes Region, 1680–1815," in *The New Peoples*, eds. Peterson and Brown, 37–72; and Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties*.

63 Miller, "From Riel to the Métis."

64 "Beyond Red River: New Views of Métis History Symposium," Michigan State University, 2006.

65 Brenda Macdougall, "*Wahkootowin:* Family and Cultural Identity in Northwestern Saskatchewan Métis Communities," *Canadian Historical Review* 87, 3 (2006): 439.

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69 Ruth Swan, "The Crucible: Pembina and the Origins of the Red River Valley Métis," (Ph.D. diss., University of Manitoba, 2003). Swan's use of the term "Indianized Frenchmen" is in reference to individual French Canadian traders who lived among First Nations groups and adopted their customs and culture rather than those freemen who formed their own bands.

70 Macdougall, *Wahkootowin*, 437–438.

71 Ibid., 456.

72 Nicole St-Onge, "Uncertain Margins: Métis and Saulteaux in St-Paul des Saulteaux, Red River, 1821–1870," *Manitoba History* 53 (2006): 2–10.

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