

Hidden in Plain Sight Aboriginal Contributions to Canada and Canadian Identity

Creating a new Indian Problem

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Abstract

Post colonial indigenous scholarship grounded in indigenous theory and experience works to create a 'complex understanding' of indigenous peoples in the contemporary world. The text *Hidden in Plain Sight Aboriginal Contributions to Canada and Canadian identity*¹ invites a dialogue about aboriginal contribution to the development of the Canadian nation and challenges the prevailing ideas that Aboriginal peoples were passive victims of colonization.

Introduction

The history of indigenous peoples in Canada has been told through the eyes and words of Europeans, mainly the British and French, who established a new nation-state in 1867. The national history of Canada, until recently, paid scant attention to indigenous peoples. Olive Dickason, a Metis historian and former journalist, is credited with changing the historical perception of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and their role in the history of the country. Since her seminal works, *The Myth of the Savage* (1984) and *The Native Imprint: The contribution of First Peoples to Canada's Character*, volumes I and II(, 1995, 1997), there has been a huge increase in the historiography of aboriginal peoples. Historians, at least, are coming to terms with an indigenous presence.

One of the ideas that has begun to be explored, stimulated by Dickason is the idea of 'contribution'. It is an area that needs further exploration. New research shows that Aboriginal peoples did not roll over and let the steamroller of European civilization and colonization roll over them. Research by Frank Tough (*As Their Natural Resources Fail*, 1996), Arthur Ray (*Give Us Good Measure*, 1978). Laurie Meijer-Drees(*The Indian Association of Alberta*, 2002)), Carter(*Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Farmers and Government Policy*, 1993), Rolf Knight (*Indians at Work*, 1978) and even the *Jesuit Relations (1610-1791)* show a vibrant engagement by Aboriginal peoples with the newcomers to this land. Yale Belanger, one of my graduate students, for his Phd dissertation this year has prepared a short history of Indian political organizing starting in 1879. He challenges much of the conventional literature that says that indigenous people were largely inactive and not politically engaged with the Canadian state.

Beginning to explore the idea of contribution is a difficult and troublesome project. Trying to talk about contribution when many are talking about colonization creates dissonance: how can you talk about contribution when there is so much misery? I have been guided by traditional teachings that discuss the need for balance among four elements of the medicine circle. So far the picture of aboriginal peoples has been remarkably unbalanced and problematic to development. The two volume text is an attempt to provide some balance and to add a new dimension to the contemporary portrayal of indigenous people. I situate it in the realm of post-colonial scholarship in a particular fashion as describe later.

The genesis of the text *Hidden in Plain Sight*

A few years ago I taught a third-year university class in Aboriginal governance at Trent University. The class was an exploration of the ideas that animate contemporary Aboriginal

¹ *Hidden in Plain Sight*, David Newhouse, Cora Voyageur and Dan Beavon, University of Toronto Press, forthcoming (June 2004)

political and social collective action. In an early part of the year, I asked students to list adjectives that described Aboriginal peoples. The list we generated was filled with words which depicted poverty, dispossession, anger, marginalization, hostility, effectively creating an image of a community in great pain and living lives of woe, pain and suffering, struggling to maintain a way of life against great odds. Words such as creative, innovative, persistent, artistic, assertive, strong-willed did not emerge from the first round of discussion.

The same year, I conducted an informal survey of fourth-year business students and first-year Native Studies students. I asked them to identify what contributions Aboriginal people have made to Canada. Both groups of students had great difficulty in identifying any contribution. The most common responses were land (mostly from Aboriginal students) and natural resources. A few identified place names, the canoe, green spirituality, and tobacco. One insightful student said that the Aboriginal peoples' contribution to Canada was, "Canada itself, all of it, lock, stock and barrel". Both groups of students had great difficulty in describing aboriginal peoples in positive contributory terms. In December, 2004, I appeared before the Canada Senate's Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. The Chair of the Committee asked me: Why is it that Aboriginal peoples are seen as a burden on the state? As Canadians we don't see other groups as burdens but we do see Aboriginal peoples as burdens. Noel Dyck writing in *What is the Indian Problem Tutelage and Resistance in Canadian Indian Administration* (1991) argues that the view of Indians as problems has dominated Canadian public policy since Confederation. Post colonial Indian scholarship begins to challenge this characterization.

The chapters in the text are responses to a call for papers that we issued through a variety of networks: academic, public service, community organizations. We asked people to write about aboriginal achievement and contribution to Canada. What we received surprised us. We received about 50 responses to our call, many more than we could accommodate in a single volume. These papers detailed an extraordinary set of contributions ranging from the aesthetic like Mikmaq influence on early east coast furniture making to indigenizing aspects of the Canadian justice system to what we regard as the largest contribution of them all: the largest transfer of land from aboriginal possession to Canada through the treaties. It is hard to argue for a more fundamental and central contribution. Without the treaties, Canada would not be Canada.

We organized the papers into thematic areas in two volume. We decided that we would personalize the text by adding a series of small profiles of people we considered to have made outstanding achievements. This proved to be no easy task. We eventually chose individuals who in our views exemplified the achievements of each section. As we prepared lists of aboriginal people to select from, we were amazed at the level of achievement and the large number of people to choose from. Much of what we found was hidden in plain sight.

This is from the introduction to the text:

John Ralston Saul, writing in *Reflections of a Siamese Twin Canada at the end of the Twentieth Century* argues that Canada is founded upon three pillars: English, French and Aboriginal. There has been little recognition of the third group as a pillar or as a foundational group. Canada has not yet come to terms with its Aboriginal heritage.

In the Canadian history books of the last four decades, Aboriginal peoples appear at the start, then disappear only to pop up again like prairie gophers, as welcome as a prairie gopher and just as much a nuisance. It is no wonder that students are unable to articulate Aboriginal contributions to Canada since the dominate idea they encounter, through schools and the media, is that Aboriginal people are a problem that needs to be solved.

The third pillar, then, is seen as needing to be propped up by the other two. We are happy to report that the results of the last two decades of work on aboriginal history is slowly starting to find its way into Canadian History texts. There is now a general recognition that Aboriginal people have been present in Canada since Confederation, that the treaties were important (but not yet central) to Canada being what it is, and that the Canadian state has treatyly

Aboriginal peoples unfairly, with a high degree of dishonesty and ill will. We are hopeful that as aboriginal history becomes more prominent in overall Canadian history that the legacy of the past can be overcome. Yet at this time we must still deal with the continuing legacy of the Indian Problem.

The burning issue since the establishment of settler governments in Canada has been what to do with the Indians. Governments over the years have each had their own particular view of the "Indian Problem". At times, the problem was how to get us to join military alliances, how to civilize us, how to assimilate us, how to eliminate us or how to get us to integrate into Canada's multi-cultural environment. Each variation on the "Indian Problem" has led to a particular set of actions by the state. At the dawn of the 20th century, the prevailing view was that Indians would simply disappear. However, until they did disappear, the task became how to deal with this 'weird and waning race'. As we all know, the Indians did not disappear as predicted. The population has increased over the 20th century. The question for us now is: what is the Indian problem as we move into the 21st century?

A confident, aggressive, savvy, educated, and experienced leadership has emerged in Aboriginal communities over the past three decades. This leadership is highly skilled, knows how to push hard and knows how to get what it wants. Behind the leadership is an ever-growing cadre of thousands of Aboriginal professionals who have gained post-secondary credentials and workplace experience in mainstream and Aboriginal communities. These professionals are slowly moving into decision-making positions and are affecting change. Behind them are thousands of students who are currently in post-secondary educational institutions across the country. Over the next few decades these individuals will also be moving into leadership positions. As a whole, these people are determined, well-educated, courageous and want a better world for themselves and for their children.

Many see Aboriginal Self-government within their grasp. They have experienced aspects of self-government in education, in health care, in economic development, in social work, in housing, in cultural programs, and in language training.

The members of this highly-educated group have a different understanding of the world than those who came before them. They are now imbued with what we regard as the fundamental condition of modern Aboriginal society; post-colonial consciousness. It is a society that is aware that it has been colonized in many ways; a society that is aware of the implications of its colonization and which is choosing deliberately, consciously, and systematically to deal with that colonization; a society that is coming to terms with what has happened to it and a society determined to overcome its colonial legacy. It is a society that is putting together the knowledge and creating the wealth to effect changes in Canada and its treatment of them.

Post-colonial consciousness will be the defining political and social force within Aboriginal society over the next generation. Post-colonial Indians are angry and want to dismantle the master's house -- or at least renovate it to accommodate their desires more easily. This desire for change, arising out of post-colonial consciousness, brings a number of challenges for Canadians. One challenge will be finding ways to change the governing structures and institutions of Canada to accommodate Aboriginal governance. Accomplishing this requires broad public support and a will to accommodate aboriginal aspirations.

The 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended a major public education effort aimed at helping Canadian citizens understand Aboriginal aspirations, cultures, communities, and ways of living. This is an area that is often neglected in discussions of this nature. We forget that Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal governance takes place within a Canadian context that has had a hard time coming to terms with a continued Aboriginal presence, let alone a post-colonial one that is insistent upon being seen and heard. Garnering public support means changing the views that the public holds of Aboriginal peoples.

Over the years, our students have begun to get a bit frustrated at the stories of Aboriginal

woe, pain and suffering they have been told. They tell us that they know this story, in some cases, Aboriginal students have lived this story. They want to create a new story. This is the challenge before us, as educators, public servants, Canadians. How do we create a new story about Aboriginal peoples – a story of talent, competence, accomplishment and hope. This is a story of Aboriginal contributions to Canadian society. It is a more positive story – a story of success.

This text is part of the new story that is being written. This story has many parts.

Part of the story is about politics:

There is a political vision of Canada which includes Aboriginal peoples as partners in Confederation, that ensures that Aboriginal peoples share in the abundance of resources of this country and that treats Aboriginal peoples justly, fairly, and respectfully.

This vision was set out explicitly in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). The Commission proposed a solution that recast the relationship between Canada and Aboriginal peoples that reconstitutes Aboriginal Nations and their governments. It also recommends a third order of government in Canada be created to enable Aboriginal peoples to govern themselves. RCAP proposed that the process of Confederation continue until Aboriginal peoples are included as full and charter members of Canadian society.

Part of the story is about Aboriginal societies:

This sets the context and foundation of modern Aboriginal society as confident, aggressive, assertive, determined and desirous of creating a new world. This modern Aboriginal society is creating this new world from both Aboriginal and western ideas.

Part of the story is about history:

History is the official story that we tell ourselves about ourselves in the past events. It also defines us and helps to make sense of where we came from and what may happen. Today, we conceive of history as consisting of many stories. In a post-modern age, the idea of one grand narrative that tells one authoritative story is losing ground. One single narrative simply is not complex enough to present the multitude of stories that we must now include. A popular 1950s television show introduction said: There are 8 million stories in the naked city. Aboriginal stories are now part of these.

History is also the story that tells us who we are, where we came from, what we did, why we did what we did, and sometimes tries to tell us where we are going. History defines us and makes us human. In fact, some might say that the ability to think historically, link the past with present, and to speculate on possible futures is a fundamental characteristic of humanity.

History is also a continuing story that changes our understanding of ourselves. Our increased knowledge means that we can ask different questions about the past. Stories can change with time and with perspective. Yet we must not forget that not all stories are given equal time. Not all stories are heard and acknowledged. We cannot separate the history from power. There was a time in history when only those with the ability to write could document events in writing. It is still a fact that those who have power still get to write their version of the story and to have it accepted as 'truth'. However, the Aboriginal story is beginning to be told. Telling it from our perspective is difficult because we do not have power to make others listen. But why should it be so difficult to extend the rafters, to use an Iroquoian term, to include these Aboriginal stories? Whose story is challenged by the inclusion of Aboriginal ones?

It seems that at this moment in Canada's history that two intellectual projects should be of interest. The first is the "visibility project." This means a critical examination and rewriting of Canadian history that ensures the visibility of Aboriginal peoples. The British and French response to the presence of Aboriginal peoples is what presently defines Canada. Aboriginal participation in the formation of Canada is ignored. Without the treaty process which transferred most of the Canadian landmass from Aboriginal control to Canadian control,

Canada would not exist in its present form. In addition, the state would not possess the wealth and benefits derived from the natural resources extracted from that landmass. A significant portion of the history of Canada is defined by its relationship to the Aboriginal peoples within its borders. To ignore that ongoing relationship is to render Aboriginal peoples out of existence. Canada simply would not be Canada without us, despite the past attempts at erasure.

The second project is the "tribal history project." This means writing histories of Aboriginal communities through tribal/national/community effort. For example, despite all the scholarship, there are only a few written histories of Aboriginal communities written by community members. If we view history as the way in which we come to understand ourselves through our past, then this project is critical for Aboriginal peoples. As Aboriginal peoples we must begin to understand ourselves through histories that we create for ourselves. If not, then we continue to let others define us and we remain in the same place we are now -- extraneous to Canadian society and a burden for it as well.

These tribal histories already exist in every community and Aboriginal nation across the country. These histories are not simply the oral histories resident in the minds of a few old people and elders. They are contained within the songs, dances, rituals, and ceremonies of many cultural groups. These things tell the history of a particular group and people in the same way that written histories do.

It is this second project that we think is the most important at this time and the most intellectually challenging. We ask, "What does it mean to write a tribal/national/community history from Aboriginal perspectives?" We think that this project provides an opportunity for others to see the humanity of Aboriginal people. We will portray ourselves as active agents in attempting to live in the world in which we find ourselves. We will challenge the notion that Aboriginal peoples will simply lay down and allow the steamroller of western civilization to crush us into the ground as it moves across the land.

One of the most interesting intellectual undertakings within contemporary Aboriginal communities today is the attempt to establish a solid philosophical framework for Aboriginal societal collective actions based upon ideas from traditional world views, life ways, and spiritualities. Can Aboriginal peoples use traditional prophecies as the interpretative framework for tribal/national/community histories? For example, the Anishnaabe prophecy of the seven fires tells us that we will almost lose our culture and languages before a revival or the 8th fire is lit. Can we interpret the events of the past century as part of the 7th fire, as part of a dark ages before the renaissance and enlightenment? If so, then we can interpret all that has happened as a necessity to be endured. Is it wrong to give people hope that an 8th and final fire, promising everlasting peace may soon arrive? How different is this Anishnaabe prophecy from the Christian teachings which tell us that we are now in a time of waiting before the Second Coming? Or how different is this prophecy from its secular equivalent -- the idea of progress? All interpretations give hope to human beings that a better world is coming which gives us strength to get up each morning and face the day.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples laid out its conception of the history of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the newcomers as having four distinct evolutionary phases: separate worlds, contact and co-operation, displacement and assimilation, and negotiation and renewal. Is this how we see our shared history on this continent? Do we all agree that we are in the negotiation and renewal phase? Some might argue that we are still in the assimilation and displacement phase. Yet despite this debate, we must ask ourselves whether this interpretative framework holds. Does anything come after the negotiation and renewal phase? We daresay -- sweetness, light, and a better world. Sound familiar? The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' historical paradigm was developed by a Mohawk academic and lawyer, an educated person who was trained in the best legal tradition of Canada as well as in Aboriginal traditional teachings.

Olive Dickason, a Metis scholar and winner of the National Aboriginal Achievement Award

writes in her seminal text, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* that the themes of persistence of identity and the adaptability of Aboriginal peoples are the keys to understanding Aboriginal history. We admit that we like that interpretative framework. It resonates within us as it probably resonates within most Aboriginal peoples. Is this the story that we will come to tell ourselves? That we are people of persistence, adaptability and strength who have survived much and who are forging a new life for ourselves in a much changed land? It certainly is a very different one than the one in the Canadian history texts. Yet we think that we are falling into the trap of looking for only one story that makes sense of it all. Do we want complexity in our history? We want a simple story that tells us how it was and what connects us to the past. We too need to stop and remind ourselves that we live in a pluralistic world -- even within Aboriginal communities. A traditional Anishnaabe person might write a very different history than a Metis Scholar or a Mohawk Lawyer.

As mentioned earlier, history consists of the stories that we tell ourselves about past events. But, what happens when a story is, incorrectly told, or missing all together? When significant parts are missing, then the story is incomplete and understanding is skewed. If the story is incorrectly told, then our understanding of ourselves is erroneous. However, if a story is missing; then humanity is denied. We do have opportunities, and we believe duties and responsibilities to fill in omitted story segments, to correct the stories that are inaccurate, and to include missing stories. In doing so, we acknowledge the humanity of Aboriginal peoples

The text is an attempt to add to the story of Canada by making visible Aboriginal contributions to Canada in a wide variety of areas. We also recognize that there is a continuing debate within the broader Aboriginal communities about Canada and its relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Some see themselves as part of Canada: recall the Inuit leaders on the occasion of the establishment of Nunavut who termed them: Mothers and Fathers of Confederation; recall the words of Chief Joseph Gosnell upon the ratification of the Nisga'a treaty: I am proud to be a Canadian and a Nisga'a. However, there are some who do not consider themselves Canadian citizens. They see Canada as having illegally established itself in this land and believe that the State has ignored the legitimacy of First Nations territory. They claim that Canada committed the illegal act of annexation and absorption by taking their ancestors into the new country of Canada. But there are also those who are ambivalent, too many, whose daily lives are filled with acts of mere survival.

We see this text as contributing to a broader awareness of Aboriginal peoples. We focus on contributions, while recognizing that the problems of marginalization and poverty continue to exist and must be addressed. Helping Canadians to see Aboriginal peoples as contributing members of Canadian society may, we hope, make it easier to address some of other problems faced by Aboriginal people today. Seeing that Aboriginal peoples have made and continue to make excellent contributions to Canada helps to break down the barriers between us and illustrate that we all have similar concerns, that we all want happy, healthy, and productive communities.

We hope to show that there have been remarkable contributions, ranging from the treaties, military service, and justice, through to arts, media, literature, education, sports, and culture. Behind these contributions are remarkable people who have pushed the boundaries of their communities and of Canada itself. They have demonstrated remarkable leadership and deserve to be recognized. A quick check with the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation of their award nominees for each year of the last seven indicated several thousand nominees. We have chosen those who have had, we believe an effect upon the public consciousness of Canada: Chief Dan George, Harold Cardinal, Billy Diamond, Norval Morriseau, Jeannette Armstrong, Alwyn Morris, Douglas Cardinal, Olive Dickason, and Tommy Prince -- to name a few.

We were surprised at the range of contributions and the interconnectedness of the topics. Who would have thought that Mikmaq quill artists would have an effect on 17th century furniture making, Inuit dog breeding, and the role Indian cowboys play in Canadian rodeos.

We became more aware of treaties, treaty makers, and the central role of treaties in Canadian political history. In our view, Canada simply would not be what it is without the treaties. This is why we chosen to start this volume with this topic. David McNab's article on his fur trade family illustrates the complex interwoven social nature of Canada and the constant interaction of aboriginal peoples and newcomers. They were in individuals who met, married, had children and tried to make the best of their lives. Russell Barsh presents a view of Aboriginal peoples serving as a conscience for Canadian society by reminding citizens of the need to continually pursue social justice. The emergence of a new Canadian justice system is being informed by Aboriginal peoples' long-held ideas about justice.

In the 27-year period between the White Paper on Indian Policy in 1969 to the release of Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Reports in 1996, Canada has moved from an official government policy of termination and assimilation to a reluctant acceptance of the inherent right of self government. Section 35(1) of The *Constitution Act, 1982* recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and Treaty rights in Canada. These rights are given to Metis, Inuit (formerly called Eskimo) and Status Indians. There is a broadly supported and well-functioning set of political organizations and associations whose goal it is to advance Aboriginal interests. A number of court cases such as *Calder*, *Sparrow*, *Guerin*, and *Marshall* have resulted in a well-tested foundation of jurisprudence which has created an unparalleled legal Aboriginal presence. This jurisprudence gives legal strength to the Aboriginal and Treaty Rights and the special relationship between Canada and the Aboriginal peoples.

In the arts, the Woodland School of Aboriginal Art based upon the work and techniques of Norval Morriseau, developed new forms of carving, painting, and pottery. There is now a recognized and celebrated genre of Canadian Aboriginal art which includes a wide variety of expression including Inuit stone carving, Iroquoian soap stone, Haida masks, Miqmaq baskets, Ojibway quills, and postmodern Aboriginal expressionism represented by artists like Carl Beam and Jane Ash Poitras.

There is also an expansion of Aboriginal music beyond Winston Wuttanee and Buffy Saint Marie. We have now Kashtin, Red Power, 7th Fire, Robbie Robertson. *Aboriginal Voices Magazine* used to publish the top ten albums in Indian country. Aboriginal production companies have appeared on the music scene and are thriving. The Genie Awards have created a special category for Aboriginal music.

There are also writers galore. The literary works of Thomson Highway, Jeannette Armstrong, Drew Hayden Taylor, Gregory Shofield, Maria Campbell, to name few have made a name for themselves in mainstream society. In fact, there is sufficient Aboriginal literature to fill several university level courses which are gaining popularity on campuses across the nation.

Aboriginal people have been involved in television and radio productions. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) launched two regular series having Aboriginal peoples: *North of 60* and *The Rez*. CBC radio launched, to popular acclaim, the *Dead Dog Cafe*. For a brief period in the 1980s, CBC radio also had a weekly public affairs show on Aboriginal issues. And in September 1999, with the approval of the CRTC, the new Aboriginal Peoples Television Network was launched into most cable viewer's homes across Canada.

The National Native Achievement Foundation, formerly the Canadian Native Arts Foundation, gives out awards every year to Aboriginal peoples from across Canada who have made outstanding contributions to society. This award has been given to Aboriginal artists, performers, entrepreneurs, athletes, academics and others. It has no difficulty in finding nominees. Choosing winners from such an accomplished group of individuals is a daunting task for the judges.

In the area of health and healing, we have seen the emergence of a wide spread healing movement that affects just about every Aboriginal person in this country as well as the establishment of Aboriginal health centres in many locations across the country. In 2001, the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) awarded \$12 Million to research teams to

develop 4 research centres to study Aboriginal Health in Canada.

In education, there is now one Aboriginal university and 17 Aboriginally-controlled, post secondary institutes in Canada. The last federally run Indian residential school was closed in 1985. All public schools on Indian reserves are now under Indian control. In urban centres, there are Aboriginal survival schools that seek to retain Aboriginal culture and keep Aboriginal languages alive in the educational setting.

There are also now an increasing number of Aboriginal people choosing academic careers, and working as teachers and as professors in post-secondary sectors. There has been a great increase in the number of Aboriginal people attending post secondary institutions in Canada. There are also more than 30,000 status Indian students in post secondary education institutions -- up from 160 in the early 1970s. These students are now studying in a vast array of academic disciplines including medicine, law, education, social work and the natural and social sciences.

In large urban centres, there is an extraordinary array of service and cultural organizations serving the ever-increasing urban Aboriginal population. There are now almost 130 Aboriginal Friendship Centres located across the country to aid Aboriginal people as they make the transition from the rural to the urban environment. More than half of the Aboriginal population now live in urban centres. Canadian cities like Winnipeg, Vancouver, and Edmonton have larger Aboriginal populations than the largest Indian reserves. Approximately 40% of the status Indian population lives in urban centres.

We have come a long way in three decades. There is now a solid foundation of hard-won legal rights, locally controlled institutions, pride, a renewed sense of capacity and responsibility, and a strong desire to maintain and enhance Aboriginal identities.

These changes affect the writing of Aboriginal history. Until recently, Aboriginal peoples have been portrayed in the historical literature with almost a complete lack of human agency. We reacted against government policy. We were rarely portrayed as human beings attempting to build our communities. We rarely pursued our own interests. We acted mostly in defense or in reaction to others. Even when Canadians write about the last 25 years, we are written out of the central part of the play and are mere bit players.

In April 1998 the CBC radio show, *As it Happens*, featured a member of parliament to talk about the reasons he had sponsored a private member's bill to overturn the conviction of Metis leader, Louis Riel, and to have him declared a Father of Manitoba and a Father of Confederation. A professor who taught Canadian History at the University of Toronto was also asked to comment. While presenting his case the MP was quite rudely rebuffed by the professor who said that the whole case was silly and that the MP's efforts would not make a bit of difference to Louis Riel and that the idea was imbecilic. He argued that Louis Riel was indeed insane and that it was not good form to honour someone who had killed so many people in a rebellion against the Canadian state. The professor seemed oblivious to the fact that we honour many people who have killed thousands of people all the time.

The interview ended with a shouting match between the two with the *As it Happens* moderator saying at one point: you cannot understand each other if you keep talking all at once. What was striking about this exchange was the absolute refusal and rudeness of the professor in dealing with what clearly is an alternative thesis -- his open hostility to another point of view.

While a debate about Louis Riel can be highly emotional, what is important to note is the unwillingness to accept alternate theses and alternate interpretations of history. The official history, ie, the story of Canada that is part of our public consciousness is indeed hard to challenge. The story of Canada is incomplete, perhaps immorally so we would argue, unless we also include the history of Aboriginal contributions. This text provides one attempt to document Aboriginal contributions to Canada. In the process, we hope that we can help to foster a new Canada: one that includes a place of dignity and respect for Aboriginal peoples.

That's how we situated the text.

New indigenous scholarship

The text that we created could not have been created 3 decades ago. The will to do so simply did not exist within the academy as we know it. There have been many changes in the last few decades. The last three decades have created a new Indian, one who lives in this new world with what I have come to call 'post-colonial consciousness.'

Modern aboriginal society is defined by its post-colonial consciousness. It is a society that is aware that it has been colonized in many ways; a society that is aware of the implications of its colonization and which is choosing deliberately, consciously and systematically to deal with that colonization. It is a society that is coming to terms with what has happened to it. It is a society that is determined to overcome its colonial legacy. It is a society that is starting to possess the ways and means to achieve its own goals.

Post colonial Indians study Canada and are unwilling to accept their one dimensional portrayal within it. Post colonial Indians want more than a simple passing reference in history texts or to be the passive policy objects of government or corporate policy.

Post colonial consciousness creates tensions: It creates a desire to go back and start over again but is fully conscious that as a colonized people we can't go back and start over again. The world lost as a result of colonization cannot be regained. We can only go forward. Post colonial consciousness is imbued with a strong sense of history and tradition and a desire to see these forces affect the present and the future.

Post-colonial consciousness also creates a tension with the current descendants of the colonizers. 'Post' in some people's views implies a departure but the creation of North American post-colonial reality is different from African or Asian post-colonial reality. In this case, the colonizers are not leaving and will continue to be a huge political, social, cultural and intellectual presence.

What are the implications of this idea of post-colonial consciousness?

Post colonial Indians see all aspects of aboriginal life as ground for aboriginal influence. The restoration of aboriginal governance then becomes a central theme of modern aboriginal societies.

A society that is desirous of using traditional thought then requires these ideas to be made visible. It establishes means of seeking them out, exploring, examining, analyzing, discussing, debating them and experimenting with ways of turning them in into everyday actions. This is the work of scholars as well as the work of individuals and groups charged with building communities. Over the last decade in particular there has developed within Canadian universities and Aboriginal educational institutions small groups of aboriginal scholars who are doing this important work. A huge cadre of consultants and public servants who are tackling the difficult but important tasks of thinking through these ideas in action. A large group of aboriginal organization managers, policy analysts, program officers are similarly engaged in the practicalities of this desire. All are engaged in a set of tasks devoted to the central desire for aboriginal stewardship.

Post colonial Indigenous scholarship rooted in traditional aboriginal thought is a fundamental part of the governance landscape. The ability and capacity to decide for oneself what is a problem, the parameters of the problem, the nature of inquiry into the problem, the inquiry itself including the definition of method, the data to be gathered, the analyses to be done, the interpretation of data, the construction of options and solutions, the dissemination of results, the translation of these results into action and the eventual re-examination and reappraisal of the scholarship and its ideas is central to governing.

Post colonial Indigenous scholarship comes to the table with its central notion of 'complex understanding.' Complex understanding occurs when we begin to see a phenomenon from various perspectives as well as the relationships among these perspectives. Complex understanding doesn't seek to replace one view with another but to find a way of ensuring that all views are given due consideration. It doesn't work in an either-or fashion. A phenomenon is not one thing or another but all things at one time. Complex understanding allows for our understanding to change depending upon where we stand to see or upon the time that we look or who is doing the looking. Complex understanding is grounded in a view of a constantly changing reality that is capable of transformation at any time.

Complex understanding is based on dialogue rather than dialectic. In this sense, it is deeply rooted in traditional aboriginal notions of how one comes to understand. The notion can create a broader and deeper understanding of a phenomenon. It fosters a conversation among different disciplines, perspectives, knowledge systems, methods of inquiry. It fosters understanding without necessarily inviting competition. Challenge is present through the attempt to understand and explain the sometimes differing, sometimes similar views.

Post colonial Indigenous scholarship also brings to the table the notion of sensemaking. Sensemaking is the collective coming to understand something. Sensemaking is rooted in identity. Making sense becomes a collective process. Let us put our minds together. Let us come to one mind. Let us find consensus are examples of the discourse that we see all around us. Indigenous scholarship offers the promise of collective knowing rather than expert knowing.

Post colonial Indigenous scholarship doesn't just engage the intellect. It engages the mind, spirit and body and it considers all in its exploration.

Post colonial Indigenous scholarship also brings with it a willingness to engage other disciplines and other ways of knowing. Indigenous scholarship does not reject the knowledge that has been gained by the west in its exploration of physical, social or spiritual reality. Indigenous scholarship brings these ideas to the table and considers them alongside aboriginal ideas, accepting or rejecting them on the basis of their usefulness.

Post colonial Indigenous scholarship also brings with it a sense of mind and intellect grounded in aboriginal experience, thought-world and view of reality. All these factors are important to creating legitimacy in the eyes of aboriginal peoples. It gives a sense of concreteness to aboriginal thought. It restores a sense of intellectual aboriginality, bringing to visibility a part of the 4 elements of human beings usually seen when discussing aboriginal peoples.

Post colonial Indigenous scholarship also brings with it a sense of agency, an ability to shape the world through one's thought, action and feelings. It is this agency that we seek to describe through texts such as Hidden in Plain Sight.