

REMEMBERING HAROLD CARDINAL

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I hadn't met Harold Cardinal before the "Natives and Settlers Now and Then" conference at the University of Alberta in 2000. Like many, I was familiar with his influential first book, *The Unjust Society*. And I knew from literary texts like Maria Campbell's *Half-Breed* of his influence on many Aboriginal thinkers, including artists, at a time, the early 1970s, when Aboriginal peoples were gathering strength and establishing their voices on many stages, in many formats. This momentum was due in large part to Harold Cardinal. I had taught his essay "A Canadian: What the Hell It's All About," from his second book, *The Rebirth of Canada's Indians*, in the classroom, and continue to teach it today because it's still one of the most effective tools I've found to help students, including those not familiar with Aboriginal histories and cultures, to appreciate the very different conceptions that "Canadians" and Nee-yow or Cree peoples have of their land, nation, and home.

Harold speaks in his writings not just with the intellectual force and eloquence of a highly regarded orator with years of experience and stature; he also speaks with compassion for the hardships of other people in addition to his own, with humility, humour, and a genuine interest in and curiosity about other peoples and traditions, including Western cultures. Through the opportunity to meet him in person and while working with him as he developed his essay for this book, I was also struck by the depth of his appreciation for the spiritual significance of treaty-making, the laws governing human relationships, or what he calls *Wa-koo-to-win*. As I reread his words today, this deep reverence for his people's spiritual traditions resonates powerfully and seems to explain so much of his life's work and accomplishment.

PATRICIA SEED:

If you are very lucky, you may hear someone like Harold Cardinal in your lifetime. I only heard him once, at this conference, but I have never listened to anyone like him before or since. Oratory itself can merely be a learned skill, honed by practised reading from political scripts composed by someone who has marked all the appropriate emotional pauses and inflections. Harold Cardinal did far more than this. He spoke extemporaneously for over an hour, engrossing the entire audience. He combined these extraordinary oratorical skills with acutely phrased observations on comments and points of view (including my own) that he had only heard for the first time five minutes before he spoke. His synthetic and critical intelligence appeared all the more powerful for the modesty with which he spoke—and the obviously heartfelt commitment to his community that lay behind it. I, for one, regret that I will never hear that voice again.

FRANK TOUGH:

My first encounter in person with Harold Cardinal was in 1972 when I heard him speak to a group of students at the University of Manitoba Students' Union Festival of Life and Learning. Years later, when he was associated with the Department of Native Studies at the University of Alberta, I asked him to write a comment for *Native Studies Review* on a recent Supreme Court of Canada decision concerning the effect of the Natural Resources Transfer Agreement (NRTA) on Treaty Rights. This resulted in an interesting discussion, and it has contributed to my obsession with the contrast between history and law as to the meaning of the NRTA.

An apt way to commemorate Dr. Cardinal is to put on the record my introduction to convocation when the University of Alberta awarded Harold an LL.D (June 1999). This was his first Honorary degree, and in my view was long overdue. I believe that it is highly appropriate that this recognition came from an Alberta university:

Eminent Chancellor: On Behalf of the Senate of the University of Alberta, I have the privilege to present, for the Honorary Degree of a Doctor of Laws, Mr. Harold Cardinal.

For more than three decades, Harold Cardinal has been an articulate and thoughtful leader for the Aboriginal and treaty rights movement. At a crucial time in the modern history of Indian people, Harold Cardinal provided incisive leadership—which in turn has had a profound effect on subsequent relations between Aboriginal peoples and the larger society. His analysis

of the federal government's 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy laid a foundation for a very different future for Aboriginal peoples than that proposed by the Department of Indian Affairs. Thirty years ago, the positions advocated by Mr. Cardinal may have seemed extraordinary, but today his analysis has become an accepted and common framework for understanding the historical and contemporary relationships between First Nations and the Canadian government. Canadian society as a whole can thank Harold Cardinal for his reasoned and consistent analysis.

Harold Cardinal's contributions are multifaceted and influential. As an author he published *The Unjust Society* and *The Rebirth of Canada's Indians*. *The Unjust Society* gained influence some thirty years ago by offering a persuasive Indian perspective. As a political leader he served for nine years as President of the Indian Association of Alberta. In his work as a consultant, researcher, and negotiator, he has dealt with the pressing day-to-day problems faced by reserves. As an intellectual, he has been an Assistant Professor, after which he returned to studies, completing an LLB and an LLM. He is currently working on a PhD in Law at the University of British Columbia. He is here with his sons and daughters and his wife Maisie, who is working on a PhD in Education. We wish to offer to you and your family congratulations for this achievement.

Although Mr. Cardinal has lived in Ottawa, Edmonton, and Vancouver and has studied at Harvard, he has remained close to his community of Sucker Creek, Alberta. Harold follows traditional Cree culture, and his comprehension of sacred knowledge is of value to younger Natives. His ability to carry out political and legal discussions between Cree and English is unsurpassed. This expertise at conducting difficult dialogues greatly facilitated the Office of Treaty Commissioner in its most recent work with Saskatchewan Elders. Cardinal speaks easily to both grassroots communities and members of the academy. Although long overdue, this is a good year to honour Mr. Cardinal.

The School of Native Studies is delighted that its mere ten years of existence can be associated with the Senate's honouring of Mr. Cardinal. Without the leadership of people like Harold Cardinal, there would be no Native Studies.

Also this year we acknowledge the Centenary of Treaty Eight, which was signed at Lesser Slave Lake on 21 June 1899. The

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intention of Indians to enter into a relationship with newcomers is not an obscure fact of history. In official circles today, a renewal of treaty relationships has gained recognition, yet this has been a lifelong commitment of Mr. Cardinal.

Eminent Chancellor, it is with the utmost respect that I present to you for the Honorary Degree of a Doctor of Laws a Cree man who has advanced the noble values within Canadian society for the betterment of all First Nations—Mr. Harold Cardinal.

SHARON VENN.E:

In the 1960s, Indigenous Peoples were legally allowed to speak for themselves. In the previous years, there had been many laws against movement off the reserves, and against attending meetings or raising money for court actions. These laws were enforced by the state of Canada. Indigenous Peoples went to jail for violating the laws of Canada. Out of this history came Harold Cardinal, supported by his Elders to speak for his people. He spoke unafraid about the injustices heaped on our Peoples. It was a scary time. Indigenous Peoples did not speak out and criticize the government in public. Harold went public and spoke at every opportunity to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

When I was at the University of Victoria in the early 1970s, I went to see Harold speak at the Public Library. Afterwards, he took the time to greet the few Indigenous students and encouraged us to continue with our education because "you are the future warriors for our people." To the end of his life, he was talking about treaties and the way to implement and honour them. In the last year of his life, I spent many hours with him discussing treaties and treaty-making, including the need to write things down for future generations. Harold was concerned that the spiritual significance of treaties was being lost to the younger people. To the end of his human time on the earth, he wanted to find ways to reach out to young people to help them understand their legacy of being the owners and keepers of the land and laws. Harold was a human being for a short time on the earth, but he made valuable contributions that lifted up generations of Indigenous Peoples.