

GREG POELZER AND KEN S. COATES

from
treaty
peoples to
treaty
nation

A ROAD MAP FOR ALL CANADIANS



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PREFACE: TOWARDS EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

IN 2012, WE PUBLISHED a series of opinion pieces in Canada's national newspapers expressing our outlook on the future of Aboriginal affairs in Canada. At the time, the papers were full of stories about the dreadful housing conditions and infrastructure crisis at the Attawapiskat First Nation in northern Ontario, complete with overheated rhetoric and finger pointing. On February 17, in the *Globe and Mail*, we outlined the two camps of public opinion in "We Are All Responsible for the Plight of Canada's First Nations": there were those who believed that responsibility lay with the Government of Canada and those who claimed it lay with First Nations themselves.

The first camp, composed of a number of First Nations leaders and many non-Aboriginal Canadians, argued (then as now) that Ottawa should take primary responsibility for the mess. It had, after all, created the Indian Act in 1876 (the federal statute dealing with status, local government, and the management of reserve lands and communal monies), the reserve system, and residential schools. The federal government needed to move quickly to address the dependency and despair that characterized First Nations communities. It needed to provide equality of result to remove what many considered a black mark on the nation.

The opposing camp argued that Aboriginal people needed to clean their own house. They needed to root out corrupt politicians, abandon

uneconomical reserves for towns and cities, reject further reliance on government handouts, and free themselves and the country from their unsustainable dependence on the Government of Canada. Some writers, such as the provocative University of Calgary political scientist Tom Flanagan, recommended that “special” status for Indians be eliminated. Flanagan’s work on Louis Riel, Aboriginal rights, and Indigenous government has generated strong and critical responses from Aboriginal leaders for over a quarter of a century and received substantial support from critics of Aboriginal rights.

We argued then, and we argue now, that both camps have it wrong.

Canadians as a whole must take ownership of the challenges facing Aboriginal communities: substance abuse and suicide, poverty and deplorable housing and living conditions, high dropout rates and unemployment. But we as a people, or peoples, need to stop looking for a single, sweeping solution, whether it be constitutional change, a government program, or a radical overhaul of Aboriginal governance. Meaningful change will require not just policy makers but millions of Canadians to step forward to create the Canada they want. As we wrote in the *Globe and Mail*, we must invite Aboriginal people “fully into the fold as neighbours, friends, and full partners in Confederation. It is about time all Canadians began to live as treaty peoples.”

After our opinion pieces ran in the papers, prominent political and business leaders, Aboriginal *and* non-Aboriginal, contacted us personally to make positive comments. We were taken aback, though, by the vitriolic comments posted online. Here are a few samples from the *Globe*:

- > If I was allowed to live tax free, have a panoply of services, and funds available to me, and ignore a variety of laws (like hunting seasons), etc., etc. Yeah, I would feel disadvantaged . . . uhuh . . .
- > The authors of this piece have come to the wrong conclusion and any remedies they prescribe are therefore wrong. The native people are mostly responsible for their present condition and future remedies. There are a few native bands who have developed a new economy for their members. But most have developed a culture of reliance on government for their well being. I see very little desire to take responsibility for their current position. Many reserves are located far from places of

employment, and yet the band members insist on their rights to live on their reserve. Any reasonable person would recognize the unsustainable position they are in and pick up and move to where employment could be found. But not these natives. There is absolutely no reason for the taxpayers to continue to support these people, when they are unwilling to help themselves.

- > I am NOT responsible for the plight of the First Nations people. Until they decide to take responsibility for themselves and become aware that THEY are responsible for their own lives, they will NEVER escape from the poverty, rampant alcoholism, substance abuse, crime, and unemployment that is so prevalent on reserves.

Seventy-five percent of the comments were negative, and close to half fell along the lines of “Get a job,” “Stop whining,” and “Clean up your act – then we’ll talk.”

No one who spends any time working in Aboriginal affairs is immune from the expression of such sharp opinions, and the response to our opinion pieces served as a reminder that the path ahead will not be easy. Yet we remain optimistic, and it is in that spirit that we have written this book. We recognize that many Canadians have had their fill of Aboriginal affairs over the past forty years, but supportive comments from some Canadians and our conversations with community leaders have made it clear that we stand not at a breaking point but at a *breakthrough* point. Everyone agrees on the need for change – we simply lack agreement on how best to move forward.

This consensus – which can more pessimistically be viewed as the fundamental contradiction in Canada’s current Aboriginal policy – became clear in the aftermath of the much-debated Kelowna Accord, an intergovernmental agreement signed in 2005 by Prime Minister Paul Martin and leaders of the main national Aboriginal organizations and the provincial and territorial governments. Ever since Confederation, Conservative and Liberal governments had followed a cautious, piecemeal approach. Now, the accord’s negotiators were promising a fundamentally new approach to Aboriginal affairs in Canada and laying the groundwork for sweeping commitments. Aboriginal leaders enjoyed unprecedented control over the substance of the negotiations and used it to set the main priorities: housing, education, economic development,

health, and accountability. Ottawa's financial commitment was unprecedented – \$5.1 billion over five years, an amount unheard of in Canadian history, with a promise of a second five-year commitment to be negotiated after the accord expired.

The main commitments focused on practical matters: improved housing, education, health care, and water and sewage; the encouragement of private homeownership; and increased support for Aboriginal governments. Critics, particularly in the Conservative Party, warned that the accord was expensive, not carefully thought out, and constituted an expansion of “government knows best” approaches. Clearly, the Tories were not on board – a key consideration as the country headed into an election.

Yet it was clear that a new and unprecedented consensus existed among federal and provincial leaders – the status quo was no longer tenable. During the Trudeau years, roughly from 1968 to 1984, it was the provincial premiers who had routinely led the opposition to Aboriginal demands. At Kelowna, by contrast, Gordon Campbell, premier of British Columbia, insisted that Canada, if it wanted to be a truly compassionate nation, needed an agreement like the one now being crafted. The meeting ended with the recognition that short-term infusions of money would not meet Aboriginal people's needs and aspirations, with a promise of further sessions, and with a highly public affirmation of the status and authority of Aboriginal governments. Long-term observers of Aboriginal–government relations in Canada believed that something profoundly important had happened at Kelowna and that, at least conceptually, the country had set out down a new path. That there was growing recognition that Aboriginal communities had the right to self-government amounted to a step towards the acceptance of a third order of government (not only federal and provincial/territorial but also Aboriginal). The discussions themselves made it clear that no one expected quick solutions to the challenges facing Aboriginal people, which had been several hundred years in the making. Critically, the meetings signalled that equality of opportunity for Aboriginal people had become a national priority for Canada. The agreement held the promise of real and sustainable partnerships – the only conceivable foundation for a long-term solution to the challenges facing Canada's Indigenous peoples.

The Kelowna Accord did not survive the next few months. During the 2006 election, Aboriginal issues got some attention but did not take centre stage. Stephen Harper's Conservatives went public with their opposition to the accord; many Aboriginal leaders spoke out against the Conservative position and clearly supported the Liberals. Paul Martin tried to use uncertainty about the accord's future, along with other policy positions, to demonize the Conservatives, suggesting that his opponents had a hidden agenda. To some degree, though, all of the contending parties recognized a simple truth about electoral politics in Canada: Aboriginal issues, however urgent, simply do not matter much to non-Aboriginal Canadians.

When Canadians elected the Conservatives to a minority government, Prime Minister Harper and his newly appointed Indian affairs minister, Jim Prentice, declared themselves and their party to be committed to the principles and goals of the accord. Yet their first budget stepped back from the commitments that had been negotiated at Kelowna. The news that the accord would not go forward was met more with resignation than with anger. There was no public outcry, and Aboriginal leaders turned to developing good relations with the new administration. In retrospect, many Canadians had misgivings about making major financial commitments to Aboriginal communities.

But there was an unexpected twist to all this. Although he did not support the accord, Harper adopted a conciliatory stance on Aboriginal issues once in office, and Prentice was one of the most qualified people ever to hold the Indian Affairs portfolio. The Conservatives picked up on the work begun by the Liberals and concluded three land claims with BC First Nations in 2006. When a cabinet shuffle loomed in early 2007, Aboriginal politicians urged Harper to leave Prentice at his post. Harper listened to them, even though he needed Prentice elsewhere. After a cabinet shuffle later in the year, Prentice's replacement, Chuck Strahl, maintained the conciliatory line, as would Strahl's successor, John Duncan. The Conservatives might have disagreed with the accord's details, but clearly they understood that much more was needed to address Aboriginal issues and aspirations. Provincial and federal politicians across the political spectrum had come to realize that change had to happen.

In light of all this, *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation* is an optimistic book. Issues of profound importance continue to challenge Canada's Aboriginal peoples – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. But at the same time, much has been changing for the better, major improvements are under way, and significant opportunities lie ahead. Indeed, we argue that negative commentary and unrelenting stories of poverty and despair, in the media and on message boards, have actually limited Aboriginal people's options and had a negative impact on how non-Aboriginal Canadians view their obligations. There is too much focus on failure, and not enough on success. There are ways forward, and they do not necessarily require a remaking of Confederation or radical changes in Aboriginal people's aspirations. This book offers all Canadians practical, viable steps forward.

In an effort to define (or redefine) Aboriginal–newcomer relations in Canada, Aboriginal leaders and scholars have taken up metaphors such as the Two Row Wampum and have long referenced concepts such as the honour of the Crown, nation-to-nation negotiation, and the power imbalance between the colonized and the colonizer. In this book, we examine all of these views, but we also argue that there is a simple and direct concept – one steeped in law and history and embedded in the Constitution – that points the way to the future. This concept – that Canadians are treaty peoples – is deeply meaningful to Aboriginal peoples, yet it has largely been forgotten by other Canadians. The Prairie First Nations who signed the Numbered Treaties with the Crown between 1871 and 1921 talk openly about being treaty peoples. The concept expresses their belief in the promises made at the time of treaty and their dreams for a better relationship with non-Aboriginal people and governments.

Canada has a tradition of treaty making dating back to the eighteenth century, when the British Crown signed “peace and friendship” treaties in the Maritimes. Throughout Canada's history, Aboriginal people have generally understood these treaties as the foundation for a living and sustained partnership. Leaders often speak of the “spirit of the treaties,” which to them is more significant than the specific terms and technical language contained in the documents. These treaties were often ignored by later British and Canadian governments, and while this robbed them of much of their practical vitality, it did nothing to diminish their social and symbolic importance.

Scholars such as Peter Russell and Sákéj Henderson have reintroduced the concept of treaty peoples to national debates, highlighting the prospect for more positive and constructive partnerships. Prairie First Nations understand that treaties are expressions of hope and primarily about relationships. They are not dry, ossified documents but starting points for friendship, collaboration, and respectful coexistence. Non-Aboriginal Canadians “get” the legal and technical aspects of treaties but have largely missed the boat on the point that treaties bind Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians together in a permanent and mutually beneficial partnership.

Many Canadians have forgotten that in a hundred ways we are all treaty peoples, that two groups of people came to the original bargaining table, and that hundreds of agreements have been signed since the eighteenth century: constitutional agreements, self-government agreements, and agreements to devolve federal and provincial responsibilities to Aboriginal governments. Aboriginal people have participated in the Canadian military and in the country’s ceremonial life; they have forged intellectual partnerships at universities and colleges; they have sought and accepted apologies for the harms done to them in residential schools. And this is only a partial list. The core treaty between First Nations and other Canadians is not one document or a hundred. Rather, the centrepiece of this relationship is the realization that First Nations and other Canadians agreed from the early days of New France, and later British settlement, to coexist in friendship, to work to find the best solutions for the country as a whole, and to build relationships that will endure and allow all parties to flourish culturally, socially, economically, and politically. That the history of Aboriginal–newcomer relations is marked by so little violence and so few confrontations illustrates that Aboriginal peoples have respected their part of the bargain.

Some will argue that our proposal is too radical and that honouring the treaties and taking up our responsibilities as treaty peoples will entail abrogation of authority and power to Aboriginal peoples. We ask them to consider this: although we never apply the term to the relationship that has evolved between Quebec and the rest of Canada (or, for that matter, between Canada and every province in the nation), this relationship can be characterized as an informal treaty. The arrangement has never been fully defined and is clearly a work in progress;

nonetheless, it serves as a comprehensive accord between two or more cultures. Many Aboriginal scholars, as we discuss, share the view that the treaties are alive, vital, and important documents that should shape the future, as they defined the past, and that reconciliation based on equality is possible. Non-Aboriginal writers such as Michael Asch, in *On Being Here to Stay: Treaties and Aboriginal Rights in Canada* (2014), question the legitimacy of the Crown's assertion of sovereignty and urge Canadians to rethink, at the most fundamental level, their relationship with Aboriginal peoples. In *The Comeback* (2014), John Ralston Saul argues that "if we start down a road of shared reconciliation and restitution, we will have taken a crucial step in building a sense of ourselves and the country. It is a matter of being true to where we are, to what is fair and possible here. That consciousness, that sense of ourselves, will solidify our ability to live together and to do so in an atmosphere of justice." Clearly, Canadians continue to debate and review the fundamental elements of Aboriginal-newcomer relations.

As we will show, other countries have done much better than us at bringing the treaty concept into the core of their existence. New Zealand has a foundational accord – the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840. That treaty, ignored for more than a century, has been reborn as the central pillar of New Zealand society, redefining Māori–Pākehā (newcomer) relations and, in ways that have proven complicated, controversial, and constructive, the very nature of what it means to be a New Zealander. In the United States, treaties with American Indians remain influential, primarily in the level of autonomy asserted by tribal authorities and recognized by the US government. In many instances, the political re-empowerment of American Indian communities has also resulted in substantial socioeconomic transformation.

In our hearts, we believe that Canadians are already on the path to becoming a treaty nation. During the opening ceremonies of the Vancouver Winter Olympics in 2010, cheers engulfed the stadium when the chiefs of the four First Nations on whose lands the games were taking place were afforded head-of-state status by the organizers. The applause spoke volumes to the emergence of a new, revitalized understanding of Canada. You can see it, too, in the ceremonial life that now surrounds other high-profile events, in the art in our embassies and major galleries, and in the slowly growing realization that

First Nations are not rivals, enemies, or constitutional children but true partners in the grand Canadian experiment. The practice of non-Aboriginal people acknowledging that they stand on the traditional territories of First Nations – unheard of even a decade ago – is now expected protocol.

Canadians need to get serious about being treaty peoples and realize that the responsibility for doing so lies with everyone, not just with governments and the courts. Beyond legal and contractual requirements, beyond the complex negotiation of land claims and self-government agreements, Canadians must treat Aboriginal people with respect and understanding. The treaty system in Canada is first and foremost a pact between cultures and peoples and only secondarily a set of legal documents defining relationships between governments and First Nations. In the spirit of moving Canada along a new path, we offer Canadians a road map for change. This book is our attempt to break the logjam, to move beyond rhetoric and finger pointing, and to delve into the art of the possible. Canada can and must do better. Aboriginal governments and peoples can and must do better, even if the weight of history falls disproportionately on their shoulders. Canada needs new ideas and a new level of commitment.

In *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation*, we begin by reviewing the barriers – historical and contemporary – to productive and mutually beneficial relations between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. We then review the key ideas and metaphors brought forward by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars and commentators to explain long-festering problems in Canada. We consider the intellectual elements of the arguments and their practical application in the twenty-first century. In a shift from the standard approach to the study of Aboriginal affairs in Canada, we also focus on the many positive, constructive, and beneficial developments that have occurred in Aboriginal communities and organizations over the past two decades. It is easy to get lost in the bad news, to be rendered catatonic by stories of hardship and despair, and to get drawn into highly emotional battles between advocates of Aboriginal sovereignty and those who would eliminate Aboriginal rights. These arguments are part of the Canadian political landscape, but they are wholly inadequate for dealing with contemporary realities and finding common ground.

The story of Aboriginal success and achievement is well hidden in this country and must be shared. Remarkable stories about acts of reconciliation – deliberate and positive steps taken by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups – provide reasons for considerable optimism. Developments in Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Saskatchewan provide solid reasons to believe that viable solutions will be found. The crises in Aboriginal communities are real, but it's important to recognize that the First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and non-Aboriginal people of this country have made great strides in developing more positive and constructive relationships.

In this book, we offer practical, realistic, and affordable solutions to the challenges facing Aboriginal peoples and Canadians seeking a path towards reconciliation. Some are radical and, if implemented, will be unique to Canada; others already exist, either in one part of Canada or in another country. We hope our recommendations will reach governments (Aboriginal, federal, provincial, and municipal), corporations, and Canadians at large. We are realistic enough to accept that some of our ideas may not work and that many will not be attempted. But we act in the full realization that Aboriginal people have carried far too much of the burden for this country's inadequate and lethargic policy making. Aboriginal people understand the full meaning of the concept of being treaty peoples and have been waiting for non-Aboriginal Canadians to catch on. It is time.

But here is the greatest irony – and the greatest challenge. In the final decades of the twentieth century, national guilt and the Canadian social conscience intersected, leading to an outpouring of support for intervention in Aboriginal affairs and a commitment to government-led programs and support. The rapid empowerment of Aboriginal peoples through the courts and political processes that followed, however, upset what appeared to be a Canadian consensus about the urgency of addressing Aboriginal needs and aspirations. Generosity of spirit also ran up against anger and deep frustration among Aboriginal people. A generation of Aboriginal leaders launched bitter critiques of Canada and its policies, reflecting the politicization of Aboriginal issues and growing despair at the community level. Aboriginal and other Canadians, having seemingly found a middle ground of government-led problem solving, started to head in opposite directions.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the current of anger and animosity that exists towards Aboriginal peoples and affairs in our country. Frustration mounts with each Aboriginal legal victory or new political agreement, and Canadians are generally uneasy about the emergence of wealthy and powerful Aboriginal leaders and communities. Many new Canadians, in particular, have had trouble recognizing the logic of massive financial transfers, Aboriginal self-government, and legal entitlements. As the political power of this group grows, the national consensus is further eroding. Many Canadians reject Aboriginal aspirations. They resent modern treaties, the duty to consult on resource development, and federal transfers to Aboriginal communities; they resent what they perceive as a culture of dependency on reserves and radicalism in the Assembly of First Nations and other Indigenous organizations. There were strong negative reactions when the Assembly of First Nations rejected a deal with the Government of Canada to add \$1.5 billion per year to First Nations educational funding. The Supreme Court of Canada's decision to recognize Aboriginal title on non-treaty lands in the William (Tsilhqot'in) court case in 2014 disturbed many non-Aboriginal people. Where we see people working together to achieve a common ground, they see the failure of decades of government intervention to do anything to solve the deep crises in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.

It would be a mistake to simply write off these critics' concerns. The overwhelming majority of them are not racists, and they are not uncaring people. Most simply believe that self-reliance trumps reliance on government. But their point of view is based on a number of misunderstandings: "Aboriginal Canadians get everything for free"; "None of them pay taxes"; "all the chiefs are crooks"; "band governments are incompetent"; and so on. There is a strong undercurrent of opposition to special status and to the growing legal authority of Aboriginal communities. Many people want to shut down isolated reserves and move those residents to towns and cities. When Aboriginal people stop or slow down a development project of potential value to society as a whole, frustrations come to the surface. When these folks speak up, supporters of Aboriginal aspirations can be too quick to judge them as bigots and hatemongers – terms that apply to only a tiny percentage of opponents.

There is nothing inherently wrong with opposing new plans or initiatives. Criticizing self-government or other ways of empowering Aboriginal people is not automatically racist – and people profoundly resent being labelled as racists simply because they disagree with the legal, academic, and political consensus that has emerged around Aboriginal rights in Canada. The problem, ultimately, is not that the status quo does not work to the satisfaction of all Canadians but that we are on the verge of things getting much worse. Canadians face the return of Aboriginal radicalism.

Canadians have been troubled by the conditions that have faced Aboriginal people for generations, but we as a nation have tended to take a paternalistic approach to the search for solutions. After the 1990 Oka Crisis, the first well-publicized violent conflict between First Nations and the federal government in the late twentieth century, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney established the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and tasked it with examining the root causes of Aboriginal difficulties and recommending changes. This proved to be a controversial exercise. In its first year, the commissioners focused more on identifying problems than on articulating solutions, and non-Aboriginal interest declined throughout the multi-year inquiry. The final report, issued in 1996, offered sweeping recommendations for a renewed relationship based on four principles: recognition, respect, sharing, and responsibility. The principle of recognition called on all Canadians to recognize that “Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants and caretakers of this land and have distinctive rights and responsibilities flowing from that status” and that “non-Aboriginal people are also of this land now, by birth and by adoption, with strong ties of love and loyalty.” The third principle recognized that sharing “is the basis on which Canada was founded, for if Aboriginal peoples had been unwilling to share what they had and what they knew about the land, many of the newcomers would not have lived to prosper. The principle of sharing is central to the treaties and central to the possibility of real equality among the peoples of Canada in the future.”

These principles were clear and simple. And beyond them, the final report articulated seven general and hundreds of specific recommendations to address the challenges facing Aboriginal Canadians. The seven general recommendations called for a radical restructuring of Aboriginal–non-Aboriginal relations in Canada, including a new

Royal Proclamation, an Aboriginal Treaties Implementation Act, an Aboriginal Lands and Treaties Tribunal Act, and an Aboriginal Nations Recognition and Government Act. The report provided this country with a toolbox full of ideas and suggestions about how Canada could reconfigure its relations with Aboriginal peoples. But the very comprehensiveness (and cost) of the recommendations spooked Canadians, so they did not receive widespread public support.

The report was more effective at articulating the challenges than in proposing broadly acceptable solutions. Again, everyone recognized there was a problem, but there was nothing approaching a nationwide consensus about how to solve it. Then as now, Aboriginal radicalism had little support outside Aboriginal communities and only a sliver of support in academia. At the same time, opponents of Aboriginal empowerment generated real fury among Aboriginal Canadians. Decades after the commission, Canadians' long-held affection and compassion has eroded even further, and not just as it relates to Aboriginal peoples. Belief in the benign intervention of the nation-state in the affairs of citizens has given way to fear and anger. Non-Aboriginal people reject the idea that more money will solve problems even as Aboriginal leaders, facing ongoing crises in their communities, demand greater funding. More and more non-Aboriginal Canadians oppose the legal and constitutional empowerment of Aboriginal governments, just as those governments are gaining the levers of power and the ability to manage them more effectively.

From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation offers solutions and suggestions that fit with the core values of most Canadians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Most Canadians believe fundamentally in *equality of opportunity*. They embrace the idea that government *and* society should level the playing field for both individuals and communities. These ideas run deep in our country and are reflected in everything from equalization arrangements among Canada's provinces to student loan programs. As a nation, we cherish individual rights and freedoms as enshrined in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and we defend the rights of individuals *and* communities. But we also recognize that all Canadians have a measure of responsibility for their own well-being. The level of volunteerism in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities across Canada speaks to that sense of responsibility; so does the

willingness of individuals to serve on band and municipal councils. Canadians as a whole are pragmatic about creating institutions that enable their values and ideals to thrive. They embrace the idea of Canada as a community of communities, and they define their country in large measure by the quality and availability of social assistance, medical care, and other support programs.

In this book we argue that there are three keys to creating a country in which all Canadians can enjoy and accept their rights and responsibilities as treaty peoples. First, Aboriginal people must be accorded status and honour in both state and society. Second, Aboriginal political communities must be empowered within our political systems, possibly through a Commonwealth of Aboriginal Peoples, which would replace the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Such a body would create more space for Aboriginal self-government and more acceptance of the idea of a third order of government. It would also open a space for redefining Aboriginal citizenship, addressing questions of accountability, and accommodating the political needs of urban Aboriginal populations. Third, Aboriginal people must be put on an equal footing with other Canadians through expanded economic opportunities.

If we don't do these things, we will never evolve into a treaty nation. We have taken some pragmatic steps in this direction, but we need to take more – steps that will demonstrate a commitment to compromise, mutual understanding, and innovation. It is hard to overstate the importance of Prime Minister Harper's 2008 apology for residential schools as a means of addressing the status and honour of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Other steps could include a parliamentary review of the royal commission, exchanges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and accommodations for Aboriginal culture in schools and workplaces. In the economic realm, stereotypes and national mythology notwithstanding, Aboriginal people and communities are anxious, indeed sometimes desperate, for economic opportunity. Indigenous leaders often speak out against the welfare culture that pervades many of their communities. Indeed, Aboriginal people acknowledge that decades of welfare dependency, or what Ellis Ross calls "managing poverty," have not served their communities well.

We are optimistic about the opportunities for success. Improvements in Aboriginal peoples' economic performances will enhance their status and increase their political power; enhanced political authority will

strengthen the hand of Aboriginal businesses and workers. For their part, Aboriginal Canadians will have to recognize the limits of Canada's generosity and flexibility. They will, to secure the necessary compromises, need to realize that concessions will be required on their part, especially as they relate to public accountability and exemptions from comparable levels of taxation. For their part, non-Aboriginal Canadians will have to recognize that they must take important and enduring steps and that the time is now.

Many able and insightful commentators have written at length about the future of Aboriginal people within Canada. In this book we will be acknowledging and outlining their ideas and contributions with knowledge and respect. Many of the most compelling and passionate arguments, however, have one fatal flaw: they are disconnected from Canadian practicalities. However strong the passions and commitment of Aboriginal leaders, Canada is not going to recognize Aboriginal people's demands for full sovereignty, although it might – and should – support more than limited self-government. Arguments advanced by non-Aboriginal Canadians in favour of eliminating Aboriginal legal status and closing reserves are likewise completely unworkable. The rejection of the extreme positions on both sides of the debate still leaves an enormous amount of space for innovation, creativity, and new ideas. It is on this common ground – part of the long-standing tradition in this country of finding accommodations between Aboriginal peoples and newcomers – that the future of our country rests. So long as our future strategies stay true to the core principles that define Canada, including equality of opportunity and the idea that Canada is a community of communities, we have reason to hope.