

Three Myths About Urban Aboriginal People in Canadian Cities



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[Introduction]

- The Indigenous experience internationally is increasingly urban
- In 2006, 84 per cent of Māori in New Zealand, 76 per cent of Indigenous Australians, and approximately 60 per cent of Native Americans lived in cities.
- In Canada, 53.2 per cent of Aboriginal people lived in urban areas.

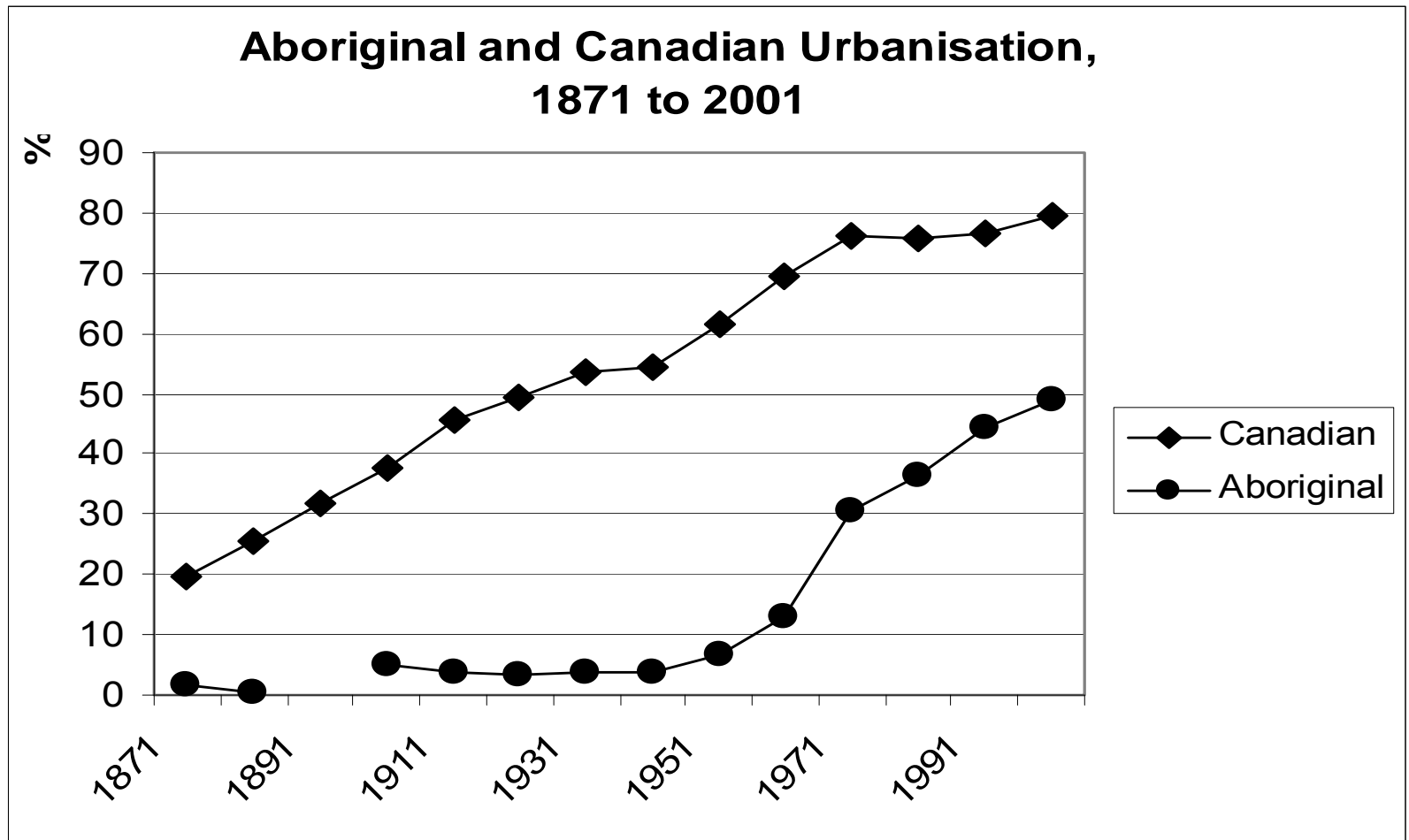
[Common Misperceptions or Myths]

- Aboriginal people are abandoning reserves and rural communities and concentrating in inner city areas.
- Aboriginal cultures and urban life are incompatible, and to be successful, they need to assimilate to mainstream culture.
- Urban Aboriginal people are primarily a marginalized socio-economic group.

URBANIZATION PROCESSES

- Historically expectations were that Aboriginal people would leave reserves and rural communities for cities.
- Urbanisation rates began to increase in 1950 and climbed sharply in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Urbanization rates vary for different legal categories of Aboriginal peoples.

Urbanization Patterns



Urbanization Patterns

	Total	First Nations	Métis	Inuit	Registered Indian
Total, 1996	1,101,960	529,040	204,115	40,220	488,040
Total, 2006	1,172,790	698,780	389,780	50,480	623,780
On reserve, 1996	32.8%	47.4%	1.5%		46.0%
On reserve, 2006	26.3%	43.1%	1.1%	0.9%	48.1%
Rural, 1996	20.4%	12.8%	31.4%		13.0%
Rural, 2006	20.5%	12,2%	29.5%	61.5%	11.3%
Urban, 1996	46.8%	40.0%	67.1%	28.0%	41.0%
Urban, 2006	53.2%	44.7%	69.4%	37.6%	40.6%

[Interpreting Urbanization]

- Challenge
- Sources of Growth
 - Legislation
 - Changing patterns of self-identification
- Role of the city in migration patterns

Type and Percent of Moves in Last 18 Months

Within the Province

	In the City	Between City and Reserve	Between Reserves	Between Cities	To Another Province
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Average (n=40)	54.2	30.5	5.1	8.5	6.2
Adult Men (n=20)	54.7	26.3	4.2	7.4	7.4
Adult Women (n=20)	53.7	35.4	6.1	9.8	4.9

[Adult Female, Age 32]

- July 2-7 2005 – 4 days, living with mother and mother's husband, grandfather, own five children in a two bedroom apartment in Prince Albert
- June 2005 – 1 month, living with Dan (boyfriend) and boyfriend's cousin in a basement suit, in Saskatoon. Left because he abandoned her.
- May 2005 - 1 month, living with Dan (boyfriend) in a house at Candle Lake. Left because Dan's job moves around.
- January 2005- April 2005 - 4 months, living with John (boyfriend) in a basement suit, Prince Albert. Left because it was an abusive relationship.
- August 2004-December 2004 - moves between Prince Albert and reserve every 1 or 2 weeks. Lives with: Mom or friend when in Prince Albert, with Dad when on reserve. Children living with her Dad. Goes to reserve to see children; goes to Prince Albert because she gets tired of reserve life/people.
- June –July 2004 - 2 months, living with Mom in a rented cabin for the summer in Christopher Lake. Left because done renting.
- January 2004-June 2004 - 6 months, living with aunt, aunt's 7 children, aunt's 5 grandchildren on reserve. Left: to stay at cabin.

[Adult Male, Age 36]

July 2005- 3 days, living with cousin and cousin's wife in an apartment in Prince Albert.

July 2005- 2 days, living under bridge in Prince Albert.

June-July 2005 - 1 month, living with brother, brother's girlfriend, brother's three boys, younger brother and younger brother's 2 daughters on reserve. Left to come to Prince Albert for methadone program.

March –May 2005 - 3 months, living by himself in a house in Prince Albert. Left because he couldn't pay the rent.

January-February 2005 - 1 month, living alone in the apartment in Prince Albert. Left because he found a better place.

December 2004-mid-January 2005 - 6 weeks, living in correctional centre in Prince Albert.

November 2004 – 2 weeks, living alone in apartment in Prince Albert

July -November 2004- living with brother, brother's girlfriend, brother's three boys, younger brother and younger brother's 2 daughters on reserve. Left to move back to Prince Albert.

January 2004- June 2004 - 6 months, living with 10 year old son's mom, in Prince Albert. Left to move to reserve.

[Implications]

- Importance of rural development
- Challenges about appropriate scale of intervention
- Need for interface mechanisms

URBAN ABORIGINAL CULTURES

- Assumptions in Western thought about incompatibility of Aboriginal and urban cultures
- Alternatives
 - Reinforcement of Aboriginal cultures in urban areas
 - Necessity of urban Aboriginal cultures for success in cities


Importance of urban Aboriginal cultures

Aboriginal culture in the cities is threatened in much the same way as Canadian culture is threatened by American culture, and it therefore requires a similar commitment to its protection. Our culture is at the heart of our people, and without awareness of Aboriginal history, traditions and ceremonies, we are not whole people, and our communities lose their strength....Cultural education also works against the alienation that the cities hold for our people. Social activities bring us together and strengthen the relationship between people in areas where those relationships are an important safety net for people who feel left out by the mainstream (David Chartrand, President of NAFC, 1993).

Table 3: Self-Governing Aboriginal Institutions in Winnipeg, 2002

Organization	Primary Focus	Year Established
A Bah Nu Gee Child Care	Child Care	1984
Aboriginal Centre of Winnipeg	Community Development	1991
Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg	Political and Advocacy	1990
Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre	Health	1994
Aboriginal Learning and Literacy Foundation	Education	1990
Aiyawin Corporation	Housing	1983
Anishinabe Oway-Ishi	Employment	1989
CAHRD/NES	Employment Training	1983
Circle of Life Thunderbird House	Religious/Cultural	2000
Indian Family Centre Inc.	Religious/Social Service	1973
Indian Metis Friendship Centre	Cultural/Social Service	1959
Kanata Housing	Housing	1982
Kateri Tekakwitha Parish	Aboriginal Church	1978
Kinew Housing	Housing	1970
Lord Selkirk Women's Group	Youth Services	1997
Ma Mawi Chi Itati Centre	Child and family services	1984
Manitoba Association for Native Languages	Native Languages	1985
Métis Resource Centre	Cultural	1995
MMF - Winnipeg Region	Political	
Native Clan	Inmates	1970
Native United Church	Religious	2000
Native Women's Transition Centre	Women's Resources	1979
Nee-Dawn-Ah-Kai Day Care Centre	Child Care	1986
Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad	Youth Shelter	1993
Neeginan Development Corporation	Community Development	1998
Original Women's Network	Women's Resources	
Owitisookaageedi Youth Organization	Aboriginal Youth	2000
Payuk Inter-Tribal Housing Co-op	Housing	1985
Turtle Island Community Resource Centre	Community Development	1992
Wahbung Abinoonjiiq	Family Violence	1995

Source: Peters 2002

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Indigenous leaders often construct their organisations as sequestered spaces, reclamations of pre-colonial decision-making processes. In doing this, the formal legal relationship of organisations to the state is buried amidst the cut and thrust of Aboriginal politics. The traditional social and political life of clan groups is reinvented as community politics in the era of self-determination (Morgan 2006:373-374).

[Thunderbird House Winnipeg]







	Vancouver	Edmonton	Regina	Saskatoon	Winnipeg	Thunder Bay	Toronto
Aboriginal	40,310	52,100	17,110	21,535	68,385	10,055	26,575
% of CMA	1.9%	5.1%	8.9%	9.3%	10.0%	8.3%	0.5%
First Nations	60.6%	44.2%	56.8%	54.3%	38.5%	75.4%	68.6%
Metis	38.9%	54.6%	43.0%	45.4%	61.0%	24.1%	30.1%
Inuit	0.5%	1.2%	0.1%	0.3%	0.5%	0.5%	1.3%



Implications of urban Aboriginal cultures

- Challenges of self-determination
- Jurisdictional disputes
- Competition among organizations
- Difficulty providing services for smaller populations
 - Like if you wanna talk about being Saulteaux, what our culture is all about, the language and the value systems and also the traditions or if there's a council dance or a sweat on my reserve and I have no way to get there then I'm, you know, I'm hooped. I can't do it because it's all the way over there. So, I mean, if I wanna go to a sweat then I have to, say, call [Cree elders] which, if it's as good as it gets then okay, I'll sweat, but I'm sweating with Cree culture not Saulteaux culture and there goes the beginning of Pan Indianism (Peters et al, 2008).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIVERSITY

		Vancouver	Edmonton	Saskatoon	Winnipeg	Toronto	Ottawa
Unemployment Rate	Aboriginal	10.7	9.8	14.6	11.3	8.7	8.8
	Non-Aboriginal	5.6	4.6	5.2	5.0	6.7	5.7
Median Income	Aboriginal	18,203	19,735	16,480	18,620	24,238	25,838
	Non-Aboriginal	27,596	29,195	26,112	26,334	26,754	32,219
Units Needing Repair	Aboriginal	14.0	11.6	11.8	14.2	11.3	12.7
	Non-Aboriginal	6.8	5.8	6.0	8.4	6.0	6.5

[Ghettoization]

- Historic and contemporary concern with development of ghettos
- Roots in US literature on black and Hispanic ghettos
- Urban research does show over-representation of Aboriginal people in poorer urban neighbourhoods

Welcome to Harlem on the Prairies

*Story by John Stackhouse. Photos by John Morstad
The Globe and Mail, November 3, 2001*



The toughest cops on the Indian beat know what they will find even before they kick in the door. Hair Spray Jerry is there, slouched against a wall, and in the basement apartment's bedroom is his girlfriend, Diane, on a bare mattress, contorted in pain. Her face is bruised, her mouth badly swollen, her blood moist on the floor.

Diane is often in this state on "payday Friday," the day Saskatoon is flooded with welfare cheques and its jagged-edged native neighbourhood on the west side turns violent. "I called 911 because he was being a shit," she says as tears stream across her cuts.

Evaluating the “ghetto” hypothesis

	#	%									
	Aboriginal	Aboriginal	0-9.9%	10-19.9%	20-29.9%	30-39.9%	40-49.9%	50-59.9%	60-69.9%	70-79.9%	80-89.9%
Prince George, BC	8,765	10.6	35.9	40.6	23.5						
Winnipeg, MB	68,385	10.0	36.1	35.7	14.9	8.3	2.9		2.1		
Regina, SK	17,110	8.9	37.1	39.2	0.0	11.0	12.7				
Saskatoon, SK	21,535	9.3	44.0	24.4	16.9	11.4	3.3				
Kamloops, BC	6,930	7.7	46.9	29.7	23.4						
Saulte Ste. Marie, ON	7,735	9.8	48.9	32.4							18.7
Thunder Bay, ON	10,030	8.3	50.0	29.4	20.6						
Fredericton, NB	2,380	2.8	53.4							28.1	18.5
Chilliwack, BC	5,580	7.0	65.8	13.3						8.4	12.5
Edmonton, AB	52,100	5.1	68.8	22.1	6.3	2.8					
Sudbury, ON	9,950	6.4	69.0	3.1							
Peterborough, ON	3,565	3.1	75.9	23.4							
Nanaimo, BC	5,290	5.8	78.2	21.8							
North Bay, ON	3,700	6.0	84.9	15.1							
Brantford, ON	3,845	3.1	87.4	12.6							
Vancouver, BC	40,135	1.9	87.6	6.7	2.1	2.1	1.5				
Kelowna, BC	6,025	3.8	88.3	11.7							
Victoria, BC	10,855	3.3	89.0	1.1							
Lethbridge, AB	3,970	4.2	89.8	10.2							

Evaluating “ghetto” hypothesis

	Edmonton	Saskatoon	Regina	Winnipeg
Aboriginal increase 1991-2006	39.4	33.3	25.7	49.5
% of inner city, 1996	6.6	11.2	14.8	15.7
% of inner city, 2006	6.5	13.2	18.6	18.5
% of Abor. population in inner city in 1996	22.6	19.5	16.8	51.6
% of Abor. population in inner city in 2006	16.9	16.8	16.9	40.4
% of city Aboriginal	5.1	9.3	8.9	10.0
% of high poverty tracts Abor.	12.7	33.5	40.8	28.1
% of Abor. population in high poverty tracts	1.5	17.0	15.3	22.5

[Contextualizing Poverty]

- Historic roots
- Contemporary improvements
- Growth of urban Aboriginal organizations contributes to emerging middle class

[Implications of socio-economic diversity]

- Homogenization contributes to perpetuation of negative stereotypes
- Need to recognize diversity of needs
- Need to recognize dispersal of urban Aboriginal populations

[Conclusion]

- “Myths” have some truth to them, but the reality is considerably more complicated
- Need to evaluate models designed to describe the urban experiences of other groups for their applicability to urban Aboriginal populations