

# White-Dominant Settlements in the Canadian Northwest Territories\*

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## RÉSUMÉ

Les influences géopolitiques, économiques et culturelles, découlant des types d'agences gouvernementales, militaires ou privées ainsi que de leurs activités respectives, ont amené des changements profonds et rapides tant chez les habitants du nord canadien que dans la région elle-même. Ces changements sont étudiés ici en regard des types de communautés qui s'y sont développés. Une insistance particulière est mise sur le degré d'intégration sociale et de progrès économique atteint par les indiens ou esquimaux qui sont venus dans ces nouveaux centres pour y trouver du travail.

Les problèmes complexes d'intégration communautaire résultent du fait que la population de ces centres est composée de groupes distincts (indigènes, métis et blancs), ayant chacun des attitudes bien particulières, et aussi du fait que ces centres ne sont, pour les employés des agences gouvernementales ou privées, que des bases d'opération et non des endroits de résidence permanente.

Three major forces are at work in the modern Canadian North transforming the region and its people. The first is geopolitical, the second is economic and the third is cultural transformation of native peoples. Canada's North is politically and militarily a strategic zone of importance in the jet-age; its untapped resources represent a hoped-for new economic horizon, and its native peoples are scheduled to become incorporated into the mainstream of Canadian life.

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The recent Canadian northern development program has brought national government and military agencies and also private construction and transportation agencies into the North where they have set up headquarters in new settlements or in older ones. The old frontier settlement with its miners, trappers, and natives has been overrun by a bewildering variety of government civil servants, military and technical personnel and small-business men who represent a southern Canadian population.

Thus there is no "typical" northern community today, nor is there any longer a simple three-way populational breakdown into northern White, Metis and Native.

This article discusses the complex problems of community integration that results from the fact that a variety of government and private organizations use these settlements as bases for their specialized personnel, and from the variety of populational elements, native, white, southern Canadian and old timer whites who are resident there.

For the native Indians and Eskimos who have flowed into these new settlements and become dependent upon wage labour, we shall examine to what extent they are achieving social integration and making economic progress.

All the data and ideas herein set forth have resulted from a year's field trip in the Canadian Northwest Territories (June 1961 - May 1962). A major objective of the research was to determine the nature and variety of communities that are emerging in the Canadian North. In this research examples of distinctive settlement types were selected ranging from technical and military stations to various kinds of frontier towns. A thumbnail community study was made of each such settlement.

### *General Remarks on Community Organization*

The 20th century frontier area in the North is a rather remarkable place, for in it the most modern as well as traditional kinds of technologies, social and political orders coexist in various ways. There are ultra modern military bases and technical stations and even southern Canadian type "suburbias" on the one extreme,

and on the other are shack towns, construction camps, squatter neighbourhoods and even tent cities. Sophisticated southern populations live in close physical proximity to rugged old-timer northern whites, metis and natives. In the same settlement some men go to work in modern office buildings while others tote their rifles into the arctic wastes to hunt for meat and furs.

Government bureaucrats, small-business men, drifters and semi-nomadic whites and natives are all represented. The sections of a settlement containing government departments are highly organized socially, while other neighborhoods of whites, metis and natives are simply amorphous frontier agglomerations of families and single men.

The modern settlement, therefore, in this neo-pioneering stage, is a mosaic of government departments, private corporations, business men, and white and native wage workers. Some of this population represent stable residents while others are transient or semi-transient. It is much too early to expect social integration to be achieved in such a polyglot society. However, it is true that the government tends to polarize, at least economically, all other elements about itself. The government represents the most certain source of wealth, planning and organization: in a word, jobs, money and security.

Insofar as in some settlements the most important tasks today are to establish and provide administration, communication, welfare and education services for the new region, government departments such as the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, the Department of Transport, and the Northern and Indian Health Service are the key agencies (cf. Fort Smith or Inuvik). Here where private enterprise exists it acts in an auxilliary role. The political structure of such settlements takes its form from the nature of the government agencies that are based here. Thus, various large government departments, each with its own bureaucratic staff, its own personnel, equipment and areas of jurisdiction, co-exist. However, if one government agency is especially important, such as the Department of Northern Affairs in Inuvik, it is in fact the dominant political force in the settlement.

In contrast to the settlements whose main *raison d'être* is government business and work is carried out through the agency of government departments, there are some settlements in which private enterprise has scope to develop; for example, Yellowknife and gold mining, or Hay River and fishing or transportation activities. These two communities have a civic machinery of the elected mayor and council variety. However, even in such more politically advanced settlements, only a small percentage of the white population is politically active and this interest is limited to the members of the business sector. The ordinary white job-holder and certainly all of the metis and natives are politically inert.

Finally, as regards settlement neighbourhood and residence patterning, we find the government civil servants living in special high standard housing enclaves and the other whites, metis and natives living interspersed in a more frontier, haphazard fashion. In some settlements the government has initiated housing projects for natives, thus, in effect, creating special neighbourhoods for them. In general, the business whites and better paid white workers occupy housing closer to government neighbourhoods and the natives and metis live either amongst the poorer whites or in outlying neighbourhoods.

### *Populational Elements*

As we have seen, there are three vital populational components in the larger northern settlements: (1) government civil servants and other, private agency sponsored, southern Canadians; (2) non-government northern whites; and (3) native Indian, Eskimo and Metis groups.

Let us analyze each component now: The government civil service and private company personnel are an extremely heterogeneous group. They come from every province of Canada, represent small town and large cities and even rural or isolated Maritime villages. Some are recent immigrants from England, Germany, Scandinavia or the United States. Depending upon whether their positions are administrative, scientific or technical, skilled or unskilled, their educational attainments vary from

advanced university training to simple grade school levels. They are mostly persons recruited from the existing agencies in the south to do the same or similar jobs in the north. A lesser number are attracted into joining a government agency by the desire to be posted north. For many, their motives reflect an interest in higher pay or more prestigious positions rather than in adventure and the "challenge of the north". Few have had a previous northern experience. It would appear that the physically healthy, the willing and the "available" of all sorts simply accumulate at any given settlement. The north no longer seems to demand a special type of rugged, adventurous personality to fill skilled or semi-skilled positions in the security of a modern settlement.

The second group, the northern whites, are similarly a fascinating varied group, but covering an entirely different spectrum of personality and social types than the government or agency personnel. They include: (1) all of those restless, adventurous whites who were resident in the Northwest Territories for many years before the big development drive began — the trappers, prospectors, and all-around bush-living whites; (2) those who had previously been employed by the Hudson's Bay Company, the mines, or the various transportation companies that plied the Mackenzie River system; (3) persons previously employed in construction work in northern settlements or military installations and who had somehow remained; and (4) the few hardy business men trickling into the north in search of a hoped-for untapped economic frontier.

The third group, the Indian, Eskimo and Metis, who have poured into the larger settlements of the north such as Frobisher Bay, Inuvik, Fort Smith, Churchill, Yellowknife and Hay River represent a spectrum of acculturation. At one extreme we find persons who until recently have lived by hunting and trapping, speak a native language and act and think in essentially traditional modes; at the other extreme, are young men and women of 18 - 35 who now have some schooling, know no native skills and are incapable of living off the land. However, both are thoroughly committed to a settlement life. Most of the younger persons appear to have already passed beyond the point of no return as

far as readaptation to the older aboriginal mode of life is concerned.

### *Inter Group Relations in Settlements*

#### *1. Government Civil Servants and Local White Residents*

Two fundamental issues tend to arise out of the confrontation of southern Canadian civil servants and local northern whites. Civil servants and the executive staffs of large supporting private agencies can command far richer resources in salaries, housing, food and facilities than the independent local whites. Jealousy is therefore inevitable. Also, because civil servants and agency personnel are basically job holders their status in the community as settlers tends to be suspect by the northerners who have seen them come and go.

In terms of economic adaptation, the more adaptable and energetic northern whites quickly seize small business opportunities in retail or service trades, or find their way into good positions as auxiliary local help in some government or private agency. Only the occasional congenial personality with social talents finds his way into acceptance in some government centered social circle, for most real frontier, individualistic types are not at home in more normal southern Canadian circles. Some old northerners have married native women and this certainly accounts for some of the lack of rapport between such families and the government-centered social group in which southern Canadian wives control important avenues of acceptance. In some cases earlier friendships between single southern Canadians and northern whites may dissolve as wives begin to appear in the settlement, and new types of social activities transform the social scene; for example, the cocktail party and curling.

The group with least contact with the government-agency world naturally enough is the marginal fringe of whites who socially and economically begin to shade into the native or metis world. These include ex-trappers, ex-prospectors, transportation and construction workers, casual laborers, drifters and lone wolves; in sum, the flotsam and jetsam of the northern frontier.

## 2. *Married Persons and Single Persons*

As we are dealing with the opening phases of regional development, work in isolated, rugged outposts requires the use of single males. The white population at first was represented by construction workers and agency personnel charged with building or establishing offices, shops, homes and in general creating facilities for others yet to come. Much of this early work was done by persons who came for summer seasons only. Even though in the succeeding phase, roughly after 1954, when family groups now existed in large numbers, many single persons still remain in these settlements. The rough, unskilled and semi-skilled construction workers who arrive for summer work live in isolated barracks or special camps removed from the core of the settlement itself. The local drinking establishment is their only acknowledged preserve in the settlement itself and their local social contacts are often limited to native peoples. In some places, they are today not permitted even these contacts: native neighbourhoods being "out of bounds" for them (this is a case of barring the stable door after the horse has bolted). However, there are also large numbers of teachers, technicians or clerks who are unmarried, and these in their own way must seek their society from amongst the social category of the "unmarried," for the married southern Canadian families tend to form tightly cohesive social circles and exclude all persons who cannot share in the basic social activity of party-making. Feminine society revolves about the coffee visiting round, and for this activity the right kind of home is needed. Married society, at least for most of the southern Canadian sector, features intense social cliques based on reciprocity of the host-guest roles for which expensive facilities are necessary. It tends to exclude not only the unmarried men and women but also those married persons who refuse to play the social game.

## 3. *White and Native Intergroup Relations*

The culture contact situation can be conveniently divided into two phases. In the early phase of post World War II settlement building activities, 1947-1954, very large numbers of transient single men flowed north and these had direct and at times very inti-

mate contacts with natives. In 1956 another wave of construction workers passed over the Eskimo region during the quite fantastic DEW Line construction period. This contact period introduced young natives, especially those brought in to work and live among these whites, to peculiar or specialized aspects of southern civilization such as would be displayed by transient workers and single men away from home (these include language, drinking and gratification patterns in general, attitudes towards spending money, treating women, etc.).

In the second phase, when white families began to appear even in outlying posts as the dominant social element, contact between whites and natives changed in character. This new influx of whites was better equipped to carry on a more "normal" southern style of social life and they began to form exclusive social ingroups. The social, cultural and economic distances are today so painfully apparent to whites and natives that the drawing apart into two social worlds could hardly be prevented.

#### *4. More Acculturated Natives and Less Acculturated Natives*

In both Inuvik and Frobisher Bay where large numbers of natives have been drawn from widely dispersed areas, a veritable melting pot of natives has occurred, but mainly within the confines of special native neighbourhoods. The native elements contain a spectrum of less to more acculturated Eskimos, depending upon the type and intensity of contact with whites. In general the western Arctic received its culture shocks much earlier than the eastern zone, but today in both areas a whole new generation of quasi-acculturated neo-native or neo-Canadians (depending upon the semantic acrobatics preferred) has arisen. This is the age group of 18 - 35 alike among Eskimos and Indians who now have some formal schooling and a fair grasp of English; many are semi-skilled workers and all are clearly no longer aboriginal native in outlook or skills. This group is now generationally set off all over the north from their post-traditional hunting or trapping parents, who themselves are once or twice removed from their pre-mining, trapping or whaling era ancestors. This new younger generation has established some cross-cutting identity and seems to have evolved its own "devil-may-care" social



style with the drinking party as the meeting place. The older generation clings to narrow kinship or regional affiliations. It is difficult to establish social or political cohesion among these ingathered persons from widely scattered points for whom permanent residency in a single community is a novel experience.

### *Conclusions*

1. All northern settlements are composites of three populational components: a civil servant and government sponsored personnel who represent recent arrivals in the region; a non-government northern white population; and a spectrum of natives in various stages of acculturation — Metis, neo-Metis, and conservative Native.

2. The community structure of northern settlements is a balancing of two types of societies: a) a modern, highly organized occupational community made up of discrete autonomous agencies in which the population consists of job holders, not true settlers, and social organization is supplied by job organization; and b) a more traditional frontier society made up of independent whites, metis and natives showing amorphous social ties.

3. Problems of community integration between the three basic populational components arise from very marked disparities in social, economic and cultural standards of living. That is, today these groups have very little in common to encourage "togetherness."

Finally, this is a period when the Eskimos and Indians are being exposed to new cultural influence by southern whites. This time instead of miners, trappers, whalers and missionaries, the agents are government employees charged with direct tasks of assisting native peoples to reach a better economic and social way of life. The 19th century produced the Metis — a marginal backwoods variant peripherally adapted to the world of white miners and trappers. In the post World War II settlements we seem to be seeing the creation of another kind of Metis — one with a grade school education, a semi-skilled worker with modern tools, but one who as a person is still socially peripheral to the dominant white social elements of the community.

Two conditions must be changed in order to prevent yet another group of natives in transition from becoming frozen into marginal men:

1. A change in the existing social structure of settlements that makes for a static division of persons into government sectors, non-government white sectors and a shadowy social world of metis and natives.

2. A change in the economic structure whereby peripheral niches in the economic scheme of things are filled by natives. In the past this was largely caused by sheer prejudice and lack of education on the part of natives, but today it is to a large part due to an underdeveloped local economy which is based heavily on direct and indirect government aid rather than on local resources.

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SCHEMATIC REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL DISTANCE  
 BETWEEN POPULATIONAL COMPONENTS  
 IN LARGER SETTLEMENTS  
 IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES — CANADA

— 1961-1962 —

