

Lessons from the Past

Today, the government of British Columbia is trying to find ways to make sure the rights of all people in the province are respected. This was not always true in the past.

For many years, the Canadian and British Columbian governments thought that the best way for people to get along was for everyone to be the same. They wanted Aboriginal peoples and new Canadians to give up their own cultures and become like Europeans.

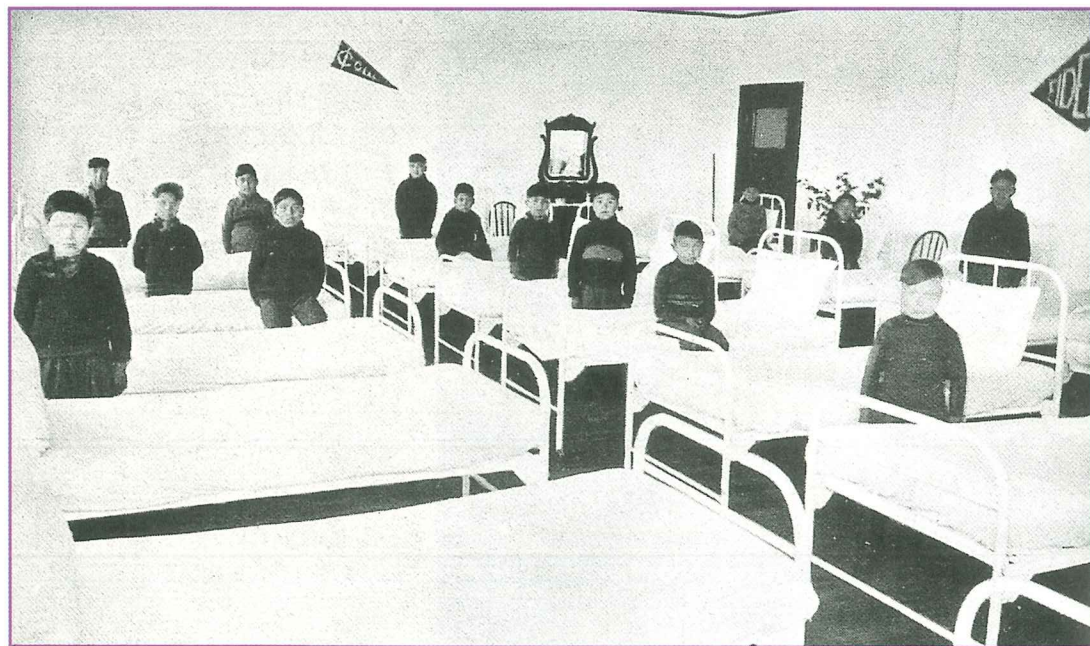
Laws in the Past

The government did many things to try to change Aboriginal cultures. In British Columbia, for example, they passed a law that made potlatches illegal.

Another law said that all Aboriginal children had to go to **residential schools**. All across Canada, Aboriginal families had to send their children to live at schools run by people from European cultures. These schools were often far from the children's homes. At the schools, the

What do you think of this idea?

This picture shows boys at a residential school in their **dormitory** (where they slept.) What would it be like to be sent far from home and not be allowed to speak your own language?



children were not allowed to speak their own language or do the things that were normal in their culture.

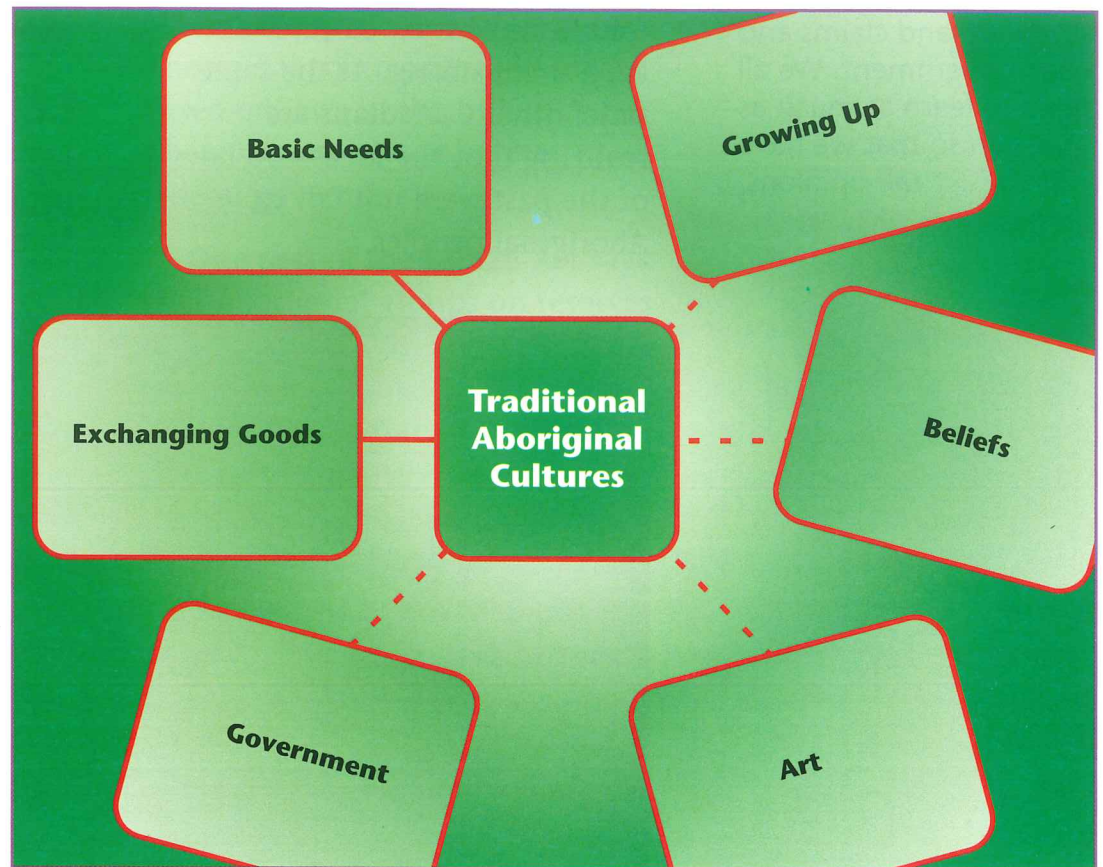
Broken Cultures

Some Aboriginal people agreed with the government's ideas. Many others didn't. They tried to hide their children from people who came to take them away to school. In British Columbia, potlatches were sometimes held in secret. In the end, though, Aboriginal peoples didn't have enough power to change the government's ideas.

Because they could not practice their traditions, many Aboriginal communities began to have problems. The Elders could not show young people how to do things or tell them stories about the past because the children were away at the residential

schools. Some young people didn't know what to do with their lives, and they got into trouble.

People's basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter were met, but they were losing other parts of their culture. Without all of the pieces, a culture has trouble surviving.



Think For Yourself

In a group, discuss the broken culture web. Try to imagine what happens when you take away one part of the web. After your discussion, decide how to complete this sentence:

- *A culture needs all of its parts because...*

New Ideas, New Challenges

Canadians have many different points of view about land claims and self-government. We all need to learn as much as we can so that we have fair opinions.

Today, many Aboriginal people are working to bring back the traditions of their cultures and keep them strong. At the same time, other Canadians are realizing that the ideas and laws of the past were not fair to Aboriginal peoples.

Two challenges for the future are **land claims** and **self-government**.

Land Claims

Land claims involve Aboriginal peoples' rights to certain lands. Some Aboriginal groups did not

During treaty negotiations, Nisga'a leaders arrived at the Parliament Buildings in a ceremonial canoe. Why do you think the Nisga'a chose to arrive in a traditional way?



sign treaties with the Canadian or provincial governments. These groups say they have never given up their rights to their traditional territories. They think it is time to start negotiating for this land.

The **Supreme Court** of Canada makes important decisions about laws in the country. The judges in the Supreme Court looked at this issue and at Canadian laws. They decided that Aboriginal peoples are right. Groups who have not signed treaties have rights to their traditional territories.



In 1998, the government of British Columbia began negotiating with Aboriginal groups in the province who did not already have treaties. These new treaties are different from the treaties in the past. They show more respect for the rights of Aboriginal peoples.

Self-government

Since 1876, government in most Aboriginal communities has been based on laws in the Indian Act. These are laws made by the federal government.

One part of the Indian Act says that Aboriginal groups on reserves must elect a leader. In most Aboriginal cultures, though, the head of a group either inherited the position or was chosen after a group discussion. Voting wasn't the traditional way of doing things.

Today, Aboriginal groups want to make their own decisions on the best form of government for their communities. This might be traditional or modern, or a combination of both.

One exciting change was the creation of the territory of Nunavut on 1 April 1999. Newspapers and magazines all across Canada had information about this important event. You can learn more about it in the following report.

Today, many unfair laws have been changed. For example, all people are free to practise their beliefs, and there are no more residential schools

Nunavut Is Born

IQALUIT, 1 April 1999

Today the Inuit hopes for self-government came true when the territory of Nunavut was created. In Inuktitut, Nunavut means “our land.”

The ceremonies to create Nunavut were held in Iqaluit, the capital of the new territory. The new legislature building was too small to hold all the guests, so people gathered in a large building at the airport.

Outside, fireworks lit the dark sky. Inside, there were speeches and drum dancing. A traditional soapstone lamp was lit as a symbol of strength. Three Elders watched over everything as papers were signed to create the territory.

The Inuit had been working for 30 years for this moment. The area that is now Nunavut used to be part of the Northwest Territories.

Most of the people in the area are Inuit. Inuit culture had trouble surviving after the arrival of Europeans. The Inuit in the eastern part of the Arctic believed they could do a better job of taking care of their own people.

Nunavut’s first premier, Paul Okalik, said, “We, the people of Nunavut, have regained control of our destiny. Today we stand strong and welcome the challenges Nunavut faces.”

Reported by Margaret Matthews



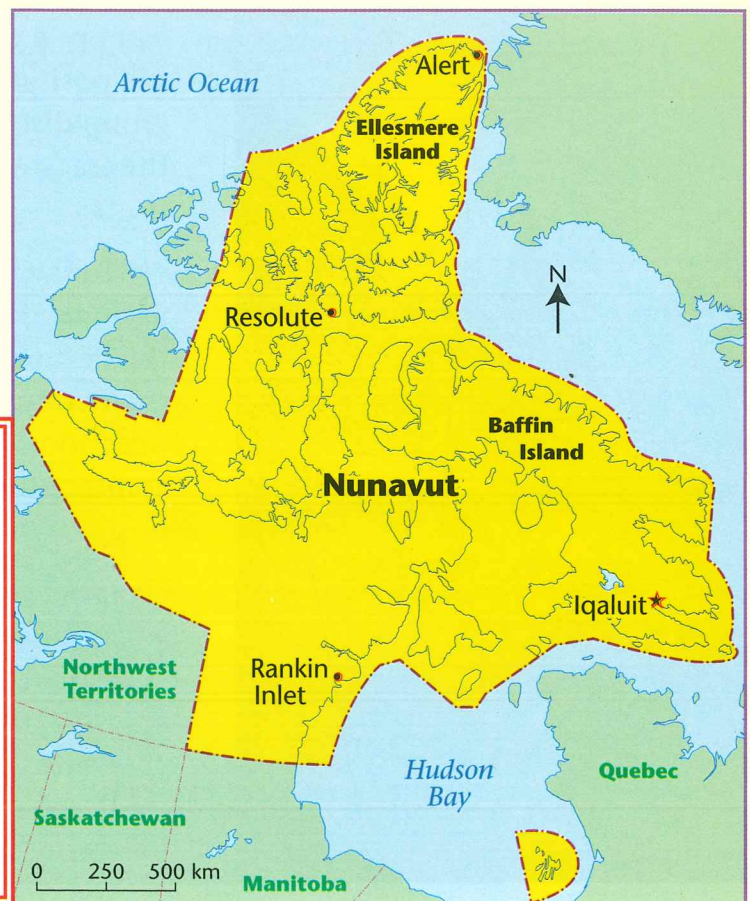
Just after midnight on Friday, 1 April 1999, fireworks lit the night sky over Iqaluit to celebrate the new territory of Nunavut

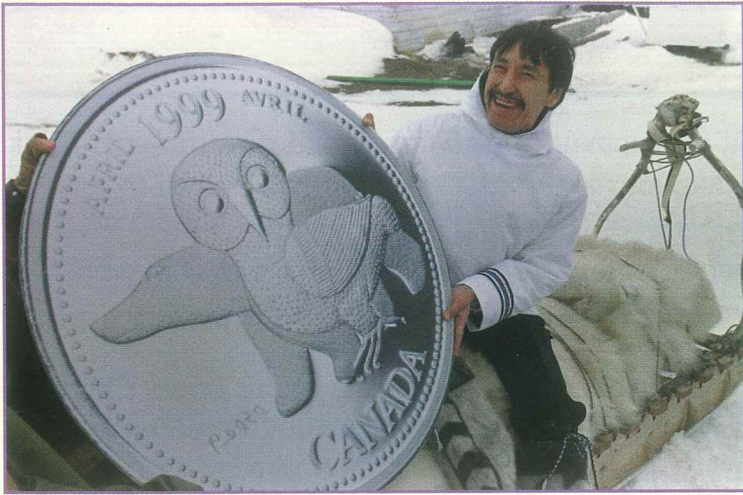
Nunavut Facts

Official languages: Inuktitut, English, and French
85% of the people speak Inuktitut

Size: 20% of Canada’s land area
About the size of British Columbia, Alberta, and Yukon together

Population: 25 000 people
By comparison, the population of BC is 3 724 500





Paul Okalik displays a model of the new Nunavut coin made to mark the creation of the new territory.



Women wearing traditional caribou skins joined the celebrations in Nunavut.

How the New Government Will Work

In elections, the people of Nunavut will vote for MLAs in 19 ridings. Together, these MLAs will form the Legislative Assembly. The MLAs will then elect a premier to lead them.

The Legislative Assembly will meet in a round room designed with benches around the side. The benches are covered with seal-skin. The room's ceiling is shaped like the ceiling of an igloo.



Guests at the Nunavut celebrations tour the new legislative building in Iqaluit.

Lively Communities

A boriginal people today are working in their communities to make sure young people learn their own languages and understand their history and culture. They are doing this in two ways. One way is by practising traditional ceremonies. The other way is by using old traditions to create new ones.

Passing on Names

In many Aboriginal cultures, names have a great importance. By keeping up the tradition of passing on ancestral names, people are keeping their past alive. They are also recording their rights to the land and its resources for the future.

Today, many Aboriginal people have two “first names.” One is the name they go by in everyday life. The other is an ancestral name they are called on special occasions such as potlatches.

New Traditions

In the past, powwows were held by Plains peoples to celebrate something or to prepare for war against another group. Today, powwows are friendly social events where many different Aboriginal groups come together. They are a new tradition in many communities.

At powwows, people dance in a big circle called an **arbor**. The dances are a type of prayer honouring the creator of all life.

Is there something special your community is doing to keep your culture strong? How can you help?

Potlatches are an important way people in Kwakwaka'wakw communities today keep the traditions of the past and pass on rights and honours to the next generation.





A Closer Look

A Powwow

This powwow took place on a summer weekend. People started arriving many days before. Some people set up tents to sell crafts and food. Others came to dance and drum.

The Sampson family and other people in the community worked hard for weeks to get everything ready. There was a stage for the announcer and places for people to sit to watch the dancing. They also put notices in newspapers and on the radio. They wanted to make sure everyone knew they were invited to come to the powwow.

During the powwow the family served food. The meal everyone looked forward to the most was smoked salmon and **bannock** [BAN-uk]. Bannock is a type of fried bread.

The Grand Entrance is one of the most exciting parts of the powwow. First come the flags and the eagle-feather standard, followed by the dancers in their **regalia** [rih-GALE-yuh]. The regalia are the special clothing worn for these celebrations. There are different styles of powwow dancing and different styles of regalia for each one.

This Grand Entrance took place on the afternoon when young people were dancing, so young people were chosen to carry the flags and the eagle-feather standard. The boy carrying the standard is Anastacio [an-az-TA-zeo] (Sonny) Garcia, Tom Sampson's great-nephew. The eagle feathers represent the many different groups that come together for a powwow. The boy in front is Sonny's friend Ian Sam.

