

The Métis in the 21st Century Conference

June 18-20, 2003

Saskatoon

Day 3 – Tape 1

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Andy Siggner: What I would like to do is give you a demographic reality check based on the latest census data that we now have, which was the 2001 census data. And what I will do is take you through some of the concepts that are used in the census. This will, I think, be important in the context of the whole discussion over the last two or so days on identity, Métis identity. And we'll show you the kinds of questions we have in this census which allows one to, basically, identify Métis people, as well as other Aboriginal people, and then I'll take you through some information on the demographics—the population size and growth of, of the Métis population. I'll touch on, only briefly, 'cause Evelyn Peters will be looking at more carefully, the whole issue of geographic distribution of the Métis population. We'll look at the age and gender or sex structure of the population and migration. Let me just flip to that slide so you can see what I'm talking about here. And then I'll take a quickie look at some of the education labour force and income data. And then I'll finish up with some implications and, and conclusions.

There are four, sorry, there are four concepts, and these turn out to be questions in the census. The first question that allows us to identify peoples' origins or ancestry is, is what we usually refer to as the ethnic origin question, and this asks people about who their ancestors were. It doesn't ask them directly about who they are yet, but it asks them who their ancestors were, and you can respond by writing in as many ancestors or origins as you have, and multiple responses are indeed encouraged in that question. The, the other question, well, one of the, the second question that we have is a question which is a more direct question on whether or not, whether you are an Aboriginal person, and you can respond no or you can respond yes. And if you respond yes, you can indicate North American Indian, Métis, or Inuit or

even combos of those responses. And given some of the things we've heard over the last day or so, that certainly seems to be out there, and indeed, the data tell us that.

The other two questions, there's one directly on registered Indian or treaty status, and that allows for people to indicate whether they have legal Indian status. And the last one is on band membership, and that one was added more or less in 1991 after Bill C-31 allowed First Nations to establish their own membership codes. So it was then possible that a First Nation could have someone who had no Indian status actually be a member of the band. So we added those, that question to it. So those are the four concepts. And you can see that at least on, on two of them they come pretty close to the current MNC [Métis National Council] definition in terms of origins and, and self-identity. What the census doesn't get at is community recognition, which is a little tougher kind of issue to get at, the recognition by the Métis Nation.

Let me move on and show you a hundred years of growth in the Aboriginal population, based on the ancestry or origin question. You can see that from 1901, it, it was sitting at about 128,000 and, and stayed fairly flat. That's because the Aboriginal population in Canada at that time had very high fertility but it also had very high mortality. As a consequence, this is usually in demographers' terms considered the first stage of a demographic, the demographic transition model where you have high fertility, high mortality, which means very low growth, and you can see that for the first fifty years of the population being measured. After that, however, the population takes off into what we call the second stage of the demographic transition, a huge growth starting in the 1960s, and ramping up to about a seven-fold growth from 19-, the second half of the century, running from about a 160 odd thousand up to 1.3 million, which was the latest count of people who have reported at least one Aboriginal ancestor on their origin question.

What happened in the 1960s was that there was a very significant drop in infant mortality among the Aboriginal population. This is mostly

documented on the registered Indian population. However, when we look at the age structure of the Métis population, which we'll do in few minutes, likely the same sort of thing happened with the Métis population as well. What that meant was fertility stayed high, mortality dropped real fast, and what do you get? Rapid growth, right? In fact, what I've dubbed generally as the Aboriginal baby boom of the 1960s. It was a little different than the post-war Canadian baby boom, when a bunch of horny soldiers came home and decided they'd make lots of kids for, to make a family. This was a result of a drop, the Aboriginal boom was a result of a drop in infant mortality. End result? Pretty much the same, except the Aboriginal baby boom is delayed, is about ten years later into the 1960s and early '70s, compared to the post-war baby boom, which peaked in 1956-57.

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