"Our City Indians": Negotiating the Meaning of First Nations Urbanization in Canada, 1945-1975

Evelyn J. Peters

Contemporary cultural criticism has celebrated the potential of the idea of the "traveling native" for disrupting cultural assumptions about the modern "nation." The focus has been on movements across contemporary national borders and boundaries—fundamentally, on transnationalism. However, nations also make sense of themselves through internal spatial and social divisions. Challenging these divisions also disrupts definitions of "nation." The urbanization of First Nations people in Canada provides a telling illustration of this point.[1]

First Nations people were systematically dispossessed of their lands, which were "emptied" for colonial resettlement.[2] Colonial constructions of the Canadian "nation" involved the creation of narrowly circumscribed native territories or reserves, separate from metropolitan centers.[3] Arguably, reserves were viewed as temporary enclaves, places where First Nations people would either be civilized through agriculture, Christianity, or education to take their place in emerging Canadian society, or where First Nations people could live in peace while their "races" died out. The invention of reserves as temporary and "primitive" spaces of First Nations culture and history, secured a "place" for First Nations people in the spatial order of the Canadian nation.

By the early decades of the 1900s, almost all First Nations people were settled on reserves, and almost all reserves were located at a distance from urban centers. Through a variety of mechanisms, many of which remain to be fully documented, these largely segregated patterns of settlement persisted unaltered into the 1950s (Table 1). Increasing population pressure and a chronic lack of economic possibilities on the small and often resource-poor reserves resulted in a gradually rising number of First Nations people migrating from reserves to cities after mid-century. Despite their initially very small numbers, non-aboriginal people perceived First Nations peoples' presence in urban centers as extremely problematic.[4] The conference referred to in the title of this paper, one of a number of events during this period involving a variety of non-

governmental organizations and representatives from three levels of government, attested to the discomfort that emerged when First Nations people became known as "city Indians."[5] Governments and First Nations representatives responded to widespread concern over the presence of First Nations people in cities, and by 1975 the main dimensions of government policy for urban First Nations people had taken shape.

Willems-Braun has emphasized the need to explore "the ways that colonial pasts continue to organize experience in the present."[6] As government

Table 1. Canadian Census Counts of Urban Populations, Canadian and Indian Ancestry[1] Populations, 1871-1981[2]				
	Canadian Population Living in Urban Areas		Indian Population Living in Urban Areas	
Date	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1871	712,465	19.6	1,740	1.7
1881	1,111,475	25.7	651	0.6
1891	1,537,098	31.8	N/A	N/A
1901	2,021,799	37.6	4,765	5.1
1911	3,280,444	45.5	3,905	3.7
1921	4,350,299	49.5	3,531	3.2[3]
1931	5,573,798	53.7	5,056	3.9
1941	6,252,416	54.3	4,469	3.6
1951	8,628,253	61.6	11,015	6.7
1961	12,700,390	69.6	28,382	12.9
1971	16,436,850	76.2	90,705	30.7
1981	18,215,440	75.6	150,675	36.4[4]

Sources: Canada, Statistics Canada, *1981 Census*, cat. 92-.0911, Table 3; *1971 Census*, cat. 92-723, Table 3; Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *1961 Census*, cat. 92-553, Table 82; *1951 Census*, vol. II, Table 4; *1941 Census*, vol. III, Table 10; *1931 Census*, vol. IV, Table 44; *1921 Census*, vol. I, Table 23; W.E. Kalbach, "Growth and Distribution of Canada's Ethnic Populations, 1871-1981," in Leo Dreidger, ed., *Ethnic Canada. Identities and Inequalities* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1987): 102.

[1] Census counts for ethnicity refer to racial or ethnic origins or ancestry, which do not necessarily capture the groups with which the respondents identify.

[2] The term "Indian" is used because that is the terminology of the census. The counts and percentages of Indians are not comparable between census years because of differences in geographic coverage, changing definitions of urban, and varying question format and instructions to enumerators.

[3] Data for 1921 to 1961 include Inuit people.

[4] Includes Indian, Métis, and Inuit.

agencies struggled to make sense of First Nations urbanization, they were influenced by a colonial history that relegated First Nations people and cultures to spaces separate from modern and, particularly, urban society. This paper explores the frameworks government agencies employed to understand First Nations peoples' movements into cities, paying particular attention to how these frameworks related to earlier colonial geographies of dispossession and reserve creation, and how they related to First Nations' perspectives on the urbanization process. It begins with a brief description of First Nations urbanization between 1945 and 1975—a pivotal period in the emergence of urban First Nations people within Canada. It then turns to the government departments' and First Nations representatives' attempts to formulate responses to these changing geographies. Despite contradictions in government-program development, and despite First Nations representatives' attempts to influence the definition process, policies and programs that emerged during this period reinforced colonial interpretations of the place of First Nations people and cultures in the Canadian nation.

Dimensions of Urbanization

Inconsistent patterns of data collection make it difficult to document the movement of First Nations people to cities or to relate urban population numbers to the growing public interest in their situation with any precision.[7] Table 2 shows the number of registered Indians living off of the reserve between 1959 and 1981. The small number living off the reserve suggests that throughout this period, urbanization rates were very low, even though they were increasing. The greatest absolute increase in Indians living off reserve was between 1966 and 1971, but even if all of these were urban migrants, this represents an increase of only a little over 5,000 individuals per year in Canada's cities. While some may have migrated to cities through "enfranchisement," the term used to describe the process through which First Nations people were encouraged to give up their legal status as Indians and become ordinary citizens of the country, data on the historically low number of enfranchisements shows that this was not a common route First Nations people used to leave their reserve communities.

Census statistics also suggest that the total number of First Nations people in major Canadian cities remained low, both in terms of absolute numbers and as a percentage of the total population (Table 3). At the same time, population estimates from various non-governmental organizations and individuals concerned with urban aboriginal populations were much higher than census counts. At a 1962 conference on urban aboriginal people involving federal, provincial, municipal, and non-governmental organizations, the latter estimated that there were more than 5,000 Indians living in Winnipeg, and approximately 3,000 living in Edmonton.[8] In 1980, journalist Larry Krotz reported non-governmental-agency estimates of 25,000-80,000 aboriginal people in Winnipeg, over 25,000 in Regina, and 30,000-40,000 aboriginal

Table 2. Total and Off-Reserve Registered Indian Population, 1959-1976				
Year	Registered Indian Population	Off-Reserve[2]		Enfranchisements[1] Per 5-Year Period
		Number	Percent	
1959[3]	179,126	30,372	16.9	
1961	191,709			2077
1966	224,164	43,746	19.5	3216
1971	257,619	69,106	26.8	3009
1976	288,938	79,301	27.4	1094

Sources: Canada. Indian Affairs Branch, *Indian Affairs Facts and Figures* (Ottawa: Indian Affairs Branch, 1967): 5; Canada. Statistics Canada, *Perspective Canada: A Compendium of Social Statistics* (Ottawa: Ministry of Industry, Trade and Commerce, 1974): 244.

[1] Figures for 1961 and 1966 are estimates based on the Department of Indian Affairs' fiscal year; figures for 1971 and 1976 are based on the calendar year.

[2] This number does not include individuals living on Crown land.

[3] Statistics on off-reserve residency began to be collected in 1959.

Table 3. Aboriginal People in Major Metropolitan Centres, 1951-1981				
	1951	1961	1971[1]	1981
Montreal	296	507	3215	14450
Ottawa-Hull	—	—	—	4370
Toronto	805	1196	2990	13495
Winnipeg	210	1082	4940	16575
Regina	160	539	2860	6575
Saskatoon	48	207	1070	4350
Calgary	62	335	2265	7310
Edmonton	616	995	4260	13750
Vancouver	239	530	3000	16080

Sources: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) *Customized Data, 1981 Census* (Ottawa: Indian Affairs Branch, 1985). Statistics Canada, *Perspective Canada* (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1974): 244.

[1] The 1971 data do not include the Inuit.

people in Edmonton.[9] Part of the difference between these estimates and census figures may be the result of undercounting of aboriginal populations, either because respondents did not identify themselves, or because they were in living situations not easily accessible to census takers. However, the magnitude of the difference between census counts and agency estimates suggests that other factors were involved. Moreover, they hint at the high levels of concern that had emerged about the urban migrant situation, and a sense of being overwhelmed by the challenges this migration involved. Some of these perceptions arose from the prospect of incorporating a relatively poor, undereducated population into city life. The debate and concern centering on First Nations migration suggest that the response to their presence was shaped in no small part by the sense that First Nations were "out of place"—that their presence in urban areas represented a transgression into what had been defined as a space for non-aboriginal peoples and cultures.[10] As Jean Lagassé indicated in a 1959 study for the Manitoba Ministry of Agriculture, "the belief that an Indian's place is on the reserve is still very strong among the Canadian people."[11]

Although policymakers, researchers, and politicians of this period clearly focused their attentions on the move from the reserve to the city, it is clear that patterns of migration were not so simple. For many First Nations people living in cities, the reserves and rural areas of their genesis were places that still represented home, places that were important for their sense of cultural identity, and places to which they wished to return to raise their children or to retire.[12] An analysis of First Nations migration patterns between 1966 and 1971 found that while in-migration to urban centers accounted for 22 percent of aboriginal relocation in that period, 31 percent of migration could be attributed to moves from one reserve or rural area to another, 22 percent were moves from one city to another, and a significant 17 percent of moves were return migration from cities back to reserves and rural areas.[13] In addition, surveys documented the fact that migrants to cities often kept contact with relatives and friends on reserves and there were steady flows of visitors in both directions.[14]

Almost all surveys of First Nations people living in cities during this period found that the main reason individuals and families moved to urban areas was to find employment, effectively escaping the economic limitations inherent in the reserve system.[15] Other common reasons for migration were for education, medical care, "family reasons," or because of problems on the reserve. A national study that examined off-reserve migration in relation to reserve characteristics, found that reserves with greater resources in terms of employment and educational opportunities, services, and stronger local governments, had lower rates of outmigration.[16] These findings underscored the continued attachment of many First Nations people to their reserves despite the sometimes dramatic demographic changes of this period.[17]

It is difficult to follow settlement patterns of First Nations migrants following their arrival in urban areas. A common assumption has been that they settled in the inner city or "skid row,"[18] and some of the studies that explored

aboriginal location within cities seemed to confirm this assumption.[19] It is also apparent that some migrants, socially and economically marginal, created "shantytowns" at the geographic margins of urban areas, although the extent of fringe settlement during his time period is not known.[20] Still, it is clear that in some cities, First Nations populations were scattered throughout urban areas, and that a significant number of First Nations migrants moved directly to more suburban locations rather than to inner-city housing.[21] Despite these varied settlement patterns, and despite their small numbers, non-aboriginal people largely saw the presence of First Nations people in cities as problematic.

Defining Urban Indians

The negative perception of growing urban First Nations populations put increasing pressure on governments to respond. Before government agencies could formulate responses, they faced the challenge of defining the nature of the population toward which government programs should be directed, and the nature of the problem that required remediation. Building on Michel Foucault's 1978 lecture entitled "Governmentality,"[22] researchers have demonstrated that the way in which subjects are represented—what concepts are invented or deployed to render them governable—is a prerequisite for policy intervention.[23] First Nations urbanization challenged government agencies to define the meaning of First Nations urbanization and the nature of the urban First Nations population. The definitions that emerged through this process proved revealing.

The idea that First Nations urbanization represented a larger process of culture change soon became dominant in government agencies.[24] This interpretation was championed by the Indian-Eskimo Association, a largely non-aboriginal and non-governmental organization with a mandate to improve the condition of native people in Canada. The Indian-Eskimo Association exerted considerable influence over government departments responsible for programs for urban First Nations people during this period.[25] Father André Renaud, one of the original organizers of the association, summarized this perspective at a 1957 Calgary conference on aboriginal people in urban areas:

> Our Indian Canadian is faced or hampered with…his own personality. The Indian Canadian is different from his fellow Canadians of European descent….These differences have nothing to do with his blood or heredity but are from his cultural heritage….For instance, his concepts of time, money, social communication, hygiene, usefulness, competition and cooperation are at variance with our own and can prove a stumbling block to successful adjustment….Our duty is to establish: (1) Where do these cultural traits interfere with smooth adjustment? At work, in recreation, at home etc. In other words where does he get into trouble because he is an Indian and what can be done about it? (2) Where does he make the most successful adjustment and cultural contribution to our society and how could we expand or open these areas?[26]

The assumption underlying Renaud's interpretation was that First Nations migrants to the city faced difficulty because they came from reserves characterized by cultures with behaviors, values, skills, and institutions suitable to pre-modern society, but antithetical to life in modern urban settings.[27] This framework, then, reaffirmed the spatial ordering underlying the colonial construction of the Canadian nation—the identification of reserves and their residents as minute islands of traditional and primitive culture amidst a growing tide of modern and modernizing Canadian society. Reserves were defined as existing in a different timeframe.[28] The clearest statement of this position is arguably found in a 1967 address by the Honorable Arthur Laing, minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to a convention of the Native Brotherhood in Vancouver: "[T]he reserves will have to continue to be centers of Indian Community life for many years to come....The reserves must provide an essential time-cushion while Indian people make their own decision as to the kind of life they want to lead."[29]

The movement of First Nations people to cities was interpreted by most policymakers of the post-war period as a decision to integrate into the Canadian mainstream. This interpretation rendered First Nations people in cities categorically distinct from First Nations people on reserves. In 1962, R. Alex Sim, chief liaison officer in the Citizenship Branch of Canada's Department of Citizenship and Immigration, produced a paper proposing the definition of a new "category" of Indian—the "urban Indian":

> It is time that the expression "Urban Indian" began to take its place with others—the Plains Indian, the Woodlands Indian, the Enfranchised Indian, and the Half-breed or Metis [sic].... From the point of view of the Citizenship Branch, an urban Indian is anyone who is living off the reserve in a setting where there are industrial and commercial job opportunities, and who identifies himself as an Indian.[30]

David Sibley has argued that the process of boundary construction homogenizes or "purifies" the identities of individuals contained within those boundaries.[31] One comes to assume that individuals living in a certain area share the same attributes. Categorizing First Nations people by place of residence redefined them as two distinct but internally homogeneous populations—urban Indians and reserve Indians. Urban First Nations people were represented as possessing different qualities, perspectives, values, and behaviors from their relatives on the reserve. They were viewed as being a transformational ethnic category, in the process of shedding their traditional cultures and identities and becoming Canadian citizens.

The invention of the population category of "urban Indian" introduced new possibilities for administration and provided a rationale for the involvement of government departments not historically associated with the administration of First Nations affairs. According to Sim, "It seems that we are prepared to pursue these two goals: one of first-class citizenship off the reserva-

tion, the other to maintain the principle of trusteeship implicit in the present reservation system."[32] While reserve Indians had historically been administered by the Department of Indian Affairs (later termed the Indian Affairs Branch), the Citizenship Branch of Canada, an agency customarily in the business of aiding international immigrants, was to take precedence for policy and program development for First Nations people in cities.[33] In this way, the Citizenship Branch introduced new programs, services, and administrative structures that were associated, not with the historic responsibility of the crown for aboriginal peoples, but with efforts at integration and the forging of new citizens. For the Citizenship Branch, First Nations urbanization was a matter of "internal migration," an analogue of overseas immigration, representing "a new phase where the skills that were applied to immigrant groups can be used with Indians who migrate to the cities."[34] The Indian Affairs Branch could maintain its historic role with respect to reserve residents, a population to which these goals still did not apply.

Defining rural-to-urban migration as a process of culture change, government agencies depicted urbanization as inevitably damaging and disturbing. Represented in terms of their past and pre-urban cultures, First Nations migrants were expected to uniformly experience culture shock upon their departure from the reserve. The threat urban lifeways posed to First Nations cultures was assumed to make it difficult for migrants to create opportunities for themselves, creating a rationale for direct government intervention. This intervention would ultimately take myriad forms.

Creating Programs

The frameworks of meaning that government agencies used to understand First Nations urbanization affirmed the assignment of separate spaces for First Nations and majority Canadian cultures. While both the Indian Affairs and Citizenship branches agreed that "urban Indians" represented a distinct population category, the two branches advanced different policy and program-development goals for this population. Program development was a complex process, affording opportunities for the destabilization of spatial categories both through internal contradictions in branch programs and through initiatives from First Nations representatives.

Indian Affairs Branch Placement Program

Beginning in the early 1960s, the Indian Affairs Branch had identified the increasing involvement of provincial governments and other federal government departments in providing services to First Nations people as important to the integration process. Indian Affairs maintained that provinces and municipalities were constitutionally responsible for providing social assistance to First Nations people once they left the reserve.[35] During this period, though,

the development of Indian Affairs Branch programs for urban First Nations people was contradictory. In its 1956-57 *Annual Report*, the branch announced a program addressing the urbanization issue. In response to what it called the "problems of adjustment to the standards of the non-Indian community," the branch created a placement program that worked in cooperation with the National Employment Service.[36] Indian Affairs placement officers were responsible for selecting individuals from reserves to be placed in urban employment, and for providing these individuals with fiscal and administrative support during the initial phases of their employment. The goal of integrating Indians into the national mainstream appears to have been their guiding motive.

Placement officers became deeply involved in individual cases, and at times officers intervened extensively in their clients' lives in an effort to facilitate permanent urban employment and residence.[37] Careful selection of First Nations candidates for this program, and intensive supervision and control after their placement, suggest that the program represented the extension of the historic wardship role of the Indian Affairs Branch off of the reserve and into the city.

The placement program could be easily reconciled with the long historical mandate of the Indian Affairs Branch's to intervene in the interest of assimilating First Nations people, but simultaneously it was at odds with an administrative perspective that employed the spaces of reserve and city to define different categories of Indians.[38] As a result, there was considerable debate and discussion within the branch about the desirability of involvement in the placement program. The debates were brought to a head in 1972, when an urban Blackfoot group in Calgary introduced a placement program similar to that of the Indian Affairs Branch, with support from local Indian Affairs officials.[39] As the Blackfoot initiative gained publicity, other First Nations groups began to request support for similar initiatives, creating increasing conflict within the Indian Affairs Branch over policies, practices, and jurisdictions. The Indian Affairs Branch could not reconcile First Nations control over their own service delivery in the city with its longstanding definition of First Nations people as either wards or as ordinary citizens. The Indian Affairs placement program was largely abandoned by 1975.[40]

Citizenship Branch Friendship Centers

While the Citizenship Branch, like the Indian Affairs Branch, viewed urbanization in terms of both the threats and assimilationist potentials of culture change, it approached program development in its own way. Drawing on its experience facilitating the adjustment of immigrant groups, the Citizenship Branch promulgated a model of urban ethnicity for First Nations groups in the city. For the Citizenship Branch, the assumed inevitable loss of traditional culture in the urban environment was seen as a disabling experience on the short term, which must be counteracted with strategies to allow migrants to retain or regain aspects of their identity during the period of transition. As

J.H. Lagassé, later director of the Citizenship Branch, informed the audience at an Edmonton conference on urban aboriginal people:

> A way must be found by which cultural values from the native culture remain until values of the larger culture can be taken on. People who make a satisfactory adjustment are those who can maintain their own culture long enough to learn the new culture.[41]

Friendship Centers comprised the main mechanism through which the Citizenship Branch became involved with native people in urban areas.[42] In a 1965 address at the Vancouver Friendship Center, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration J.R. Nicholson emphasized their cultural role:

> It is your avowed purpose, the task of all in the Indian Friendship Centers, to assist [migrating Indians] to make the adjustment to a way of life which is in strong contrast to the traditional Indian culture of the reserve. It is up to you to help soften the blow. Unless such a service is available to him, the Indian who has newly arrived in the city often finds that he is being asked to reject completely everything that has been dear to him for generations, in favour of a way of life about which he knows little or nothing. It is up to you, in the Indian Friendship Center, to provide a place where the harassed city-migrant can find a sheltered haven where he can rest and take stock of himself during the hectic process of adjustment to city life.[43]

This was "culture as therapy," facilitating integration by providing a temporary if somewhat superficial sense of identity, a reprieve and a source of self-esteem.[44] For the Citizenship Branch, then, the boundaries differentiating reserve and city were not absolute, and urban and reserve lifeways were not completely exclusive. Some aspects of First Nations cultures (still associated with past times and distant reserve places) could be accommodated and even prove beneficial in city life. However, according to Citizenship Branch policy, the place of First Nations culture in urban life was highly circumscribed, and was destined for replacement. Generally seen as antithetical to urban life ways, it should be contained and diffused within the walls of the Friendship Center through special celebrations and contact with other natives.

Certainly, the benefit of First Nations culture in the city was limited to its role in facilitating the initial adjustment of migrants. The branch emphasized the responsibility of Friendship Centers to promote the "full utilization of, and referral to, existing services to prevent segregation." Migrating First Nations people were to be referred to provincial and municipal agencies for social assistance, employment and financial information, personal counseling, justice issues, and any other social needs.[45] Centers were seen as essential for narrowly defined cultural programming, but the major role in facilitating integration was to remain with the institutions of the dominant society.

First Nations Perspectives

The available material suggests that many First Nations people under-stood the process of urbanization through different frameworks of meaning than did the Citizenship and the Indian Affairs branches.[46] One theme thread-ing through the First Nations material contradicts the distinction between "urban Indians" and reserve communities. A 1976 proposal by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians to conduct a survey in urban areas clearly contradicts the assumption that urbanization reflected a rejection of the reserve commu-nity of origin and an attempt by migrants to adopt a new cultural identity. In the proposal the federation characterized urban migrants as "treaty Indians who belong to the different Indian bands in the province."[47] The 1978 report based on the survey emphasizes: "Throughout the entire report, the reader should bear in mind that this is not a report on Urban Natives. It is a report on band members living off-reserve."[48] The report noted that:

> Although a large number of Indians have left their home reserves, and it is likely that larger numbers will continue to do so, this cannot reason-ably be interpreted to mean that these people are rejecting their Indian culture and traditions, their home reserves or their fellow band mem-bers. While this assumption may be true in a limited number of cases, the general discussions that interviewers held indicate that the vast ma-jority of Indians living in cities still consider themselves to be members of their band—not urban Indians.[49]

The definition of urbanization as a problem of culture change was also challenged. For Calgary Friendship Center Executive Director Andrew Bear Robe, culture was only one of many more important factors affecting the ability to succeed in the city:

> An Indian moving into an urban community does not always find it difficult. It depends on many tangible and intangible factors such as the amount of education and skilled training a person has acquired; single or married, and if married—how large is the family; a student or a per-son looking for permanent employment; a Treaty, non-Treaty or a Metis [sic] person; a drinker or a non-drinker; an Indian thinker with typical habits and attitudes, or an Indian who has become acculturized to the dominant white society; good personal appearance accompanied by the important ability to express oneself articulately and distinctly, or a per-son with poor grooming and withdrawn personality—the availability of a car or no transportation at all, and many other factors which make a person more or less employable.[50]

In a report commissioned by the Citizenship Branch, Bear Robe linked difficulties native migrants had in the city directly to the economic impover-ishment of the reserves from which migrants had come, rather than to some

traditional culture that was supposedly incompatible with urban life.[51] Refusing to define First Nations migrants only in terms of their supposedly pre-urban culture, Bear Robe's argument contradicted the association of urbanization and culture shock. It also pointed out the heterogeneity of the migrating population, and suggested that the issue of urbanization required a much more nuanced analysis from one that used the spatial categories of urban and reserve to define distinct populations for policy and program development.

In contrast to perspectives that emphasized the inability of urban First Nations migrants to develop adequate coping strategies without non-native intervention, and that prescribed a limited role for aboriginal cultures in urban areas, First Nations people argued that they had an essential role in meeting the needs of urban Indians. The Federation of Saskatchewan Indians explained that band councils continued to feel responsible for the welfare of band members who migrated to off-reserve areas:

> The bands to whom [migrants] belong, and the Federation as their representative, have serious concerns about what is happening to the people who make up this migration. As well, the Federation and the bands feel a deep responsibility for these people and wish to find ways of extending this concern by offering them help and support with the problems resulting from their move.[52]

First Nations representatives increasingly pressured for First Nations involvement and control of Friendship Center boards and programs during this period. They also rejected the narrow scope and place for First Nations cultures in the city defined by the Citizenship Branch. They noted that mainstream service organizations did not have the skills or knowledge to provide appropriate assistance; that First Nations migrants preferred to receive assistance from aboriginal Friendship Center personnel; and that because of their lack of knowledge of First Nations cultures and circumstances, social service organizations often referred clients back to Friendship Centers.[53] Bear Robe's argument went further, suggesting that the issue was not limited to service provision, but First Nations representation in political and economic systems:

> This haphazard concern for the general welfare of the native people of Canada will not change until Indian leaders themselves demand the change. They will not effect the change unless they become involved with the main political and economic pulse of this country, either as city aldermen, members of the Provincial Legislative, members of Parliament, businessmen or leaders of organizations promoting social change for all people concerned…. Until we actually have Indian people assuming important, influential and responsible roles in society, either in government or in business, the Indian voice and demands will never get top priority or have an adequate hearing.[54]

In her critique of work based on Habermas' definitions of the public sphere, Nancy Fraser has explored the ways dominant public narratives are contested

or resisted by subordinate social groups. She writes about these alternative formulations as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs."[55] The frameworks of meaning through which First Nations migrants interpreted the process of urbanization emphasized a continuity of culture, identity, and relationships between city and reserve. They also asserted a strong role for First Nations representatives in defining a response to the urbanization process. In this way, First Nations put forward an alternative categorization of space, one that was not constructed on the basis of contrasts between First Nations and settler space that were rooted in the cold terrestrial calculus of colonialism.

Conclusions

In the 1940s, almost all First Nations people lived on reserves and very few lived in Canadian cities. These patterns reflected and perpetuated colonial attitudes based on constructed dichotomies of First Nations people and Canadians, primitive and modern, historical and contemporary, on which the spatial order of the Canadian nation was founded. The migration of First Nations people to cities upset the colonial geographies of isolated and bounded native territories separate from the metropolitan centers of the nation. These movements challenged First Nations and non-First Nations people to formulate frameworks for understanding the "place" of First Nations people in the Canadian nation. Interpretations of First Nations urbanization between 1945 and 1975 are particularly interesting in this respect. Anthropologist Nancy Lurie argued that First Nations people saw the process of urbanization less as one of moving from reserve to city than as traveling *within* their traditional territories or equivalent spaces—performing, in contemporary times, historically familiar patterns of movement and migration.[56] First Nations representatives' rejection of "urban" and "reserve" as meaningful categories upon which to construct indigenous identities or to base responses to First Nations urbanization is consistent with a mapping of identity based on traditional territories, rather than on colonial spaces of bounded and isolated native reserves. First Nations representatives' arguments about providing services to community members living in cities was consistent with their traditional responsibilities over economic and social life within traditional territories. This idea was nascent between 1945 and 1975, but it would be developed much more fully in later decades.[57] The idea of traditional territories challenges representations of the Canadian nation that are built on containing and bounding First Nations people and cultures and that separate them from the metropolitan centers of population and power. Traditional territories underlie all of what is now called Canada, including all of its urban areas. First Nations' ideas about traditional territories subvert colonial representations of the internal spaces through which the Canadian nation creates its identity.

The response of government agencies to First Nations urbanization, worked out over several decades, was complex and often contradictory, and provided

opportunities for First Nations people to attempt to define the significance of urbanization in ways which fit their own frameworks of meaning. Clearly the introduction of Friendship Centers and, to a lesser extent, the Indian Affairs Branch Placement Program provided a toehold for First Nations representatives to begin to challenge hegemonic definitions of First Nations cultures in relation to urban places and cultures. Between 1945 and 1975, these efforts were largely ineffectual, though, and the resulting policies and programs did not significantly challenge the colonial representations of First Nations people and cultures that were embedded in dichotomous social and spatial divisions. First Nations representatives were unable to effectively insert their interpretations into the dominant discourse—a sobering reminder of the difficulty marginalized peoples face in forcing an understanding, let alone a serious consideration, of counterhegemonic perspectives.[58]

Government responses to the First Nations urbanization involved the reaffirmation of reserves as First Nations territories, separate in time and space from the centers of the modern nation where First Nations people existed only precariously as mainstream citizens. They also involved, through Friendship Center programming, the creation of narrowly circumscribed spaces for native cultures *within* the city, but limited only to an initial period of adaptation to urban life. Both of these responses bounded and located First Nations people and culture, and both reproduced a nation divided into "primitive" spaces of native culture and the "modern" space of mainstream Canadians. In this period, the colonial organization of space perpetuated the colonial ordering of society. Government policy toward First Nations migration would continue to reaffirm this time-honored division uncritically; only gradually and reluctantly would policymakers begin to consider the aboriginal perspectives on this important dimension of their modern history.

Notes

1. The Canadian constitution defines Indians, Métis, and Inuit peoples as the aboriginal people of Canada. Each of these three groups has a different history as well as a unique set of rights as defined in Canadian legislation and jurisprudence. My focus here is on Indian people. Indians are the descendants of the indigenous peoples of Canada, registered under Canada's *Indian Act*. I prefer to use the term "First Nations" because of the colonial overtones the term "Indian." However I employ "Indian" when this term was the common usage at the time. I also recognize that many First Nations people choose to identify themselves by their cultural origins—for example, Cree, Gwitchin, or Algonquin— rather than by the homogenizing term "First Nations."

2. Kenneth G. Brealey, "Mapping Them 'Out': Euro-Canadian Cartography and Appropriation of the Nuxalk and Ts'ilhqot'in First Nations' Territories, 1793-1916," *The Canadian Geographer* 39 (1995): 140-156; R. Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographic Change* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); Bruce Willems-Braun, "Buried Epistemologies: The Politics of Nature in (Post)colonial British Columbia," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 87 (1997): 3-31.

3. In Canada, the policy that was supposed to accompany this process was treaty-making through which First Nations people relinquished title to their lands in exchange for small reserves and promises for a variety of services and material provisions. Clearly, this policy was often disregarded. The basic assumptions about the nature of aboriginal title and the place of aboriginal people in the nation that are reflected in this policy, however, differ from those of other nations. The construction of the Australian nation, for example, was based on an idea of "terra nullius" or empty land. An exploration of the

implications of these differences for interpretations of aboriginal urbanization is beyond the scope of this paper.

4. Neils W. Braroe, *Indian and White: Self-Image and Interaction in a Canadian Plains Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Hugh Brody, *Indians on Skid Row: The Role of Alcohol and Community in the Adaptive Process of Indian Urban Migrants* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1965); Mitsuru Shimpo and Robert Williamson, *Socio-Cultural Disintegration Among the Fringe Saulteaux* (University of Saskatchewan: Center for Community Studies, 1965); David Stymeist, *Ethnics and Indians* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1975); Yngve G. Lithman, *The Community Apart: A Case Study of a Canadian Indian Reserve Community* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1984).

5. This phrase comes from the title of an early conference on urban Indian issues. See Regina Welfare Council's *Our City Indians* (Regina: Saskatchewan House, 1958).

6. Willems-Braun, "Buried Epistemologies," p. 4.

7. Census data are problematic because definitions and categories change, and in different years ancestry is traced through the father, the mother, and through both parents. An estimate of urban Indian populations can be made from the Indian Register kept by the Department of Indian Affairs. While the department kept treaty pay lists prior to 1951, these do not identify place of residence of those receiving payments. Beginning in 1959, the department began to collect information about individuals living "off reserve," that is, neither on reserves or crown land. These data can be used as a proxy for urbanization, but the numbers must be interpreted cautiously. Limitations include changing definitions, lack of specific information about exactly where individuals are living off the reserve, the location of a number of reserves in urban centers, and failure to regularly update records.

8. Gordon K. Hirabayashi, Anne J. Cormier, and Vincent S. Billow, *The Challenge of Assisting the Canadian Aboriginal Peoples to Adjust to Urban Environments* (Edmonton: Report of the First Western Canada Indian-Métis Seminar, 1962).

9. Larry Krotz, *Urban Indians: The Strangers in Canada's Cities* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers Ltd., 1980).

10. Tim Cresswell argues, "The occurrence of 'out-of-place' phenomena leads people to question behavior and define what is and what is not appropriate for a particular setting." Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 22.

11. Jean H. Lagassé, ed., *A Study of the Population of Indian Ancestry Living in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Department of Agriculture and Immigration, Queen's Printer, Winnipeg, 1959): 141.

12. Walter E. Boek and Julius K. Boek, "The People of Indian Ancestry in Greater Winnipeg" in Jean H. Lagassé, ed., *A Study of the Population of Indian Ancestry Living in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Department of Agriculture and Immigration, Queen's Printer, Winnipeg, 1959); Trevor Denton, "Strangers in Their Land: A Study of Migration from a Canadian Indian Reserve," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1970); Larry Ellis, Elaine Pinacie, Velma Turner, and Hilda Swiftwolfe, *Survey of Band Members living Off Reserve* (Prince Albert: Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, 1978); Nancy O. Lurie, "The Indian Moves to an Urban Setting," *Resolving Conflicts—A Cross-Cultural Approach* (Winnipeg: Department of University Extensions and Adult Education, University of Manitoba, 1967): 73-86; Donald N. McCaskill, "The Urbanization of Canadian Indians in Winnipeg, Toronto, Edmonton, and Vancouver: A Comparative Analysis," (Ph.D. thesis, York University Department of Sociology, 1979); William T. Stanbury, *Success and Failure: Indians in Urban Society* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1975).

13. Andrew J. Siggner, "A Socio-Demographic Profile of Indians in Canada, in J.R. Ponting and R. Gibbins, eds., *Out of Irrelevance* (Toronto: Butterworth and Co. Ltd.,1986): 31-65.

14. Stanbury, *Success and Failure*; Union of Ontario Indians, *Indians in the City Project* (Toronto 1972); David B. Vincent, *The Indian-Metis Urban Probe* (Winnipeg: Indian-Métis Friendship Center and Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, 1971); Denton, *Strangers in their Land*; Jeanne Guillemin, *Urban Renegades: The Cultural Strategy of American Indians* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975); Evelyn J. Peters, "Native Households in Winnipeg: Strategies of Coresidence and Financial Support," *Research and Working Papers No. 5* (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg, 1984). First Nations women appeared to play an important role in facilitating this continued contact, managing relatively stable households that allowed others to visit or find temporary or emergency accommodations.

15. Indian Association of Alberta, *Native Migration Survey, Edmonton* (1971). Frank Maidman, *Native People in Urban Settings: Problems, Needs and Services* (Toronto: A Report of the Ontario Task Force on Native People in the Urban Setting, 1981); McCaskill, *Urbanization of Canadian Indians*; Stanbury, *Success and Failure*; National Association of Friendship Centers and the Secretary of State, *A Survey of Native People* (Ottawa: 1977); Vincent, *India-Metis Urban Probe.*

16. Linda Gerber, *Trends in Out-Migration from Indian Communities Across Canada* (Ottawa: Department of the Secretary of State, 1977).

17. A perspective that takes gender into account, though, offers a slightly more complex picture. While few surveys differentiated between men and women in examining reasons for migration, those that did found that men were more likely than women to cite employment as the reasons for moving, while women were more likely than men to cite "family reasons" or problems on reserves as the main reason for migration to the city. See Stewart Clatworthy, *The Demographic Composition and Economic Circumstances of Winnipeg's Native Population* (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, 1980); Clatworthy and Jeremy Hull, *Native Economic Conditions: Regina and Saskatoon* (Winnipeg: Institute of Urban Studies, 1983); Stanbury, *Success and Failure.*

    The reasons for this may be linked to the ways in which colonial legislation, policies, and practice undermined women's roles and status in First Nations communities. The implication is that men's and women's attachments to reserves and their ability to move back and forth may have been different. See Evelyn J. Peters, "Subversive Spaces: First Nations Women and the City," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 16 (1998): 665-85.

18. Brody, *Indians on Skid Row*; John Melling, *Right to a Future: the Native Peoples of Canada* (Toronto: T.H. Best Printing Co. Ltd., 1967).

19. Boek and Boek, *People of Indian Ancestry*; Clatworthy, *Demographic Composition*; Arthur K. Davis, *Edging Into Mainstream: Urban Indians in Saskatchewan* (Bellingham: Western Washington State College, 1965); Edgar J. Dosman, *Indians: The Urban Dilemma* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972); Mark Nagler, "Status and Identification Groupings Among Urban Indians," in Mark Nagler, ed., *Perspectives on the North American Native* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972): 280-88.

20. Davis, *Edging into Mainstream*; Peter D. Elias, *Metropolis and Hinterland in Northern Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, 1975).

21. Dosman, *Indians*; Krotz, *Urban Indians.*

22. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Pete Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).

23. See for example Burchell, et al., *Foucault Effect*; Pete Miller and Nikolas Rose, "Governing Economic Life," *Economy and Society* 19 (1990): 1-31; Mariana Valverde, "Despotism and Ethical Liberal Governance," *Economy and Society* 25 (1996): 357-72.

24. Competing interpretations of the urbanization process were in circulation at the time. Some writers argued that reserves were characterized as dysfunctional or marginalized, rather than as traditional cultures, which contributed to problems migrants were experiencing in the city. See Dosman, *Indians*; Family Service Association of Edmonton, *Adjustment Factors in the Indian Moving to the Community: A Descriptive Study* (Edmonton: Family Service Association of Edmonton, 1969); John J. Honigmann, Social Disintegration in Five Northern Communities *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 2 (1963): 199-214; Henry Zentner, "Reservation Social Structure and Anomie: A Case Study," in Nagler *Perspectives*; Henry Zentner, *The Indian Identity Crisis* (Calgary: Strayer Publications Ltd., 1973).

    Discrimination, poverty, lack of education and employment, and processes of proletarianization were also contenders for the explanation of "the urban Indian problem." See Braroe, *Indian and White*; Canadian Corrections Association, *Indians and the Law* (Ottawa: Canada Welfare Council, 1967); Elias, *Metropolis and Hinterland*; Lithman, *Community Apart.* However, the idea of culture change took precedence as the main organizing framework during this period of time. See Lithman, *Community Apart,* p. 7.

25. During the period of this paper, the Indian-Eskimo Association provided a forum for discussions about the situation of urban Indians by organizing roundtables and conferences and making frequent representations to government officials. Many of the events were funded by either the Citizenship or Indian Affairs branches, and by fiscal year 1963, the Indian-Eskimo Association was one of only two organizations receiving sustaining grants from the Citizenship Branch. See Citizenship Branch Director Jean H. Lagassé, *Memorandum,* (Canada: National Archives of Canada, Record Group 6, Volume 661, File 2-4-8, 23 March, 1966).

26. Father André Renaud, "The Indian in the Community," *National Commission on the Indian Canadian* (Toronto: National Commission on the Indian Canadian, 1957): 3.

27. This interpretation is reminiscent of colonial practices documented by anthropologists of interpreting distance in space as analogous to distance in time and of assigning non-Western cultures to a separate time from Euro-North American cultures. See James Clifford, "Of Other Peoples: Beyond the Salvage Paradigm," in H. Foster, ed., *Discussions in Contemporary Cultures* (Seattle: Bay Press/Dia Art Foundation, 1987): 121-30; Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race,*

Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1985): 40. These distinct cultures are viewed as traditional and unchanging, belonging to some ancient time, or unsullied by contact with contemporary or modern society. McClintock describes these cultures as existing in "anachronistic space"—"prehistoric, atavistic and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity."

28. See A.P. Asimi, "The Urban Setting," *Resolving Conflicts—A CrossCultural Approach* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Department of University Extensions and Adult Education, 1967): 89-96; J. Jameson Bond, *A Report on the Pilot Relocation Project at Elliot Lake, Ontario,* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1967); Melling, *Right to a Future;* Mark Nagler, *Indians in the City* (Ottawa: Candian Research Centre for Anthropology, Saint Paul University, 1970); Joan Trudeau, "The Indian in the City," *Kerygma* 3 (1969): 118-23; Vincent, *Indian-Metis Urban Probe;* Lous Zeitoun, "Canadian Indians at the Crossroads: Some Aspects of Relocation and Urbanization in Canada," *Unpublished Report* (Ottawa: Department of Manpower and Immigration, 1969).

29. Arthur Laing, "Address to the Convention of the Native Brotherhood," Vancouver," (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs Library, 25 February 1967): 4, 8.

30. R. Alex Sim, "What Is Meant By 'Urban Indians,'" National Archives of Canada, Record Group 29, Portion of 60 File 2-38-6 1 (no date, but probably written in 1962): 1.

31. David Sibley, "Survey 13: Purification of Space," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 6 (1988): 409-421.

32. R. Alex Sim, "Perspectives," in Hirabayashi, *Challenge of Assisting,* 26.

33. Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent outlined the connection between citizenship, immigration, and Indian affairs on introducing the parliamentary resolution to create the new department. "Having citizenship, immigration and Indian affairs in the one department would indicate that the purpose of the activities of that department was to make Canadian citizens of those who were born here of the original inhabitants of the territory, or those who migrated to this country." Canada. House of Commons, *Debates* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 26 November 1949): 2285.

    In 1949, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration was created as part of the process of dismantling the last vestiges of wartime government organization. The new department combined the Citizenship Branch, which was previously under the Secretary of State, and the Immigration and Indian Affairs branches, previously under Department of Mines and Resources. In 1966, the Indian Affairs Branch was moved to the Ministry of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources. In 1968, Indian Affairs became part of a new Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. To avoid confusion, the terminology used here will be either "Indian Affairs Branch" or "Indian Affairs."

34. Letter from R. Alex Sim, chief liaison officer of the Citizenship Branch to R. England, 14 August 1962. National Archives of Canada, Record Group 30, Volume 2, File 19.

35. Branch-sponsored research into constitutional obligations concluded that there were no barriers against the involvement of provincial governments and other federal government departments in providing and funding services for First Nations migrants. This policy culminated in the Trudeau government's 1969 White Paper, which proposed to do away with all elements of special status for First Nations people in order to integrate them. In the face of overwhelming protests by First Nations people, the White Paper was officially withdrawn. However, the emphasis on provincial involvement in providing services to First Nations people continued. See Harry Bostrom, "Recent Evolution of Canada's Indian Policy" in Raymond Breton and Gail Grant, eds., *The Dynamics of Government Programs for Urban Indians in the Prairie Provinces* (Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1984): 519-544; Sally Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda 1968-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981).

36. Canada, Indian Affairs Branch *Annual Report* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1956-57): 50.

37. See the description of the program in: Canada, Indian Affairs Branch, *The Indian News* (1957): 2. Also see Dosman, *Indians,* 84-98 and 101-106 and Carl R. Latham, *Indian Placement Programme Administered by the Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration,* Master's report (Toronto: University of Toronto School of Social Work, 1958).

38. Branch Director H.M. Jones historically viewed the placement initiative as a logical extension of Indian Affairs programs and objectives of integrating First Nations people. Jones to Lagassé (23 May 1962) National Archives of Canada, Record Group 26, Series A-1-b Vol. 69 file 2-38-6.

39. Joan Ryan, *Wall of Words* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1972).

40. Most of the costs were incorporated into general programs developed by the Department of Manpower and Immigration. Indian Affairs programs covered only occasional supplementary assistance for items and costs not covered under Manpower and Immigration programs.

41. Jean H. Lagassé, "The Cultural Implications in Leaving the Reserve" in Hirabayashi, et al., *Challenge of Assisting,* 13.

42. Established as a referral service for urban native people, the first center opened in Winnipeg in April 1959. By 1962, the Citizenship Branch indicated there were similar developments in 19 urban areas.

43. John R. Nicholson, Address to the Indian Friendship Center in Vancouver, (12 June 1965): 5-6. Available at the Department of Indian Affairs Library in Ottawa.

44. This phrase is used in Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation* (Brighton: Harvester Wheatwheaf, 1992): 131.

45. Susanne Johnson, *Migrating Native Peoples Program Evaluation Summary* (Ottawa: National Association of Friendship Centers, 1976).

46. A number of First Nations people subscribed to a view of urbanization that equated it with culture change. (See for example Isaac Beaulieu, "Urbanizing the Indian" *Ontario Housing* 6 (1964); Walter Currie, "Urbanization and American Indians," Address to Mid-Canada Development Corridor Conference (Toronto: Indian-Eskimo Association, 1979). During the time period of this paper though, alternative interpretations were put forward primarily by First Nations representatives.

47. Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, *Indian Urban Development Project. Phase I. A Proposal to Undertake an In-Depth Survey of the Circumstance of Treaty Indians Living in Urban Areas* (National Archives of Canada, Record Group 10, Volume 12712, File 1/1-19-4, 2 November 1976): 1.

48. Ellis, et al., *Survey of Band Members*: 3.

49. *Ibid.*, 22.

50. Andrew Bear Robe, *A Study Tour of Canadian Friendship Centers, June 1August 31, 1970*, prepared under the auspices of the Steering Committee for the National Association of Friendship Centers (Ottawa: Citizenship Branch, 1971): 28.

51. *Ibid.*, 1-2

52. Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, *Indian Urban Development*, 1. Also see the description of the Indian Association of Alberta's proposal to the federal government that Indians living off reserve should continue to be under federal jurisdiction in Harold Cardinal, ed., *The Rebirth of Canada's Indians* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1977).

53. Standing Committee on Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence No. 17 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969): 568, 570-71, and 582.

54. Bear Robe, *Study Tour,* 30-31.

55. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," In Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992): 123.

56. Lurie, *Indian Moves*

57. The idea threads through the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1996).

58. Sparke makes a similar argument using a more contemporary example. Matthew Sparke, "A Map that Roared and an Original Atlas: Canada, Cartography, and the Narration of Nation," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 88:3 (1998): 463-96.