ONE PATH, MANY DIRECTIONS: THE COMPLEX AND DIVERSE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL REALITY

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The title for this journal issue is derived from a traditional Indigenous teaching. The fundamental tenant embedded in Indigenous philosophy, as illustrated by the teaching, is that we as Human Beings all travel the same path. Our common journey begins when we are born and ends, as with all things, when we pass away. In between these two points in time we exercise our free will and make choices. The choices we make, in how we live our daily lives, take us in many different directions and lead us to the strength of Humankind… our diversity.

This journal is an expression of this traditional teaching. As Aboriginal peoples we share in the common journey of all peoples and contribute to the marvellous diversity of Humankind. As a distinct group however, Aboriginal peoples experience a unique set of conditions that impact on and define the nature of our existence. The purpose of this journal is to give the reader a glimpse, however brief, into the diverse and complex nature of contemporary Aboriginal reality in Canada.

As stated in the title to this edition, this journal issue is built around a simple cause, helping to ensure that the public discourse on Aboriginal issues is based on a more complete understanding of the complex and diverse realities of First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples and communities. Public deliberations about Aboriginal issues continue to be derailed by old preconceptions, incomplete understandings, and outright disinformation. Although levels of public awareness of Aboriginal issues have improved, there remains a great deal of room for improvement.

As researchers interested in public policy, we believe that effective knowledge transfer – including sound research, mobilization of research findings, and open and informed debate involving all stakeholders – ultimately leads to better research, better public policy, and better outcomes.

As Indigenous scholars, we feel a particular responsibility to set an example for public deliberations about key issues facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Indeed, a good deal of our time is spent enlightening students and colleagues about the tragic and painful pasts of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, providing frameworks through which they can understand current realities, and challenging them to educate others. Through this journal, we extend this work to the broader public policy discourse. We expose Canadians to the extent of diversity of

Aboriginal people, and challenge readers to move beyond the myths and misinformation that have tended to cloud their views and understandings of Aboriginal peoples.

As a means of doing this, in the following pages we offer the reader a sampling of information that addresses the complexity and diversity of Aboriginal peoples, and of the many complex issues they face, through four discrete lenses: cultural diversity and richness; geographic nuance; health and socioeconomic complexity; and diversity of public opinion.

Newhouse and Heiber lead off the first section on cultural diversity and richness. They provide an exciting study that details how Aboriginal people, culture and imagery have established a growing and vibrant presence in cyberspace. Anderson's discussion of treaty annuity payments explores the cultural, economic and political significance of historic treaties to Canada's First Nations, while simultaneously addressing the shortcomings of the annuity program. Next, Norris explains how linguistic classification systems, which most non-expert observers know very little about, can understate the extent of linguistic diversity in a region, as well as the robustness of individual languages. In the final paper of this section Galley calls for new policy approaches to supporting and recognizing Aboriginal languages.

The next section, geographic nuance, consists of an exhaustive study of Aboriginal migration and mobility trends. In this study, Clatworthy updates findings from previous reports with 2006 Census data, and shows how Aboriginal population growth in different regions and geographic settings is influenced by migration. It's an important study that directly challenges the oft-cited assertion that urban Aboriginal population growth is being driven by a mass exodus of First Nations people from reserves.

Cooke and Guimond lead off the third section, health and socioeconomic complexity, with an update of the Registered Indians Human Development Index showing that, between 2001 and 2006, progress in closing the socioeconomic gap between Registered Indians and other Canadians may have stalled. Next, Dewache presents findings from a qualitative validation study of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's Community Well-being Index: based on a series of interviews with residents of the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation, Dewache finds support for the well-being scores as they appear in the Community Well-being Index, but also concern that discussions of well-being ought not be limited to analyses of socioeconomic data but encompass issues such as health, cultural continuity and expressions of self-determination. Adams, meanwhile, uses findings from an opinion survey to illustrate how Aboriginal people in Manitoba view their living conditions, and are concerned with improving them.

Penney and colleagues explore the tragic problem of suicide in Inuit communities, and their findings suggest that factors relating to social connections and networks appear to be associated with lower suicide rates. Next, Eni and Senécal confront the sensitivities surrounding fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and argue the need for more social frameworks to be applied in research on this topic. Aman examines factors associated with success of Aboriginal high school students in British Columbia. Finally, Mann calls for a discussion of new approaches to mitigate the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women and girls.

The fourth section, diversity of public opinion, wraps up the journal with a very brief glimpse at the complex range of questions that will define the future of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Jedwab, utilizing reams of public opinion data, seeks to situate Canadians' attitudes towards the place of Aboriginal people in the Canadian narrative in relation to attitudes towards Canadian cultural value constructs such as official bilingualism and multiculturalism; he concludes that the objective of relating "the multiple stories that reflect Canada's reality" represents "an ongoing challenge for Canadian policy-makers and educators."

A choice was made early on in the development of this journal to focus on the diversity and complexity of Aboriginal peoples historically and as they are today. In a 2007 interview, Stewart Clatworthy told CBC News that demographic analysis shows that if *Indian Act* rules regarding who is eligible for Registered Indian status are not changed, "you could essentially create a situation where there would be no one born who would qualify." Litigation currently before the Supreme Court of Canada has challenged the constitutionality of some of those same rules. Land and resource claims are slowly being settled, Métis registries are being established to facilitate the regulation of Métis Aboriginal hunting and fishing rights, and self-governing institutions in Inuit regions continue to grow. Many more journals could be filled exploring each of these questions in turn, along with others. The diversity of Aboriginal Canada cannot be captured in a still photo.

Nevertheless, it is our hope that this journal represents a useful snapshot of the diversity, the depth, the richness, of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. There is so much to know, to appreciate, to feel. So come, turn the page, and know us better.