



INDIGENOUS TERMS DESCRIBING IDENTITY

Indigenous

According to the United Nations, “Indigenous” relates to the description of self-identified peoples who have historically inhabited the lands where they currently reside, before and after contact or colonization, with distinct cultures, societal functions, languages, beliefs and connection with the land and its resources. Although they are the non-dominant society, these Indigenous peoples continue to keep their cultures, traditions, lifestyles, history, and identity distinct and thriving. Currently, the preferred term is ‘Indigenous’, or in French, ‘autochtones’.

- Indigenous is the most appropriate term to use if you do not know a more specific identity of a person, such as Cree or First Nations. It is the term that was chosen by Indigenous leadership in Canada, and it replaces outdated terms such as Aboriginal and Native.

Aboriginal People

Aboriginal Peoples moved into popularity as the correct collective noun for First Nations, Inuit and Métis and was widely adopted by government and many national groups. This distinction was made legal in 1982 when the Constitution Act came into being. Section 35 (2) of the Act states: In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada”.

Indian Status

Indian Status refers to a specific legal identity of an Aboriginal person in Canada. With the creation of the Indian Act of 1876, the Canadian government developed criteria for who would be legally considered an Indian. This criterion continues to be outlined in Section 6 of the Indian Act, thus defining who qualifies for Indian status. Given the government’s historical unilateral authority to determine who

is legally Indian, the Assembly of First Nations as well as other leaders and academics have described the Indian Act as a form of apartheid law.

- The only time it is appropriate to say Indian is when referring to the Indian Act or the tools of the Indian Act (i.e., Secure Certificate of Indian Status, a.k.a. treaty card).

Non-Status Indian

Non-Status Indians are those people who identify as Indian (i.e., Mohawk, Mi'kmaq, Cree, Maliseet, etc.) but who by choice or legislative exclusion are not registered under the Indian Act as Indians (i.e., they do not have "status"). For many, the term Non-Status Indian is not so much an identity, but a state of being.



First Nations

The term “First Nations” refers to one of three distinct groups recognized as “Aboriginal” in the Constitution Act of 1982. The other two distinct groups characterized as “Aboriginal” are the Métis and the Inuit. There are 634 First Nation communities (also known as reserves) in Canada, with First Nation governments. First Nations are part of unique larger linguistic and cultural groups that vary across the country. In fact, there are over 50 distinct nations and language groups across the country.

First Nations have a unique and special relationship with the Crown and the people of Canada as set out in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and manifested in Treaties, the Constitution Acts of 1867 and 1982, Canadian common law and International law and as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This special relationship between First Nations and the Crown is grounded in First Nation inherent and Aboriginal rights and title, Treaties and negotiated agreements with a view toward peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, recognition and the equitable sharing of lands and resources.

Red River Métis

The MMF (Manitoba Métis federation) defines the Métis as: Métis are a people of North American Indian and European ancestry who coalesced into a distinct nation in the northwest in the late 18th century. The Métis were a prominent and independent people in the 19th century and rose to resist the takeover of their homeland. Unfortunately, the immigration from Ontario, the United States and Europe was too strong and destructive, and the Métis Nation was defeated following a second resistance by Louis Riel. What followed was an enduring period of dispossession, injustice and impoverishment that caused the denigration of the Métis’ political and social structure.

- Red River Metis, in the political definition, refers to a person of North American Indian and European ancestry originating from west central North America (Red River descendants) and recognized by the Metis Nation. Others in Canada also informally identify as Métis.

Inuit (Inuk)

The Inuit are the aboriginal inhabitants of the North American Arctic, from Bering Strait to East Greenland, a distance of over 6000 kilometres. As well as Arctic Canada, Inuit also live in northern Alaska and Greenland, and have close relatives in Russia. They are united by a common cultural heritage and a common language. Until recently, outsiders called the Inuit "Eskimo." Now they prefer their own term, "Inuit," meaning simply "people." There are about 40,000 Inuit in Canada.