

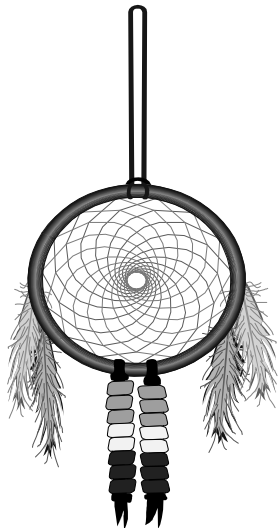
This is one of a series of brochures designed to raise awareness of Aboriginal peoples, their cultures and world views. It is hoped that by answering the questions that arise from the myths and stereotypes of Aboriginal people, that a better understanding of each other will become the norm.

For further information, please contact

The Aboriginal Student Centre  
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or

The Office of University Accessibility  
474-9240  
[accessibility@umanitoba.ca](mailto:accessibility@umanitoba.ca)



Let us get to know the facts before embarrassing ourselves with subtle and overt forms of racist, stereotypical, discriminatory and prejudicial comments concerning a people whose legacy stretches back to time immemorial.

For further questions concerning Aboriginal people in Canada contact the Aboriginal Student Centre or visit our website.

Or

Contact *Equity Services* which provides information, education and referral regarding a disrespectful environment, employment equity, harassment and discrimination. For questions about rights and responsibilities, call Louise Giesbrecht at 474 - 7388

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**Aboriginal Student  
Centre**



***Racism...Pt.1  
Know The Facts  
About  
Aboriginal  
Peoples***

**Tel: (204)474-8850**

In Canada's multi-cultural society there are many ideas and beliefs that lead to conflict between various groups. Every culture and person has experienced or witnessed overt or subtle forms of racism and what some people choose to believe about a group of people may be unrealistic.

This is why the Aboriginal Student Centre has chosen to provide accurate information about Aboriginal people in order to change previously distorted or unknown information with the goal of creating a positive and enriching relationship for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

### **Who are Aboriginal people?**

In Canada, the term "Aboriginal," applies to status and non-status Indians, Inuvialuit, Inuit and Métis peoples. It is also used in other parts of the world to refer to the first inhabitants in a given area. Aboriginal is the term used in Canada's Constitution Act of 1982. Aboriginal people are members of a large number of uniquely different and well-defined nations, communities and societies. Because of the complexity and diversity of their cultures, a number of stereotypes have flourished over the years. These misunderstandings continue to influence society's perception of Aboriginal people, and obstruct the development of mutually beneficial relationships between groups.

### **Some Common Questions:**

#### ***Do Aboriginal people receive special status or treatment?***

Almost every aspect of status Indian life on reserve is regulated by the *Indian Act*. It is debatable whether the treatment accorded Aboriginal people under the Act can be called "special". Since its creation in 1876, the Act has been used to:

- Replace traditional governing and decision-making systems with simple majority-elected, all-male band councils;
- Limit the Aboriginal land base from vast traditional territories to small reserves;
- Eliminate economic development by prohibiting Indians from selling land, agricultural goods or farm animals;
- Prohibit Aboriginal people from investing moneys earned by their communities;

Prevent Aboriginal people from voting provincially or federally (this was lifted in 1948 and 1960, respectively);

Limit the ability of Aboriginal people to leave the reserve (written permission from the Minister of Indian Affairs was required);

Prohibit Aboriginal people from retaining a lawyer or raising funds with the intention of hiring a lawyer;

Remove Aboriginal children from their homes and families to attend distant government-funded and church-run Indian Residential Schools; and

Eliminate diverse Aboriginal identities by creating categories of "Indianness" -- i.e. status Indians, Inuvialuit, Inuit, Métis

There are three other very distinct reasons for "Special Status". First of all, Aboriginal people are descendants of the first occupants of North America and we are indigenous to the land. We were never defeated in war; instead we were willing to negotiate peacefully to allow settlement, as long as our special status was recognized and honoured. Secondly, many First Nations negotiated treaties in good faith, allowing settlement in exchange for specified rights. During the reserve/treaty period federal representatives promised that treaties would be respected and honoured "as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and the water flows". Finally, as descendants of prior occupants, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit have a unique cultural claim within Canada's multicultural society. These special rights are needed to protect the unique components of Aboriginal culture which are indigenous to this great country we share. Remember that Canada's various Aboriginal societies have had to stand against remarkable opposition to protect these rights and ensure that they are provided.

#### ***Do Aboriginal people get free education and, if so, why have they not taken advantage of it in the past?***

It is true that First Nations people do have a right to an education at the expense of the federal government due to the promises made during the reserve treaty period of Canada's development. However, keep in mind that not all of Canada's Aboriginal people (e.g. Bill C-31 and Métis) receive the right to a "free" education. During the reserve treaty period Aboriginal leaders were thinking of future generations and wanted to ensure their people had the skills and knowledge necessary to take their place in Canadian society. Recall that the hated

pass system often prevented movement off the Reserve. Also remember that because of the challenges that Aboriginal people have had to face and continue to face today, Aboriginal people are at a disadvantage financially, in education, health, socio-economically, and politically. Aboriginal education is the best way to ensure self sufficiency in the future. During the late sixties and early seventies there were approximately 80 Aboriginal students in post secondary education across Canada. Today Aboriginal student population is approximately 40,000 and rising each year. Even with the supports programs that exist, Aboriginal people still face many barriers such as long waiting lists for status identity, housing, and post secondary funding.

#### ***Why don't Aboriginal people pay taxes?***

Federal tax exemptions for Aboriginal people have existed as part of the *Indian Act* since before Confederation. However, these exemptions only apply in very specific and limited conditions. Only status Indians whose incomes are earned on-reserve are legally exempt from personal income tax. In 1991, only 36 percent of adults living on-reserve were employed.

Statistics Canada reports that the average annual income level for Aboriginal people **on-reserve** is under \$10,000. Even if this exemption did not exist, most on-reserve status Indians still do not earn enough in order to be taxed. Furthermore, those 60 percent of all status Indians living off-reserve are required to pay all income taxes, provincial sales taxes and the Goods and Services Tax.

The Supreme Court of Canada has concluded that the purpose of this exemption is to preserve the entitlements of status Indians to their reserve lands and to ensure that the use of their property on reserve lands is not jeopardized because of the government's ability to tax.