

Canada at a Crossroads

*Boundaries, Bridges, and Laissez-Faire
Racism in Indigenous-Settler Relations*

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Chapter One

Colonization and the Development of Group Positions: A Brief History of Indigenous-Settler Relations in the Rainy River District

Now you see me stand before you all; what has been done here to-day has been done openly before the Great Spirit, and before the nation ... and in taking your hand, I hold fast all the promises you have made, and I hope they will last as long as the sun goes round and the water flows, as you have said.

Mawedeponais (quoted in Morris 2009 [1880], 73)

Chief Mawedopenais of Long Sault Rapids, just west of Fort Frances, spoke these words to Alexander Morris, lieutenant-governor of Manitoba and Crown representative, upon signing Treaty No. 3 at the North-west Angle, Lake of the Woods, on 3 October 1873. This event, and the Crown's subsequent neglect of Anishinaabe understandings of the treaty, marked a pivotal transition in Indigenous-settler relations in the Rainy River District.

As Blumer (1958, 5) says, group positions are a "historical product ... set originally by conditions of initial contact," including power (i.e., material resources, military force, numbers), self-conceptions, aims, and opportunities. Subsequent interactions, especially in the political-economic arena, "may mould the sense of group position in ... diverse ways" (5). Yet as group positions become "entrenched" in the "prevailing social order," they are not constructed anew at whim, but rather carried forward by shared memories and institutions, and only rarely modified by "big events" that capture public attention, "awaken strong feelings of [group] identification," and "raise fundamental questions about relations" (6-7).

Understanding how the sense of group positions developed and changed over time, including why, at the time of my research, many white settlers in the Rainy River District expressed a sense of group superiority/entitlement and perceived threat, requires tracing the

history of colonization (and anticolonial resistance) in the region. This chapter shows how the balance of power between Indigenous and settler peoples shifted over time from the first days of contact and the fur trade era to the signing of Treaty No. 3, colonial impositions, and accelerated resource-extraction and settlement, to the more recent Indigenous resurgence, regional economic decline, and (increasing) settler uncertainty. The story here is local, but similar dynamics have occurred across the country at various times.

In this case, the Anishinaabe had the upper hand early on, playing fur trade companies against one another, charging tolls, and evicting miners. They bargained hard during treaty negotiations. But Canadian governments soon ignored Indigenous understandings of the treaty and imposed a new social order. "Free land" was given to settlers, old-growth forests were gutted, gold was mined, and primarily white towns flourished, while First Nations communities were forcibly relocated, segregated on reserves, or "extinguished," and Indigenous children were taken to residential schools. Over the past few decades, however, the tables have started to turn again. As many white residents struggle with mill, mine, and farm closures and population decline, Indigenous communities are healing, growing, and rebuilding, and the balance of power and sense of group positions is increasingly in flux.

What follows here is not a complete history of the region or its political economy, but rather a general overview of major developments and turning points. My aim is to set the context for subsequent chapters that will examine in more detail how Rainy River District residents make sense of their relationships, interact with one another, and reproduce or challenge historically rooted structural inequities and racist ideologies.

Early Contact and the Fur Trade Era

Indigenous peoples have lived in what is now northwestern Ontario for at least nine thousand years. The Anishinaabe – specifically, the Saulteaux tribe, or Boundary Waters Ojibwa – likely arrived in the northern Great Lakes region between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. According to Anishinaabe Elder Edward Benton-Benai (1988), they migrated from the eastern seaboard, stopping at various locations, over a period of about five hundred years, following prophecies to move west ("where food grows in the water") (see also Warren 1984 [1885]; Willow 2012).

An independent, self-governing nation, the Anishinaabe had their own (Algonquian) language, laws, institutions, economic system, social organization, and cultural and spiritual practices. They followed a

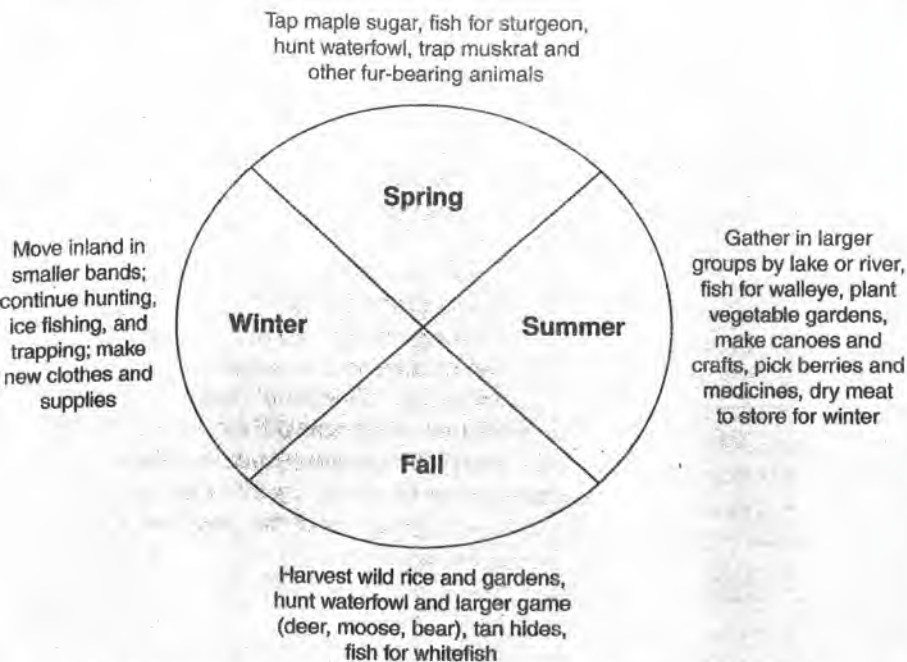


Figure 1.1 Traditional Anishinaabe Seasonal Rounds. Illustration adapted from McQuarrie 2003 and Waisberg 1983.

patrilineal clan (*doodem*) system, had a Grand Council and Midewiwin (Grand Medicine Society), and practised a semi-nomadic lifestyle, travelling to specific locations each season to harvest the available resources (see figure 1.1). They lived in wigwams, travelled by birchbark canoe and snowshoe, and traded with other Indigenous nations. Individuals and bands retained significant autonomy, and leaders governed by "influence and respect rather than institutionalized coercive force" (Willow 2012, 28).

The first contact with Europeans in the region occurred in 1688 when French explorer Jacques de Noyon travelled west on Lake Tecamamiouen (later named Lac la Pluie, or Rainy Lake) on a mission to persuade the Anishinaabe to trade directly with the French, rather than with the English through Cree (Nehiyawak) intermediaries. At this time, Cree and Assiniboine peoples also lived in the region, and the Anishinaabe were at war with the Sioux to the south.

By 1731, when the nephew of Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de La Vérendrye, established Fort St Pierre at what is now Fort Frances –

making it "the oldest continuous [non-Indigenous] settlement west of Lake Superior" (Bray and Epp 1984, 13) – the Anishinaabe were in firm control of the region. Although wary about the post being built on their summer camp grounds without consultation, they developed peaceful trade relations with the French, trading beaver pelts and other furs for guns, knives, kettles, cloth, and other goods.¹

After the Seven Years War (1756–63), the British gained control of all French holdings in North America. Scottish fur traders replaced the French, but the Anishinaabe, having supported the French, mistrusted the Scots; when they arrived, they were "denied passage ... and forced to turn back" (McQuarrie 2003, 14). The Montreal-based traders therefore turned to Frenchmen who had been living among the Anishinaabe, learning their language and skills and earning their respect. In 1779, a new trading post, Fort Lac la Pluie, was built downstream from the Koochiching waterfall, close to where the Anishinaabe harvested sturgeon each spring and whitefish each fall. Employing twenty to forty men at a time, many of whom married and had children with local Anishinaabe women, Fort Lac la Pluie soon played "a vital role in the vast fur-gathering empire of the North West Company" (16). It was a relatively large settlement, with living quarters, warehouses, gardens, and wheat fields, and a crucial resting and transfer point.

In 1792, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) established a competing post at Manitou Rapids (about fifty kilometres downstream). As local historian Neil McQuarrie (2003, 16) says, "The Anishinaabe took every advantage, expertly playing the two companies off against each other" and ensuring good prices. After the HBC took over the North West Company in 1821, the fur trade declined in many regions, but remained profitable here well into the 1860s. Although the old fort was abandoned, a newer HBC post (Lac la Pluie House) still overlooked the falls, and competition continued with the American Fur Company post across the river at International Falls. Once again, the Anishinaabe of the Rainy River District "relished their position of power between the two sets of traders" (McQuarrie 2003, 21).

In 1830, HBC governor Sir George Simpson and his wife, Lady Frances, visited the area; the Town of Fort Frances was named in her honour. A decade later, Governor Simpson met with an assembly of over five hundred Anishinaabe in Fort Frances who threatened to withhold wild rice, "the staple article of provision" for Lac la Pluie traders, unless the company ceased its attempt to end the liquor trade in the district" (Holzkamm, Waisberg, and Lovisek 1995, 179). Recognizing their strength, Simpson complied: "I consider it good policy to avoid any difficulty or dispute with them," he said (*ibid.*). Indeed, the fur

trade in this region was generally cooperative and mutually beneficial, but largely proceeded on Anishinaabe terms.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Anishinaabe of the Rainy River District had "an expanding population [more than tripling between 1821 and 1875], national gatherings, independent tribal government ... and large-scale athletic competitions" (169). They were described by Euro-Canadian officials and religious leaders as "tall, strong, and well built" (Reverend Peter Jacobs 1852, quoted in Holzkamm, Waisberg, and Lovisek 1995, 173), and "saucy and independent of the Hudson's Bay Co." (Dawson 1859, 26). Nevertheless, the wider political-economic environment was changing, and with the influx of settlers across the continent, the Confederation (and expansion) of Canada, and the signing (and violation) of Treaty No. 3, the local balance of power and sense of group positions also was transformed.

Treaty Negotiations

In 1869, two years after Confederation, the Hudson's Bay Company surrendered its charter over Rupert's Land and the North-Western Territory² to the British Crown. Under the Royal Proclamation of 1763, however, the Crown was still obligated to purchase these lands or obtain a legal surrender from the Indigenous peoples. Now wishing to open said lands for settlement, agriculture, and large-scale resource extraction, and expand the Dominion of Canada, the federal government initiated a series of eleven Numbered Treaties between 1871 and 1921. As a strategically located gateway to the west, the Rainy River District was among the government's first priorities. Yet the process of treating with the Anishinaabe took a challenging four years and more than a little coercion.

Although the Royal Proclamation recognized a limited form of Indigenous land rights, it also assumed the crown's right to purchase Indigenous lands or extinguish "Indian title" whenever it saw fit. This sense of entitlement was rooted, at least in part, in the doctrine of discovery, a set of fifteenth-century papal decrees stating that the first European Christian nation to "discover" uninhabited lands, or lands not being put to "productive use" (however European Christians defined it), was "legally justified in assuming full, sovereign ownership" (Henry and Tator 2006, 107).³ The Anishinaabe begged to differ.

In 1859, the government sent Simon Dawson, an engineer/cartographer, to survey the territory between Lake Superior and the Red River Settlement to determine its suitability for agriculture and transportation routes west. Upon arriving in Fort Frances, he was invited to a

Grand Council meeting, grilled on the purpose of his expedition, and told by Anishinaabe chiefs that he was allowed to explore the country on the condition of no more settlement "without their being consulted" (McQuarrie 2003, 24). The chiefs also said they would be willing to meet with Canadian leaders to discuss their relationship, "as they wished to be friends" (ibid).

The construction of the Dawson Route was prompted by the Red River Resistance in 1870 when Prime Minister Macdonald ordered Colonel Garnet Wolseley and twelve hundred troops to quash the Métis uprising.⁴ Starting from Fort William, they followed Dawson's route, and, along the way, built "roads, bridges, portages, and blockhouses for storage," and stopped in Fort Frances where they "left a surplus of supplies" and "started a 36-bed hospital" (Fort Frances [FF] Museum Permanent Exhibit 2006/07). Over the next decade, the Dawson Road was further improved and became the main route west until the Canadian Pacific Railroad was completed in the 1880s, passing through Dryden and Kenora instead.

Anishinaabe leaders (such as Chief Wabinogigok of Seine River) continued to regulate access to their lands and charged tolls for passage over their waterways. The Wolseley expedition was no exception, and they heeded Dawson's advice to take a "cautious and delicate approach" (Chute and Knight 2006, 110). On multiple occasions, the Anishinaabe blocked the establishment of Christian missions. In 1872, Chief Blackstone and his band (east of Fort Frances) evicted American miners and demanded compensation for wood. As Reverend Salt at Rainy Lake wrote in his journal in 1855, the Boundary Waters Ojibwa were adamant about their "claim [to] not only territorial but sovereign rights" (Waisberg and Holzkamm 1998, 3).

Thus, when approached about entering a treaty with the Crown in 1870, the grand chief of the Grand Council responded:

We want ... much that the White man has to give, and the White man on his part wants roads and land. When we meet next summer, you must be prepared to tell us where your roads are to pass and what lands you require ... do not bring settlers and surveyors amongst us, to occupy and measure our lands, until a clear understanding has been arrived at, as to what our relations are to be. (Waisberg and Holzkamm 1998, 4)

The first two attempts to negotiate a treaty in 1871 and 1872 failed because the government considered Anishinaabe terms to be too "extravagant." Yet Chief Mawedopenais of Manitou Rapids emphasized the value of his people's land and their inherent rights to it:

The sound of the rustling of the gold is under my feet where I stand; we have a rich country; it is the Great Spirit who gave us this; where we stand is the Indians' property, and belongs to them. (Morris 2009 [1880], 62)

Meanwhile, the Red River Resistance was suppressed, Métis leader Louis Riel fled to the United States, and Treaties No. 1 and 2 were signed in Manitoba. Simon Dawson persuaded the government to return to negotiations and approve higher compensation, given the importance of the region and the military strength of the Anishinaabe.⁵ As Reverend George Grant wrote on an 1872 expedition through the Rainy River Valley:

[The Anishinaabe] surely have rights to this country, although they have never divided it up in separate personal holdings ... And now a foreign race is swarming over the country, to mark out lines, to erect fences, and to say "this is mine and not yours" 'til not an inch shall be left the original owner. All this may be inevitable. But in the name of justice, and of the sacred rights of property, is not the Indian entitled to liberal, and if possible, permanent compensation? (McQuarrie 2003, 25)

In response, the federal government appointed Alexander Morris, a Conservative lawyer and lieutenant governor of Manitoba, the North-West Territories, and Keewatin, to lead the negotiations, and authorized somewhat better terms. Although the Anishinaabe wished to meet at Fort Frances, their political headquarters, Morris insisted on the Northwest Angle, which offered a quicker escape route to Manitoba. He was accompanied by a large militia, Simon Dawson, Robert Pither (HBC factor and Indian agent at Fort Frances), and George McPherson ("an intelligent half-breed trader" and interpreter), among others, while the Anishinaabe contingent included twenty-two chiefs and approximately eight hundred men, women, and children.

Discussions began with the Anishinaabe demanding compensation for timber cut on their lands since 1868, accusing Dawson of breaking promises during the Wolseley expedition, and questioning whether the government could be trusted again. During three days of intense debate, proposals and counter-proposals, the chiefs reiterated that "it was the Indian's country, not the white man's" (Morris 2009 [1880], 59). As reported by Morris, Mawedopenais insisted:

All this is our property ... the Great Spirit has planted us on this ground where we are, as you were where you came from ... The white man has

robbed us of our riches, and we don't wish to give them up again without getting something in their place. (62-3)

In response, Morris told the Anishinaabe that if they did not accept his terms "the conference was over" and he would tell the queen that they "refused to make a reasonable treaty." With a paternalistic flourish, he added, "I shall go away feeling sorry for you and for your children that you could not see what was good for you and for them" (50).

After this threat, the chief of Lac Seul, a northern community that had begun to struggle from the dwindling supply of game (due to the fur trade) and the lack of arable land and throughways (unlike the fertile Rainy River Valley), said he was still interested in a treaty. Exploiting these divisions, Morris exclaimed that he knew the chiefs were "not all of one mind" and "your interests are not all the same," but that "he would make a treaty with those bands that were willing to accept his terms" (64-5). The chiefs then assembled separately for five hours. Métis interpreters held "a very lengthy and exhaustive discussion" with them. According to the Manitoban newspaper account reported by Morris, on 3 October 1873 the Anishinaabe ultimately agreed "to accept the Governor's terms, with some modifications" (66).

The proceedings concluded with Mawedopenais stating that the agreement would stand "as long as the sun goes round and the water flows" (73). Upon shaking his hand, Morris replied that he would "keep all my promises, in the firm belief that the treaty now to be signed will bind the red man and the white man together as friends for ever" (73).

The precise terms of the treaty have always been contentious. According to the Crown's "official" text, the treaty meant that twenty-eight Saulteaux bands (Anishinaabe communities) in what is now northwestern Ontario and southeastern Manitoba "surrendered" 55,000 square miles (88,500 square kilometres) of land in exchange for reserve lands, annual annuities, other goods and services (such as fishing nets, ammunition, farming tools, and schools on reserve), a ban on liquor sales, and the right to continue hunting and fishing in their traditional territories. Even in this version, the terms were more generous than the previous two treaties, including larger reserves (640 acres per family of five, rather than 160 acres), higher annuities (five dollars per person per year, rather than three dollars), agricultural equipment and supplies, and harvesting rights (Miller 2009). Given the government's "take-it-or-leave-it approach," these concessions were impressive (Dickason 2006, 177). They also forced the government to revise Treaties No. 1 and 2 and set the precedent for future treaties.

According to the Anishinaabe, however, the treaty was an agreement to *share* the land in "peace and friendship" (Morris 2009 [1880], 72); it enabled Canadian settlement in their territory on condition that the Anishinaabe received just compensation and were able to continue their traditional ways of life (for Anishinaabe interpretations, see Mainville 2007; Mills 2017). The Paypom Treaty, which is based on the notes of Joseph Nolin, a Métis interpreter hired by the chiefs, and which corresponds more closely with Anishinaabe oral history, contains striking differences from the government's text.⁶ It says nothing about land "surrender." Nor does it mention the "taking up" clause, whereas the government's text says Indigenous harvesting rights are "subject to such regulations as may, from time to time, be made, and saving and excepting such tracts as may, from time to time, be required or taken up for settlement, mining, lumbering, or other purposes." By contrast, the Paypom document states, "The Indians will be free as by the past for their hunting and rice harvest" (see Willow 2012, 42–9). Moreover, it has been alleged that Canadian government officials may have written the treaty text beforehand, based on previous negotiations (Daugherty 1986). These conflicts have never been resolved and, as of this writing, remain at the root of ongoing land claims and other legal actions.

The development of a treaty between the Anishinaabe and the crown potentially provided the foundation of a equitable, cooperative, and mutually beneficial relationship. From an Anishinaabe perspective, however, the treaty was quickly and repeatedly violated, and relations deteriorated (at least at the government-to-government level). Over the next few decades, the regional balance of power shifted dramatically, turning the sense of group positions on its head.

Colonial Settlement and Treaty Violations

After the signing of Treaty No. 3, the first non-Indigenous Canadians with the intention of becoming permanent settlers (as opposed to explorers, missionaries, or traders; some of whom intermarried and remained in the district) began travelling to Fort Frances via the Dawson Route. Major advertising campaigns promoted the influx of settlers. As Frank Yeigh of the Department of Crown Lands wrote in 1892, perhaps embellishing somewhat given the long, cold winters and relatively short growing season:

No part of the Dominion offers better advantages to the farmer-immigrant or the man who desires to hew out a home in a new country, than the Rainy River District ... in its agricultural capabilities ... its ... navigable

waterways ... its healthful and equable climactic conditions ... the comparative ease with which the virgin land can be cleared and tilled ... the remunerative employment ... in connection with the extensive lumbering operations [and] great mineral wealth ... the free granting of farm lands by the government; and ... the building of colonization roads and bridges ... the District presents attractions possessed by few and certainly not surpassed by any other part of Canada. (Yeigh 1892)

Under the Rainy River Free Grants and Homestead Act (1886), the Ontario government surveyed the district, laying out twenty square townships and dividing them into 160-acre plots that were "granted free of charge" to each adult male settler willing to build a house and cultivate the land (FF Museum Permanent Exhibit 2006/07).⁷ Settlers could also purchase up to 80 more acres, including riverfront lots, at one dollar per acre. "To help the settlers," as the Fort Frances Museum Permanent Exhibit states, "the government shipped in, by steamboat, loads of cows, horses, sheeps, and pigs." By the 1890s, Fort Frances was "a thriving farming community," with many new homes and businesses.

Forestry operations also accelerated, with sawmills operating along Rainy River and at Lake of the Woods. Agriculture and forestry were seen as interdependent economic engines:

As the lumbermen removed the trees, they were helping to clear the land. Settlers could then turn this land into new farmland. The farmers would then be able to supply the lumber camps with food, and ... add to their income by working as lumberjacks during the winters. (FF Museum Permanent Exhibit 2006/07)

Several gold mines also opened in the region. The first "colonization road" was constructed in 1885, connecting farmers and lumberjacks to Fort Frances (see figure 1.2).⁸ By 1891, there were 7,000 whites and 2,800 Indians in the Rainy River District, a significant change from two decades earlier when Indigenous peoples had been the majority (Drache 1983).

As the settler population grew, the Anishinaabe were devastated by smallpox epidemics in the 1880s and early 1900s and by the 1918/19 influenza pandemic. Meanwhile, government policy towards Indigenous peoples had become increasingly coercive and paternalistic. Contrary to the spirit of a treaty (as understood by the Anishinaabe), the 1876 Indian Act designated Indigenous peoples as "wards of the state" and unilaterally distinguished "status" from "non-status" Indians, thereby

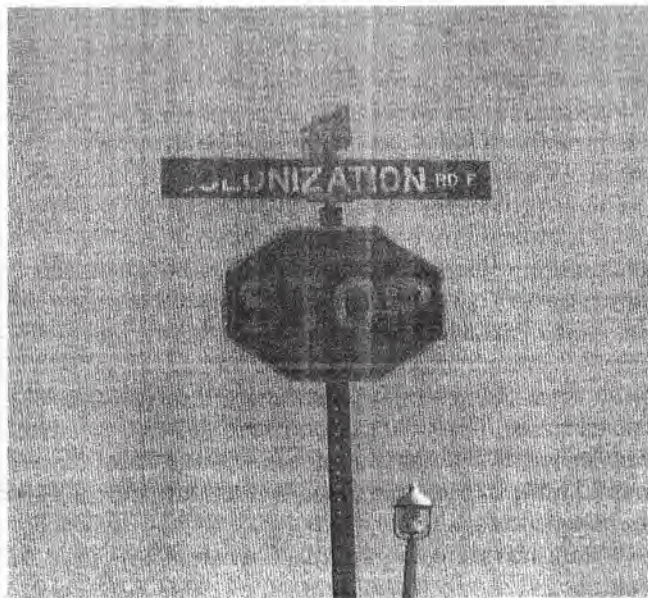


Figure 1.2 Colonization Road, Fort Frances, Ontario. Many towns in northwestern Ontario, including Fort Frances, have a Colonization Road – a visible reminder of a pivotal historical and ongoing process. Photo courtesy of the author.

determining who was eligible for treaty rights and other state benefits.⁹ For example, it denied Indian status to First Nation women who married non-status men and to First Nation persons who attended university or voted in Canadian elections.¹⁰

The federal government also imposed a band council system,¹¹ undermining traditional governments, and assumed the right to veto band legislation and depose Indian chiefs. As “free land” was being granted to white settlers, Indigenous peoples were increasingly driven off their lands and restricted to reserves (Daschuk 2013). Under the pass system,¹² established in 1885 (but inconsistently enforced), Indigenous people were forbidden to leave and non-Indigenous people forbidden to enter Indian reserves without permission of the local Indian agent.¹³ Indigenous ceremonies were banned, and children began to be abducted and placed in residential schools (for detailed reviews, see Miller 1996; Milloy 1999; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP] 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC] 2015).¹⁴

In the Rainy River District, these and other government regulations, and the ongoing appropriation and destruction of Indigenous

harvesting areas, were associated with substantial declines in Indigenous peoples’ political, economic, and social position and overall well-being. During treaty negotiations, Simon Dawson had promised to assist in the selection of reserves (both wild lands and farm lots) that would have “minerals and timber capable of providing revenue to swell Native coffers” (Chute and Knight 2006, 116). However, Ottawa passed an order-in-council in 1874 that no reserves should include “any lands known to the Commissioners to be mineral lands.” When gold was discovered on the Wauzhushk Onigum (Rat Portage) reserve near Kenora in 1886, over half a million dollars in gold was mined, and the local Anishinaabe received none of it.

Nevertheless, seven reserves were selected along Rainy River, representing 9 per cent of the fertile clay plain, including riverfront villages and fishing stations (Waisberg, Lovisek, and Holzkamm 1996). Additional reserves were set aside north of Fort Frances, on Rainy Lake, and at various locations east.

By this time, the local fur trade had virtually ended. As treaty negotiators and government officials had encouraged, some Anishinaabe turned more to farming. The Anishinaabe had long sold agricultural produce, including corn, potatoes, pumpkins, onions, and carrots, to fur traders. In the first decade after the treaty, farming output increased. Reports by Inspector McColl in the early 1880s observed “decided advancement” and increased cultivation, especially among the Rainy River and Rainy Lake bands. In 1884, he said, “The industry and perseverance of these Indians are most remarkable” (quoted in Waisberg and Holzkamm 1993, 184) and noted their prime location for supplying timber companies.

In 1881, however, the federal government prohibited the sale of Indian produce to non-Indian consumers (without written permission of the Indian agent), to white farmers’ benefit. Additional barriers to agricultural development on reserves included lack of training and inadequate equipment, despite many complaints to government that these were treaty promises. Lacking any response, the Anishinaabe of the Rainy River District ceased commercial farming. Between 1886 and 1900, cultivation on the Fort Frances agency reserves fell from 186 acres to 13.5 acres. Instead, the Anishinaabe relied more heavily again on hunting, fishing, and gathering, and sometimes found employment in lumber camps and gold mines, on the CPR, and as fishing guides and domestic servants.

The new resource-extraction industries quickly took their toll on Indigenous peoples and their lands and waters. Although the “lumber business breathed new life into the economy of Fort Frances ... virtually

the entire shoreline of Rainy Lake, as well as land along the streams leading to it on both sides of the border, was logged over" (McQuarrie 2003, 35–6). Magnificent old-growth white pines (used for ship-building) were nearly extinct.

Flooding from navigation and power dams caused further problems. A petition from the Grand Council in 1892 charged that flooding of their wild rice crops by a dam at the outlet of Lake of the Woods was "the principal cause of our starving in winter" (quoted in Waisberg and Holzkamm 1998, 15). Believing that the treaty had promised non-interference in Anishinaabe harvesting practices, they added, "We have kept our part of the Treaty, is it not hard that the government should not keep theirs?"

In 1909–10, another dam was completed at Koochiching Falls, supplying hydroelectric power to the towns of Fort Frances and International Falls and their big new pulp and paper mills. Yet it also raised water levels by about eight feet, causing extensive damage:

Flooding destroyed Ojibwa houses, gardens, hay and rice fields, cemeteries, and eroded shorelines around Rainy Lake and up the Seine River ... Effluent from the mill degraded sturgeon spawning grounds on Rainy River and adversely affected drinking water quality. (Lovisek, Waisberg, and Holzkamm 1995, 7)

Although the Fort Frances Indian agent dismissed the complaints of Rainy Lake chiefs as "a few crotchety kickers," every chief and councillor in the Fort Frances area sent petitions about the flood damage. Homes were destroyed and families forced to relocate. Wild rice beds and cultivated gardens were ruined, raising fears of starvation. As one Rainy Lake chief expressed:

At Hay Marsh Bay ... we are prohibited to fish without license in our reserve [and our] Rice crop, Hay marsh, Musk Rats, were all flooded by the backing up of the [Fort Frances] dam. We have been deprived of all our best of privileges and our Indian agent is our greatest enemy ... who does his best in working against us in curtailing our rights. (quoted in Lovisek, Waisberg, and Holzkamm 1995, 9–10)

Meanwhile, the spiritually, socially, and economically significant sturgeon stock was virtually exhausted by "government encouragement of large-scale non-Native commercial fisheries" (Waisberg and Holzkamm 1998, 9). Between 1895 and 1899, over one million pounds of sturgeon was harvested, primarily by non-Native commercial fishers,

sometimes only for the caviar, leading to the species' near extinction; "a resource managed by traditional means on a sustained yield basis [for centuries] was appropriated and destroyed within two decades" (10).

"The Indian Uprising That Wasn't"

Despite the shifting balance of power and the negative impacts of colonial settlement on Indigenous peoples, the sense of group positions in the Rainy River District remained somewhat unsettled at the turn of the twentieth century. A curious incident, described in local history books as "The Last Indian Menace" (Emo 1978) and "The Indian Uprising That Wasn't" (McQuarrie 2003), helps illustrate the point.

In June 1900, "wild rumours" circulated that the Boundary Waters Ojibwa were planning a revolt (Emo 1978, 298). According to settler gossip, Indigenous residents blamed settlers for recent forest fires and threatened to burn down their homes. Ah-na-ma-ay-ka-bou, a medicine man from Leech Lake, Minnesota (192 kilometres southwest of Fort Frances), reportedly had received messages from the Great Spirit that the Anishinaabe should terminate relations with whites and return to traditional ways; he also prophesied a "great storm" that would wipe out the settlers and sent messengers to the Rainy River District to share the news (McQuarrie 2003, 47). On 28 June the Rainy Lake Herald reported:

Considerable excitement was caused this week by the strange actions of the Indians in this district, who were leaving their reserves and gathering in large numbers ... There was so much talk of an Indian rebellion that Reeve Thompson, Fort Frances, called a meeting to discuss the matter. (quoted in Drache 1983, 82)

Members of the Manitou Rapids, Little Fork, Rainy Lake, and Seine River reserves all assembled north of Fort Frances, on the banks of Rainy Lake. Other Anishinaabe simultaneously assembled at Big Grassy, on Lake of the Woods. When Mrs Johnson, a "pioneer" on the US side of Rainy River, saw thirty canoes filled with Indigenous people in what appeared to be war paint, she was terrified (Thompson 1979, 8). Mr Wheeler, a white neighbour married to an Anishinaabe woman, told her that "the Sioux were trying to stir up our Chippewa Indians and have called a big pow-wow on the lake" (8). He advised her to give them whatever they wanted and "don't show fear or disgust." When the Indigenous people stopped in her store, "they all paid [for bread and supplies] and there was no marauding" (8).

Meanwhile, many settlers were so frightened that they fled to Rat Portage (now Kenora). Others hid in root cellars with their guns. The Rainy River Valley was "almost deserted by women and children" (Drache 1983, 83). The Minnesota National Guard was called to International Falls with ten thousand rounds of ammunition, guards were stationed in Fort Frances, and preparations were made to send back-up troops from Winnipeg. Indigenous singing and drumming could be heard for miles.

Yet there was "little or no evidence" of the rumoured uprising (McQuarrie 2003, 47). In July, the mayor of Rat Portage and an Indian agent met with the Anishinaabe at Big Grassy. They found about 450 people gathered, "none of whom had any thoughts or intentions of harming anyone. In fact, they expressed great indignation over such reports" (47). Soon after, the gatherings ended, and the Anishinaabe, placing white flags on their canoes, paddled home. According to local history books, "Life in the district quickly returned to normal" (47).

What is especially curious about this incident is that the same local history books (and oral histories) generally describe friendly relations in the Rainy River District. Although some settler families had little interaction with Indigenous people, others said "Indians were a major factor in their social life" (Drache 1983, 84). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some Indigenous and settler people hunted and did business together, Indigenous and non-Indigenous children played together, and Indigenous people sometimes worked for settlers (as midwives, guides, lumberjacks, etc.). Intermarriage was relatively common. But even some whites who had such contact with Indigenous people believed the rumours of an imminent uprising and fled. Most settlers were likely aware of the recent "Indian wars" to the south¹⁵ and exposed to media propaganda about "savage" Indians resisting "progress."¹⁶ Moreover,

The pioneers realized that the Indians did have reason to resent the white man's presence as the settlers along the Rainy River and the lake were squatters on Indian land which had never [been] ceded ... ancient Indian burial grounds along the river were being overrun by settlement. Sacred graves had been tampered with and even destroyed. (Thompson 1979, 8)

These observations suggest that, despite often having friendly relations with local Indigenous people, white settlers also had a deep-seated fear that perhaps the benefits they had accrued from colonization were not secure, that they were not naturally entitled to resources and privileges (including the Indigenous land they now occupied) but also had

treaty obligations, and that Indigenous people were not so happy with the arrangement.

Overall, the rumoured uprising might be seen as an early test of whites' sense of superior group position, after the balance of power had begun to swing. Yet the perceived threat did not materialize. The "scare" was over as quickly as it started, whites and Indians returned to their "places," and colonial policies and practices were only further entrenched in the coming years.

Nevertheless, the rumoured uprising did set the tone of local Indigenous-settler relations for decades. As we will see in subsequent chapters, there is still a curious blend of intermixing and congeniality with mistrust and miscommunication, which sometimes escalates to the point of threatened open conflict but usually dissipates just as promptly.

Settler Booms, Indigenous Struggles

For most white settlers, the early twentieth century was "a time of growth and prosperity" (McQuarrie 2003, 72). Rainy River District was "booming. Logging continued at a rapid pace ... Settlers were taking up the last ... available agricultural lands" (55). The Canadian National rail line, from Thunder Bay to Winnipeg via Fort Frances, was completed in 1901, bringing more settlers and easing the shipment of lumber, mining resources, and agricultural equipment. The Town of Fort Frances was incorporated in 1903, but already had a municipal government, school, church, general stores, hotels, two sawmills, and more than a thousand residents.

The Shevlin-Clarke Lumber Company opened additional sawmills in 1911 and 1913, "the largest ... at the time," eventually employing over seven hundred men and producing eight hundred thousand board feet of lumber per day (FF Museum Permanent Exhibit 2006/07). Meanwhile, timber baron E.W. Backus, who had financed the construction of the Fort Frances dam, opened two large pulp and paper mills, one in International Falls in 1910 and another across the river in Fort Frances in 1914.

The 1905 power agreement to supply hydroelectricity to the mills also provided Fort Frances with four thousand horsepower per year at no more than fourteen dollars per horsepower, in perpetuity, in exchange for land and water-power rights. This agreement has long provided residents with "the lowest power rates in the province" (*Fort Frances Times* 2006).

Meanwhile, the Rainy River and Kenora districts "produced over half of Ontario's gold from 1890 to 1910" (FF Museum Permanent Exhibit

2006/07). In the 1920s, massive gold reserves were discovered north of Red Lake, sparking "the biggest gold rush since Klondike." Another major discovery after the First World War was the iron deposit at Steep Rock Lake, near Atikokan, where one hundred billion gallons of lake water was drained and a river diverted to enable open-pit mining.

In 1909, the Town of Fort Frances also leased a valuable lakefront property on the Agency One reserve, between Fort Frances and the Couchiching First Nation, from the federal government on behalf of four "Rainy Lake bands" (Couchiching, Mitaanjigamiing, Naicatchewenin, and Nigigoonsiminikaaning).¹⁷ Although it had long been a summer gathering and ceremonial site of the Anishinaabe, the town called it Pither's Point Park (after the local Indian agent who had built a home there).¹⁸ With its natural sand beach and oak trees, it quickly became a hub of town social life, including picnics, swimming, camping, concerts, dancing, and athletic competitions. Many residents also enjoyed the Rainy Lake Golf and Country Club, adjacent to the park. However, the lease arrangements were controversial. The town had hoped the park would be sold or given to them rather than leased. The First Nations disagreed among themselves who was authorized to sign the lease, since Agency One had been used by the Rainy River, Seine River, and other bands as well. Moreover, the terms of the ninety-nine-year lease (thirty-five dollars per acre) were never updated for inflation (see chapter 3).

Meanwhile, as the remaining free grants and homesteads were taken up, some settlers complained that the Indian reserves were too large, "tying up some of the best agricultural and timber lands," and that more should be opened to settlers (McQuarrie 2003, 60). The Ontario government agreed that Treaty No. 3 was "overly generous" and "routinely asserted that the reservations [were] larger than required, and had an unfair effect on White settlement" (Waisberg, Lovisek, and Holzkamm 1996, 342). In the interim, a pivotal court case, *St. Catherine's Milling and Lumber Co. v. The Queen*, had gone in Ontario's favour, to the detriment of Indigenous and treaty rights.¹⁹

Technically, the case, filed in 1884, was about the right to issue timber licences on crown land. The federal government, which had issued a permit to the lumber company, claimed the right based on its constitutional authority (in the 1867 British North America [BNA] Act) over "Indians and Lands Reserved for Indians," and on Treaty No. 3, which, it argued, had transferred land title to it. Ontario claimed the right based on the 1867 BNA Act, which gave provinces jurisdiction over lands and natural resources. Although Ontario was not party to Treaty No. 3 and provincial boundaries were disputed with Manitoba and

Minnesota (the land in question had been part of Rupert's Land), Ontario asserted provincial ownership, denied Indian title, and assumed the right to confirm or deny reserves. The Anishinaabe complained that they were "neither consulted nor brought to the witness stand," but were ignored (Dickason 2006, 259).

Oliver Mowat, then premier of Ontario, argued that "there is no Indian title in law or in equity" (*ibid.*). Against all evidence, the Anishinaabe were described in court as an "inferior race ... in an inferior state of civilization," "heathens and barbarians," and "rude red men," with "no government and no organization, and cannot be regarded as a nation capable of holding lands" (260). The Ontario court, "strongly influenced by the racial considerations raised in Ontario's depositions" (Waisberg, Lovisek, and Holzkamm 1996, 342), agreed. Chancellor Boyd ruled that the Anishinaabe did not have "proprietary title to the soil, nor any claim thereto as to interfere with ... colonization" (quoted in Dickason 2006, 259). His decision was upheld through three appeals, with the final one by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in 1888.²⁰ One year later, the Canada (Ontario Boundary) Act decreed that most of Treaty No. 3 territory was in Ontario. The implications of this decision were profound. As the European imperialist and social Darwinist era peaked, the racist rhetoric of "whites" over and against "Indians" prevailed.²¹

As Leo Waisberg and colleagues (1996, 343) document, Ontario, as a condition for confirming the Treaty No. 3 reserves, "demanded federal concessions and Indian removals." This included "elimination of all but one reserve on the fertile Rainy River plain, 'cancellation' of the Anishinaabe reserve within Quetico Provincial Park, provincial retention of water areas and hydro powers, and payment of federal money [to the province]" (344). The provincial treasurer, in 1905, called the Anishinaabe "an incubus [i.e., sexually violent demon] upon the territory" and portrayed the appropriation of Indigenous lands as "a civilized remedy" (339). The federal minister of Indian affairs agreed that "the interests of the people [i.e., settlers] must come first, and if it becomes a question between the Indians and the whites, the interests of the whites will have to be provided for" (344). Thus, when white settlers in the Rainy River District clamoured for more land, including a former mayor of Fort Frances, who lobbied government officials to "open up" more reserves, six of the Rainy River bands were relocated:

By threats of removal without payment, Ojibwa were forced to abandon their villages and relocate to Manitou Rapids. Over 43,000 acres of reserve lands, the most arable in the region, were taken. The seven Rainy River bands lost 89% of their land. (345)

Meanwhile, the Sturgeon Lake Band to the east was formally "extinguished." When Quetico Park, a 1.18-million-acre wilderness preserve, was created in 1909, it fully encompassed the Sturgeon Lake Indian Reserve 24C. The following year, while Quetico was advertised as a world-class tourist destination, park rangers expelled Anishinaabe families "at gun point":

Traplines and cabins were destroyed. Random shootings of "poachers" occurred. The Ojibwa were completely removed from part of their homeland, while rangers planted gardens, built houses, and dined on wild fare. (347)

Moreover, "there was no legal surrender ... the band was not consulted ... [and] compensation or replacement lands were not offered" (347). Ironically, given Quetico's purported aim of creating a refuge free from human impacts, intensive logging began in it around 1918; there were five lumber camps in the area, and "even the timber rights to Lac La Croix First Nation went on the auction block" (Peruniak 2000, 79).

Restrictive provincial game laws also were enforced. Despite treaty promises to protect Indigenous harvesting practices, hunting and fishing off reserve without a licence was criminalized, and Anishinaabe were arrested. In 1916, Pierre Hunter of Lac Seul was convicted of possession of moose meat, imprisoned for thirty days in Port Arthur, and then released to walk home (more than three hundred kilometres). "Afraid to kill game, he died after four weeks travel" (Waisberg, Lovisek, and Holzkamm 1996, 348).

Treaty No. 3 chiefs routinely petitioned Indian agents and other government officials about these and other broken treaty promises. Delegations of Fort Frances chiefs in 1909 and 1912 asked for "understanding" and "fair play":

We don't want to be stopped and Game Inspectors cutting our lines and taking our nets it is in our Treaty Papers and you are not right to take our privileges [sic] away ... Are your words or the words of the Great White Queen, our Mother, to be as smoke? (Waisberg, Lovisek, and Holzkamm 1996, 347)

Yet, by and large, the Anishinaabe were ignored. Ontario's "Indian removal policy" was justified by "provincial rights" and racist ideology, and ultimately served to enrich the province and many settlers, at Indigenous peoples' expense.

After the First World War, when both Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents enlisted at high rates in the Canadian Armed Forces,

Indigenous peoples almost disappear from local history books, which focus more on the development of settler towns and communities.²² Perhaps, by this time, white residents' political and economic dominance was more secure. Reserve lands were diminished and the pass system limited interaction. For many settlers, Indigenous neighbours became an afterthought. As Ralph Paulsen (2015) of Nestor Falls (ninety-four kilometres northwest of Fort Frances, population 692) explained:

I don't think my family ever held ill will towards our First Nation neighbours. We didn't have any feelings about them at all. They were them and we were us.

In 1920, Indian residential school attendance became mandatory for all Indigenous children. Some Anishinaabe parents fought with and were arrested by the RCMP officers who tried to kidnap their children. Other families hid in the bush. Multiple generations were subject to this system of cultural genocide, which disrupted identities, families, and communities, inhibited the transmission of languages and cultural practices, and left many survivors alienated from both settler and Indigenous societies (TRC 2015). At the borders of Fort Frances and Couchiching First Nation, St. Margaret's Residential School operated from 1906 to 1974 (see chapter 9). Residential schools also existed in Kenora and Sioux Lookout. In addition to their traumatic intergenerational effects on Indigenous peoples (Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman 2014), residential schools ripped apart Indigenous and settler residents. As told by Bertha Davis Moore, an older white resident of Chapple (fifty-eight kilometres northwest of Fort Frances, population 741):

I used to play with the little Indian children who often frequented our home and I would walk ... to the Manitou Reserve to play with a little girl that I loved. Her name was Victoria ... [She] was sent away to boarding school. I have never seen or heard of her since. I often wonder what became of Victoria. Does she remember me? (Clink 1997, 80)

Even when residential schools began to be phased out and many First Nations children attended day schools in town, the "Sixties Scoop" wreaked havoc on Indigenous communities and families.²³ In the Rainy River District, hundreds of Indigenous children were apprehended by the Children's Aid Society, on grounds that their parents (many of whom had been abused in residential school and had therefore never had the opportunity to learn proper parenting skills) were unfit to parent.²⁴ Rather than being kept with kin, these children

were often adopted out to white families, sometimes in distant regions, and forbidden contact with their birth families. These practices began to change only with the creation of the local First Nations-controlled Weechi-it-te-win Family Services in 1982.²⁵

In the 1950s and 1960s, without Indigenous consent, burial mounds were excavated at Point Park, Long Sault Rapids, and Oak Grove Camp (north of Rainy River), the latter of which was described by the Royal Ontario Museum's assistant curator as "the most spectacular in Canada" (Thompson 1979, 160). Although some Indigenous residents continued to work as fishing guides and lumberjacks, and there were always individuals who excelled despite the odds, most Anishinaabe were excluded from "good jobs" in town, opportunities to practise traditional livelihoods were increasingly limited, and health and well-being suffered.

Otherwise, the Rainy River District continued to grow and thrive. Although the forestry sector faced setbacks during the Great Depression, including temporary shutdowns at the Fort Frances mill, resource industries rebounded after the Second World War. Between 1947 and 1949, pulp and paper production tripled in northern Ontario (Bray and Epp 1984). Meanwhile, large-scale labour strikes in the late 1930s had resulted in union recognition, higher wages, benefits, and pensions for most white forestry workers. Although some Indigenous war veterans were hired at the Fort Frances mill (which reportedly had a "jobs for veterans" policy), Indigenous forestry workers were mostly employed in the less well paid and less secure bush camp and wood drive processes. Moreover, the experiences of Indigenous veterans were not always positive. According to an older First Nations man I interviewed, who had served in the Canadian army during the Second World War:

When I was in the military, I was treated better over in Europe than ... in my own country. And I tended to think, "Hey, I should've stayed there." I know some of my fellow Native Canadian soldiers [did].

Many returning Indigenous soldiers were also denied government benefits that non-Indigenous veterans took for granted.

Although the Fort Frances mill flourished in the postwar period, the J.A. Mathieu sawmill on Couchiching First Nation (which had employed some band members) shut in 1951, leaving contaminated soil to this day. In the 1960s, a pulp and paper mill in Dryden dumped toxic sludge into the English-Wabigoon river system, resulting in (ongoing) mercury poisoning in the Grassy Narrows and Whitedog First Nations communities, in the north of Treaty No. 3. This poisoning effectively

demolished the traditional fishing economy, eliminated a food staple, and created persisting health problems, from birth defects to neurological disorders (Willow 2012).

The Second World War also boosted regional mining, with mineral production in Ontario doubling between 1945 and 1951 (Bray and Epp 1984) and staying strong until the 1970s. But, as with forestry, most of the jobs and revenue went to whites. Immigration, especially from eastern and southern Europe, increased as well, and the population of Fort Frances reached a record high of 9,947 in 1971. Many Anishinaabe people also moved into town, renewing the higher historic levels of interaction and intermarriage.

With the opening of major new highways, including Highway 71 to Kenora and Highway 11 via the Noden Causeway to Thunder Bay in 1936 and 1965, respectively, tourism increased, and cottages and cabins were built across the Rainy River District. Locals and visitors alike enjoyed going "up the lakes" in summer. According to some residents, the highway connections were a mixed blessing for First Nations, however, as they reportedly encouraged assimilation but also provided job opportunities and access to the goods and services of larger towns. The Kenora highway project also bulldozed Onigaming First Nation gravesites, and local First Nations were not compensated for highway right-of-ways (see chapter 10).

During this same period, new technology pushed many Indigenous people out of work. As Howard Hampton, the long-serving local member of provincial Parliament (MPP) from 1987 to 2011 and former leader of the Ontario New Democratic Party, explained:

One [issue that] has always brought people together is ... dependence on the natural environment ... The first voyageurs and fur traders ... could never have survived here without working hand-in-glove with the First Nations ... The logging industry ... relied upon the First Nations, because all of the wood moved by water [and] the people who understood the water routes were the First Nations. (interview with author, 10 November 2008)

However, he said, the shift to transporting logs by train or truck "eliminated all kinds of jobs that were [held] by First Nations" due to government regulations and credentialing processes. Wealthy tourists with sonar devices no longer hired First Nations guides "to show [them] where to fish and ... avoid the reefs." While new businesses opened in town, First Nations had difficulty securing financing for economic development because of the legal status of reserve lands.

Even today, despite treaty promises of a school on every reserve, most First Nations in the Rainy River District bus their children to schools in Fort Frances or other townships; those that do have schools receive two to three thousand dollars less funding per pupil. First Nations child welfare agencies also receive between 22 and 34 per cent less funding than their provincial counterparts (Murphy 2016). Couchiching First Nation pays three times the rate for water and sewer services as the Town of Fort Frances. As elsewhere in Canada, Indigenous residents have higher than average rates of chronic illnesses (heart disease, diabetes) and psychological distress (Newton-Taylor and Larion 2009). They are more highly represented in the Fort Frances and Kenora jails and more often the victims of crime and violence. Reflecting a wider ongoing Canadian problem (RCMP 2014), several local Indigenous women have been murdered or have gone missing in recent decades. At the political level, First Nations band councils are highly regulated and restricted by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), while Indigenous laws and policies (such as the Treaty No. 3 resource law or Grassy Narrows First Nation's declaration against clear-cutting) are routinely ignored. There has never been an Anishinaabe mayor or councillor in Fort Frances, despite Indigenous people now comprising nearly 17 per cent of the town's population (22 per cent of the district population).

In short, like elsewhere in Canada, historical and ongoing processes of colonization have created a racialized social structure wherein settler-Canadians (especially whites) have long enjoyed advantages over Indigenous peoples – often at the latter's expense – in terms of access to and control of lands, jobs, money, education, political power, safety/violence, and health outcomes.²⁶ For more than a century, this inequitable racial structure has supported whites' sense of group superiority and entitlement.

Turning Tides: Indigenous Resurgence, Settler Uncertainty, and (Renewed) Group Threat

Since the 1970s, and especially since the turn of the twenty-first century, Indigenous communities in the Rainy River District have enjoyed a remarkable resurgence and new opportunities, while local settlers have faced economic decline and growing uncertainty. This changing context has precipitated an ongoing (and very much unsettled) shift in power dynamics, challenging group positions and enhancing settlers' perceptions of group threat.

The Anishinaabe have always protested treaty violations and resisted colonial impositions. With the new balance of power in the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, most of their concerns were ignored. In 1924, Treaty No. 3 First Nations retained a Kenora lawyer to show that "their Treaty Rights have been violated and gross injustice done them for the past forty years" (Waisberg and Holzkamm 1998, 16). In response, Canada amended the Indian Act in 1927 to prevent First Nations from hiring legal counsel; the Kenora lawyer was told that pursuing the case "could result in criminal conviction" (16). At this point, the Grand Council Treaty No. 3 was reactivated and formalized to provide a "national voice" regarding treaty rights and interests. In 1941, Grand Chief John McGinnis petitioned Canada as follows:

Queen Victoria promised to love the Indians just as she loved the white people ... The promise has grown less every year. What us Indians lived as for a living, the white man is taking these away from us now ... Our old people and children look as if they would starve ... We have given many complaints to the Indian Agent [and he has sent] our complaints to Ottawa and we never get an answer. (quoted in Waisberg and Holzkamm 1998, 19)

Meanwhile, political organizations representing Indigenous peoples across Canada, such as the North American Indian Brotherhood (precursor to the Assembly of First Nations), also formed. Under pressure, Ottawa revised some of the most coercive aspects of the Indian Act in 1951, such as the ban on spiritual practices and ceremonies.

In another turning point, the federal government's 1969 White Paper proposed abolishing the Indian Act, Indian status, and all associated rights and benefits. When First Nations across Canada protested, condemning the proposal as a "thinly disguised policy of extermination" (Cardinal 1969, 1) and emphasizing that treaties are historic, moral, and legal obligations, the government retracted its proposal. Within Treaty No. 3, the Ojibway Warrior Society's armed occupation of Anicinabe Park in Kenora in 1974 sent a strong message that there would be serious consequences to the violation of Indigenous and treaty rights; as group position theory would predict, it also sparked a vicious racist backlash (see chapter 10).

Fort Frances residents compared their local situation favourably to both Kenora and the United States (where the American Indian Movement [AIM] was in full swing). Although Indigenous residents still faced subtle and overt racism (see chapter 4), and although many sympathized with AIM and the Anicinabe Park warriors, no such protest occurred in the Rainy River District; local relations were generally

peaceful and cooperative. However, the chief of Couchiching First Nation did threaten a road blockade over the town's refusal to extend water and sewer services to the reserve. When the lease on the Rainy Lake Golf and Country Club expired in 1977, the land reverted to the Agency One bands and the golf course eventually shut, generating ongoing resentment by many whites.²⁷ At the same time, intense discussions over the Point Park lease began: "The bands felt that the \$35 lease was no longer reasonable and wanted it raised," while the town sought ownership "but the bands and Indian Affairs rejected the idea" (McQuarrie 2003, 149) (see chapter 3).

On a national level, "aboriginal and treaty rights" were "recognized and affirmed" in Canada's 1982 Constitution Act. The 1997 Delgamuukw decision upheld the notion of Aboriginal title, while the 1999 Marshall decision lent more support to Indigenous harvesting rights.²⁸ Such decisions have helped realign (though have not equalized) the legal playing field.²⁹

In this new legal and political environment, dozens of land claims were filed in the Rainy River District (and hundreds across Canada). The first local land claim settlement – concerning Mitaanigamiing First Nation's forced relocation (see below) – was reached in 1990, after the community's well-researched case garnered media attention and the government was accused of "constructive dismissal." The same year, the Quebec municipality of Oka approved a golf course and luxury condominiums on Mohawk burial grounds, triggering the Oka Crisis, or Kanehsatake Resistance.³⁰ Big Grassy (Mishkosiimiiniiziibing) First Nation in the northwest of the Rainy River District blockaded a bridge in solidarity and to draw attention to their own land claims (see chapter 10). Subsequent direct actions occurred at Ipperwash, Burnt Church, Gustafsen Lake, Grassy Narrows, and many other communities across the country, but never in Fort Frances.³¹

In 2005, Rainy River First Nations (RRFN) (forty kilometres west of Fort Frances) signed the then largest land claim settlement in Ontario. As compensation for lands taken from them in 1914–15 to make way for white settlers, the community received seventy-one million dollars with which to purchase up to forty-six thousand acres of land. It also regained control over sacred sites and management of the local sturgeon stock, which has been revived, thanks to RRFN's efforts (see chapter 3).

Meanwhile, the Indigenous population has been booming and the white population declining. Between 1971 and 2006, the overall Rainy River District population decreased by 16.3 per cent and that of Fort Frances dropped by 18.5 per cent (Statistics Canada 2007). Between 1996 and 2006 alone, however, the district Indigenous population increased

by 51 per cent (from 3,040 to 4,615); First Nations and Métis people now constituted nearly 22 per cent of district residents.³²

These population shifts are indicative of further changes in the local political economy:

Declining employment opportunities in forestry and agriculture are unleashing a spiral of interconnected effects: youth out-migration, retail fading from main streets, a shrinking tax base reducing municipal capacity to update services and infrastructure, while new policies (e.g. new standards for water and fire management) increase fiscal pressures and add momentum to the current crisis. (Ortiz-Guerrero 2010, 48)

The regional mining sector began to wane in the 1970s, with some highly industry-dependent towns (such as Atikokan) suffering massive job losses. Many family farms have shuttered due to competition from agribusiness, an aging farming population, and youth out-migration. Between 1931 and 1981, the number of farms in northern Ontario dropped from 16,757 to 3,715 (Bray and Epp 1984). Local businesses have also struggled due to competition from big box retailers (such as Walmart and Canadian Tire in Fort Frances) and a rise in online consumers. Schools and hospitals have been amalgamated and centralized. Meanwhile, CN rail passenger service and bus service from Fort Frances to Thunder Bay and Winnipeg were cancelled (in the 1970s and early 2000s, respectively), increasing geographic isolation, especially for those who relied on public transportation.

Above all, the forestry sector – the backbone of the local economy – has struggled, with dozens of mill closures and thousands of layoffs since the early 2000s (Ontario Forestry Coalition 2007). Thousands more had jobs dependent on forestry, whether hauling logs to the mill or providing support services. Yet Indigenous people have not been affected nearly as much as whites. At the Fort Frances pulp and paper mill, the town's largest employer as of 2008, less than 2 per cent of the seven-hundred-plus employees identified as Indigenous.³³ During my fieldwork in 2007–9, the Fort Frances mill was temporarily spared the fate of its neighbours in Atikokan, Ignace, and Kenora. But in 2014 it too was indefinitely shut.³⁴

These conditions have generated a perfect storm for the regional economy (Ortiz-Guerrero 2010). If there is an economic bright spot, it is among the Indigenous communities, who are opening new businesses (including an eighteen-hole golf course, restaurants, engineering and consulting services, a furniture-making business, a historical interpretive centre, and eco-tourism), entering into profitable agreements with

mining companies, and regaining some control over natural resource management. Now more than a generation removed from the residential school era, and with the support of at least symbolic recognition through government and church apologies, the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, and work done by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (see chapter 9), local Indigenous communities are undertaking their own healing and cultural revitalization initiatives: reviving their languages and traditional governments, rebuilding their institutions, and asserting their identities and rights (see chapter 10). Indigenous youth are increasingly graduating from high school, attending university or college, and returning to the district to support their communities.

As group position theory would predict, the conditions are ripe for the historically dominant white settlers to perceive a (realistic and symbolic) threat to their group position: declining economic security and population loss for them, and population growth, material gains, and a cultural renaissance among the long marginalized Indigenous peoples.

The Role and Position of the Métis

To understand the history of group relations in the region, it is also important to consider the Métis. Although I have described group positioning in terms of “Indigenous” and “settler,” these are not monolithic groups, as different individuals and communities have different experiences, resources, and opportunities, and relationships vary. In the Rainy River District, since the fur trade era, there have been *three* salient groups: First Nations (primarily Anishinaabe), settlers (primarily whites), and Métis (offspring of mixed marriages who formed their own distinct communities).

The Métis originated in two major streams. First, French voyageurs from the early eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries sometimes married Anishinaabe women. Not only were there no white women in Rupert’s Land at the time, but intermarriages solidified trading partnerships, and Anishinaabe women often taught European traders vital local knowledge and skills. Their mixed children usually lived among the First Nations, largely assimilating to their culture, but also bringing outside influences such as Roman Catholicism, and often working in the fur trade or as interpreters, guides, or clerks. By the early 1800s, many “half-breed” families clustered around the Rainy Lake trading posts, and a unique sense of Métis identity emerged (Botsford 2013).³⁵

Meanwhile, the Red River Métis in Manitoba, mainly descendants of Scottish fur traders and Cree or Ojibwa women, developed their own

large settlements and thought of themselves “as neither European, nor First Nation, but as a distinct and separate people” (Botsford 2013, 2). They farmed, hunted buffalo, and developed their own customs and Michif language. After the Red River Resistance in 1870, when the federal government sent military troops to quash Louis Riel’s provisional government, many Métis families who had lost land and homes fled west, but others came east to the Rainy River District, settling in towns like Fort Frances. At least one white soldier from the Wolseley expedition (George C. Allan) also returned to the district and married a Métis woman. Since this time, Métis residents of the Rainy River District have continued to intermarry with Anishinaabe, with settlers, and among themselves.

When asked about intergroup bridges in my interviews, many residents cited the long history of intermarriage and the prominence of local Métis, which they said had created bonds between Indigenous and white residents and helped limit conflict and violence (see chapter 7). Yet the situation is complex. Although many mixed families live in Fort Frances, Indigenous/white remains the primary dividing line for many residents.

In the late nineteenth century, the federal and provincial governments refused to recognize a distinct Métis community, only allowing identification on the census, for example, as “Indian” or “white.” Overt anti-Indian racism was common. Thus, some Métis, especially the Red River stream (Allan, Calder, McLeod, Tucker), “went underground ... no longer admitted their mixed heritage,” and tried to blend in with European settlers in town (Botsford 2013, 13). Many thought this would protect them and their children from both interpersonal and institutional racism. Others, especially the French “half-breed” stream (Bruyere, Jourdain, Mainville, Morrisseau), joined the First Nations on newly created reserves. During treaty negotiations in 1873 several Métis played important roles as translators and note-takers, including Joseph Nolin, who was hired by the Anishinaabe and whose notes inform the Paypom Treaty; George McPherson, who was hired by Morris; and Nicholas Chatelaine, who was described by a government official in 1889 as having “great influence [and] inducing the Indians to make a Treaty with the Government in 1873” (Botsford 2013, 39).

In this context, local Anishinaabe chiefs, including Mawedopenais, felt that if their Métis relatives chose to live with them and participate in their communities, they should enjoy the same treaty rights and obligations. They therefore worked with Métis leaders to lobby the federal government to include people of mixed descent who lived among the First Nations as treaty beneficiaries. In 1875, a “half-breed adhesion” was signed – the only such adhesion to any treaty in Canada.

Given this unique history, it is unsurprising that my research showed Métis residents often viewed themselves as a bridge between First Nations and settlers. Every Métis interviewee had close friends and family members in both groups, and they often found themselves playing "peacekeeper" (see chapter 7). A fair-skinned Métis woman explained:

Couchiching is a Métis community, just as much as Fort Frances. It was two Métis communities growing up side by side, yet one got the prejudice and the other one didn't, which is a really interesting comparison because it's not the blood, it's not the roots ... it's not even the cards that have been dealt; it's the cards that were chosen ... Because in the 1870s, we were given the choice to be white or Indian. We weren't given the choice to be Métis ... My ancestors chose to be white and other people chose to be Indian. And I've had many benefits because of it, but I've also [experienced] many prejudices ... And it doesn't matter which community I'm in, I'm the defender of the other one.

These comments also suggest underlying tensions. As described by interviewees, people of mixed descent who "chose to be Indian" were permitted by Chief Migiziis of the Little Eagle Band and Chief Gobe of the Mitaanijigamiing (Stanjikoming) Band to share their reserves at what is now Couchiching First Nation. Soon after, the federal government imposed the band council system, and the "half-breed" population outgrew the original Anishinaabe bands. Conflicts over leadership arose. Members of the Little Eagle Band who felt that their way of life was not respected by the "half-breeds" broke away to form their own community to the north. Meanwhile, the local Indian agent relocated the Mitaanijigamiing Band to another reserve that became an island after hydro-dam flooding in the early twentieth century (the basis of the 1990 land claim settlement). By 1908, when the land surrender (for lease) was taken at Point Park, the "half-breeds" were politically dominant at Couchiching. Even as recently as the 1960s, Couchiching band members said, there were near-daily fistfights between descendants of the half-breeds and the Little Eagle Band.

Meanwhile, half-breed residents who "chose to live as white" often downplayed their Indigenous ancestry and distanced themselves from their more stigmatized relatives who lived as "Indians" on reserve. Some of the former rose to prominent positions in town, owning businesses and integrating with the "whites."

Since the 1970s, dramatic changes have occurred among the Métis, consistent with the trends outlined above for First Nations. The 1982 Constitution Act recognized the Métis as a distinct people with

Aboriginal rights. The 2003 Powley decision extended (limited) harvesting rights to the Métis.³⁶ The Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO), whose president (as of this writing) is from Fort Frances, now provides many programs and services (including education and training, economic development, healing and wellness). In this context, and with the growing Indigenous rights movements across Canada and globally, more and more residents of mixed descent who previously identified as white have traced their ancestry and applied for Métis status.³⁷

Securing Métis status was a source of pride for many Rainy River District residents – it was often described as "coming home" and experienced as the freedom to be who they are and to have their "true" identity recognized. Consistent with group position theory, however, it also enhanced tensions with both whites and First Nations and within Métis communities over who should be eligible for which rights and privileges. On one hand, individuals who had always identified as Indigenous were sometimes reluctant to recognize others who appeared to be applying for Métis status (or Indian status through Bill C-31) for opportunistic reasons and who, due to federal rules, had come to enjoy similar rights without experiencing the same barriers.³⁸ While some agreed that people of mixed descent who could trace their ancestry to distinct Métis communities (or whose ancestors had lost Indian status by marrying out) should be entitled to Aboriginal rights, they worried that the government had not expanded the available pot of resources to keep pace with Indigenous-identity population growth. Meanwhile, many whites felt angry and betrayed by friends and neighbours who had once identified as white and distanced themselves from "Indians," but who then claimed Métis or Indian status when it was financially or otherwise beneficial. Alternatively, one white municipal leader described the Métis as "integrated fully" and "hard-working, tax-paying citizens who have pitched in to help ... and yet don't ask for appreciation in return" – an implicit contrast with stereotypes of "Indians" that perhaps enables whites to view themselves as non-racist and yet maintain a sense of superiority vis-à-vis First Nations (a form of subtyping; see chapter 7). As some interviewees suggested, one thing the Canadian government does very well is "divide and conquer."

In short, the history of intermarriage and the distinct role of the Métis in the Rainy River District have long constituted a bridge between First Nations and settlers and perhaps reduced violent conflict. The inequalities in the district are somewhat less than in many parts of Canada. But recent shifts in the political and legal environment, including the ongoing Métis resurgence (as part of a wider Indigenous resurgence), have exposed and exacerbated tensions within and between all three

communities, raising perceptions of group threat and posing further challenges to the sense of group positions.

Given the complexities outlined in this chapter, and the marked shifts in power and positions over time, I began to enquire how Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of the Rainy River District understood their relationships. What did they perceive as the greatest boundaries and bridges? How were group positions and structural inequities being sustained or challenged in daily interaction? And what might be the most promising ways forward? These questions are the focus of subsequent chapters.

1. Colonization and the Development of Group Positions

- 1 Historian Richard White (2011, x) describes the wider Great Lakes region at this time as a “middle ground,” a physical and social space in which diverse peoples sought to negotiate their differences and often misunderstood one another, but also developed new systems of shared meaning and exchange.
- 2 A huge tract of land northwest of Lake Superior, including the Hudson Bay drainage basin and what is now most of northern Quebec, northern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, northern British Columbia, Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut.
- 3 In fact, multiple generations of white Christian settlers were socialized to believe – via government ads, media, and schools – that they were superior and entitled to land and resources, that their hard work as pioneers was building a great country, and that Indigenous ways of life were inferior. However, settlers’ economic well-being – as farmers, miners, loggers, and so on – often came at the expense of Indigenous peoples and their ways of life. It is therefore logical that when Indigenous peoples stand up for their land and rights and seek to prevent or control resource-extraction activities on their lands, this is seen as a threat by settlers whose livelihoods have long depended on such activities.
- 4 When the Canadian government purchased Rupert’s Land from the HBC in 1869 and appointed an Anglophone governor, the Métis, led by Louis Riel, forbid the governor from entering the territory and declared a provisional Manitoba government. Prime Minister Macdonald then sent a military expedition to enforce federal authority. For a Métis perspective, see Andersen (2014).
- 5 Although the Anishinaabe alone might not have defeated the Canadian armed forces, they would have inflicted serious damage, cost the government millions, and perhaps inspired more widespread insurrection, at a time when Canada was worried about securing its border with the United States.
- 6 A copy of the Paypom Treaty may be accessed at <http://caid.ca/paypom010208.pdf>.
- 7 Rainy River Free Grants and Homestead Act. 1886. S.O. 1886, c. 7.
- 8 For more on the significance of colonization roads for settler colonialism in Canada, see the 2016 film *Colonization Road* narrated by local Anishinaabe comedian Ryan McMahon (St. John 2016).
- 9 An Act to amend and consolidate the laws respecting Indians, S.C. 1876, c. 18. <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100010252/1100100010254>.
- 10 For critical analyses of the Indian Act and its amendments, see Cannon (2006) and Lawrence (2004), among others.
- 11 Under this system, each band (which is usually, but not always, composed of a single First Nation community) must elect a chief and council following the Indian Act.
- 12 For more details, see the 2015 film *The Pass System* (Williams 2015).
- 13 Indian agents (almost invariably white men) were appointed by the federal Department of Indian Affairs to administer the Indian Act.

- 14 Between 1867 and 1996, the federal government funded a church-run residential school system, whereby over 150,000 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes, placed in bleak dormitories, forbidden to speak their languages or practise their traditions, given new English or French names, and indoctrinated with Christianity. The explicit purpose was to “civilize” the “savages” and “assimilate” them to the mainstream working class. Survivors were often caught between worlds: denied good jobs in settler society because of discrimination and inadequate education and alienated from their own communities because they had been removed for so long and taught to disdain their ways of life.
- 15 For example, in the 1898 Battle of Sugar Point, the Leech Lake band fought US troops (over the arrest of tribal members and the lumber companies’ over-harvesting of timber), killing six soldiers (Thompson 1979).
- 16 See, e.g., Cronlund Anderson and Robertson (2011).
- 17 The Agency One reserve was established “not ... for any particular chief or band, but for the Saulteaux Tribe, generally,” or at least the Rainy Lake bands (Simon Dawn, quoted in Holzkamm and Waisberg 2000, 44). For many years, it was the site of the local Indian agent’s headquarters.
- 18 Robert Pither served as Indian agent at Fort Frances between 1871 and 1888. He remained the park’s namesake until 2014 when, after repeated complaints by the Anishinaabe about Pither’s unjust treatment of Indigenous peoples (including excavating burial mounds at Point Park for his root cellar) – despite having an Indigenous wife – the town dropped “Pither” from the name.
- 19 *St. Catherine’s Milling and Lumber Co. v. The Queen* (1888) 14 A.C. 46 (J.C.P.C.), *aff’d* (1887), 13 S.C.R. 577 (S.C.C.).
- 20 The significance of this court decision cannot be understated. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (the highest court of appeal in the United Kingdom) essentially ruled that the crown could overturn Aboriginal title whenever it wished. This became the basis for “Aboriginal law” in Canada for more than a century. More recent rulings by the Supreme Court of Canada (such as the 1997 *Delgamuukw* and 2014 *Tsilhqot’in* decisions) define Aboriginal title more liberally; but, while they restrict the conditions under which the federal or provincial governments may override Aboriginal title, they still give the crown the final say (Alfred 2005; Pottie 2014; *Tsilhqot’in Nation v. British Columbia* (2014) S.C.C. 44).
- 21 Social Darwinism was an ideology that distorted Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and misapplied it to human societies. It claimed, for example, that some human “races” were physically and morally superior to other races and would (or should) naturally outcompete them. Such ideas were often used to justify late-nineteenth to early-twentieth-century European imperialism and, later, Nazism (Hofstadter 1992).
- 22 A more detailed history of Indigenous-settler relations in the mid-twentieth century could be gleaned from oral histories, church archives, employment records, and census data. This would be another project in itself. The key point here is that, by now, the balance of power was in settlers’ favour, their sense of group position was entrenched, and intergroup relations were generally pleasant so long as Indigenous people knew their “place.”
- 23 For more on the Sixties Scoop (as it unfolded in Ontario) and the associated class action lawsuit, see <https://www.sixtiesscoopsettlement.info/>.
- 24 As the TRC (2015, 138) explains, child apprehensions were also based on “prejudicial attitudes toward Aboriginal parenting skills and a tendency to see Aboriginal poverty as a symptom of neglect, rather than as a consequence of failed government policies.”
- 25 Weechi-it-te-win strives to provide “care that is rooted in [Anishinaabe] customs, traditions and values” and “to repatriate children who have been brought into care outside of Weechi-it-te-win’s jurisdiction and reunite them with their families, communities and culture” (www.weechi.ca).
- 26 While class, gender, and other such inequalities exist within “Indigenous” and “settler” groups (Satzewich and Wotherspoon 2000), the Indigenous/settler divide is especially salient in many regions, including northwestern Ontario. For analyses of between-group inequalities on a cross-Canada scale, see Denis (2018), Frideres and Gadacz (2011), and RCAP (1996), among others.
- 27 As explained by local Métis lawyer Clint Calder at a public forum in 2009, the land is technically held in trust by the Crown. Since the federal government reportedly would not authorize new arrangements on the land, the former golf course became an open field.
- 28 *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* (1997) 3 S.C.R. 1010; *R v. Marshall* (1999) 3 S.C.R. 456.
- 29 On the limitations of such legal decisions, see Alfred (2005) and Pottie (2014), among others.
- 30 A seventy-eight-day armed standoff between Mohawk warriors, the RCMP, and Quebec police (Simpson and Ladner 2010).
- 31 For more on these and other conflicts, see Coulthard (2012) and Hedican (2013).
- 32 Reasons for the population increase include a much higher birth rate, legislation such as Bill C-31, which enabled many First Nation women (who had lost status through intermarriage) and their descendants to regain status, and a growing number of residents tracing their ancestry and applying for Métis citizenship (Cannon 2006; Statistics Canada 2007). Reasons for the decrease in white population include a lower birth rate and higher youth out-migration, especially with the collapse of the forestry sector (Ortiz-Guerrero 2010).

- 33 At the Ainsworth OSB (oriented strandboard) manufacturing plant in Barwick, between 1997 and 2010, an average of 2 of 155 employees identified as Indigenous.
- 34 Across Canada, twenty of fifty paper mills have closed since 2000, and 118,000 forestry jobs (one third) were slashed between 2004 and 2014. Reasons include decreased demand for paper, high energy costs, international competition, and fluctuating exchange rates (Keenan, Parkinson, and Jang 2014; Ortiz-Guerrer 2010).
- 35 The question of Métis identification is politically fraught. See, e.g., Andersen (2014) and Vowel and Leroux (2016).
- 36 *R v. Powley* (2003) S.C.C. 43.
- 37 Approximately half of Fort Frances residents who had identified as Métis on the census were MNO members.
- 38 Although MNO membership requires acceptance by the Métis community, some individuals of mixed descent have acquired Indian status through Bill C-31 without participating in any First Nation community.