

Métis Identity– Darren R. Préfontaine, Leah Dorion, Patrick Young and Sherry Farrell Racette

Section Objective: To better understand the roots of Métis identity and how the Métis have self-identified throughout history. The students will also be informed of current efforts by the Métis political leadership to foster a stronger Métis identity through self-governing institutions.

I. The Origins of Métis Identity (Darren R. Préfontaine)

We Métis are the descendants of Indian women who lived freely on the Plains of Western Canada and who were masters of their realm. We Métis are also the descendants of French Couruers de Bois, who worked for both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company in order to make commerce in the fur trade. Our heritage is of a unique race, which has the right to live freely and proudly and to be masters of our destiny. We are also called "Bois-brûlés" because of the colour of our skin but we prefer the name Métis from the French verb "métisser" to mix races.

Louis Riel (translation – Darren R. Préfontaine)

"I am, and we should all be proud of being Métis as we are the progeny of the best of two peoples."

Adrian Hope - Kikino Métis Settlement

Who are the Métis? This is a contentious question with no definitive answer. Numerous Métis political organizations and individuals have their own definitions as does the Canadian government and the larger society. The Métis are unique in that they are the first North Americans to emerge from both Indigenous (Algonquian, Athapascan, Iroquian and Siouxan) and European peoples. Métis heritage evolves around the civilizations of Indigenous America and of Western Europe. Not surprisingly, the Métis borrowed much from their First Nations, French, French-Canadian, Celtic and English parent cultures. However, their culture was distinct from these other cultures: the historic Métis took what they needed and perfected a unique hybrid culture.



Nobody knows for sure where and when the first European and Indigenous-American mixed-bloods emerged (through *Métissage*⁷). Much conjecture exists in the historical literature, some argue that the first Métis were the products of Inuit, Innu, Beothuk (who many feel were a culturally mixed people), or Mi'kmaq intermarriage with the Viking colonists of Vineland or Atlantic Canada around 1000 AD; still others maintain that 13th and 14th century Celtic and Basque fisher people and missionaries produced the first American mixed-population. Other legends tell stories of ancient Phoenicians, Romans and Chinese landing in North and South America in antiquity. Some British and American scholars ardently believe that some of the first colonists in Virginia married into such coastal tribes as the Delaware, and then vanished from the historical record. These earlier encounters may well have produced mixed-blood populations.

However, one important factor would have been missing in those peoples' development as a mixed population: they did not have a group consciousness. Thus no Ethnogenesis² occurred. When these early intermarriages occurred before the first era of European colonialist expansion in the Americas, the mixed-blood people created would have been small and would have been absorbed by their mothers' bands. Therefore, these individuals would not have been able to analyze how they differed from both their parent groups and were similar to other mixed-bloods. This is an essential precondition for Ethnogenesis to occur.

The Prairie/Great Plains Métis are not the only mixed blood populations, which have existed in the Americas and the world. In Latin America, the conquering Conquistadors of Spain and Portugal created vast populations of *Mestizos*, or people of Iberian and Indian descent. In the United States, whole populations of African-Americans married into American-Indian bands, particularly in the southern states. South Africa has its Coloureds, a mix between African tribesman and Dutch and British Settlers, the Islamic world saw much intermixture between Arabs, Hebrews, Turks, Persians and Europeans, and South Asia had a great deal of intermarriage between Malays and Chinese. So as a mixed population, the Métis of Canada are not unique: they are but one of many mixed-heritage populations, which have existed since time began. Nevertheless, the historic Métis of Rupert's Land are unique from most of these other mixed-blood populations because they developed a group consciousness. Few other mixed blood populations in the world have achieved this. Indeed, of all the Indigenous peoples in the New World, only the Métis survive as a group, which identifies itself as a mixed-heritage nation with a distinct political will separate from their First Nations and Euro-Canadian ancestors.

¹ **Métissage:** The mixing of distinct races in order to produce a new people.

² **Ethnogenesis:** Is the emergence of group awareness or identity for a newly created people, who have the same culture and usually economic background. Ethnogenesis leads to the creation of identities within smaller and regional subcultures or variants of a larger national culture.

Miscegenation, or interracial coupling, is a worldwide phenomenon and its very existence poses an interesting cultural dilemma. Why have some mixed-heritage populations developed a group consciousness, while others have not? How did such First Nations as the Mohawks incorporate large numbers of Euro-Americans into their nation, but still managed to preserve their Aboriginal identity? This is an interesting example because Mohawk nationalism is quite vocal despite the fact that technically all the members of that nation are of a mixed heritage. In all reality, choosing to be a Métis, a Mohawk or a Canadian or a member of any other group or nation, either exclusively or in conjunction with other groups and identities, means identifying yourself with others in a common cause or adventure. You and the people with whom you share an identity have decided to share a common past, both invented and real, even a founding myth, and a group mission, and a certain commonality, exclusivity and collective will as members of a distinct community. This is nationalism or group consciousness.

Group consciousness and/or nationalism usually emerges when a particular cultural group perceives itself to be neglected or mistreated by a larger group in society. Often this victimization is false, but it may as well be real when large numbers of people believe it to be true. However, victimization ideology, as it is known, is a reality for all the Métis and Aboriginal peoples in Canada, as it is for most of the world's Indigenous peoples. For all these people, their victimization is a reality firmly based on the historical and current social fact that they have suffered through centuries of colonial administration, which has been detrimental, or as some argue, genocidal to their group identities and individual well being. Indeed, their common plight as Canada's largest, poorest, and most victimized underclass is a unifying factor, albeit a negative one.

Most of what we know about early European-Indigenous intermarriage is from a European (specifically clerical) point of view. While the Europeans often encouraged the intermarriage of the French and Indians, they wanted it on their terms, in Church sanctioned marriages and not by marriages *à la façon du pays*³. European males' motives for marrying First Nations' women are easy enough to document. These early Canadian and Acadian marriages occurred partly because both colonies, like all frontier societies, lacked marriageable women, and also because First Nations woman offered the European and Creole⁴ extra economic support in key areas of the developing fur-trade, and the skills to survive in a harsh Canadian climate. By establishing these interracial marriages, the Aboriginal women were merely establishing the same economic and kinship ties which they had practiced since time immemorial and they were also practicing their autonomy of choice. They just substituted French men and *Canadiens*⁵ for Aboriginal men when they married *à la façon du pays*. Another factor, which was key in the development of these interracial marriages, was the simple fact that European trade goods such as a metal cooking pot or a blanket made life somewhat easier.

What does Métis mean?

The word "Métis" was first documented in 1615. It means a mixture of various races. The word has exactly the same meaning as the Spanish word *Mestizo*, and both come from the Latin word *Mixtus*. In Canada, nobody knows for sure how or when the Métis began calling themselves Métis, but Louis Riel is credited to have been the first

³ **À la façon du pays:** In French, this term means "marriage in the fashion of the country". The English equivalent is "country marriage".

⁴ **Creole:** Was a European born outside of Europe in colonial times. In Canada, French Canadians and Acadians were the first Creoles.

⁵ **Canadien:** Is the name, which the ancestors of the Québécois and other French Canadians gave themselves in New France to differentiate themselves from French people born in France, and later English Canadians, whom they called "*Les anglais*" (the English). The more vernacular "*Canayen*" was also used. In fact, the Michif word for all French people is "Kanayen".

person to call the French-Métis population of Rupert's Land, Métis in a formal writing. The proper pronunciation of Métis is actually "May-tis", but the Anglicized "May-tee" is the dominant pronunciation. Many Métis Elders still refer to themselves as "Meetis", "May-tis" or "Michif" – the archaic French pronunciation of the word Métis.

How the Historic Métis identified themselves.

The early Métis most often called themselves "*Michif*" or "*gens du libre*". They also had a variety of other names including: *Apetogosan* (half-son), *Canadians*, *Country Born*⁶, *Half-breed*, *Half-caste*, *Mixed-blood*, *Natives*, *Savages*, *British Indians*, *Home Guard Indians*, *French Indians*, *Indian French*, *Winterers*, *Pork eaters*, *Freemen*⁷, *Sauvages* (savages), *Coueurs de bois*⁸, *Voyageurs*⁹, *Hivernants*¹⁰, *Mangeurs du lard* (pork eaters), *Gens du libre* (Free People), *Bois brûlés*, (Burnt wood men) *Chicot* (burnt people) and *Wissakodewinimi* (half-burnt stick men). Therefore, the early Métis were given names based on their mixed ancestry, their occupation in the fur trade, their European or Aboriginal ancestry, their desire to be an independent people, and their skin colour, which was different from both their First Nations and European relatives.

The historic Red River Métis also recognized that they were "free" like their French-Canadian Voyageur fathers and First Nations mothers, and they lived their lives accordingly in the Great Lakes basin and on the Prairies as independent fur-traders, voyageurs and buffalo-hunters. The nomadic and free-spirited historic Métis gradually

⁶ **Country Born:** A historical term used to identify mixed blood children of British and Indian descent, as opposed to the term Métis, which originally identified mixed blood children of French and Indian descent.

⁷ **Freeman:** Independent traders and middlemen in the fur trade. Many Métis worked as freemen and many contracted their services out to the HBC and NWC.

⁸ **Coueurs de bois :** Early French and French-Canadian fur traders who ventured into Canada's interior to secure trade and make alliances with the Native people. The term means runners of the woods.

⁹ **Voyageurs:** French and French-Canadian fur traders that traveled westward in search of trade with the Aboriginal peoples.

¹⁰ **Hivernants:** Term for the Métis in the 19th century who remained on the prairies, often in small temporary villages, in winter to hunt bison once the commercial hunts were over. They camped in regions with sufficient fuel, water, and animals to subsist through the winter.

moved onto the Canadian Prairies and the American Great Plains, and married into the Cree, Saulteaux, Dene, Dakota, Lakota, Nakota, T'suu Tina and other members of the Black foot Confederacy. On the Plains, the Métis took on such names as *Otipemisiwak* or Free People or the Flower Beadwork People – a tribute to their penchant for brightly adorned flower beadwork clothing. These are names with positive connotations, and not surprisingly, the Métis preferred to call themselves by these terms.

How contemporary Métis identify

Today, many people in Canada of mixed Aboriginal and European descent identify as Métis. This is largely due to Section 35(2) of the *Constitution Act 1982*, which includes the Métis as one of Canada's three Aboriginal peoples, along with Indians (First Nations) and the Inuit. In Canada, the term "Métis" has become a generic term for any person of mixed First Nations, Inuit and European ancestry. For instance, the Métis Nation of Labrador represents people of mixed Inuit, Innu, Mi'kmaq, and Settler (Anglo-Celtic) backgrounds.

Until recently, the term *Métis* or *métis* was used to identify the French-Canadian-Indian mixed heritage children and the more pejorative "Half-breed" was used to identify all other mixed heritage people. Today, however, the term "Métis" is used to identify anyone with mixed European-Indian ancestry. Other terms, such as Cree-Metis, French-Métis, Ojibway-Métis, Mi'kmaq-Métis, Iroquois-Métis are being used by some Métis to recognize their diverse heritages. In fact, it is important to realize that no Métis experience is the same. To be Métis means being of mixed-descent but it also means having a diversity of experience. There is no one common Métis experience: each person, family and community experience is distinct. As a result, constructing Métis identity has proven difficult.

In the past, the Métis often lived in isolated communities and were largely able to preserve their identity. Over time, however, assimilation took a heavy toll on Métis identity: for several generations many suppressed their Métis heritage in order to better fit into Euro-Canadian society. This sense of negativism is changing. Currently, many Métis have moved to urban areas and are in the process of rebuilding their political, economic and social networks. Métis cultural restoration is a priority among Métis organizations and individuals.

How others have identified the Métis

A) New France (1534-1760)

The First European state to organize a government in Canada was (the Kingdom of) France. The French crown had a number of plans for Aboriginal people in the Americas, and while some of these plans were altruistic, most of their policies would have robbed the Métis and the First Nations people of their identity. One of the great myths which has emerged in the New World since the Contact Period has been the idea that the French embraced Native Americans, the English colonizers pushed them aside, and the Spanish and Portuguese murdered them. The royal policy of New France was similar to these other powers because it wanted to make the Native peoples French and Christian within its boundaries, but where it differed was that it recognized Aboriginal sovereignty on lands inhabited by the First Peoples. This was why most First Peoples outside the Six Nations Confederacy, the Fox and the Dakota aligned themselves with the French and *Canadiens*. The *Canadien coureur de bois* and *Voyageurs* were also establishing kinship ties with many Odawa, Ojibwa, Algonquin, Innu, Mi'kmaq and Huron women. The First Nation peoples could, therefore, look past French attempts to assimilate them, by putting "Black Robes" or missionaries in their

midst or the characterization of them by French officials as the "other" or "savage" (*sauvage*). In the end, *raison d'état* or for reasons of state politics meant that New France and these First Nations groups needed each other in their war against the Iroquois and the British.

New France was a frontier society, with little immigration from the *Métropole*¹¹, and because of this, there was a real shortage of marriageable women in the colony. Early in the French regime, Samuel de Champlain, the so-called "Father of Canada" wanted to merge his Creoles, the *Canadiens*, with the First Peoples in order to create a new Catholic and French "race" in Canada. In the process, some First Nations women were baptized into the Roman Catholicism and were given French-Catholic names. The same occurred for their children. New France did not, therefore, recognize baptized mixed-bloods or *Métis* as a separate group, but instead saw them as *Canadiens*. Of course, those *Métis* born in country marriages, a much larger population than the baptized ones, merged into their mother's bands.

B) How the British Colonial State defined *Métis* people (1763 - 1849)

After the British Conquest of Canada in 1760, the *Métis* and most First Peoples continued to have an uncertain future. In 1763, many Aboriginal nations in the Great Lakes area rose up against British rule under Pontiac's leadership. The British and British-Americans crushed the resistance, but it forced the British to realize that they had to placate Native sentiment. In 1763, the *Royal Proclamation* created a huge reserve in the Great Lakes basin in order to maintain peace between First Nations and colonists. However, in 1775, the American colonists rebelled, and most Aboriginal nations, including the *Métis* rallied to the British side. Britain lost the Revolutionary

¹¹ *Métropole*: Is a colonial country's mother country. Historically, France and Britain were Canada's two *métropôles*.

War, and the Aboriginal nations lost control of the Ohio Country. War with the Americans followed again in 1812, and many Métis fought for the Crown.

Despite the Métis' loyalty, the British did not recognize their distinctness. However, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC)¹² and its rival, the North West Company (NWC)¹³ recognized the Red River Métis' distinctness in the early 1800s. The NWC encouraged the development of Métis consciousness in order to use it in their struggle with the HBC. When such HBC laws as the 1814 *Pemmican Proclamation(s)*¹⁴ tried to stop the Métis' buffalo hunters from selling pemmican, this amounted to a tacit acceptance of Métis distinctiveness. Métis nationalism was born of these events, especially the 1816 Battle of Seven Oaks.¹⁵ After the 1821 merger¹⁶ of the two fur trading companies, many Métis found themselves unemployed as "surplus" labourers. They began to think of themselves as "Free Traders". As a result, further conflict between the Métis and the HBC would occur into the 1850s over the Company's trading monopoly¹⁷, which only served to heighten the Métis' group identity.

¹² **Hudson's Bay Company:** A powerful trading company based in England, and dedicated to trading for furs with North America's indigenous peoples. The Company started as a trading monopoly in 1670, and is Canada's oldest incorporated company.

¹³ **North West Company or NWC :** A Scottish, Anglo-American and Canadien (French Canadian) fur trade company established after the Conquest of Canada (1760) and based out of Montréal. The NWC used the same inland fur trade as the French and Canadiens and had the same rivalry with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). The NWC employed many more Métis than the HBC prior to the amalgamation of the two companies in 1821.

¹⁴ **Pemmican Proclamation:** A Hudson's Bay Company proclamation of July 1814, which attempted to regulate the Métis buffalo hunt. The Métis, of course, resisted this measure.

¹⁵ **(The) Battle of Seven Oaks :** A battle fought on June 19, 1816 in which about 20 Selkirk settlers led by Hudson's Bay Company employee Robert Semple tried to intercept and confiscate the pemmican of Métis buffalo hunters led by Cuthbert Grant. The battle was short and bloody, was a complete victory for the Métis, and became an important event in the creation of Métis nationalism.

¹⁶ **1821 Merger:** The union or amalgamation of the Hudson's Bay Company and its hated rival the North West Company. The merger ended about 50 years of hostilities between the rival companies, events, which involved many Métis.

¹⁷ **Trading monopoly:** Occurs when a trading company has exclusive right granted by government legislation, to trade in a specified territory. In the context of Métis history, this term meant the exclusive trading monopoly granted to the Hudson's Bay Company for the Hudson's Bay drainage basin granted in 1670 by the English Crown, which the Métis ignored either in the employ of the North West Company or as free traders.

C) How the Canadian State defined Métis (1849 until 1982)

Up until recently, the Canadian state continued the British colonial state's lead when it came to interpreting Métis identity. Early Canadian officials knew that the Métis were a distinct population, however they failed to recognize that distinctiveness in legislation. For instance, in the 1850 Robinson and Superior Treaties¹⁸, some Métis signed on as "Half breeds"; however, there was no legal recognition of the Métis as a distinct people in these statutes. This failure to recognize the Métis subsequently occurred in *The British North America Act (1867)*¹⁹, *The Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians Act (1869)*, *The Manitoba Act (1870)*²⁰, *The Land Claims in Manitoba Act (1873)*, *The Administration of Justice, North West Territories Act (1873)*, *The Indian Act (1876)*²¹ and *The North West Territories Act (1876)* and *The Dominion Lands Act (1877)*.²² In fact, *The Indian Act*'s only reference to "Half breeds" indicates that they were not allowed to take Treaty after they had taken Scrip. The choice left to the Métis by the Canadian state was clear: they had to become either a Status or Treaty Indian or a Citizen, but not Métis. Canada would not formally recognize the Métis as a distinct Aboriginal people until the 1982 Patriation of the Constitution.

What factors would have made the state reluctant to recognize Métis identity? Perhaps the most important factor may have been psychological: Euro-Canadians may

¹⁸ **Robinson and Superior Treaties**: Two treaties signed in 1850 between the Province of Canada and such Great Lakes area First Nations as the Ojibwa and Odawa (Ottawa). The treaties were named after the treaty negotiator for Canada and Lake Superior. These treaties were the basis for Canadian treaties after Confederation.

¹⁹ **(The) British North America Act**: An act of the British parliament, which created the Dominion of Canada on July 1, 1867 out of the former independent colonies of Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

²⁰ **(The) Manitoba Act (1870)**: An act of the federal government in response to the Red River Resistance, which created the province of Manitoba. Protective measures for the French language and Catholic school rights were put in place to protect Francophone Métis culture, but very little was legislated to develop and sustain a Métis land base, although 1.4 million acres of land was guaranteed to the Métis.

²¹ **(The) Indian Act**: This act, revised considerably, was established in 1877 and was based on colonial Indian policy in the Province of Canada (1841-1867). The act outlined Canada's legal responsibilities towards Indians. For many years, the *Indian Act* regulated every aspect of Indian life. The act defined who was Indian. The act was paternalistic and contained rules that discriminated against Indian women. Amendments to the act outlawed Indian fundraising for land claims and gatherings of Indian people for ceremonial activities. For instance, an amendment to the act banned the Potlatch, a social practice of gift exchanging among British Columbian First Peoples, in 1884, but was repealed in 1951.

not have wanted to recognize Métis distinctiveness, because by doing so they would not have been able to assimilate them. Euro-Canadians always recognized that the Métis were part European, and they attempted to cultivate the Métis' European heritage. During the fur trade, European and Euro-Canadian fathers of Métis and Country-Born children tried the very same tactic. The new Dominion of Canada²³ knew that recognizing the Métis as a distinct people on the Prairies would mean endangering the dream of extending Ontario across the Prairie West. The Canadian West was to be Anglo-Celtic and Protestant, and the French, Catholic and Aboriginal Métis did not fit into this pattern.

Unfortunately, there are not any concise definitions of who a Métis person actually is. Many have theorized about this topic and there are a number of definitions. Some argue that only those who are descendants of the historical Red River Métis are true Métis, others argue that all mixed-heritage people of Aboriginal and European heritage are Métis, and still others believe that all "Non-Status" Indians are Métis. Complicating all of this was the existence of the historic Métis and their legacy of resisting Anglo-Celtic hegemony in various locales. While these people are deservedly the martyrs of all Métis – and for many French, Aboriginal and Western Canadians as well – it must be remembered that they were a distinct people, who through great effort, were able to maintain a unique culture. This culture is greatly different than that of today's Métis: it was largely francophone and Michif-speaking, and relied on providing labour, technology and transportation for the fur trade and the bison hunt. Most Métis today, while having an Indigenous identification with the natural world, lead more sedentary lives and almost always speak English instead of their Aboriginal and patois heritage languages. However, there are many ties that bind the collective destinies of all-living

²² **(The) Dominion Lands Act:** In 1879, the act made provisions to provide Métis in the Northwest with a land grant based on the scrip system used in Manitoba.

²³ **Dominion of Canada:** The union or Confederation of the British North American provinces of Canada (Ontario and Québec), New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in 1867, and the subsequent additions of the North West Territories (1869), Manitoba (1870), British Columbia (1871), Prince Edward Island (1878), Alberta, Saskatchewan (1905) and

and deceased Métis. They all share a desire for redress regarding the bureaucratic theft of their land, through scrip and treaty, and for the Canadian state's consistent failure to legally recognize them as a charter or founding people of Canada.

While lawyers, academics and political activists argue over the exact definition of whom a Métis person actually is, the fact remains that to identify oneself as a Métis is solely a personal decision. Being a Métis is a choice to become a member of one of Canada's founding nations. Ultimately, then, anybody with mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry, no matter the mixture, or those First Nations who were absorbed by the Métis who feel that they are Métis, and those who identify with the Métis' historic struggle against the Canadian state, is a Métis. Therefore, having mixed Aboriginal and European ancestry is not the same as actually being a Métis. If, in fact, having such a mixed heritage was the sole prerequisite for being a Métis, then all the First Peoples of Canada, and a significant portion of the non-Aboriginal population would be Métis.

While there are Métis throughout Canada, it is in the Western provinces and territories where Métis identity is most vibrant and vocal. This is no coincidence because the Métis Nation was formed here and this is where the struggle for group recognition and an identifiable Métis land base resonates loudest. This is a result of historical circumstance, as well as human will. In fact, a number of historical, socio-economic and political factors have lead certain groups and individuals to proclaim a mixed-heritage or Métis heritage and others to submerge, abandon, lose or even deny it. Prairie Canada had a recognizable group of predominantly francophone Métis who forged a "New Nation" in 1816 at Red River by resisting Anglo-Celtic hegemony (encroachment on their lands), struggled to create the province of Manitoba in 1869-

Newfoundland and Labrador (1949). The term "Dominion" was also used interchangeably with Canada until the

70, and were finally martyred as a people during the 1885 Resistance. These were a series of events, which galvanized a sense of identity in Prairie Métis, as did their common socio-economic status, and ethnicity as mixed-heritage people with a unique Indigenous culture in English and French variants.

An essential component of Métis, and by extension all Aboriginal peoples, identity is the common desire to ameliorate their unfortunate social plight. To achieve this, the Métis believe that they need self-government, to have their Aboriginal rights, culture, and status recognized and to have their land claims resolved. Specifically, they desire the creation of a Métis homeland(s) where they can live, draw income from, and govern themselves in their own Aboriginal traditions. Thus, being Métis means sharing in and being part of a culture, but it is also a personal commitment to improve the lives of Métis people, and to have the Métis recognized as a distinct Aboriginal people. This is the mission of the Métis in Canada.

The fact that all Métis and all other Aboriginal people in Canada face the same economic, social and political marginalization should be enough to unify them in their challenge for redress. Colonialism and racism have hindered the development of a strong group identity among the Métis for generations. By this time Métis identity, in the 1960s and 70s, had become rebounded from three generations of colonialism. It does not, however, because of the imposition of various categories of "Aboriginality" by the Canadian state. The imposition of a Eurocentric conception of "Aboriginality" and the categorization of First Nations (Indians) under the 1876 *Indian Act* and subsequent Canadian laws, which have set up arbitrary definitions of all Aboriginal people in order to divide them, has resulted in wide scale factionalism in the Aboriginal rights movement.

1950s. The Dominion of Canada was created by the

All of this leads us back to the question posed earlier: why do certain mixed-heritage individuals and groups identify themselves as Métis and others do not? There are multiple reasons. In the case of the historic Red River Métis, they were allowed to develop and foster a common cultural identity, which many, if not the majority, of today's Métis identify as their own. Other Métis, however, are compelled to become Métis not only because they personally identify with the Métis' historic struggle for recognition, and see themselves as culturally Métis, but also because they resent the imposition of a Eurocentric conception of "Aboriginality" upon their group by the non-Aboriginal population. Many mixed heritage people and other Aboriginal people, such as the Non-Status First Nations, have acquired a Métis identity because it is the only category of "Aboriginality" left to them after the federal government took away their inherent right to be a "status" Aboriginal. This should not be too surprising because the Métis and "Non Status" First Nations are culturally and legally similar.

II: Métis Origins and Identity: A Brief Historiography - Darren R. Préfontaine

John Ralston Saul, one of Canada's most important man of letters, said in a lecture in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan in September 1998, that there are three pillars in Canada: First Nations, Francophones and Anglophones, but the cement that holds these three pillars together is the Métis. Moreover, he argued that the best thing to have come out of European and First Nations interaction was the creation of a new people, the Métis. One thing is certain, though, the Métis were integral to the development of Canada. Unfortunately, reading the traditional historiography of the Métis does not allude to this obvious truth: the Métis only entered the pages of history books in studies of the great continental fur trade, and when they resisted the Canadian state. In fact, the vast majority of books written about the Métis deal with the 1869-70 and 1885 Resistances in what are now Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

In the past, scholars and popular writers concentrated exclusively on Louis Riel and the two resistances, which he led, to the exclusion of other aspects of Métis history. As a result, the historical record was skewed and biased, and did not reflect the totality of the Métis experience, especially Métis origins. Even when studying the 1869-70 and 1885 Resistances, scholars, writers and educators have concentrated on the role of Louis Riel in fostering resistance, while the mass of Métis participants have been ignored, and have not been allowed to take their place in the historical tableau. Still further, very few of these studies were written by Métis academics; therefore, the authors coloured their work with the prevalent anti-Métis biases of their times. Reading books written by Giraud, Stanley or Morton reveal more about the scholar's and the dominant society's prejudices than about the Métis. Métis authors and academics, largely through Métis-run publishing houses like Pemmican Publications and the Gabriel Dumont Institute, have reclaimed their communities' experiences and deconstructed many of these long-held prejudices. As a result, community-based studies and social histories are now the dominant trend in Métis Studies. Métis participants in the Past are finally receiving that historical voice which others have denied them.

A particularly fascinating aspect of Métis Studies is Métis Origins and Identity, which has only really been an area of study since the late 1970s. In Canada, political impulses have contributed immensely to the study of Métis Origins. For instance, in 1982, the repatriated Canadian Constitution recognized that the Métis were one of Canada's three Aboriginal people; the others being Indians (First Nations) and Inuit.²⁴ This recognition has raised profound questions about who is Métis. However, this was not always so. The Métis of Canada and the United States have been called the "New

²⁴ Department of Justice, Canada, A Consolidation of the Constitution Acts, 1867 to 1982. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1987, Section 35 (2), 1982 Constitutional Act. p.69. "In this Act, "aboriginal peoples of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada".

Peoples”²⁵ because they emerged through intermarriage between two distinct populations, First Peoples and Europeans.

Astonishingly, however, the Métis almost always entered the traditional historiography²⁶ in studies of the great continental fur trade, or when they interrupted the plans of fur-trade officials or Canadian politicians, especially during the 1869-70 and 1885 Resistances. Historians only analyzed Louis Riel and the political events leading to the two major Métis resistances and ignored community or social historical analysis²⁷. Those bits of history, which discussed Métis origins was rabidly racist. For instance, two historians, the American Francis Parkman²⁸ and the French Canadian Lionel Groulx²⁹ believed that Métissage³⁰ brought Europeans to the same level of

²⁵Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S.H. Brown, “Introduction”, in Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. Brown (Editors), *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985, pp. 3-4.

²⁶ **Historiography:** Is the study of how history and historical interpretation has changed over time. History: Is the interpretation of the past events and people through the use of primary source documents. The branch of knowledge concerned with the recording and explanation of historical events. See Pierre Savard and A.B. McKillop, “Historiography”, *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*, Volume I A-For. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1985, pp. 817-19.

²⁷ In the past, Euro-Canadian historians generally wrote about political, economic and military matters. From the late 1800s until the early 1960s, the “Great Man of History” school was the dominant canon in Canadian historical writing. Rather than studying society as a whole, historians wrote biographies of politicians, soldiers and diplomats. Social and economic factors, along with the concerns of ordinary Métis, were rarely assessed. History was largely written from an ethnocentric (read Euro-Canadian male) perspective since the great man of history theory still applies to Métis history. For instance, popular historians continue to work on projects, which concentrate exclusively on Louis Riel rather than having a more thorough analysis of the Prairie Métis’ historic grievances. See George Woodcock and Paul Chartrand, *Making History: Louis Riel and the North-West Rebellion of 1885*. Montréal: The National Film Board of Canada, 1997. This interactive CD-ROM is a useful resource, especially its biographies, photographs and primary documents. However, its Aboriginal content is limited to a few quotes from Métis scholar, Paul Chartrand. Nonetheless, with this focus on individuals we are learning more about some of the peripheral people in Louis Riel’s life including his friends and secretaries. See: Raymond J.A. Huel, “Living in the Shadow of Greatness: Louis Schmidt, Riel’s Secretary”, *Native Studies Review*, pp. 16-27; Donatien Frémont, *Les Secrétaires de Riel: Louis Schmidt, Henry Jackson and Philippe Garnot*. Montréal: Les éditions Chantecler Ltée, 1953.

²⁸ Francis Jennings, “Francis Parkman: A Brahmin among Untouchables”, *William and Mary Quarterly*, XLII, 1985, pp. 305-28. Parkman wrote during the mid and late-nineteenth century.

²⁹ Esther Delisle, *The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-Semitism and the Delirium of Extremist Right-Wing Nationalism in French Canada 1929-1939*. Toronto and Montréal: Robert Davies Publishing, 1995, pp.80-81 In one of his polemical histories of New France, Canon Groulx maintained that there were only 94 marriages between Aboriginal people and the *anciens Canadiens* (French Canadians). Furthermore “these Métis have left no descendants among us, as their families were extinguished at the end of the eighteenth century”. Lionel Groulx, a priest and the first professional French-Canadian historian wrote between the 1910s and the 1960s. He founded both *L’Action Nationale* and *Revue D’histoire de la Amérique française*. In Québec, Groulx’s views on Métissage have been discredited. For instance, the Québec historian, Louise Dechêne studied the parish registers of Ville Marie (Montréal) from 1642 to 1712, and found only seven recorded marriages between First Nations and French colonists. However, she argues that this does not mean that Métissage did not occur in early colonial Canada, for even around Montréal there were incalculable marriages “à la façon du pays” – common law marriages which would not have been recorded by the Church. Louise Dechêne. *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth Century Montreal*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill and Queen’s University Press, 1992, p. 14.

"savagery" as Native Americans. Parkman's racist views regarding European and First Nations intermixing are articulated in the following excerpt from one of many historical narratives. Here is Parkman's analysis of a French-Canadian *coureur de bois*, which would be likely very similar to his view of a Métis:

The fur-trade engendered a peculiar class of men, known by the appropriate name of bush rangers, or *coureurs de bois*, half-civilized vagrants, whose chief vocation was conducting the canoes of the traders along the lakes and rivers of the interior; many of them, however, shaking loose every tie of blood and kindred identified themselves with the Indian and sank into utter barbarism...The renegade of civilization caught the habits and imbibed the prejudices of his chosen associates. He loved to decorate his long hair with eagle feathers, to make his face hideous with vermilion, ochre, and soot, and to adorn his greasy hunting frock horsehair fringes. His dwelling, if he had one, was a wigwam. He lounged on a bearskin while his squaw boiled his venison and prepared his pipe. In hunting, in dancing, in singing, in taking a scalp, he rivalled the genuine Indian. His mind was tinctured with the superstitions of the forest. He had faith in the magic drum of the conjuror; he was not sure that a thunder cloud could not be frightened away by whistling at it through the wing bone of an eagle; he carried the tail of a rattle-snake in his bullet pouch by way of amulet; and he placed implicit trust in his dreams...³¹

Traditional North-American historians felt that the existence of Métis and other mixed-race populations impeded European settlement and created a corrupted gene pool.³² From about 1850 until the 1960s, the Frontier Thesis,³³ the Savage-Civilization

³⁰ **Métissage:** "Croissement, mélange de races. Le métissage de la population brésilienne. Le métissage culturel – acculturation." "Race-mixing; race-mixing in Brazil; cultural-mixing". Source: *le Robert, quotidien. Dictionnaire pratique*

³¹ Francis Parkman, *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Conquest of Canada, Volume 1: To the Massacre at Michillimackinac*. (Introduction by Michael N. McConnell). Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994, pp. 78-79.

³² Often European primary sources from the early colonial period, such as the *Jesuit Relations* often had negative portrayals of Aboriginal people. "Some say to us, 'Do you think you are going to succeed in overturning the Country'. Thus do they style the change from their Pagan and Barbarous life to one that is civilized and Christian". *Jesuit Relations* (1936), 10:27. See Alfred Goldsworthy Bailey, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures, 1504-1700: A Study in Canadian Civilization*. Second Edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969 and Thierry Berthlet, "La Francisation des Amérindiens en Nouvelle France: Politiques et Enjeux Frenchifying the Natives in New France: Policies and Aims", *Etudes Canadiennes/ Canadian Studies*, No.34, pp. 79-89. Finally, consult: Ramsay Cook, editor, *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993. This book is useful in that it provides the reader with Cartier's view of First Peoples.

³³ The Frontier Thesis was a canon of historical discourse in North America and other areas colonized by Europeans, which maintained that the agricultural frontier of settlement is vibrant and shows the best traits of the national culture. Before European settlement could take root in a particular frontier a number of "obstacles" had to be overcome including the "pacification" of Indigenous peoples, the clearing of land and the creation of infrastructure. This theory and its Eurocentric moorings have been discredited, and scholars have tried to downplay its thesis of civilisation clashing with a savage frontier. This frontier is "...the 'westward movement', the expansion of European-American Civilization at the expense of both traditional societies and natural ecology. Such a history is at heart dialectical, a history of conflict, and as Frederick Jackson Turner pointed out back in 1893, the point of interaction between the old (the wild...and Indian culture) and the new (explorers, mountain men, and pioneers) is the frontier". J. Lyon, "The Literary West" in Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O'Connor and Martha A. Sandweiss, Editors, *The Oxford History of the American West*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, (pp. 709-44), p. 707. In the same volume consult Charles S. Peterson "Speaking for the Past", pp. 743-69, for a better understanding of how the frontier thesis marginalized Aboriginal people. Métis historian Olive Dickason argues that the savage-civilisation

dichotomy³⁴ and Social Darwinism ³⁵ were articulated in the newly expanding social sciences, humanities and in popular literature. Such sweeping, Eurocentric³⁶ theories, enthused more by personal prejudice than empirical observation, were long deconstructed, and are no longer acceptable paradigms.

"Progress" meant that traditional Aboriginal lifestyles were obsolete. Thus emerged the curious concept of the "vanishing Indian" (and Métis), a rationalization justifying mistreatment of a rival culture. In fact, the vanishing First Nations motif produced the distinct social science of Anthropology, which initially sought to document First Nations civilization before it disappeared. From dime-store novelists and the hacks of the grub-street press, to such talented and respected authors as Mark Twain (his "Injun Joe" in *Tom Sawyer* was an evil Métis) and Walt Whitman, emerged the view that all First Nations and Métis were savage, evil, cruel, and unpredictable elements that had to be subdued. The widespread cruelty of the American Indian Wars, which were

dichotomy existed as early as the Contact Period (1534-1666). The ethnocentric primary documents, such as the Jesuit Relations left over from the early Contact Period obviously coloured Parkman's and other historian's interpretations of the contact period. Olive Dickason, *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1997. See also Cornelius J. Jaenen "L'autre en Nouvelle France/ The Other in New France", *Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers*, 1989, pp. 1-12; Cornelius Jaenen, "Amerindian views of French Culture in the Seventeenth Century", *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. LV. No.3. September 1974, pp. 261-291.; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. This book is particularly useful in that the author argues that the French colonists and the Aboriginal nations of the Great Lakes region were able to achieve a rough amount of cultural accommodation before this region became inundated with Anglo-American farmers following the War of 1812.

³⁴ During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, scholars, journalists and popular authors noticed the ease with which Europeans colonised Indigenous peoples throughout the world. They equated this trend to the inherent supremacy of European peoples over Native populations. Extreme Eurocentrism followed which led to colonialist tragedies from Africa, Southeast Asia to the North American Plains. Out of this racist thinking emerged the discipline of Anthropology, which was initially the study of the "disappearing" Indians of North America. Anthropologists and historians created a hierarchical structure, which placed Northwest European and American civilization at the top and hunting and gathering and Indigenous culture at the bottom. "Stages" of civilization would occur after years of struggle and adaptation, and a particular culture could either move up or down the savage-civilization ladder. See Bruce G. Trigger, "The Historians' Indian: Native Americans in Canadian Historical Writing from Charlevoix to the Present", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXVII, No.3, 1986, pp. 315-342. See as well: Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995 and Francis Jennings, "Historians and Indians" in the *Encyclopaedia of North American Indians*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996, pp. 248-51.

³⁵ **Social Darwinism:** This concept was based on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. It postulated that human societies evolve, like humans have biologically. Hunting and gathering societies were seen as the least developed, and industrial societies, especially those of Europe, as the most advanced. To better understand how Social Darwinism and Eugenics tainted the social discourse in Canada from 1885 to 1945, consult: Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics, 1885-1945*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990.

³⁶ **Eurocentric:** Is a bias, which many people in the West have long had towards indigenous cultures throughout the world. Essentially, the Eurocentric worldview emphasizes that every thing of value and virtue has come from

sensationally reported as just retribution for acts of Aboriginal "barbarism", contributed to what can only rightly be called hate literature. As usual, Canadian authors and historians embraced the anti-Indian canon, although less virulently. Canada's racism has always been more polite than that of its southern neighbour.

It was erroneous and insulting for past historians to assume that the Métis were a static people incapable of evolving and were thus doomed by the onward march of progress. People, as individuals and as groups are never static: individuals evolve and devolve and society is always in a constant state of flux. Métis identity is flexible, and can readily adapt to a variety of situations, because it is a mental rather than a physical or environmental construct. The fact is that the Métis developed their sense of nationhood not because of European and Euro-Canadian civilization or the North West Company or even Louis Riel. Rather, it was the natural expression of their own reality in the context of their own social development. The Métis should be seen as active agents and participants in their fate. Their collective will conditioned their response to the intrusion of hostile Euro-Americans. In the end, they were not overwhelmed because they were "primitive" or failed to adapt to the advent of "progress"; they were overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers. These Métis were, in fact, active agents of their destiny, and their ability to adapt or was the essence of their identity. Of course, the Eurocentric view that civilization had to triumph over an "imperfect" natural environment found no empathy with the Métis because they, like all Aboriginal peoples, saw (and still see) themselves as an "imperfect" part of a "perfect" and ever-changing natural and historical cycle.

If literature, history or even anthropology failed to persuade Euro-North-Americans that those Métis and Indians who resisted becoming "citizens", were "un-British" or

Christian and capitalist-based Western European and North-American society, and everything from non-Western

"un-American", than nineteenth century science would. Indeed, a hodgepodge of eclectic ideas, some pseudo-scientific and others legitimate theory, but perversely twisted, emerged and categorized the human race into different racial hierarchies. The most notorious, and eventually genocidal of these was Social Darwinism, a racist ideology that lent credence to the Europeans' conquest of the world. Racial hierarchies based on the virility, intelligence and martial prowess of various races emerged with the Anglo-Saxon/German or "Aryan" "race" as the ideal and the worlds' Indigenous peoples at the bottom of the totem, as less than fully human. Of course, the mixing of races, particularly a "noble" one such as the Anglo-Saxon or Gallic race with its "inferior" counterpart horrified many.

The "mongrelization" of the bloodlines was a very real concern at this time and the folly of *Métissage* and other acts of miscegenation or race mixing was a popular topic of learned discussion. It was almost universally believed that the children of such interracial unions acquired the worst traits of their ancestral races. In fact, a whole folk culture developed in Anglo-American society ridiculing the "Squaw man", a white man who married a Aboriginal -American woman and produced a "mongrel progeny". Legal repression against mixed-blood people, particularly against Mulattos, Chicanos and American *Métis* was common in many American states from the mid 1900s onwards. Fortunately, Canada never had any anti-miscegenation laws; however, social convention made it almost impossible for interracial marriages to exist. Canada instead attempted to take away the *Métis*' right to be recognized as an Aboriginal people by imposing its own standards of "Aboriginality" upon them.

The liberating climate of the 1960s led to the rise of socially conscious groups in society who resented the way traditional political history ignored their groups' contribution to

cultures is not as important.

the Canadian mosaic. This led to an explosion of writing by regional, feminine, Aboriginal and ethnic historians who wrote their own interpretations of the past. Social, intellectual, women's and cultural history soon emerged as sub-disciplines of Canadian history. In particular, the sub-discipline of Ethnohistory³⁷, which uses Anthropological techniques, particularly Cultural Relativism³⁸, has gone a long way to dispel the myths and biases of traditional historians.

Since the mid 1960s, a new generation of historians and social scientists have analyzed the historical record, employed the findings of archaeology, and have studied contemporary Métis and other Aboriginal cultures, and have determined that these people were not any more primitive relative to their Anglo-American contemporaries. Their *weltanschauung* (worldview) was merely different from that of the Europeans, and it was best suited to meet their socio-economic needs. Seen in this light, their culture, be it First Nations, Métis or Voyageur, was actually practical and malleable to the prevailing social, economic and political context of the time. However, historians failed to understand why Métissage occurred, and they certainly failed to analyse this phenomenon from the point of view of Native women. It was not until Jennifer Brown and Sylvia Van Kirk, both non-Aboriginal women, published their groundbreaking works that the role of Native women in fostering Métissage became documented.³⁹ Using anthropological techniques, particularly Ethnohistory and Cultural Relativism, which maintains that we should not judge traditional cultures by our standards, did this.

³⁷ **Ethnohistory:** Is a sub-discipline in history which attempts to be sensitive to the point of view of particular groups of people different than that of the historian writing about them. See Bruce G. Trigger, "Ethohistory: Problems and Prospects" *Ethnohistory* 29, No. 1, (1982), pp. 1-19.

³⁸ **Cultural Relativism:** An anthropological theory, which maintains that we should not make value judgements against traditional cultures since they can only be evaluated by their own standards and values.

Knowledge about Métis origins is still emerging and Miscegenation⁴⁰ Studies is still in its infancy. Not surprisingly, the process of “being and becoming” Métis is one of the most interesting areas of Métis Studies. Nobody knows for sure when the first Métis person lived or when Contact first occurred.⁴¹ Until recently, little academic attention was paid to the origins of the Métis. Furthermore, few historical surveys – other than the recently released *Metis Legacy* and the *Metis: Our People, Our Story* CD-ROM ⁴² – have attempted to assess the full sweep of Métis history. Yet, more comprehensive and detailed historical surveys of the entire Métis experience in Canada would be welcome.

Little is known about the development of Métis group identity. One of the inherent problems in researching this field is the lack of primary resources relating to the development of Métis group identity throughout North America. Since historical memory in Métis society is largely orally based, it is extremely difficult to analyze the development of early Métis nationalism or group identity, especially outside of Prairie Canada. Métis perspectives from the early 1800s have largely been lost. With so few

³⁹ Jennifer S.H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980. Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870*. Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980.

⁴⁰ **Miscegenation:** “The interbreeding of races, esp. of whites and non-whites”. Source: *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary*.

⁴¹ **Pre-Contact Period:** The period in history before Europeans came into contact with Aboriginal peoples. **Post-Contact Period:** In the Americas, the period in history after Europeans came into contact with Aboriginal peoples. This period is most often associated with all recorded time after 1492 and Christopher Columbus’ alleged “discovery” of the New World. See Bruce G. Trigger, *The Indians and the Heroic Age of New France*. Ottawa: the Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet, No. 30. A popular, but much too cliched joke states that the first Métis person was born nine months after the first European arrived. The period of New France (1534-1763) was when the Métis people emerged and developed a distinct identity separate from First Nations, *Canadiens* and British Americans. See also George R. Hamell, “Strawberries, Floating Islands, and Rabbit Captains: Mythical Realities and European Contact in the Northeast during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 21, No. 4 (1987), pp. 72-94; Christopher L. Miller, “A New Perspective on Indian-White Contact: Cultural Symbols and Colonial Trade” *The Journal of American History*, Vol.73, No.2, September 1986, pp. 311-28; Howard Adams, *The John Cabot Myth: Did Cabot Discover Newfoundland? The Answer has to be No!* Vancouver, 1997; Bruce G. Trigger, “Early Native North American Responses to European Contact: Romantic versus Rationalist Interpretations”, *The Journal of American History*, March 1991, pp. 1195-1215. For a controversial look at Indian-European contact, consult James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Context of Culture of Cultures in Colonial North America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 and James Axtell, *Natives and Newcomers: The Cultural Origins of North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Finally, it would be well worth consulting Denys Delâge, *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600-64*. Translated by Jane Brierley. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993.

⁴² Lawrence J. Barkwell, Leah Dorion and Darren Préfontaine, Editors. *Metis Legacy*. Winnipeg and Saskatoon: The Louis Riel Institute of the Manitoba Metis Federation and the Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2001. Leah Dorion, Todd

written and oral resources it is difficult to analyze such fundamental issues as early Métis nationalism and group identity. As a result, such non-Métis scholars as Giraud and Stanley maintained that the Métis did not develop a group consciousness out of their own cognizance.⁴³

A recent development in the historiography is the study of the “other” Métis – Métis who lived outside of Rupert’s Land. These new works challenge the conventional way of thinking about the Métis experience since they analyse the emergence of mixed-heritage groups throughout North America. Historically, many early mixed-heritage populations, particularly in the Great Lakes region, and what are now Québec and the Maritime Provinces were assimilated into First Nations, Acadian and French-Canadian populations. As Olive Dickason argues most of these Métis groups did not identify as being Métis, despite their mixed heritage.⁴⁴ Other historic Métis groups, particularly, in what are now the Northwest Territories, the Great Lakes area and in the Pacific Northwest, readily identified as being Métis.⁴⁵ Consequently, their Métis identity was localized in small communities, and did not cover large expanses of territory. The Rupert’s Land Métis are therefore unique because they developed a group consciousness and a political will separate from First Nations and Euro-Canadians, over a large geographical area.

Paquin and Darren R. Préfontaine. *The Metis: Our People, Our Story*. Edmonton: Arnold Publishing and the Gabriel Dumont Institute, 1999. This is the first interactive multimedia CD-ROM relating to the Métis experience.

⁴³ George F.G. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, p. 11 and Marcel Giraud, (Translation: George Woodcock), *The Métis in the Canadian West*. Volume I. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986, pp. 406-09.

⁴⁴ Olive P. Dickason, “Frontiers in Transition: Nova Scotia 1713-1763 Compared to the North-West, 1869-1885” in F. Laurie Barron and James Waldrum in *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986, pp. 22. 38; Olive Patricia Dickason “From ‘One’ Nation in the Northeast to ‘New Nation’ in the Northwest: A Look at the emergence of the Métis” in Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown (Editors) in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985, pp. 19-37.

⁴⁵ Bunny Yanik Koosel, Ingrid Kritsch and Gordon Lennie, *The Fiddle and the Sash: A History of the Metis of the Northwest Territories*. Yellow Knife, Northwest Territories: Metis heritage Association, 1992. See also K.S. Coates and W. R. Morrison, “More Than a Matter of Bloods: The Federal Government, the Churches and the Mixed Blood populations of the Yukon and the Mackenzie Valley, 1890-1950” in F. Laurie Barron and James B. Waldrum (Editors), *1885 And After: Native Society in Transition*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1986, pp. 253-277. North Slave Métis Alliance, “Strong Like Two People: North Slave Métis History” in Barkwell et al, *Métis Legacy*, pp. 135-156

All the authors who contributed to the “New Peoples”⁴⁶ Forum and *Metis Legacy*⁴⁷ demonstrate that Métis identity has existed in various locales, over time. For instance, Jacqueline Peterson’s excellent essay “Many roads to Red River: Métis Genesis in the Great Lakes Region, 1680-1815”, demonstrates that various Métis communities were on the verge of proclaiming their group identity before the region was inundated by Anglo-American agrarians.⁴⁸ Verne Dusenbury and Martha Foster each document the dispossession of the Montana Métis.⁴⁹ John S. Long analyzes how the Métis in northeastern Ontario were registered as Status Indians during negotiations for Treaty Nine,⁵⁰ and Trudy Nicks and Kenneth Morgan describe how a unique Métis identity developed in Grande Cache Alberta.⁵¹ Tanis Thorne’s masterful monograph *The Many Hands of My Relations* discusses the development of a mixed-blood group identity in the Lower Missouri.⁵² Leah Dorion details how her family, the Dorion’s, established mixed-blood/Métis kinship ties from Lower Canada (present-day Québec), to the Lower Missouri, to the Pacific Northwest and finally to Cumberland House, in what is now Saskatchewan.⁵³ Métis identity in the Pacific North West has finally been delineated by John C. Jackson⁵⁴ and by Sylvia Van Kirk in her recent essay on Victoria, British

and Diane Payment, “The Métis Nation of the Northwest Territories: The Historic Athabasca-Mackenzie, in Barkwell et al, *Metis Legacy*, pp. 157-68.

⁴⁶ Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown, Editors, *The New Peoples*, 1996.

⁴⁷ Barkwell et al, *Metis Legacy*.

⁴⁸ Jacqueline Peterson, “Many Roads to Red River: Métis Genesis in the Great Lakes region, 1680-1815”, in *The New Peoples*, pp. 37-72.

⁴⁹ Verne Dusenberry, “Waiting for a Day That Never Comes: The Dispossessed Métis of Montana” in *The New Peoples*, pp. 119-136. Martha Harroun Foster, “The Spring Creek (Lewiston) Métis and Métis identity in Montana”, in Barkwell et al, *Metis Legacy*, pp. 99-104.

⁵⁰ John S. Long, “Treaty No.9 and Fur Trade company families: Northeastern Ontario’s Halfbreeds, Indians, Petitioners and Métis”, in *The New Peoples*, pp. 137-62.

⁵¹ Trudy Nicks and Kenneth Morgan, “Grande Cache: The Historic Development of an Indigenous Alberta Métis population” in *The New Peoples*, pp. 163-85.

⁵² Tanis Thorne. *The Many Hands of My Relations: French and Indians on the Lower Missouri*. St. Louis: University of Missouri Press, 1996 and Thorne, “ ‘Breeds are not a Tribe’: Mixed Bloods and Métissage on the Lower Missouri”, in Barkwell et al, *Metis Legacy*, pp. 93-98.

⁵³ Leah Dorion, “Are the Métis a Western Canadian Phenomena? A Case Study of the Dorion Trading Family” in Barkwell et al, *Metis Legacy*, pp. 115-126.

⁵⁴ John C. Jackson, *Children of the Fur Trade: Forgotten Métis of the Pacific Northwest*. Missoula, Montana: Mountain Press Publishing, 1995.

Columbia's founding Métis families.⁵⁵ Interestingly, Jackson demonstrates that the Pacific Métis and the Red River Métis were in contact with each other since the early 1800s.⁵⁶

However, as Brown and Peterson argue, Métis history is plagued by the necessity to reconstruct the past since the historical record was largely written (almost always by Europeans or Euro-North Americans), and much of the oral knowledge of these early Métis communities was lost⁵⁷ through assimilation⁵⁸ and acculturation.⁵⁹ The same phenomenon can be observed in other mixed-heritage peoples including the Kanakas,⁶⁰ Mestizos, Freejacks,⁶¹ Melungeons,⁶² Creek Indians,⁶³ and Choctaw "Half-breeds".

Métis origins have finally become a full sub-discipline within Métis Studies. Even the most adept researcher would have a very difficult time at finding, let alone processing all the articles and books that are emerging in this field. As more scholarly and community input emerges, our perception of the Métis past and identities will continue

⁵⁵Silvia Van Kirk, "Tracing the Fortunes of Five Founding Families of Victoria", Autumn-Winter 1997-98, No. 115-116, *BC Studies*, pp. 149-179.

⁵⁶ Jackson, *Children of the Fur Trade*, p.206

⁵⁷ Peterson and Brown, *The New Peoples*, p.9.

⁵⁸ **Assimilation:** When a person from a minority culture loses his or her cultural identity and becomes part of the majority culture. While often voluntary, assimilation can be forced as was the case for Aboriginal peoples and many non-British immigrants coming to Canada. Cultural Suppression is a related term in which a majority culture forces its mores on a less willing minority culture.

⁵⁹ **Acculturation:** The mutual cultural accommodation between two groups. The most documented case of acculturation was the mutual cultural borrowings between First Nations and Europeans during the *ancien régime* (1534-1849) in Canada. See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1660-1885*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991; James Axtell, "The White Indians of Colonial America" *William and Mary Quarterly*, No. 37 (January 1985), pp. 855-83; James Axtell, *The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

⁶⁰ Jean Barman, "What ever Happened to the Kanakas? ", *The Beaver*, December 1997-January 1998, pp. 12-19. The Kanakas are people of mixed First Nations and Polynesian heritage (from Hawaii) who settled in the Pacific North West during the latter fur trade.

⁶¹ Darrell A. Posey, "Origin, Development and Maintenance of a Louisiana Mixed-Blood Community: The Ethnohistory of the Freejacks of the First Ward Settlement" *Ethnohistory*, No. 26, Vol. 2 (Spring 1979), pp. 177-92. The "Freejacks" are a mix of Cajuns, French Creoles, African-Americans and Native-Americans. Apparently, this group felt shame about their mixed-heritage identity.

⁶² "Meet the Melungeons" in *The Fortean Times*, No. 106, (January, 1998), pp. 24-27. Melungeons are people originating from the mountains of eastern Tennessee and their origins are probably First Nations and Turkish.

⁶³ Gary B. Nash, "The Hidden History of Mestizo America", *The Journal of American History*, December 1995 (pp.941-962), pp. 943-47. See as well: William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden History*. Toronto: Collier MacMillan Canada Inc., 1988.

to evolve. For the Métis, this has meant that a more complete understanding of the Métis experience has emerged. Recent historiographical works, such as J.R. Miller's "From Riel To Métis,"⁶⁴ have articulated many, if not most, of these much needed changes in Canadian historical writing. These essays and other historical works discuss all aspects of past Métis existence, not just Riel's struggles. Nevertheless, the Métis experience still remains a "hidden"⁶⁵ history best expressed by the memories of Elders and other community people, despite many exciting developments in the literature, much of this work still needs to be deconstructed⁶⁶ of bias. Until recently, most authors maintained that the Métis phenomenon was limited to Rupert's Land.⁶⁷

III – Timeline of Laws and Legislation that have affected Métis Identity - Leah Dorion and Patrick Young

Laws are rules and regulations that people follow to maintain social order. They also impact upon a people's identity – both positively and negatively. The Métis have created laws collectively in order to set acceptable standards for the community. The Métis also had many laws imposed upon them. Currently, the Métis also abide by laws created by the Canadian state. In Canadian history existing Métis rights, which is the

⁶⁴ J.R. Miller, "From Riel to Métis", *Canadian Historical Review*, LXIX, 1, 1988, pp. 1-20. Miller assesses much of the literature pertaining to Métis history. This fine essay is a good start to better understand how the historiography on this topic has evolved from its focus on Louis Riel to the study of Métis communities. See also J. R. Miller, "Native History" in Doug Owsram (editor) *Canadian History: A Reader's Guide, Volume 2: Confederation to the Present*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, pp. 179-201. See also Stephen Hewit, "Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something collected: Recent Western Canadian Historical Writing", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 13 (Fall 1997), pp. 162-172.

⁶⁵ Gary B. Nash "The Hidden History of Mestizo America", *The Journal of American History*. December 1995, pp. 941-962. In this article, Nash documents the history of mixed-race people in America, specifically attempts by the dominant culture (Anglo-Americans) to obliterate the memory of these "hidden" people.

⁶⁶ **Deconstruct:** A belief in Postmodernism which attempts to demolish oppressive and conformist ways of thought in society by emphasising group differences and the inclusion of religious, sexual, racial and ethnic minorities into the culture of mainstream society. For a look at how a Métis scholar has deconstructed many of the historic myths pertaining to the Métis. See Howard Adams, *A Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization*. Penticton, British Columbia: Theytus Books, 1995, pp. 25-35 and 93-101. To better understand the theories of Postmodernism consult: Richard Appignanesi and Chris Garrat, *Postmodernism for Beginners*. Cambridge England: Icon Books Limited. 1996. Howard Adams specialises in colonization, however, for a more thorough analysis of the mind of the colonized and the colonizer, consult Albert Memmi *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1991.

⁶⁷ Rupert's Land was the territory of the Hudson's Bay Company in North America, which was granted to the Company in 1670, by Charles II to his cousin, Prince Rupert. Rupert's Land roughly corresponds to present day northern Québec, Ontario, Manitoba and most of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and consists of the lakes and rivers, which drain into Hudson Bay. Canada purchased the territory from the Company in 1869; the Red River Resistance soon followed since the Aboriginal population was not consulted about the land transfer. See Shirlee Anne Smith, "Rupert's Land" in *The Canadian Encyclopaedia, Volume III: Pat-Z*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1986, p. 1607.

basis of political identity, have been identified in several legal documents. The Métis identify these documents as evidence of their special relationship with Canada. The first important legal documents are the *Adhesion to Treaty Three* and the *Royal Proclamation* of 1763 which both provide legal and political protection for the inherent rights of the Métis Nation and Métis people. In a modern context, the Constitution Act 1982 and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms have recognized the Métis as a distinct Aboriginal people. This section will outline the process of creating laws and legislation and how government laws have impacted on Métis identity. Here are some laws, which have had impact on Métis identity:

1493 Papal bull by Alexander VI: Set forth the principle that all conquests were justifiable so long as their aim was to convert the Aboriginal peoples of the Americas to Christianity. This led to wide-scale colonization⁶⁸ of the New World by Spain, Portugal, France, England and the Netherlands.

1625 Hugo Grotius in *On the Law of War and Peace*: Concluded that unoccupied lands in America could legally be claimed by the nation that first discovered them and took possession of them. The term "terra nullius" or "empty land" was thereafter used to justify European conquest of the New World.

1670 Royal Charter issued to the Hudson's Bay Company: The King of England issued a charter which was to grant the land of the Hudson's watershed (called Rupert's Land) to be held "in free and common socage" so long as the lands are "not already actually possessed by or granted to any of our subjects, or possessed by the subjects of any other Christian Prince or State."

1763 *Royal Proclamation*: Issued by King George III of England recognized that Aboriginal peoples legally and originally owned their lands and that the best means of acquisition for the British colonies was the transfer of lands from their original inhabitants and their purchase by the Crown. Essentially, the proclamation recognized the Indians' rights to occupy the lands, subject to the Crown's underlying sovereignty of the lands acquired by the *Doctrine of Discovery*. The Proclamation was included in the *Canadian Constitution Act, 1982*. The act empowered governments and councils in Rupert's Land to enforce English law.

1845 The "Half-breeds" as and Administrative Category: Upper Canada. It was with the creation of the colonial government in Upper Canada (present-day southern Ontario) in 1791 that the relations between the First Nations and Métis and the Canadian government were

⁶⁸ **Colonization:** The incursion of the colonizing group into a geographical area. Usually, this takes the form of forced-voluntary entry; acting in its own interests, the colonizing group forces its way into an area. The second attribute of colonization is its destructive effect on the social and cultural structures of the Indigenous group. The values of Aboriginal people were either ignored or violated. Indigenous political, economic, kinship and religious systems are destroyed. The third and fourth aspects of colonization are the interrelated processes of external political control and Aboriginal economic dependence. In the standard practice of colonization, the mother country sends out representatives through which it indirectly rules the newly conquered land. The Aboriginal communities are kept underdeveloped. In the colonization process a two level system develops in which the colonizers own, direct and profit from industries that depend upon exploitation of colonized Aboriginal people, who provide an unskilled, seasonal work force. A fifth characteristic of colonization is the provision of low-quality social services for the colonized in areas such as health and education. The last aspects of colonization relate to social interactions between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people and refer to racism and colour-line. Racism is a belief in the genetic superiority of the colonizing European peoples and the inferiority of the colonized Aboriginal peoples.

first established on an official level. In 1755, William Johnson became the first superintendent of First Nations Affairs in North America, with the objective of this position being to ensure the support of Indians to the Crown. Johnson's wife was an Aboriginal woman by the name of Molly Brant, sister of the famous Joseph Brant (Six Nations Confederacy leader), and together they had eight children. Their eldest son John would become Superintendent General of First Nations Affairs in 1782 until 1828. It is interesting to note that of the sixteen Europeans who obtained senior ranks in the British Indian Department between 1755 and 1830, eleven were married to Aboriginal women, and two were Métis, John Askin Jr. and Thomas McKee. The early colonial government, therefore, viewed Métis in a positive light because of their influence and assistance in Euro-First Nations relations. However, with the death of John Johnson in 1830, this relationship between the Métis and government became threatened, and the issue of "half-breeds" as an administrative problem first began to arise.

By the 1830s the fur trade was declining in importance, and this combined with greater political stability in the Canadas and improved relations with the United States, rendered the First Nations unnecessary allies to the crown. The First Nations now not only became a hindrance to expansion, but also served as unnecessary economic burdens. The government wanted to reduce the presents that were given annually to them in payment for their service as allies. A proposal was put forward, in which presents were to be discontinued to visiting First Nations from the United States, with the eventual discontinuation to all Indians. As well no presents were to be given to children born after a certain date, and payment to "half-castes" was to cease because they did not have a legitimate claim to tribal membership. To implement these proposals a census first needed to be conducted. The results of this were that children born after the census were not entitled to benefits, First Nations who failed to register on the census within three years were ineligible, and no Métis or their descendants would receive benefits unless adopted by a tribe and lived as an Indian. The increased concern over the Métis population can be seen in the 1842 questionnaire distributed by the colonial government to Indian Affairs officials, missionaries and others, regarding "half-breeds" living on reserves and First Nations communities. The Four relevant questions asked were:

- What is the frequency of intermarriage?
- What is the population of the Métis in communities in Upper and Lower Canada?
- Is there a difference in lifestyle between Métis and Indians?
- In the cases of intermarriage is the condition of the First Nations improved?

The results of the questionnaire indicated that there was generally a higher proportion of First Nations in Lower Canada (present-day southern Québec) of mixed blood, while in Upper Canada the proportion was much lower. In Lower Canada, most missionaries and officials also agreed that there was no difference between the First Nations and Métis, and that intermarriage did not improve the First Nations condition as wards of the Crown. In Upper Canada, the situation was a bit different in that some government officials noted slight differences between the Métis and First Nations lifestyle, and this was further reflected in their belief that intermarriage improved the condition of the Indian. The missionaries on the other hand did not note such differences.

It is obvious then that by 1842 there was no sharp distinction made between the full blood and "half-breed" Indians on reserves. However within three years the administrative divisions established would split the First Nations into two groups. By 1845, the Métis became an administrative category in Canada, and in the process first raised the issue of Métis rights⁶⁹.

⁶⁹ Source: Whiteside, Don and Scott D. Whiteside. *Indians in Upper Canada Through 1845, With Special Reference to Halfbreed Indians. The Circle Being Threatened.* Ottawa: Aboriginal Institute of Canada, 1979.

1840s An Act for the better protection of the lands and property of Indians of Lower Canada

The term “Indian” is defined as follows:

First-All persons of Indian Blood reputed to belong to the particular Body or Tribe of Indians interested in such lands, and their descendants;

Secondly-All persons intermarried with such Indians and residing amongst them, and the descendants of all such persons;

Thirdly-All persons residing among such Indians, whose parents on either side were or are Indians of such Body or Tribe, or entitled to be considered as such;

Fourthly-All persons adopted in infancy by such Indians, and residing upon the land of such Tribe or Body of Indians and their descendants;

1857 Hudson’s Bay Company: Report to the Select Committee of the House of Commons:

Summary of the census report is as follows:

The Indian races shown in detail in the foregoing census may be classified as follows:

Thickwood Indians on the East side of the Rocky Mountains.....	35,000
The Plain Tribes (Blackfeet and C).....	25,000
The Esquimaux.....	4,000
Indians settled in Canada.....	3,000
Indians in British Oregon and on the North-west Coast.....	80,000
Total Indians.....	147,000
White and half-breeds in Hudson’s Bay Territory.....	11,000
Souls.....	158,000

1867 Constitution Act or British North America Act s. 91(24): The federal government was given jurisdiction over “Indians and Lands Reserved for Indians.” Many Métis politicians and lawyers argue that the term “Indian” in s. 91 (24) should include the “Métis”. The Supreme Court has not yet ruled on the issue of whether the terms should include Métis.

1870 and 1885 Métis List of Rights: In order for laws to be created the needs and wants of the community has to be discussed by the people. In Red River, the Métis elected leaders to represent their needs in councils and meetings. These leaders decided what values, customs and beliefs they wanted presented in the law. The Métis in the Canadian West in 1869 presented to the Canadian government concerns that they had and wanted recognized upon entry into confederation. Louis Riel and his council at Red River drafted the *Métis List of Rights*.

List of Rights:

- 1. That the Territories, heretofore known as Rupert’s land and North-West, shall not enter into Confederation of the Dominion, except as a Province, to be styled and known as the Province of Assiniboia, and with all the rights and privileges common to the different Provinces of the Dominion.*
- 2. That we have two Representatives in the Senate, and four in the House of Commons of Canada, until such time as an Increase of population entitles the Province to a greater representation.*
- 3. That the Province of Assiniboia shall not be held liable, at any time, for any portion of the public debt of the Dominion, contracted before the date the said Province shall have entered*

the Confederation unless the said Province shall have first received from the Dominion the full amount for which the said province is to be held liable.

4. That the sum of eighty thousand dollars be paid annually by the Dominion Government, to the Local Legislature of this province.

5. That all properties, rights and privileges enjoyed by the people of this Province, up to the date of our entering into the Confederation, be respected, and that the arrangement and confirmation of all customs, usages and privileges be left exclusively to the Local Legislature.

Bill of Rights:

a) That the half-breeds of the North-West Territories be given grants similar to those accorded to the half-breeds of Manitoba by the Act of 1870.

b) That patents be issued to all half-breed and white settlers who have fairly earned the right of possession to their farms; that the timber regulations be made more liberal; and the settler be treated as having rights in the country.

c) That the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan be forthwith organized with legislatures of their own, so that the people may be no longer subject to the despotism of Mr. Dewdney; and, in the new provincial legislature, that the Métis shall have a fair and reasonable share of representation.

d) That the offices of trust throughout these provinces be given to residents of the country, as far as practicable, and that we denounce the appointment of disreputable outsiders and repudiate their authority.

e) That this region be administered for the benefit of the actual settler, and not for the advantage of the alien speculator; and that all lawful customs and usages which obtain among the Métis be respected.

f) That better provision be made for the Indians, the Parliamentary grant to be increased, and lands set apart as an endowment for the establishment of hospitals and schools for the use of whites, halfbreeds, and Indians, at such places as the provincial legislatures may determine.

g) That the Land Department of the Dominion Government be administered as far as practicable from Winnipeg, so that settlers may not be compelled, as heretofore, to go to Ottawa for the settlement of questions in dispute between them and the land commissioner.

1870 Rupert's Land and North-Western Territory Order: The Order was issued to affirm the transfer of lands under the control of the Hudson's Bay Company to Canada. In agreeing to transfer Rupert's Land and the Northwest Territories, Britain required that Canada agree to certain conditions regarding the claims of Indians in the territory. Excerpts from the order that pertain to the Métis states:

And furthermore, that, upon the transference of the territories in question to the Canadian government, the claims of the Indian tribes to compensation for lands required for purposes of settlement will be considered and settled in conformity with the equitable principles which have uniformly governed the British Crown in its dealings with the aborigines.

1870 Manitoba Act: Section 31 and 32 of the Act recognized and dealt with Métis claim in Manitoba. Section 31 promised 1.4 million acres of lands to the Métis. Section 31 states:

And whereas it is expedient, towards the extinguishment of the First Nations Title to the lands in the Province, to appropriate a portion of such ungranted lands, to the extent of one million four hundred thousand acres thereof, for the benefit of the families of the half-breed residents, it is hereby enacted that, under regulations to be from time to time made by the Governor General in Council, the Lieutenant-Governor shall select such lots or tracts in such parts of the

Province as the may deem expedient, to the extent aforesaid , and divide the same among the children of the half-breed heads of families residing in the Province at the time of said transfer to Canada, and the same shall be granted to said children respectively, in such mode and on such conditions as to settlement and otherwise, as the Governor General in Council may from time to time determine.

Section 32 states:

For the quieting of titles, and assuring to the settlers in the Province the peaceable possession of the lands now held by them, it is enacted as follows:

- 1) *All grants of land in freehold made by the Hudson's Bay Company up to the eighth day of March, in the year 1869, shall, if required by the owner, be confirmed by grant from the Crown.*
- 2) *All grants of estates less than freehold in land made by the Hudson's Bay Company up to the eighth day of March aforesaid, shall, if required by the owner, be converted into an estate in freehold by grant from the Crown.*
- 3) *All titles by occupancy with the sanction and under the license and authority of the Hudson's Bay company up to the eighth day of March aforesaid, of land in that part of the Province in which the First Nations Title has been extinguished, shall, if required by the owner, be converted into an estate in freehold by grant from the Crown.*
- 4) *All persons in peaceable possession of tracts of land at the time of the transfer to Canada, in those parts of the Province in which the First Nations Title has not been extinguished, shall have the right of preemption of the same, on such terms and conditions as may be determined by the Governor in Council.*
- 5) *The Lieutenant Governor is hereby authorized, under regulations to be made from time to time by the Governor General in Council, to make all such provisions for ascertaining and adjusting, on fair and equitable terms, the rights of Common, and rights of cutting Hay held and enjoyed by the settlers in the Province, and for the commutation of the same by grants of land from the Crown.*

1879 *Dominion Lands Act:* This act applied throughout the Northwest Territories. Section 125 (e) of the Act stated that, "half-breeds" were entitled to land grants in exchange for the extinguishment of their "First Nations title".

1880 *St. Catherine's Milling Case:* The idea that the "discovery" by a European nation gave the ultimate title to the Americas, thereby ignoring the sovereignty of Indigenous nations within the "discovered" territory, was upheld as the basis for English and subsequently Canadian sovereignty in the famous *St. Catherine's Milling Case*.

1939 *Re: Eskimos:* This case, which ruled that the Inuit should have the same legal rights as First Nations, may have a great impact in the ongoing struggle to have the Métis as being recognized as Indians under section 91 (24) of the Canadian constitution.

Constitution Act, 1982 (s 35): S.35(1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed. S.35(2) In this Act, "aboriginal people of Canada" includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

1990 *Sparrow Case:* The *Sparrow Case* judgment concluded that statutes pertaining to Aboriginal peoples must be given a fair, large and liberal construction with doubtful expressions resolved in favour of Aboriginal people.

1990 Sioui Case: In the *Sioui Case*, the Supreme Court ruled that First Nations nations such as the Cree met, bargained and made treaties with European states as full equals and were truly sovereign

1989 *Dumont v. Attorney General of Canada and Attorney General of Manitoba:* This is the first Métis land rights court case in Canada. The case is based on the failure of the federal and provincial governments to uphold Section 31. of the *Manitoba Act* that promised the Métis 1.4 million acres of land in the province of Manitoba.

1992 *Métis Nation Accord:* For the purposes of the Métis Nation and this Accord, a) "Métis means an Aboriginal person who self-identifies as Métis, who is distinct from First Nations and Inuit and is a descendant of those Métis who received or were entitled to receive land grants and/or scrip under the provisions of the *Manitoba Act, 1870*, or the *Dominion Lands Acts*, as enacted from time to time. b) "Métis Nation" means the community of Métis persons in subsection a) and persons of Aboriginal descent who are accepted by that community. The Accord was part of the Charlottetown Constitutional Accord that was defeated in a national referendum held in 1992.

1994 *Morin v. Her Majesty the Queen:* The Métis from northwestern Saskatchewan, on behalf of the president of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan, filed a lawsuit against the federal and provincial governments. This is the first land claim put forward to court by the Métis of Saskatchewan.

1993-1999 Various court cases involving Métis harvesting rights, specifically the right to hunt as Indian under S. 35 of the 1982 *Constitutional Act.* 1993. *R. v. Ferguson* (Alberta), 1994, *R. v. MacPherson* (Manitoba), 1996. *R. v. Desjarlais* (Alberta), 1997 *R. v. Blais* (Manitoba), 1998 *R. v. Morin and Daigneault* (Saskatchewan), 1998. *R. Grumbo* (Saskatchewan) and 1999. *R. v. Powley* (Ontario). 1998. *R. Grumbo* (Saskatchewan). Blais granted Métis living a traditional lifestyle in northern Manitoba the right to hunt as Indians, Grumbo provided Saskatchewan's Métis to hunt as Indians province-wide before it was struck down and Powley did the same for Métis in Ontario. The other cases lead in this direction but were less clear on Métis harvesting rights.

IV. Métis Beginnings on the World Wide Web by Sherry Farrell Racette

The exact date of Métis beginnings is difficult to discern. We do know that the earliest contacts between the two groups were frequently violent and not likely to have led to romance. Initial European exploration along the eastern shores of the Atlantic Ocean often included the kidnapping of any First Nations people encountered. Other acts of violence were also experienced. The Viking settlement of L'Anse Aux Meadows on the northern tip of Newfoundland was founded around 1000 A. D. and was destroyed by the local residents following encounters which had ended in death and two boys being kidnapped and taken to Greenland. John Cabot kidnapped three Micmacs. In 1498, Gaspar Corte Real kidnapped 57 Beothuks in 1501. Slave raids continued throughout the early contact period. The Beothuks captured by Real in 1501 had been in possession of European trade goods. This indicates that friendlier relationships had

developed between the coastal nations and the men who came from France and Spain to fish off the Grand Banks. An annual trade exchange occurred which was originally conducted between men over the sides of the boats. Because of the potential for violence and kidnapping, the women, Elders and children remained inland. Over time, friendships developed between the men and members of the crews began to go ashore, joining First Nations communities and becoming key members of an emerging trade economy. It was to these men and the women they entered into relationships with that the first children of mixed ancestry were born.

The Canadatree web site presents a definition of "Métissage", the process of creating new identities from the coming together of other distinct groups. It also includes a table, which outlines the evolution of the Métis from the early 18th century to the present day. Their newsletter also provides links to essays on cross-cultural marriage, "The Structure of Ethnicity" by Christine Hart <http://users.rttinc.com/~canadatree/intermar.htm> and "Ethnic Groups and Martial Choices" by Madeline Richard. <http://users.rttinc.com/~canadatree/exogam.htm> provides some interesting theory on the impact of cross-cultural marriage on identity and group development.

Those Bay Men

Beginning in 1670, the predominantly Scottish and English employees of the Hudson's Bay Company began to move into First Nations territory and gradually established relationships with local communities. Following the establishment of political and economic alliances; sexual and romantic relationships and partnerships began to occur. The Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg, Manitoba have records, which date back to the beginnings of this enterprise. (<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/index.html>) Several of the older documents

have been collected and published. Their web site can help researchers identify which posts were active in particular regions and microfilmed documents are available for loan. It is important to remember that the Hudson's Bay Company was a business enterprise, although it emerged as a recognized governing body in the nineteenth century and the posts themselves became distinct cultural communities. The documents are business documents: accounts, post journals, employee contracts, and correspondence. For the most part, the records are organized by district and by individual posts. The HBCA site provides a number of on-line research tools.

Not Just Two Groups

While most cross-cultural encounters in the early years of contact and colonization were between First Nations and Europeans, others were present as well. The fact that African slavery was a part of the early history of Canada is one frequently forgotten. Slavery existed in New France and continued under British rule until an abolitionist law was passed in 1794. The law allowed slave owners to keep the slaves they had, although any children born after July 9, 1793 were freed upon reaching the age of 25. The last slave in Ontario was freed in 1820. In 1834, Britain passed a law abolishing slavery in their colonial territories. Slavery continued in lands under American jurisdiction until after the Civil War in 1865, with the exception of those northern states that had passed anti-slavery legislation. Slaves, both First Nations and African, were members of early fur trade communities, particularly in the Great Lakes region.

Many of the early groups who traveled into First Nations territory for exploration or trade had one or more Africans among the party. The first child born at Brandon House to Alexander Henry's fur trade community of Nor'Westers was the daughter of Pierre Bonga and a Saulteaux woman. Pierre Bonga was born a slave and earned his freedom because of his service as the chief guide in western expeditions. His father

Jean Bonga had been born in the West Indies and was brought to Michilimacinac in the Great Lakes by Captain Daniel Robertson who was the post's first British commander following the fall of the French in North America in 1763. Jean Bonga and his descendants became influential members of the fur trade community. Cass County, Minnesota honors "The Bonga's of Cass County" in a tribute for Black History Month.

Another man who became an important member of the emerging Métis communities in the Great Lakes was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable. Although his origins are somewhat hazy, he was an educated man of mixed ancestry from Haiti who became involved in the fur trade. He married a Potawatomi woman named Kittihawa and is recognized as the founder of the community of Eschikagou in 1772. Eschikagou later became known as Chicago. The Chicago Public Library (<http://cpl.lib.uic.edu/oo4chicago/timeline/dusable.html>) recognizes Du Sable in their historical timeline of Chicago.

An Early Commitment to Catholicism

The University of Notre Dame archives has a number of primary documents posted which include "calendars" of correspondence to and from Catholic missions in what is now the United States. (<Http://classic.archives.nd.edu/findaids/html/calendar.htm>) The earliest documents are from Louisiana and Florida from the seventeenth century. The correspondence includes the Great Lakes regions with references to First Nations and Métis congregations, tensions and competition from other religious denominations. Check out January 15 and 28, 1836 (<Http://classic.archives.nd.edu/findaids/html/calendar.htm>) for the story of Elizabeth Grignon, a Métisse of the region who taught school for no salary while the hired teacher who refused to fulfill his contract maintained his income. The letters mention both Louis Grignon's demands for compensation for his daughter's labour and expenses

and the praise of those familiar with Miss Grignon's work. "Elizabeth Grignon loves the school and is very industrious. There is no person so qualified to teach school as she." The University of Notre Dame archives is also the holder of the Cadotte Family Papers. The family and descendants of Jean Baptiste Cadotte are another prominent Great Lakes Métis family.

Métis Genealogy

The constant loss of community and racism that many Métis have experienced has resulted in a loss of family and community history. As the Métis struggle to reclaim their identity and rebuild their nation and communities, genealogy or the study of family history has been an area of intense activity. The Metis Resource Centre (<http://www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca> in Winnipeg, Manitoba embarked on a major research project, The Metis Roots Genealogical Project, in response to both the interest and need expressed by the community.

Interest in genealogy in general is increasing. A lot of organizations and family researchers are using the Internet to connect with each other. Most of the documents needed by family researchers such as birth certificates, marriage, and census records are in archival collections. For the most part, web sites identify "where to look", they don't provide the actual information. It's a great place to start though and you just might luck out. Here are some general sites of interest:

- The Native American Genealogy Group (<http://hometown.aol.com/bbbenge/front.html>)
- Metis Land Records in the Dominion Land Branch Records at the National Archives of Canada have records of scrip applications. (http://www.archives.ca/www/sucs/english/LandRecords.html#Metis_land)

[claims](#)) The applications include genealogical information. There is a microfilm index for the years 1886 - 1901 and 1906. Microfilm of the records can be borrowed through interlibrary loan.

- Canadian Genealogy and History (<http://www.islandnet.com/~jveinot/cghl/cghl.html>) is a listing of over one thousand genealogical and history web sites relevant to those researching Canadian families.
- Cyndi's List of Genealogy and History (<http://www.CyndisList.com/canada.htm>)

The Hudson's Bay Company Archives (<http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/index.html>) has information, which is helpful to genealogical research. Employee records and servant's accounts can provide information about individuals. Place of birth, age, father's name and employment histories are the most common types of information although post records and correspondence may have reference to the daily life and interesting experiences of certain individuals who might be mentioned by name. Some employees left wills which record the names of family members. Some biographical information has been compiled and placed in binders in the archives. If your ancestor has not already been researched, it's a painstaking task of combing the records. This collection is only useful for those individuals who were employed by the Hudson's Bay Company.

Let's Go Way Back

Most of the old Métis families can trace their surnames back to either a French or Orkney ancestor. The Cursiter of Orkney site (<http://www.cursiter.com/>) is a useful genealogical site for those families who are descended from the many men recruited from the Orkney Islands to work for the Hudson's Bay Company. The Orkney Islands are located off the north shore of Scotland. Men from the Orkney Islands made up one

of the largest ethnic groups among Hudson's Bay Company employees. They were recruited for several reasons. Their impoverished communities created a large group of working men who were unable to find employment. They were honest and hard working and used to living in a harsh environment.

A quick peek at the surnames listed identifies a number of Orkney families involved in the fur trade and connected to the old Métis nation. Anderson, Ballantyne, Brass, Campbell, Fiddler, Flett, Fraser, Hourie, Isbister, Linklater, Loutit, Spence, Stevenson, Sutherland, Tait and Sinclair are just a few of the Orkney names that are part of the Métis cultural landscape. The web site connects browsers to indexes, which include county and region of origin, birth and baptism records. Some families have records going 'way back' to the seventeenth century.

There is a lot of interest in French-Canadian and Acadian family history in Canada and the United States. Many of the names are familiar ones in Métis country. The Métis with connections to the French colonists and their descendants were the largest and most politically active group. However, when researching French surnames it is important to keep a couple of points in mind. Every person with a "French" Métis' surname is not a Métis, only some branches of the family intermarried with First Nations. It is also important not to assume that an individual who comes from Québec was French. There were and still are many First Nations in Québec and some of them had French surnames. Records sometimes indicate whether or not a person was First Nations.

The most widely used French genealogical references are Rene Jette's *Dictionnaire généalogique des familles du Québec* and Cyprien Tanguay's *Dictionnaire genealogique du Québec*. Linda Jone's web site, *Genealogy: Acadian and French-Canadian Style*

(<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/lwjones/french-c.htm>) discusses these resource and others. It includes some helpful hints for accessing information. The same site includes an explanation of those mind-boggling “dit” names that you will probably come across, as in Marguerite Monet dit Bellehumeur. “Dit” names were created for a variety of reasons. (<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/lwjones/dit.htm>) Sometimes it was one way for one branch of the family to maintain a distinct identity from other branches. Sometimes it originated from one person’s nickname. It could be the mother’s maiden name or the father’s first name. The Amyot/Amyotte family has three “dit” names associated with it. Amyot dit Lincourt, Amyot dit Villeneuve, and Amyot dit Vincelot. The Petit family have six! (dit Beauchemin, dit Boismorel, dit Bruneau, dit Coulange, dit Godin and dit Labonte).

The Great Lakes Region

A census of persons of mixed ancestry in Michigan in 1836 included many Métis in the Great Lakes communities of Sault Ste. Marie, Mackinac and St. Ignace. <http://members.aol.com/vwilson577/1836-mix.html>. The Viau, Vieu, Vieu Update (<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Acres/1636/>) is a site where the researcher has posted both her genealogy and her research about the descendants (the ones who came after) and ascendants (the ones who came before) of Joseph Vieu.

The Red River and High Plains Métis

Gail Morin began doing her husband’s genealogy and like many genealogists saw it turn into an obsession. She has published the two-volume *Métis Genealogical Compendium*. Morin’s Métis Families web site includes census indexes from the 1827 Red River Census, the 1850 Pembina County Census, the 1892 McCumber Census of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa and the 1912 Census of the Rocky Boy Cree. In addition, her site

includes stories, family genealogies, marriage records and research sources for Métis genealogical research. <http://www.televar.com/~gmorin/>

Families and Individuals

The most comprehensive resource posted on the internet for Métis family research is the Charles Denney Métis Genealogical Collection. (<http://www.glenbow.org/archhtm/denney.htm>) During the course of his life, Charles Denney collected genealogical information on over 1200 families with Red River roots. The collection is housed at the Glenbow-Alberta Institute in Calgary, Alberta. The archives have posted a finding aid to the Denney Collection. It consists of an inventory of names organized alphabetically by husbands' surname. The wife's name is also included which is particularly useful in determining whether you have found the correct family. Each entry includes the call number of the microfilm, which contains the data for that particular family. To access the information, researchers can either follow up with a trip to the Glenbow Archives or borrow microfilm through interlibrary loan. There is a service charge of \$10.70 for borrowing microfilm. Check this resource – you might save yourself a lot of work!

Gail Morin has posted biographies and genealogical information about individuals who have many descendants in Métis country. Just a few are:

Laurent Cadotte (<http://www.televar.com/~gmorin/cadotte.htm>)

Louis Cyr (<http://www.televar.com/~gmorin/cadotte.htm>)

Henry Munro Fisher (<http://www.televar.com/~gmorin/fisher.htm>)

Michael Klyne (<http://www.televar.com/~gmorin/klyne.htm>)

Jacques Hamelin (<http://www.televar.com/~gmorin/hamelin.htm>)

Louis Riel Sr. (<http://www.televar.com/~gmorin/rielanc.htm>)

More detailed information is available about Antoine Vermette, a buffalo hunter from St. Norbert, who was involved in the Métis resistance of 1870 and lived to be 104 years old. (<http://www.telear.com/~gmorin/vermette.htm>) Also, the descendants of Jacques Raphael "Jocko" Finlay (<http://www.telear.com/~gmorin/jocko.htm>) and George Adams (<http://www.telear.com/~gmorin/adams.htm>) can find short biographies and listings of descendants. "Jocko" Finlay was the son of James Finlay and a Saulteaux woman. He became a well-known figure in the early fur trade and traveled extensively in the west. George Adams was a member of the Selkirk settlers who arrived at Red River in 1815. The group was harassed by the North West Company and led to Norway House by Chief Peguis. Adams worked as a tripman on the Hudson's Bay Company York boat brigades and married a Métis girl from Norway House.

The Canadatree Newsletter <http://users.rttinc.com/~canadatree> which was published and posted on the Internet from 1993-1996 includes some interesting genealogical information on fur trade families and individuals. The newsletter is still being published, but is no longer being posted. Browsing the back issues can surface information on the following folks:

An interesting little article can also be found on the three sons of A. V. Blondeau. (<http://users.rttinc.com/~canadatree/newslett/news12.htm>) For whatever reasons, the three men changed their surnames when they took treaty in Alberta. One son took the first part of his father's name becoming Blon, which was changed over the years to Blyan. Another son took the last part of the family name becoming Dieu, which became Dion. A third son took the surname of Buffalo. When we research we must understand that surnames were very changeable. People were sometimes known by more than one name during the course of their lives. Just one of the many challenges of Métis genealogy!

Family Research Home Pages

The Fraser / Brazeau Métis clan has their own website for all those Métis descendants of Colin Fraser (1805 - 1867) and Joseph Edward Brazeau (1810 - 1870). These men were both Hudson's Bay Company employees who married Red River Métis women and fathered large families of ten children each. The web site invites descendants of the "clan" to join in genealogical research and family gatherings. Interested folks can subscribe to a newsletter. <http://www.saltspring.com/braz/>

Melvin Baudry has information about his community of Willow Bunch, Saskatchewan and his family (<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Pointe/7500/mbaudry.html>).

He includes a biography of Alexandre "Catchou" McGillis (1863-1968) who lived to one hundred and five years old. He also writes a memoir of his mother, Rosina Malaterre Beaudry.

Titameg's family: (<http://www3.yt.sympatico.ca/serena/index.htm>) an extensive genealogy of the descendants of the Cree wife of John Favel. This site also has information on the descendents of Pierre LaRoque and Marguerite Cree, Cuthbert Grant Sr., and James Sanderson.

V. Questions and Activities:

The Métis National Anthem

In the forest on the river,
and across the western plain,
as the white man journeyed westward,
to the land of the Indian.
A new race was created,
a new Nation rose up strong
Hardship as its destiny,
and its curse to not belong.
In the land from which they came
in the land they helped to build.
They found themselves the alien,
found their vision unfulfilled.
And despite their valiant effort,
to defend what they believe.

When at last the battle ended,
they were only left to grieve.

We are proud to be Métis
Watch a Nation rise again.
Never more forgotten people
We're the true Canadian.

From across the plain they traveled,
from Red River to the Peace
looking for their own homeland,
that would help them to replace
all the land that had been taken,
and the dreams that had been dashed.
Their brave heroes now called traitors,
and courageous deeds now past.
But their spirit was not broken,
and their dreams had never died.
Their determination strengthen
even while the people cried
as they waited for the battle,
that would end their years of pain.
And the final bloodless battle,
when the Nation rose again.

We are proud to be Métis
Watch a Nation rise again.
Never more forgotten people
We're the true Canadian.

For this newest generation
and the future ones to come,
with the past to motivate us,
it will help to keep us strong.
As we build the Métis Nation,
as we watch it rise again,
our past lost is motivation,
to inspire our future gain.

We are proud to be Métis
Watch a Nation rise again.
Never more forgotten people
We're the true Canadian.

We are proud to be Métis
Watch a Nation rise again.
Never more forgotten people
We're the true Canadian.

- 1) Why are the exact origins of the Métis so hard to discern?
- 2) What were some of the names, which the Métis were called historically? How do you think the Métis would have felt about these names?
- 3) How have others defined Métis identity historically?
- 4) How were the Métis portrayed in the historical literature? What does this have to say about how society in the past viewed the Métis and cultural diversity in general?

- 5) What is historiography? Write your own brief historiography of the Métis based on five books listed in the bibliography. Or, if you prefer write a historiography of another group such as the Cree or the French Canadians.
- 6) Why do you think that contemporary Métis feel that it is up to them alone to determine their group identity rather than others?
- 7) If you are of Métis ancestry trace your family tree through the services of the Metis Resource Centre (www.metisresourcecentre.mb.ca). After, this task is completed look for some of the Métis family names that are in your family tree. Did Métis and Country Born both enter your family tree? If so, why do you think that both mixed-heritage groups intermarried despite very distinct cultural traditions?
- 8) Imagine that you are the first Métis. What things are common cultural items that you would use from your First Nations and from your European heritage? Make an inventory of these. Try and think how you would fit into European and First Nations social structure. In what ways would you try and smooth relations between your mother's band and your father? What aspects of First Nations culture do you think would come in conflict with your father's culture? What happens to you when you decide to marry? Which culture would you identify with?

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