



THE IMPACT OF COLONIZATION

Colonization is a process that began 500 years ago and it still continues today. The dismantling of Aboriginal womanhood took place all along this path, and at different times for different people (Anderson, 2000: 28). "The savage onslaught of colonization focused its most crushing and lasting oppression on Aboriginal women, dealing them a triple blow. Aboriginal women lost their position of high esteem first to the dominant power of the colonizing forces which reduced both Aboriginal men and women to the status of savages, then they lost it to the dominant hierarchy of the European patriarchal

system and were brought down to the general subservient position held by European women, and lastly they lost it in their own nations through the abolition of traditional forms of governance and social decision-making, which relegated them to the lowest rung in their communities" (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2001).

This session examines the impact of colonization on Aboriginal women and shows how cultural genocide has contributed to a loss of identity for the Aboriginal culture. Racism and family violence are explored within the larger context of colonization. Milestones in First Nations History and the long struggle for justice are also discussed in this session. Finally, the importance of Aboriginal women reclaiming positive and powerful images of themselves is highlighted.

Objectives

- ❖ Discuss participants' understanding of the nature and consequences of colonization.
- ❖ Explore how colonization intentionally dismantled gender equity among Indigenous nations.
- ❖ Understand racism and violence against women within the larger context of colonization.
- ❖ Reflect on the social and political movements that were part of the long struggle for justice for Aboriginal people.
- ❖ Review the meaningful contributions of Aboriginal people.
- ❖ Emphasize the importance of Circle participants reclaiming positive and powerful images of themselves as Aboriginal women.

Topics

1. Colonization and Cultural Genocide
2. The Impact of Colonization on Women
3. The Long Struggle for Justice
4. Aboriginal Women Today

Handouts

- ✓ Milestones in First Nations History
- ✓ Traditional Roles of Aboriginal Women
- ✓ Contributions of Aboriginal People
- ✓ Profiles of Outstanding Aboriginal Women

Film:

Native Women - Politics¹

¹ To order the video "Native Women - Politics" contact First Nations Films. Telephone (604) 990-9337. E-mail: **First Nations Films** at coyote00@telus.net.



Smudge Ceremony

The Sharing Circle (First Round)

Session opens with a Sharing Circle in which each group member shares a feeling or experience as a warm-up for the session.



TOPIC #1: Colonization & Cultural Genocide

Objectives

- Discuss participants' understanding of the nature and consequences of colonization

Materials

- Flipchart Paper Markers
- Handout: *Milestones in First Nations History*

Directions:

1. Facilitators share the following definitions of “colonization” and “cultural genocide”:

Colonization refers to the process of encroachment and subsequent subjugation of Aboriginal people since the arrival of Europeans. From the Aboriginal perspective, it refers to a loss of lands, resources, and self-direction and to the severe disturbance of cultural ways and values (LaRocque, 2002).

Cultural Genocide is a term used to describe the process whereby cultural, community, and family traditions have been systematically stripped from Aboriginal people. In order to accomplish this, Aboriginal people were seen by the Europeans and the Church to be inferior to their colonizers. Negative stereotypes and disrespect for Aboriginal ways are the products of hundreds of years of the colonization process.

2. Ask group members to develop a list of things that have led to Aboriginal people not being able to practice their traditions. Items for this list include treaties, alcohol, the residential school system, Christianity, and racism, etc.
3. Refer participants to the Handout: *Milestones in First Nations History*. How did the Indian Act of 1876 serve the agenda of colonization? (i.e. traditional ceremonies were criminalized).
4. Group members are asked to respond to the following questions:
 - ❖ How do you think things would be different if Aboriginal people's religions and cultural ways had been respected?
 - ❖ How do you think residential school, Christianity, racism, etc., have affected the way you think about yourself and your community?



TOPIC #2: The Impact Of Colonization On Women

Objective

- Explore how colonization intentionally dismantled gender equity among Indigenous nations.
- Understand racism and violence against women within the larger context of colonization.

Materials

- Handout: *Traditional Roles of Aboriginal Women*
- Film: *Native Women – Politics*
- Resource: Text: *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* by Kim Anderson²

FACILITATOR NOTES:

The Dismantling of Gender Equity (Anderson, 2000)

- ❖ Anderson explores both traditional and contemporary examples of how colonization impacted gender equity in three specific areas:
 - Gender Division of Labour and Economic Authority
 - Women's Role in Politics, and
 - Spiritual Power
- ❖ Facilitator's might want to draw on examples from each area for the presentation of this topic. Chapter 4 of Anderson's book provides a well-referenced review.

Directions:

1. Facilitators share the following information:

Prior to colonization, Aboriginal women enjoyed comparative honour, equality and even political power in a way European women did not at the same time in history. Within some tribes the women were the most important members since they were the clan mothers who selected the leader of the tribe. In matriarchal societies, women were honoured for their wisdom and vision. A man also respected women for the sacred gifts, which they believe the Creator had given them.

We can trace the diminishing status of Aboriginal women with the progression of colonialism. Because of white intrusion, the matriarchal character of Aboriginal spiritual, economic, kinship, and political institutions were drastically altered. (LaRocque , 1994).

However, Matriarchal societies did not prevent male violence against women. There are indications of violence against women in Aboriginal societies prior to European contact. These men exhibited oppressive behaviour toward women against the best ideals of their cultures. Even today, all the emphasis on Mother Earth has not translated into safety of women (LaRocque , 2002). However, there is little question that European invasion exacerbated whatever the extent of potential violence there was in original cultures.

² Kim Anderson is a Cree/Metis writer, educator and researcher who works in social and health policy development and for various Aboriginal organizations in Ontario.

2. Show the film: *Native Women – Politics* (on the changing role of Native Women in their communities) (25 min)

This film is an emotionally moving and upbeat program that gives voice to some of our finest Canadian Aboriginal women. Historical segments in the program contrast the traditional equality of power, male to female within native communities, versus the regression in the roles and power of First Nations women in Canada under European dominance. We hear the voices of strong women "leaders" on how they view the rebuilding of balanced self-government within their community in the future. The Indian Act and Bill C31 are examined to highlight their effect on First Nations women. Bill C31 is examined to highlight its effect on First Nations women.

3. Invite group members to comment on what they have heard.
4. Refer Circle participants to the Handout: *Traditional Roles of Aboriginal Women*. Invite reactions from participants.
5. In her book *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*³, Elder Shawani Campbell Star says the following:

“The role of women? I would have difficulty with the word role, actually. More and more as I get older, I see this sort of recognition of being as more important than role.”
6. What do think Elder Campbell Star is trying to say?
7. Ask the group to comment on the connection between colonization and racism. (Many Europeans considered Aboriginal people to be inferior to “white people”. Faced with negative ideas about who they are and treated badly over generations, many Aboriginal people have “internalized” these ideas and have come to believe they are stupid, lazy, dirty, and immoral (Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada and Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada, 2002).
8. Invite group participants to think about the impact of colonization on family violence. (internalized negative beliefs lead to a loss of pride and self-respect for Aboriginal people and their communities, often resulting in feelings of inferiority and/or anger. This anger has lead to the eruption of violence in Aboriginal families and communities).

³ In her book Kim Anderson has written a critical and inspiring history of Native womanhood. Anderson traces the construction of the negative female stereotypes forced on Native women during colonization. Through interviews with forty contemporary Native women across Canada, she explores the issues shaping their lives and the many ways they are reclaiming positive and powerful images of themselves.



TOPIC #3: The Long Struggle for Justice

Objective

- Reflect on the social and political movements that were part of the long struggle for justice for Aboriginal people.

Materials

- Flipchart Paper Markers
- Handout: *Milestones in First Nations History*

Directions:

1. Referring again to Handout: *Milestones in First Nations History*, ask the women to comment on what stands out for them as being important in the struggle for justice. Important dates and events might include:
 - ❖ 1960 - “Indian Suffrage” – Indians get the right to vote in federal election
 - ❖ 1969 - National Indian Brotherhood successfully lobbies against “The White Paper”
 - ❖ 1974 - Nation Women’s Association of Canada formed
 - ❖ 1985 - Bill C-31 – restored status and rights to Native women who marry non-Native men and their children
2. Additional discussion questions might include:
 - ❖ In terms of “making up” for the cultural genocide that occurred through colonization, in your opinion, have Aboriginal people received sufficient justice? Why or why not?
 - ❖ Is colonization really over or are Aboriginal people still being colonized today?



TOPIC #4: Aboriginal Women Today

Objective

- Review the meaningful contributions of Aboriginal people.
- Emphasize to Circle Participants, the importance of reclaiming positive and powerful images of themselves as Aboriginal women.

Materials

- Flipchart Paper Markers
- Handout: *Contributions of Aboriginal People*
- Handout: *Profiles of Outstanding Aboriginal Women*

Directions:

1. Invite the group to brainstorm and list on the flip chart contributions of Aboriginal people. The Handout: *Contributions of Aboriginal People* can be used to generate ideas.

2. Reflect on how these contributions are different from stereotypes participants have heard about Aboriginal people in the past.
3. Encourage the women to review the Handout: *Profiles of Outstanding Aboriginal Women*.

Follow-up questions include:

- ❖ Do any of these names sound familiar?
 - ❖ Do you know any outstanding Aboriginal women? If so, what qualities makes her/them outstanding?
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Sharing Circle (Second Round)

The second round of sharing involves honouring the potential and growth of Circle participants as each shares how she has been impacted by the Circle theme and/or what new learning she will take away from the Circle that will help her in her journey towards balance, harmony, wholeness and healing in her own life.

Closing Prayer/ Meditation

**Oskâyi Kiskinotahn – New Directions
Women’s Sharing Circle**

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HANDOUTS

1. Traditional Roles of Aboriginal Women
2. Milestones in First Nations History
3. Contributions of Aboriginal People
4. Profiles of Outstanding Aboriginal Women



HANDOUT

Traditional Roles of Aboriginal Women

(Source: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005)

Inuit

Survival in the Arctic required the skills and cooperation of everyone in the camps. Women developed skills in preparing seal and caribou skins for clothing to suit even the harshest Arctic weather conditions. They prepared the food and, along with the men, fished, dried the fish and constructed the camp dwellings.

Women were also the keepers of the Qulliq, an oil lamp that was the only source of light and heat throughout the long winters. Along with Elders, women were the decision-makers of the household, influential in resolving disputes and maintaining relationships.

The most essential skills of the men were planning and carrying out the dangerous hunting expeditions for large game, such as seal, whale, caribou and polar bear. Both women and men were actively involved in child-rearing as parents, grandparents, uncles, aunties and foster parents, teaching the children of the camps respect for Inuit laws crucial to their survival.

Métis

Women played a crucial economic role in Métis culture. They produced clothing and footwear for trade, tanned hides, trapped and traded furs, dressed furs for shipment, grew vegetables, fished, built smoking lodges; smoked fish, as well as buffalo, for pemmican and produced and sold large quantities of a dried fish gelatin—*isinglass*.

First Nations

Women had an important and central role in all Indigenous cultures. Within the Iroquois League, this role included the power to choose, as well as to de-horn (or impeach) a chief. If the conduct of any sachem or chief appeared improper to the people or if he was unable to inspire their confidence, the women of his clan had the authority to de-horn and expel him by official action. They would then choose a new chief to replace him.

Women were also owners of the Longhouses and agricultural lands, responsible for decision-making and other aspects of family and community life. Men were generally the providers and defenders who carried out the decisions of the women.

HANDOUT

Milestones in First Nations History

Although in **1763**, King George R. III issued a Royal Proclamation affirming Native people had not ceded their rights and title to the land, this proclamation, like the treaties to follow, was never respected in spirit or intent by those in power.

The great Shawnee Chief Tecumseh was born about **1768**. Although he lost his life in battle, his vision of a unified Indian Confederation uniting all tribes lived on. Today, Tecumseh is recognized by historians and honoured by Native people for his role in advancing Native history, identity and culture in Canada.

In **1867**, the *British North America Act* gave jurisdiction over Indians and lands reserved for the Indians to the federal government.

This was followed in **1869** by the *Enfranchisement Act*, which asked Native people to give up their special status in exchange for Canadian citizenship rights as a way of integrating them into the new “Canadian” society.

In **1874**, Indians were required to be “registered” in anticipation of the *Indian Act*.

In **1876**, the *Indian Act* was passed, detailing the Canadian government’s system for controlling and assimilating First Peoples. During subsequent years, amendments to this act reinforced this imposing system.

Highlights of this Act

- Native people were forbidden from leaving or traveling off their reserves without written permission on a pass card signed by an Indian agent.

- Native women who married non Native men were denied their status rights, as were their children, while non-Native women, who married Native men, and their children received full status rights.
- Traditional, sacred ceremonies were criminalized; anyone caught practicing them was liable to imprisonment.
- It was illegal for Natives to kill any of their own livestock for sale off the reserve.
- Rules from inheritance rights to details of what crops could or could not be planted, to whom they could be sold and for what price were imposed and enforced by Indian agents. Similar laws were passed restricting commercial fishing sales to just one outlet.

In **1888**, legislation was passed to prevent Native people from taking out loans for farm machinery. The reason given by Hayter Reed, deputy commissioner of Indian Affairs, was that forcing the Indian to work the soil using only hand implements would help him to “evolve from hunter to peasant and only then, to modern man.”

From **1900 to 1927**, some First Nations began organizing politically to raise money for lawsuits against these injustices. The Canadian government responded by making it illegal to raise money or contribute funds for political purposes, including land claims.

The Long Struggle for Justice

In **1960**, the Canadian *Bill of Rights* granted *Indian Suffrage*, giving Indians, **for the first time, the right to vote in a federal election.**

In **1968**, status and treaty groups achieved Tecumseh's vision by forming the *National Indian Brotherhood* "uniting all Indian groups into one" as a lobbying mechanism for treaty and human rights.

In **1969**, the Canadian government released its *White Paper on Indian Policy*, calling for the complete assimilation of First Nation People into Canadian society by eliminating their special status. The National Indian Brotherhood successfully lobbied parliament and the public to defeat the White Paper.

In **1974**, the *Native Women's Association of Canada* was founded to enhance, promote and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations and Métis women.

In **1981**, the United Nations found Canada and the *Indian Act* in violation of international law, due to the discriminatory treatment of Indian women and the status law.

The *Canada Act*, proclaimed in **1982**, included a provision for Aboriginal rights, as well as a recommendation to resolve discrimination against Aboriginal women. Also, the National Indian Brotherhood changed its name to the Assembly of First Nations.

In **1985**, *Bill C-31* ended a century of discrimination against Native women who marry non-Native men by restoring status rights to them and their children. To satisfy male leaders of Native bands who had lobbied against *Bill C-31*, bands were allowed by the government to develop their own membership codes and determine who can reside within their territories.

In **1990**, a ruling by the *Supreme Court of Canada* signalled a new era in the relationship between the Canadian government and Aboriginal people. In *Sparrow v. The Queen*, the court decreed that the Crown must honour its obligations by respecting treaty and Aboriginal rights.

Also, from July to September **1990**, the standoff between Mohawks and the Quebec police and Canadian military at Kanesatake (Oka) created headlines around the world. This situation drew attention to 300 years of unresolved conflicts and escalating tension between the government and Aboriginal people.

In **1991**, the *Assembly of First Nations* successfully negotiated an amendment to the *Constitution Act* to protect treaty rights and ensure Aboriginal people are involved in any further attempts to change or revise sections of the *Constitution Act* affecting them.

Also in **1991**, a *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* was created to find ways of improving relations between the government and Canada's First People.

In **1997**, the Supreme Court of Canada made another landmark decision in the land claim of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples in British Columbia. This decision "affirms Aboriginal title exists at law and cannot be sold, surrendered or relinquished without the consent of the First Nations."

For further information, see:

- a) Assembly of First Nations: <http://www.afn.ca>
- b) Native Women's Association of Canada: www.nwac-hq.org
- c) Congress of Aboriginal Peoples: www.abo-peoples

HANDOUT

Contributions of Aboriginal People

(Source: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2005)

The following list of contributions is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather, is intended to provide a snapshot of some of many contributions of Aboriginal people in Canada.

Contributions of the Inuit

Inuit ingenuity and creativity continue to enrich contemporary life. Some examples are:

- **the kayak**, designed by Inuit, has become one of the most popular ways of enjoying water travel and sport worldwide;
- **snow goggles** were fashioned from bone, antler and ivory to reduce blinding snow glare during hunts; and
- **Inuit art** inspired by the animals, people and spirits of the Arctic is known and loved by collectors worldwide.

Contributions of First Nations

The following are just a few of many First Nation gifts to modern life:

- **Traditional medicines** such as quinine, ipecac, aspirin, and petroleum jelly. By 1820, when the first **United States Pharmacopeia** was published, it listed **over 200 drugs supplied by “Indians”** that continue to benefit modern medicine.
- **canoe**, originally made of bark and pitch;
- **toboggans**, invented by the Mi'kmaq of what is now Eastern Canada for hauling game, moving camp and traveling;
- **snowshoes** of many different types were first invented by Aboriginal people;
- **hundreds of pharmaceuticals** derived from original native remedies are still used widely in treating dysentery, cholera, upset stomach, diarrhea and scurvy; also, aspirin, petroleum jelly and cough syrup made from balsam and honey;
- **more than 100 species of plant grown today were originally grown by Indigenous people. Corn, squash and potatoes** are some of the best known of these plants that are now grown worldwide. The Huron cultivated 17 varieties of corn or maize and eight varieties of squash. (**Popcorn** and **corn syrup** have become favourite foods);
- **games**, such as lacrosse and lawn darts, originated with the First Nations;
- **chewing gum**, originally made from spruce trees;
- **ginger ale**, originally a remedy for upset stomach, is still widely used as a tonic as well as a soft drink; and
- **sunflowers** were cultivated for the nutritional value of the seeds.

Contributions of the Métis

The Métis have played an important role in the development of Canadian society and, increasingly, their special status and rights are being recognized at provincial and federal levels. The Métis National Council, established in 1983, represents elected members from provincial Métis organizations in the three Prairie provinces, as well as Ontario and British Columbia. The Métis Association of the Northwest Territories is separate from the national organization, and Métis in Quebec and the Eastern provinces are generally represented through First Nations political bodies.

HANDOUT

Profiles of Outstanding Aboriginal Women

Wind speaker, a Canadian Aboriginal news source, features profiles, photos and stories of outstanding Aboriginal people.⁴

Brenda Chambers

Brenda Chambers is the executive producer and host of *Venturing Forth*, a television documentary series that airs on the Aboriginal People's Television Network (APTN) that features stories about entrepreneurs and Aboriginal economic development across Canada. In March, she received the National Aboriginal Achievement Award in the media and communications category.

The media entrepreneur from the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations has had many outstanding achievements over her 20-year career. After graduating from Grant MacEwan College's audiovisual production program in Edmonton, she returned home to the Yukon. In 1986, she began work on *Nedaa*, a magazine-format television show for Northern Native Broadcasting. In 1991, she became the executive director of Northern Native Broadcasting Yukon. Over the years she helped develop the CBC Northern Network, Television Northern Canada and APTN. She has created numerous television programs, including a four-part current affairs series for CBC television called *All My Relations*.

Lolly Annahatak

Lolly Annahatak has never let her blindness interfere with her pursuit of life. She was diagnosed with infant glaucoma at age three, and at age 16 lost her sight completely.

But this disability didn't stop her from becoming the first student guidance counsellor for the Kativik School Board, nor did it stop her from becoming the first Inuk to earn a certificate in northern social work. She followed that with a bachelor's degree in social work from McGill University and became the first community social worker in Nunavik. She is a member of the Inuit Justice Task Force and president of NI, a regional organization devoted to the eradication of substance abuse. Annahatak has also been a part of the Aboriginal First Nation Suicide Prevention Committee for the province of Quebec for the last two years. Her life is full of purpose, despite the challenge of blindness thrown her way.

Annahatak has broken down many barriers for people living with disabilities in Nunavik, and has visited many communities to conduct research for the Kativik Regional Government on the needs of persons with disabilities.

Sharon Firth

Sharon Firth was the recipient of the 2005 National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation sports achievement award. The Aklavik-born woman successfully competed in four Olympic Games in the 1970s and 1980s in cross-country skiing, travelling to Sapporo in Japan, Innsbruck in Austria, Lake Placid in New York, and Sarajevo in Yugoslavia. She continues to inspire countless youth by her example.

Emma LaRocque

Dr. Emma LaRocque, scholar, author, poet, defender of human rights and professor in the department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba has been published more than 60

⁴ For more information on the Aboriginal people of honour, visit *Wind speaker* at www.ammsa.com/windspeaker/index.htm

times and is a tireless advocate for Aboriginal people. Dr. LaRocque earned her M.A. in religion peace studies from the Associated Mennonite Seminaries in Indiana. She graduated in 1976, and then moved on to the University of Manitoba where she earned another M.A. in history in 1980. By 1999 LaRocque had earned her doctorate in history and English from the faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies. Today, LaRocque is recognized as one of the leaders in Aboriginal scholarship.

Rita Joe

Rita Joe is a highly acclaimed poet who started writing in her 30s to challenge the negative images of Aboriginal people being taught to her children. Her books include *The Poems of Rita Joe*, *Songs of Eskasoni: More Poems of Rita Joe*, and the *Autobiography of a Mi'kmaq Poet*. Rita Joe's home is the Eskasoni First Nation on Cape Breton Island. A member of the Order of Canada, Joe is one of the few non-politicians ever called to the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, entitling her to be called Honourable for the rest of her days.

Theresa Stevenson

Theresa Stevenson is best known for the hot lunch program called "Chili for Children," which she established in 1979 in a low-income neighborhood in Regina for Aboriginal school children. She has been involved in every aspect of community life from libraries to literacy programs to lobbying government on behalf of her people.

Melanie Goodchild

Just 25 years old, Melanie Goodchild already has numerous achievements behind her. She is the owner of Raindancer Interactive, a successful multi-media communications consulting and design firm, and has also established herself in the film industry. Her productions have been broadcast on national television and screened at the prestigious Smithsonian Institute Museum of the American Indian. In 1993 she received the Broadcaster of the Future Aboriginal Peoples Internship Award from Global Television Network. Melanie is an advocate for Aboriginal youth and entrepreneurship, and she is currently national director of the Aboriginal Youth Business Council.