COMMUNITIES OF SOCIETAL INDIANS IN CANADA

by

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Of great anthropological interest, both potential and realized, are the Indian communities which exist today in Canada. Within the range of variation of human societies and cultures these communities represent cases which for many purposes are co-ordinate, and of equal value, with the classical cases of anthropology.

These communities can be approached in terms of any theoretical frame of reference and yield contributions to the understanding of human society and culture. From the point of view of salvage ethnography these communities can be, and have been, considered as the descendants of ethnographic "tribes" and the heirs of what tribal culture has survived. These communities can be studied, as some have been, in the context of interest in acculturation. It is also possible to consider modern Indian communities as possible examples in their own right or relatively distinct societies with unique cultures or cultural patterns. Such communities are not in fact "synchronic isolates," i.e., closed systems in time and space; it is nevertheless possible to analyze out open systems, and to understand them insofar as possible in their own terms, then in the context of their history and their external relations.

We may wish to identify groups of people, or, in some cases, individuals as "Indian" on the basis of one or a combination of several types of criteria, e.g., legal, biological, cultural, or societal:

(1) Legal: Indian as defined by statute and by judicial and executive decisions.

(2) Biological: A Mendelian, intra-breeding population with a genetic constitution

(allelotype) differing from that of Euro-American populations (and, perhaps, resembling presumptive aboriginal genetic characteristics) may be classed as "Indian." Such groups presumably do exist in partial reproductive isolation as a consequence of social, cultural, and legal factors.

(3) Cultural: A group may be characterized by patterns of behavior which are distinct from the behavior patterns of neighboring Euro-Americans. These distinctive behavior patterns may be of at least two sorts, (a) behavior which seems related to aboriginal behavior (i) as a fairly "pure survival" or (ii) as an evolutionary development from, or an elaboration of, behavior in the ethnographic present; or (b) behavior which seems more closely related to conditions of modern culture contact, behavior more or less determined by elements of general Canadian culture, adaptations to the external social environment. (This could include political behavior by "Indians" for "Indians.") The term Indian may or may not be reserved for behavior of the first sort (a).

(4) Societal: A distinguishable group with a high internal interaction rate and which is recognized as a group at least by its members may be classed as "Indian," because (a) outsiders consider the group to be Indian, or (b) the members of the group consider themselves to be Indian, or (c) there is a historical continuity between the present group and past groups definitely aboriginal Indian, or (d) some combination of reasons (a), (b), and (c).

Clearly the populations of Indian communities will best be defined by some set of societal criteria; indeed "societal Indians" could be defined in terms of membership, or residence, in a community localized in time and space. "Indians" societally defined probably have the most interest for anthropology generally, although for some specific problems some other kind of criteria may be equally or more useful. The general interest of societal Indians is the greater, because a group of Indians societally defined probably will include, perhaps exclusively, individuals who would be classified as Indian under strictly biological or cultural criteria. (Apparently

there are a very few communities which might be classified as Indian on sociocultural grounds, but which include few, if any, legal Indians.) On the other hand, individuals classed as Indian under legal, biological, or cultural criteria may not meet societal criteria.

For some anthropological, and even some administrative or political, purposes it may be desirable, or even necessary, to consider as "Indian" groups or individuals who are so defined by societal criteria; for often it is a community or community standards, rather than a series of individuals, which interacts with outsiders and outside influences. If there is an "Indian problem," as we hear reference to in the United States, it is probably groups of "Indians," regardless of legal, cultural, or biological factors, which contribute to a "problem" which is distinctively Indian.

In an attempt to determine the character, distribution, size, and growth characteristics of Indian communities I examined data which is partially summarized in the accompanying tables. The two principal general sources do not employ societal criteria: the Indian Affairs Branch Census of Indians in Canada (IAB) uses a strictly statutory definition; the Bureau of Statistics Census of Canada (the Census) uses several variations on ethnic (quasi-racial) criteria. However in the present context certain features of the data are noteworthy.

(1) The population of legal Indians (i.e., those individuals listed as Indians under the Indian Act) has been increasing rapidly during the twentieth century. (See Tables 1A, 1B.)

(2) Not only has this population been increasing rapidly, but, for the country as a whole, the rate of increase is itself accelerated. (See Table 1C.) However the acceleration in the five years ending in 1954 is less than the acceleration in the preceding five-year period. This may indicate a tapering-off of the population increase. On the other hand, this decline in acceleration of population

increase may be wholly or in part simply an artifact of the legal redefinition of Indian, which occurred in 1951.

(3) For the 1949-1954 increase (11%) in the number of legal Indians occurred in spite of, rather than because of, the redefinition of Indian in the 1951 Indian Act (Revised Statutes, 1952, c. 149, secs. 5-17, as amended in 4-5 Elizabeth II, c. 40, secs. 3-4). The fairly explicit purpose, and the effect, of this law is clearly to reduce, rather than increase, the number of legal Indians. Furthermore there is a certain amount, though not large, of enfranchisement of Indians.

(4) The foregoing remarks apply to the country as a whole, but there are marked regional variations. The data seem to fall into the ad hoc groupings indicated in the tables (Tables 1, 3, and 4): (a) Prince Edward Island; (b) Nova Scotia and New Brunswick; (c) Quebec and Ontario; (d) Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta; (e) British Columbia; and (f) the Territories.

Interprovincial migration is the most obvious explanation. Exigencies of the depression, of the Second World War, of the exploitation of minerals in the North and in the Prairie Provinces might explain considerable net movement. Even in 1915 the Canadian Indian population was fairly mobile, although the net migration in any area was small in most cases (moderate net in-migration into Manitoba, heavy net out-migration from the Northwest Territories). However, it is my understanding that the complete enrollment of a legal Band is reported from the Province (s) in which the Band is located; that individuals or families not residing with the Band, and perhaps in another Province, are nevertheless reported along with the Band of which they are legally members. If this understanding is correct, then, only if a whole Band (or its administrative center) is moved from one Province to another, will the migration be reflected in the IAB census.

The apparent alternative basis for the regional variations is in differential rates of

natural increase. Superficial comparison of the rates of natural increase in 1950 (See Table 4) indicates that the vital statistics are in accord with this. As between the North and the more settled regions of Canada ecological differences may account for differential rates of increase; the way of life of many Whites and Indians in the North reflects an ecological system not far removed from aboriginal conditions in many broadly conceived aspects. Differences of rate of increase in various regions of southern Canada may be more a function of purely cultural factors.

(5) As a result of amalgamations the number of legal Bands has been reduced, despite general increases in population. Thus the mean Band size must have been increasing, and, from the administrative and political view at least, the Indian population is becoming more centralized. The IAB census does not indicate whether amalgamations of Bands have any relationship to the amalgamation of physical communities. No such relationship is necessary, since Bands do not correspond one-to-one with communities.

(6) There exists a discrepancy between the size of the "population of Indian origin" as reported in the Ninth Census and the (legal) Indian population as reported by the IAB. (See Table 3.) The Census shows ca. 14,000 more individuals of Indian origin than the IAB shows Indians; this figure represents ca. 9% of the 155,516 returned by the Census (Bureau of Statistics).

In part this is a result of the use of different criteria for defining the relevant population. Unfortunately for present purposes, with the 1951 decennial census the Bureau of Statistics ceased trying to record "Indians" and "Metis" separately, and began recording only an individual's ethnic "origin," traced through the paternal line. However a graphing of past Bureau of Statistics and IAB censuses indicates that the Bureau of Statistics has consistently returned more Indians than the IAB (even when the Bureau of Statistics has distinguished Indians from Metis); also the

fact that the use of the two sets of criteria produces a discrepancy of this order is of itself an interesting datum. It is likely that some, and possibly many, of these 14,000 individuals are societal Indians. If we assume that most of the legal Indians are societal Indians -- but this assumption may not be warranted, at least in some sections of the country -- then this gives us a range within which the population of societal Indians in Canada in 1951 should fall, viz. 142,000 - 156,000.

Particularly interesting are the facts that the total of the discrepancies in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta is nearly adequate to account for the national total; whereas the discrepancy in Quebec is negative, i.e., more Indians (IAB) than people of Indian origin (Census) are reported from Quebec. The discrepancies may be accounted for, wholly or in part, if the number of Indians actually in residence in the Province at the time of the census was recorded by the Bureau of Statistics, and if the number of Indians in a Band in the Province, regardless of the actual residence of the individuals, was recorded by the Indian Affairs Branch. For instance, it may be that hundreds of Caughnawaga were returned from Quebec by the IAB, but were not returned in the Ninth Census, because they were not resident in Quebec at the time of the census. Nevertheless it apparently remains true that there is a regional variability in the Canadian Indian population and its ecological characteristics which leads to a relatively small discrepancy between the two censuses, to a relatively large positive discrepancy, or to a relatively large negative discrepancy. And the large positive discrepancies are associated with the areas of greatest recent growth of Indian population, though not with the areas of greatest absolute Indian population. Inter-Provincial movements are by no means adequate to account for this, since the negative discrepancies come no where near equalling the positive discrepancies; the ca. 14,000 total represents a net positive discrepancy.

Testimony (in 1951) before the Parliamentary committee on revising the Indian Act indicated that there were in northern Alberta (where the greatest discrepancy between censuses exists) groups which considered themselves to be Indian, which acted like Indians, and which in good faith exercised some of the prerogatives of legal Indians, only to learn that they were not so regarded by the government.

In northern British Columbia I encountered a small population of people legally White who seemed clearly to be part of the reservation community, upon the fringes of which they lived, and who in most of their overt behavior (and appearance) resembled closely the legal Indian population. For many purposes it may be useful to recognize such people as part of the Indian community, as Indians. The case of this particular group (and perhaps other cases as well) is complicated by the fact that in some contexts the members of this population will verbally identify as "Indians" and in other contexts as "White."

(7) Aside from this synchronic discrepancy, there is a diachronic discrepancy between the Census and IAB figures. In the decade 1939-1949 the population of legal Indians (IAB) increased by 18,029. (See Table 1A.) In the nearly corresponding decade 1941-1951 the "population of Indian origin" (Census) increased by only one-tenth of this (1,784). (See Table 2. It is assumed here that the Ninth Census (1951) category "Indian origin" is comparable to the sum of the Eighth Census (1941) categories "Indian" and "Metis").

Since presumably all legal Indians are included in the Census "Indian origin" category (and if the net migration of Indians between Canada and the United States - and - Alaska is negligible), this means that the non-legal "Indian" population (i.e. the difference between legal Indians and population of Indian origin) has experienced a net decrease nearly equal to the net increase of the legal Indian population, so that the net increase of the combined population is small. Probably the birth rate in the non-legal

"Indian" population is well in excess of the death rate; therefor the fairly substantial net decrease must reflect a "passing" from one census category to another, presumably indicating a sociological movement in the direction of assimilation.

This suggests the tentative conclusion with reference to societal Indians that in recent years the birth rate among societal Indians has been slightly in excess of the combined death rate and assimilation rate, yielding a small annual increase in the number of societal Indians. Even if the birth rate were to fall below the combined death and assimilation rates (as perhaps it now is), it would not fall so far below as to result in a very substantial net decrease per year of societal Indians; and thus, barring a sharp intensification or proliferation of pressures favoring assimilation, communities of societal Indians will be a factor in Canada for a long time to come.

Summary and Conclusions

To those concerned for almost any reason with Canadian Indians of especial interest are Indians in functioning communities. The population of these communities needs not, and does not, exactly correspond with the population of "Indians" defined in any but societal terms. Information on some of the Indians so defined is available in scattered sources; but there is apparently neither complete nor systematic coverage of even the order of numbers of people living in Indian communities in Canada.

In this paper selected official figures on Canadian Indian population have been organized and annotated in a manner intended to highlight both (a) suggestions as to the size, nature, and distribution of the societal Indian population and (b) questions still unanswered. The following general remarks may be offered:

(1) There were in 1950 probably between 142,000 and 156,000 societal Indians in Canada, unevenly distributed among the several regions. Possibly there were less than 142,000; almost certainly there were no more than ca. 156,000.

(2) In the decades preceding 1950 the population of societal Indians was probably gradually increasing, and at an accelerated rate; the birth rate exceeding the combined death and assimilation rates. If the net balance has now changed to a net decrease, it represents a small decrease, and, barring radical change in the conditions of acculturation, Canadian Indian communities will persist as communities and as Indian into the forseeable future.

(3) There are marked regional differences, not only in absolute size, but also in rate of growth, and census identification of Indians. These factors are certainly associated with other factors, ecological and social, including differential conditions of acculturation.

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TABLE 1: GROWTH OF CANADIAN INDIAN POPULATION

1A. Absolute figures from Indian Affairs censuses

1915	1934	1939	1944	1949	1954
CANADA					
103,531	112,510	118,378	125,686	136,407	151,558
Prince Edward Is.					
288	224	274	266	273	272
Nova Scotia					
2,042	2,093	2,165	2,364	2,641	3,002
New Brunswick					
1,862	1,734	1,922	2,047	2,139	2,629
Quebec					
13,174	13,281	14,578	15,194	15,970	17,574
Ontario					
26,162	30,631	30,145	32,421	34,571	37,255
Manitoba					
10,798	12,958	14,561	15,933	17,549	19,684
Saskatchewan					
9,775	11,878	13,020	14,158	16,308	18,750
Alberta					
8,500	10,900	12,163	12,441	13,805	15,715
British Columbia					
25,399	23,593	24,276	25,515	27,936	31,086
Northwest Terr.					
4,003	3,854	3,724	3,816	3,772	4,023
Yukon Terr.					
1,528	1,359	1,550	1,531	1,443	1,568

1b. Index of population growth (1915 population in each row is base = 1.00)

CANADA					
1.00	1.09	1.14	1.21	1.32	1.46
Prince Edward Is.					
1.00	0.78	0.95	0.92	0.95	0.94

1b. Index of population growth (1915 population in each row is base = 1.00) (cont.)

1915	1934	1939	1944	1949	1954
Nova Scotia					
1.00	1.02	1.06	1.16	1.29	1.47
New Brunswick					
1.00	0.93	1.03	1.10	1.15	1.41
Quebec					
1.00	1.01	1.11	1.15	1.21	1.33
Ontario					
1.00	1.17	1.15	1.24	1.32	1.42
Manitoba					
1.00	1.20	1.35	1.48	1.63	1.82
Saskatchewan					
1.00	1.22	1.33	1.45	1.67	1.92
Alberta					
1.00	1.28	1.43	1.46	1.62	1.85
British Columbia					
1.00	0.93	0.96	1.00	1.10	1.22
Northwest Terr.					
1.00	0.96	0.93	0.95	0.94	1.00
Yukon Terr.					
1.00	0.89	1.01	1.00	0.94	1.03

1c. Growth of Indian populations: Percent of increase per 5-year period (Base: population figure of the preceding census)

	Percent of change in the 5 yrs. ending --			
CANADA	5	6	9	11
Prince Edward Island	22	-3	3	0
Nova Scotia	3	9	12	14
New Brunswick	11	7	4	23
Quebec	10	4	5	10
Ontario	-2	8	7	8

1c. Growth of Indian populations: Percent of increase per 5-year period (Base: population figure of the preceding census) (cont.)

	Percent of change in the 5 yrs. ending --			
	1939	1944	1949	1954
Manitoba	12	9	10	12
Saskatchewan	10	9	15	15
Alberta	12	2	11	14
British Columbia	3	5	9	11
Northwest Terr.	-3	2	-1	7
Yukon Terr.	14	-1	-6	9

TABLE 2: "INDIANS" AND/OR "POPULATION OF INDIAN ORIGIN" AS REPORTED IN THE CENSUS OF CANADA (Bureau of Statistics)

	Indian race or racial origin					
1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951
CANADA						
127,941[a]	105,492[b]	110,814	122,911	118,316[c]	155,874[d]

a) Includes 34,481 "Half-breeds;" includes Eskimos.

b) Includes Eskimos.

c) If the reported number of "Half-breeds" (35,416) were included, the total would be 153,732.

d) Revision of census criteria resulted in the lumping of "pure" Indians and "Half-breeds." Includes Newfoundland (358 individuals of Indian origin).

TABLE 3: LEGAL INDIANS AND THE "POPULATION OF INDIAN ORIGIN" IN CANADA, 1951

A Pop. of Indian Origin, 1951	B Legal Indians, 1949	C Estimate of Legal Indians for 1951	D Difference, 1951
CANADA (excluding Newfoundland)			
155,516	136,407	142,000	14,000
Prince Edward Is.			
257	273		
Nova Scotia			
2,717	2,641		
New Brunswick			
2,255	2,139		
Quebec			
14,631	15,970	16,700	-2,000
Ontario			
37,370	34,571		
Manitoba			
21,024	17,549	18,300	3,000
Saskatchewan			
22,250	16,308	17,300	5,000
Alberta			
21,163	13,805	14,700	6,000
British Columbia			
28,478	27,936		
Northwest Terr.			
3,838	3,772		
Yukon Terr.			
1,533	1,443		

Sources:

Column A: Canada. Bureau of Statistics. Ninth Census of Canada (1951), vol. II, Table 32.

Column B: Canada. Dept. of Citizenship and Immigration. Indian Affairs Branch. Census of Indians in Canada: 1949.

Column C: Graphic interpolation. Appropriate values from Table 1A (above) were graphed for the years 1915, 1934, 1939, 1944, 1949, and 1954. The figures in Column C of this Table represent the 1951-intersects rounded to the nearest 100.

Column D: The value in Column C subtracted from the corresponding value in Column A. Differences rounded to nearest 1,000.

TABLE 4:
RATE OF NATURAL INCREASE
TOTAL POPULATION AND INDIAN POPULATION
CANADA: 1950

Excess of births (exclusive of stillbirths) over deaths per 1,000 of population

	General population (Including Indians)	Pop. of Indian origin (Based on 1951 figures)
CANADA	18.1	33
Prince Edward Is.	20.7	20
Nova Scotia	17.6	27
New Brunswick	22.4	33
Quebec	21.6	23
Ontario	14.5	29
Manitoba	16.5	37
Saskatchewan	18.4	45
Alberta	20.6	42
British Columbia	13.6	29
Northwest Terr.		23
Yukon Terr.		23