The liberal ideal and aboriginality: Concepts of citizenship and self-determination.

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THE LIBERAL IDEAL AND ABORIGINALITY:
CONCEPTS OF CITIZENSHIP AND SELF-DETERMINATION

by
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A Thesis
Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
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ABSTRACT

Concepts of aboriginal self-determination in the Canadian context have evolved with the development of the nation-state. Several periods of Federal Indian policy have charted the course for changing definitions of aboriginality. Overshadowing these definitions are the state imposed criteria for several categories of aboriginality. Attached to the changing concept of aboriginality are the attempts to assimilate aboriginal people into evolving state formations. A history of Federal Indian policy points to the patterns that emerge when attempts to assimilate aboriginal people are based on the tenets of liberalism as the highest ideals in Canadian state formation and nation-building, and are countered by historical demands for aboriginal self-determination. The goal of the federal government in its aboriginal policy, has been to keep rising costs for services provided to aboriginal groups at a minimum. A hidden aspect of this attempt is the regulation of aboriginal self-determination to ordinary citizenship, which in effect determines concepts of aboriginality.
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INTRODUCTION

When historical documents relating to Federal Indian policy are examined one notices mention of the liberal ideal as part of the dialogue, but not a detailed discussion on how liberalism relates to other areas of aboriginal policy. What is noticeable are the various mechanisms and attempts to assimilate aboriginal people into the Canadian state. Assimilation policy is quite significant to the incorporation of aboriginal people into the social and civil institutions of Canadian society. Therefore an analysis of the liberal ideal involving assimilation policy seems particularly relevant to an understanding of the emergence of aboriginal ethnicity. Another area in the development of Federal Indian policy is the liberal ideal of an aboriginal citizen. Yet another is the role of treaties and how policies relate to aboriginal aspirations for aboriginal self-determination or self-government. This essay analyzes aboriginal/government relations with a particular emphasis on the role of the state and role the liberal ideal has in shaping aboriginal identities and the emergence and development of the idea of aboriginality.

Moreover, various names were used to describe those aboriginal peoples who were the focus of Federal Indian policy. In this essay, however, the focus will be placed not so much on a definitive name given to these groups, but rather on the historical antecedents and on the making of certain conceptualized versions of what I refer to as aboriginality. In Canada during the last half of the 19th century, numerous forces gathered to reshape the concept of what is now referred to as aboriginality. Currently the
terminology used to categorize aboriginal peoples varies amongst such now familiar names as. status Indian, non-status Indian, Me’tis, aboriginal, Native or Native American, and, more recently, First Nations. Less commonly used names include Amerindian, Indigenous peoples, or Fourth World peoples. What these terms do not include are the historical names the original inhabitants used to indicate their specific historical, cultural, linguistic, political, and territorial origins. The terms and categories that I employ in this essay are used in a fashion that is descriptive of the transformation of aboriginality as the changing definitions used by the Canadian state. The term aboriginal becomes the preferred term used to refer to the original inhabitants of North America because of what I have determined is a synthesis of social structure and historical events that give shape to terminology. The expressions and terms I use will refer to these various categories as aspects of aboriginality.

Essentially, I argue that aboriginality emerged in the context of the relationships between the original aboriginal groups and the government in the process of state formation. Furthermore, the terms of aboriginality involve both the failure to recognize the historical diversity between aboriginal populations by social policies that obscures the relationship involved in treaty formation. Along with this argument I suggested that state policy created tensions because of the reduction of administrative responsibilities towards aboriginal groups. Aspects of aboriginality have been based on a liberal ideology which emphasizes the equalization of citizenship and economic opportunity. The liberal ideology became a major focus of
Indian policy which sought to create a better behaved and socially developed individual. However, the attempt to further aboriginal citizenship was undermined because of the failure of the Canadian state to abide by the patterns of aboriginal/government relations embodied in the treaty process or to abide by the particular provisions of the treaties. In other words aboriginality is also about the actual and potential relationship aboriginal people have to the Canadian state.

State imposed definitions play a major part of the relationship between aboriginal groups and other parts of society. The liberal ideal is a potent force in society where the social creation of individuality is fostered by Federal Indian policy. Liberal notions, as found in concepts of aboriginality, created a bureaucratic structure of domination which applied a uniform idea of social progress to aboriginal people conceived as a single category. Through the process of defining aboriginality the problem of adjusting to changing relations within the Canadian state was created. Aboriginal citizenship became narrowly confined to the intimate details of adjusting to nation building and in the larger scheme of things, social policy as a mechanism for social control. Liberal social policy begins with a belief that significant progress can be made through the creation of an enlightened aboriginal citizen in combination with government initiative. The distinction made between aboriginal groups and others is created by Federal Indian policy by reformulating categories of aboriginality and is yet another example of social control over aboriginal groups. This conversion of the once autonomous groups into
aboriginal categories took place because of a desire to control trade relations by subjecting those groups to reforms and legislation. In my main argument I describe those events which clustered around the features of economic liberalism and how this influenced and then lead to the incremental changes in the definitions used to describe aboriginal groups.

Aboriginality became a total social problem for the Canadian state. Some forms of aboriginality continued to exist, but only through disappearance of earlier forms. Other forms of aboriginality became state-defined categories that survived in terms often defined or influenced by liberalism. These categories hinged on changes in aboriginal policies that were often brought about by the partial economic collapse in aboriginal communities. One of the consequences of economic collapse was the further emergence of a sense of cultural distinctiveness and the avancement of claims for self-government. This distinction became part of the political dialogue. Therefore, part of this essay is devoted to examining the theme of aboriginal ethnicity, in light of sociological approaches to ethnicity. Aboriginality in some ways created ethnicity through demands for aboriginal self-determination, but in other ways aboriginality as part of the state controlled institutions played a large part in creating aboriginal ethnicity. But in the end, aboriginality as an ethnic distinction between imposed or chosen terms cannot be sustained. In either sense aboriginal ethnicity is not a given but bears some form of the liberal ideal. From this we can note that liberalism has as its legacy the claims to social improvement through the
development of the notorious assimilation policies which significantly influenced conceptions of aboriginality.

From the perspective of aboriginal leaders, criticisms and doubts about the direction of state policy stem from the original treaty agreements that demanded a serious inquiry into the nature of the faulty economic and social policy affecting aboriginal people. The aim of liberal social policy influenced the social order and the structure of social relations by creating a system stratified by race, sex, and social class. Liberalism also included ideas of individual choice and integration. As aboriginal groups became fully immersed in the capitalist system, and the contradictions in assimilation policy began to affect them. In my analysis I use a Marxist approach to examine how the contradictory political and economic functions of the state resulted in a continuation of the social control over aboriginal communities.

The Canadian state is involved in a range of concerns relating to the definitions of aboriginality. Aboriginality, in its fullest sense, is deeply involved in the institutions of the state. The overall range of Federal Indian policy has changed aboriginality by providing barely adequate services with the aim of pursuing sound fiscal policies in aboriginal communities. The routinization of these concerns, thinly described as citizenship, forms much of the relationship between the individual and the state. As well, aboriginal people’s emerging demands on the state are linked to civil rights such as, social welfare, language rights, community, and gender as the
contours of the aboriginal question are framed as demands for self-determination. Liberalism is often associated with a strong concern for fiscal policy to nurture nationhood and economic development. These fiscal policies provide a point of departure for the government’s acceptance of aboriginal self-government rather than broader ideas of aboriginal self-determination. These issues will be raised in the context of a discussion of the liberal ideal.

This thesis uses a historical narrative as a guide to understanding the process of assimilation and identity creation. Several historical events are chosen because they provide a glimpse of some turning points in aboriginal/government relations. The original treaties are significant because they lay the basis for subsequent policy and set the patterns for policies involving aboriginal assimilation. What becomes clear from the early period of nation-building is that consistent patterns emerge in Federal Indian policy as a specific concerns for fiscal constraints. These develop as a core policy for aboriginal/government relations. While the rhetoric involves the federal government’s aim to legitimize aboriginal citizenship, in the background is a desire to control the administrative and financial practices of the various government agencies that were established to oversee aboriginal peoples.

Throughout the essay I place emphasis on two defining policy initiatives, the 1969 White Paper and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Both make use of social policy as an attempt to reshape aboriginal/government relations. The White Paper is seen as inappropriate policy by aboriginal leaders while the Royal
Commission is viewed as constructive and pertinent to establishing a corrective course for future dialogue and a better relationship with the state. The Royal Commission includes an encompassing historical narrative that attempts to find a working definition for aboriginality. Both have their strengths and weaknesses for different reasons. Subsumed in each are pleas for aboriginal rights. Both have an preoccupation with economic institutions and the state. The White Paper argues on the basis of equal rights, while the efforts put forward by the Royal Commission involves a need to change policy and to increase social spending. The meanings attached to self-government and self-determination are found in the nature of these and other formal inquires into aboriginal/government relations that allows some insight into the continuities and discontinuities of aboriginal policy, thereby allowing a critical analysis of the state.

The Scope of Assimilation Policy

The scope of Federal Indian policy has been particularly attached to definitions of Indian status (Sawchuck 1998: 32-36). Other concepts of aboriginality as a primary or subsumed concepts have emerged out of these legal definitions. These ideas have a powerful influence on the lives of aboriginal peoples. For instance, they intrude into everyday life through the impact they have on marriage. This type of accommodation is found throughout the history of
aboriginal/government relations. When looked at from a perspective that includes the history of colonization, concepts of aboriginality arose as the Canadian state made attempts to impose definitions of citizenship on various aboriginal groups through the enactment of assimilation policies. These policies embody complex social interactions.

To study the complex interactions that formed the basis of Federal Indian policy as it relates to concepts of aboriginality and self-determination, it is necessary to understand the sequence of events that influenced the interrelationships of aboriginal groups and the Canadian state. An enormous array of indirect relationships and combinations of techniques were used to incorporate aboriginal people into the Canadian state in the early periods of contact. These strategies continue to influence aboriginal/government relations. For the most part the techniques that were used find their genesis in the system of ideas we know as liberalism. Liberalism, as part of the legitimization process, includes the primacy of the individual. Accordingly, it promoted categories of aboriginality founded on individual autonomy, the rule of law, and self-interest, and led to the creation of the status Indian as a legal definition. Under such legislation aboriginal people were subjected to the regulation of the public sphere and within the confines of state policy, both of which tended to rationalize the pursuit of economic self-interest. Liberalism influenced the development of social policy that was geared towards the assimilation of aboriginal people, and served to sever the special administrative
agreements found in the earlier treaties between aboriginal groups and the Canadian state. The core of government policy centred on assimilation directed towards the liberal ideal of citizenship, and a continuous effort to reduce administrative responsibilities and costs.

Some regularities in policy can be extracted from the history of Federal Indian policy and interpreted as tensions in aboriginal/government relations. They not only indicate the complexity of the assimilation project, but also show that in earlier periods aboriginal groups were self-conscious, rather than passive, and active participants who were able to address their interests in treaty negotiations by putting forward their demands for self-determination. This collective memory of the treaties is carried over for a long period of time. More recently concepts of an individual aboriginal citizenship can be found in the Government of Canada Statement on Indian Policy presented to Cabinet in 1969 and known as the White Paper (Department of Indian and Northern Development [DIAND] 1969), and in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP, Ottawa 1996). The wide discussion on these two documents indicate a need for a thorough analysis of assimilation policy. The White Paper demands a critical analysis because it influences aboriginal/government relations to this day, and the RCAP because it represents an attempt to redefine aboriginal/government relations.

The White Paper was based on assimilationist ideas which find their origins in the early formation of Canada as a nation state. But by this time, aboriginal people
had had extensive dealings with the Federal government and had developed a particular account of the history of Federal Indian policy. It was during the period of the White Paper that aboriginal groups across the country forced the federal government to reconsider the White Paper policy statement. In doing so they forced the government to change the approach to Indian policy, though not the substance and goal of assimilation. Because of the intense disapproval of the policy, in the following years aboriginal groups were able to gain some influence over the direction of policy.

For aboriginal groups the White Paper represented a major attempt by the Canadian government to further its assimilation policy without any meaningful discussion on aboriginal self-determination (Cardinal 1969). In the development of the overall negative response to the White Paper, concerns of those aboriginal peoples who were not included in the policy statement, more specifically non-status Indians, Me’tis, and urban aboriginals, remained unanswered. Aboriginal groups other than status Indians were affected because of the past promises contained in treaty agreements. For this reason, they found some political leverage, which allowed them to contribute to the debate on aboriginality. The reasons given for not including the other aboriginal groups are found in the categories and distinctions of aboriginality that were created through legal classifications and administrative policy. In the case of Federal Indian policy, the categories of aboriginality were derived from assumptions about racial and cultural traits that informed policy. While
the purported goal of the White Paper was to ensure that no aboriginal person would be subjected to any sort of discrimination, the Canadian state continued to control the definition of who is an aboriginal. This remains a constant theme in the formation of state policy.

More than 25 years after the rejection of the White Paper, aboriginal self-determination and the various categories of aboriginality relating to treaty and aboriginal rights were expressed in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP 1996). The RCAP is symbolically different from the White Paper and is not entirely driven by assimilation policy. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples set the direction for future public policy and provided an extensive criticism of assimilation policy. Extraordinary in scope and expectations, the Royal Commission was established in the wake of the Oka crisis, an incident involving aboriginal groups in a militant stand-off with the political and military forces of the Canadian state. The Royal Commission, which included four aboriginal people, attempted an arms length an examination of issues involving aboriginal people, including concepts of aboriginality. Immediately the demand for restored self-determination for aboriginal people became a cornerstone of the Commission's report (RCAP 1996, Vol. 1: 678-680, Vol. 5: 2-3). Different from the White Paper in intent and scope, the Royal Commission took into consideration several issues regarding aboriginality and the impact policy has had on aboriginal groups. The White Paper and other earlier legislation had set the parameters for removing the so-
called special status of aboriginals. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People examined either directly or indirectly the central policies surrounding special status and the major issues affecting aboriginal people today. In this essay, the White Paper and Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples function as a source for much of the discussion in the analysis of assimilation policy and self-determination.

Patterns of Assimilation Policy

The history of Federal Indian policy towards aboriginal groups demonstrates the significance of assimilation policy which regards aboriginal groups as destined for extinction. In the early colonial period aboriginal groups were seen as dispirited and destined to disappear because of the predominant attitudes of Anglo superiority and aboriginal racial inferiority. Earlier liberal views looked upon aboriginal people as biologically and socially inferior and in need of guidance. They were not consistently defined prior to Confederation, each section of Upper Canada had a separate definition of who was an Indian (Leslie 1985). At the time the Province of Canada assumed control aboriginal groups were regarded as relics of a past. Those holding this view perceived the the significance of aboriginal people as military allies had declined, and that they seemed to be incable of adjusting to the pressures of an encroaching settler population. The encouragement of subjugation required the
rationalization of policy. Rationalization and assimilation reflected the extension of control over aboriginal lands and an increase in fiscal control directed towards reducing the costs of colonial administration. Circumstances emerged in later periods as proposals to dismantle the Indian branch that recommended decreasing annual budgets and removing the aboriginal population either physically or by assimilation techniques (*ibid*). Concerns about the intent of treaties and issues over the possession of most aboriginal lands were effectively suspended in favour of assimilation.

The policies since Confederation, centering on the theme of assimilation and the liberal ideal, set the tone for aboriginal/government relations. By defining aboriginal citizenship and by limiting aboriginal self-determination these policies impose a compromise on aboriginal groups, thereby providing the basis for the dominant state to shape the experience of aboriginal people. While the original aboriginal/government relations were set in motion through the Indian Department, the patterns that surround aboriginal/government relations indicate the extent of control exerted by the state to define aboriginality, and the reasons concepts of aboriginality emerged. Earlier Federal Indian policy became the corner-stone on which agreements with aboriginal groups became established. This policy was dominated by aspirations to achieve nationhood and by an ambitious project to absorb aboriginal people into the mainstream of society. The framework for assimilation policy coincided with the disposing of aboriginal lands and a policy
designed to deliberately change aboriginal people into ordinary citizens.

Although aboriginal groups were given special consideration as the original inhabitants, as wards of the state and through the process of assimilation, aboriginal groups ended up with having no command of a state. They became powerless and also the most rural, the least industrialized, and also ended up as the least integrated in one of the most modern capitalist societies, all this while under the rubric of citizens having special status in relation to the Canadian state. By becoming powerless through state policy and subjected to changing definition of aboriginality the tendency was to reinforce social identity for the worse (Erikson 1993). As well, as we shall see, aboriginal groups' continual demand for self-determination, which was sought by advancing the importance of treaty rights in the social, economic, and political spheres. had the effect of keeping aboriginal people separate from other groups in society.

The principles of liberalism associated with state domination are those that reinforced the ideas of aboriginality. Generally, liberalism informed the organization of Federal Indian policy in several ways. But the dimension of liberalism involving individuadulism and fiscal restraint created special conditions for categories of aboriginality. But in order to create the conditions for changing definitions of aboriginality, aboriginal people had to be freed from the constraints imposed by the state. At the same time this freedom from the state also included intolerance for any special arrangements for any special status. To provide for these
conditions the centrality of private property with an emphasis on individual rights was considered as key to the successful implementation of assimilation policy. In the meantime, as a transitional phase, limited protections and provision of basic services were permitted, but in principle, and under the tenets of liberalism, these measures only took place whenever absolutely necessary. Meanwhile, economic interests were generally given free rein as individual agents were allowed to pursue their economic self-interest. As adverse consequences these produced certain distortions in economic activity within aboriginal communities resolvable only through state intervention and domination over aboriginal populations.

Under liberalism state domination and aboriginal subordination are changing patterns of a general nature that involve the development of explicit categories of aboriginality imposed by the state. Categories of aboriginality involve the reinforcement of group identity through several areas, including the control over resources and the distribution of wealth through the dispossession of aboriginal lands. In the absence of any lasting formal agreement with the Canadian state over social, economic, and political development, aboriginal people have lost the ability to define who is aboriginal in several areas. The Canadian state maintains exclusive control over aboriginal people while at the same time attempting to integrate aboriginal people as equal citizens. This exclusionary dimension of aboriginal/government relations is founded in the liberal ideal that emphasizes individual initiative and equality with no special status for any one particular group.
yet certain categories of aboriginality remain as state definitions. In this sense, assimilation policy is both integral and opposite in relation to the liberal ideal of integration and citizenship.

Several arguments can be introduced to explain the relationship of aboriginal groups to the Canadian state: (a) aboriginal groups maintain separateness by voluntarily withdrawing from society, (b) aboriginal societies are incompatible with the rest of society and the liberal state, or (c) the Canadian state attempts to remove barriers to equality in some areas, while furthering inequality in other areas. Several patterns in this relationship emerge. The Canadian state is affected internally by the demands made by aboriginal groups who have the unique position as wards of the state. Then, the state is affected externally by the demands made by groups representing other interests, both within Canada and internationally, that are paramount to the interest of the state and create the necessity to maintain an economic foothold on aboriginal lands. With this peculiar arrangement, and under the tenets of the liberal ideal the Canadian state does not ordinarily explain or justify the existence of a particular group. Yet for the reason of controlling economic development on aboriginal lands, the state is deeply involved in aboriginal communities and maintains it’s dominance. The state maintains the peripheral position of aboriginal groups on the basis of a rational calculation of economic self-interest and in terms of cultural difference and social organization. What becomes apparent is that in some cases barriers to equality are removed through a policy that
reflects a different standard when applied to aboriginal concerns. The results are a form of social relations that are characterized by alienation and marginality.

Under the tenets of liberalism, aboriginal groups found a door that was open to a room that was closed. Of special importance for aboriginal groups was an opening that allowed for a partial stake in governance and the right to pursue some sort of political and legal status. The inclination of the Canadian state is to define aboriginality as a goal of policy, as implied in part by the history of the ongoing dissolution of aboriginal societies. But in maintaining separateness, aboriginal groups have been able to add pressure and provoke an extended discussion on aboriginal self-determination. What bears discussion is not only the ideological perspective of defining aboriginality but also the social and political constraints, including the degree of aboriginal citizenship in relation to separate political status. As an example, in such cases, by rejecting the assimilation policy as contained in the White Paper, aboriginal groups across the country were united as never before, finding a common ground to further their demands and gain more political control.

This strategy combined the efforts of several leading aboriginal groups and brought to public attention the distressing social conditions affecting aboriginal communities. While effective in condemning the governing administration and temporally intensifying aboriginal/government relations, this strategy was less critical of the Canadian state and modern capitalism. Although aboriginal groups tended to reject certain aspects of assimilation policy by rejecting the tutelage of the Canadian state,
rejection of the liberal ideal was not at all straight forward.

Aboriginal Citizenship

Aboriginal citizenship as it evolved in Federal Indian policy involved the incorporation of aboriginal populations into the emerging nation-state. As part of this process, the federal government sought to define and extend its control over relations with aboriginal people through the implementation of legal administrative categories. As such, the legal categories of aboriginality are part of state formation. Concepts of aboriginality have been transformed throughout the administration of the state policy. Federal Indian policy has influenced definitions of aboriginality and thereby shaped aboriginal government relations and relations between different aboriginal groups. The concept of integrating aboriginal groups into the Canadian state as equal citizens with no special status for any particular group is maintained by having categories of aboriginality as part of state policy without including any meaningful involvement by those groups most drastically affected by state policy. Aboriginal/government relations are also hindered by the principles outlining special aboriginal rights. The Canadian state has created several categories of aboriginality as an important dimension to aboriginal/government relations. But when promoting aboriginal citizenship, and after years of directly shaping aboriginal communities it
has determined that less involvement by the state is central to fulfilling the
requirement of economic self-sufficiency in aboriginal communities as its main
responsibility.

The defining policy for assimilation in the contemporary period, the 1969,
White Paper, directed a focus on citizenship in the face of demands for aboriginal
self-determination. But as indicated throughout the history of Federal Indian policy
an institutional memory had been forged. These origins and principles of
aboriginal/government relations became the precursors to the later development of
concepts of citizenship and aboriginality. It is the development of Federal Indian
policy that presents a pattern of aboriginal/government relations showing how the
demands of aboriginal self-government are influenced by state defined categories of
aboriginality. Concepts of aboriginality, which were created by the state, have a
profound effect on aboriginal people. The patterns of aboriginal/government
relations that emerge in an analysis of Federal Indian policy over several periods
offer a glimpse at attempts to integrate aboriginal groups politically, culturally, and
economically. I argue, that it is the final goal of both previous and current policy to
assimilate aboriginal people as full citizens of the Canadian state under the ideals
contained in liberalism.

Aboriginal citizenship is immersed in a dual process of integration into state
formations and reproduction of social identities related to a class based social order.
A contradictory strategy of assimilation and segregation has been created by the
institutional memory of several Indian Departments to retain authority and control over aboriginal populations. The levels of obstinacy included in state defined categories is found in assimilation policies that originate in the early period of aboriginal/government relations. Previous policies directed towards defining aboriginal citizenship has attempted to maintain a fixed purpose, and have usually created new situations for aboriginal groups (Weaver 1990). Underlying Federal government policy are the unconventional problems posed by the transition to a bureaucratic structure and the creation of a state of economic dependency. The inconsistencies that underlie the special position of aboriginal people have, as an overall result, created the special category of wards of the state. This situation was created for the explicit reason to enhance government involvement while shifts in government responsibilities predicated on the failures and inconsistencies of previous policy were implemented to control aboriginal populations and aboriginal lands. The most clear examples are the inconsistencies in assimilation policy that contain the framework for citizenship that stresses legal definitions of aboriginality rather than aspects of cultural identity (Weaver 1984:186-187).

As Canada developed into a nation-state, and with the severing of colonial ties, the failure to apply the self-determination principle created problems that affected the development of social policy (Connor 1973). Yet the dynamics that contribute to such a system do not appear all at once. The direction policy took was shaped by and shaped the attempt to reconstruct a society based on the principles of liberalism and capitalist expansion. Liberalism, as previously noted, contributed to
an emerging state and transformed the experience of aboriginal people through policies hinging on the relationship between the individual and the state, and through the control of the distribution of wealth in society. This was an inter-related process that included the legal or political status of aboriginality and assimilation policy that forced the reconstruction of categories of aboriginality and intensified the ties to an administrative apparatus as the basis of citizenship. From this transformation to a category of special administrative arrangements, the core of aboriginal/government relations is shaped by policy within the liberal state. The basis for concepts of citizenship and the integration of aboriginal people into the Canadian state are the dual characteristics of policy that reflect important implications for the transformation of aboriginal groups. A perspective on historical change and the patterns of aboriginal/government relations as manifested through the control of aboriginal populations and include the development of the economic and political unity of the nation-state.

Towards Some Conclusions about Aboriginality

Weaver (1990) saw the turbulence in the present period of aboriginal/government relations as the result of the coexistence of old and new approaches to Federal policy. Up to the present, the relationship has been unyielding from the standpoint of government policy. To describe this ongoing relationship I
have analyzed several periods instrumental in setting the direction for policy. From early reports in the early development of Canada as a nation, and the several commissions on aboriginal people, there emerges a core of ideas that are as relevant today as they were back then. As later developments of social policy came about, the emerging demands for aboriginal self-determination increased. Federal Indian policy demonstrated patterns that evolved around the demand of special recognition. Examining these policies allows for a comparison of aboriginal/government relations over time and for an understanding of the changing definitions of aboriginality. Throughout the process of assimilation an important underlying theme for governance over aboriginal populations that emerged was the government’s attempts to reduce the cost and responsibilities towards aboriginal groups while implementing strategies of assimilation by defining categories of aboriginality.

The history of assimilation policy is contrasted with that of the demands for aboriginal self-determination. Infused into almost every aspect of aboriginal/government relations, past and present, are demands for aboriginal self-determination that almost invariably are based on discussions of aboriginal treaty rights. It is in this early state of political and economic development of Canada as a nation-state that the differences and contradictions in policy between aboriginal people and the governments of the day began. The development of a policy for aboriginal affairs began with offices and departments solely dedicated to aboriginal concerns. It is also at this early point of establishing a special relationship with aboriginal groups that civilization and assimilation techniques were brought together.
through the dislocation of aboriginal groups and appropriation of aboriginal lands and resources. Those early policies actually tended to deepen aboriginal/government relations and became instrumental to creating the economic marginality of aboriginal groups.

The questions of aboriginal citizenship that are concerned with assimilation and self-determination are often directed towards a form of acceptance into the social institutions of Canadian society. The ideological perspective of liberalism is significant as a response to framing issues of aboriginal assimilation versus self-determination. Through these perspectives, a criticism of social, political, and economic issues, involving the Canadian state and capitalist development can be developed. The liberal ideal essentially created the social distinctions of aboriginal groups through administrative responses to the contradictory ideas realized in Federal Indian policy, the kind of policy that determines every aspect of an individual’s life (Carstens 1991). The administration of aboriginal affairs has taken on the characteristics of a total social institution that relegates aboriginal people peripheral to the rest of Canadian society. Aboriginal people are not unaware of the crisis caused by the state and in many cases have defied assimilation on the general principle of resisting the intrusion by the state. Although the dissenting views arrived at by defending aboriginal self-determination are more often an assertion of economic and political inclusion into the institutions of the dominant state. As such, the meanings attached to resisting Federal authority and the alternative measures available to understand aboriginal groups and their relationship to the state and
modern capitalism cannot be characterized as being specifically against the liberal ideal or as representing a rejection of capitalism. But because of the special relationship aboriginal groups have to the state it should not seem unusual that aboriginal issues do find some resonance towards the left end of the political spectrum, as well as the right.

This analysis attempts to offer a critique of aboriginal/state relations through the development of Canada as a liberal/capitalist state. As well, a critique of the social, political, and economic dimensions of liberalism offers a point of view that shifts from the individual agent to an observation of the aboriginal experience. The nature of state policy is a vehicle for examining aboriginal assimilation policy as several significant events emerge that are crucial to the development of the key terms used in this essay. The concepts of aboriginality, self-determination, self-government, and aboriginal citizenship, were devised by the Canadian state as part of the nation-building process. The need to rationalize the administrative branches that dealt with aboriginal groups reflects the need for control over aboriginal people through fiscal concerns for a scaled down bureaucracy by decreasing the annual budgets. Indian Departments founded under various names and headings, took on the daily administrative responsibilities. But also as an arm of the state, these departments cooperated intimately with other organs of the state to activate policy.

As part of the proposed plan for administrative obsolescence, changes in terms of aboriginality coincided with the devolution of administrative responsibilities. In some cases, assimilation policy did achieve its desired goal, but
because of the contradictory nature of Federal Indian policy and the recollection by aboriginal groups of the historical agreements made with federal authorities, the special arrangements and administrative structures affecting aboriginal groups remained. This purpose of expanding control over aboriginal populations, while assimilating aboriginal people, reveals the deficiencies in policies that consistently led to the marginal position of aboriginal people today. As others have argued, in the context of Canadian state development, the particular transformations that affect aboriginal societies are rooted in the liberal tradition as manifestations of colonial expansion and capitalist development (Weaver 1990:183). The direction this takes in regards to aboriginal citizenship becomes more finely tuned with a focus on controlling aboriginal populations as successive patterns emerged and concepts of aboriginality become more relevant to maintain control over aboriginal populations.

What emerges from the ideas of liberalism and aboriginality is an uncertainty about the role of aboriginality as a concept. Aboriginality involves an uncertainty over defined categories, and wherever uncertainty exists, all categories of aboriginality are suspect. The proposition I conclude with is that concepts of citizenship and self-determination are often comprehensive, but can also be used to remind us that we live in a world constituted by class interest and economic hierarchies. One does not have to believe in an inevitable historical process to see the pertinence of economic conditions for communities and peoples lives. Marxism is useful to understand oppression and social dislocation and offers another perspective on the problem of aboriginal identity. The problems associated with Federal Indian
policy as discussed in this analysis of aboriginality are used as a form to organize a research problem and to analyse social policy. The events and changes in policy are the social problems facing aboriginal communities. These events as part of the history of aboriginal/government relations become techniques of inquiry, the focus is on events as frames of reference which may provide historical insight.

In this very brief description of aboriginality and Federal Indian policy, it should be clear that the social problems encountered in the aboriginal experience have a past. However, the past and the remembering of the past, as a repetition of events, contains the possibility of a different future. Such a future would not be obscured by a reduction of social experience to singular categories of aboriginality.
British Indian policies in early North America is drawn out of the strategies and tactics that ended with the domination and suppression of aboriginal people. During this period the British Imperial Crown accomplished its plans mainly by attempting to extinguish aboriginal title to aboriginal land. Control over the aboriginal population by the settler population occurred through the administration of civil rights and by eroding the political autonomy of aboriginal groups in a piecemeal fashion, making control over aboriginal lands possible. The first attempts to administer the affairs of aboriginal people by the British are codified in two important treaty documents. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty of Niagara of 1764 illustrate the process of acquiring aboriginal lands. The perspectives of the British and the aboriginal groups were based on different traditions over land use and negotiation over land ownership (Borrows 1997: 155. Milloy 1992:2. Chamberlin 1997). Pre-Royal Proclamation period treaties were made between the various aboriginal groups and several European powers on a regular basis. During the this early contact period treaties were ratified between aboriginal, Dutch, French, and British representatives. With this legacy of treaty making, the Royal Proclamation attempted to outline the rules that were to govern trade between the British and aboriginal groups. In this context the British Crown had to establish settlements and sovereignty over territories to maintain dominance in their colonies and to further secure trade. Of special importance was the need to nurture military
alliances with the various aboriginal groups. What is striking about this period is that aboriginal land could not be appropriated or allocated without the consent of aboriginal representatives. A conciliatory approach was needed to establish the boundaries between the original inhabitants, the Imperial government, and the newly arrived settlers (Milloy 1992:2). Important for later encounters, the Royal Proclamation and especially the Treaty of Niagara become the basis for aboriginal demands for self-determination in contrast to the solidification of British power in North America.

The attempt to solidify Imperial rule as codified in the Royal Proclamation recognized the right to traditional lands and the autonomy of aboriginal groups but also acknowledged the authority of the Crown’s intentions to acquire lands by Imperial authority. The Treaty of Niagara, agreed to one year later, extended the process and recognized the autonomy of several aboriginal groups. The Treaty of Niagara which was signed at the largest gathering of aboriginal people assembled at the time, privileged oral tradition over the written word. The Royal Proclamation was read aloud and ceremonial speeches and belts of wampum shell were exchanged to demonstrate the agreement. For many aboriginal groups the Treaty of Niagara maintained its historical legacy as an important piece of documentation of the promises made between aboriginal groups and the British and latter with the Canadian government (Borrows 1997, McNab 1994).

As the early political map of North America was redrawn, aboriginal groups were able to maintain their military importance for only a relatively short period.
British Imperialism, while having direct impact on some aspects of culture and aboriginal economies, did impose limits on land use and on aboriginal ancestral homelands. Aboriginal economies, after becoming part of the fur trade industry over several generations, were experiencing a gradual shift in the balance of power that began with a general policy of non-interference on the part of the Crown. Starting around the time of the Royal Proclamation, the British Crown was able to maintain political links with the several aboriginal groups as a necessity for colonial expansion and political autonomy. Meanwhile, self-reliance on the part of aboriginal groups was eroded. At first the relationship was characterized by the exchanging of gifts and acts of diplomacy. Later, as aboriginal groups sought more military assistance to gain economic advantage over other aboriginal groups and also over the newly arriving settlers, the agreements established in the Royal Proclamation and Treaty of Niagara were ignored. As this evolved the Crown maintained control and a balance of power over aboriginal groups by reassuring the protection of ancestral lands and resources through controlling the sale of and purchase of aboriginal land. By controlling the sale of aboriginal lands for settlement purposes the Crown was able to establish a constitutional foothold and colonial expansion could proceed within an economic framework.

In the early period of colonial expansion Britain became burdened with wars and financial difficulties, as this occurred the acts of diplomacy and gift giving became an assertion of Imperial gains and remained as contentious issues for aboriginal sovereignty. Previous agreements became less of a concern for Imperial
authorities. As aboriginal groups witnessed a turnabout in policy in which the
Colonial Office gradually gained more influence in the colony and over the settlers.
The once powerful aboriginal groups were weakened as settlement in the Americas
continued and the beginnings of a new policy emerged, one that attempted to civilize

The treaty process promised political and economic benefits for both the
Crown and aboriginal people, but after a period of war and the defeat of Napoleon,
the British Crown was saddled with debt. The role of the Colonial Office became
more influential. A dramatic shift in power relations and aboriginal autonomy
occurred with the transfer of authority from the military to the civil bureaucracy. The
civilization and assimilation policy took precedence over treaty agreements during a
period of reduced expenditure. Annual presents were reduced and the costs incurred
by the implementation of agricultural practices were met through the proceeds from
the sale of aboriginal lands (Milloy 1992:30-34). The British Crown, constrained by
events found the Colonies to costly to administer and attempted to reduce its
involvement. Imperial withdrawal gave rise to what was perceived as humanitarian
concerns, but the strategic aim of the policy was at the request of the Crown to
reduce expenditures in the colonies. In and around the early 1800s social engineering
and the dislocations of aboriginal people began. The changes in the direction of
policy towards aboriginals are linked to the decline of the fur trade and a call for the
abolition of the Indian Department because of a changing economy. During this
period the increased role of the Colonial Office and interests in the further settlement
of aboriginal lands drew support from the Imperial Crown in an attempt to reduce expenditures along with an attempt to make progressive improvements to aboriginal communities.

The relationship between aboriginal people and the Crown was no longer characterized by a conciliatory approach that focused on the interests and rights guaranteed under the treaties. With the end of the mercantile economic order and the adoption of free trade in the colonies, the role of the Colonial Office increased, thereby increasing its autonomy. Aboriginal groups already under the influence of the Crown were further incorporated into the dominant economy. The Crown, finding aboriginal groups importance waning, further distanced its relationship to them. As the recognition of aboriginal groups as self-determining entities was replaced with the impulse to reduce expenditures in the colonies, including those of the Indian Department, a proposal was made to the Province of Upper Canada to transfer responsibility for Indians to the Province of Canada (Milloy 1992:58). The policy developments of the period favoured the strategic interest of the Colonial Office, to further economic interest over lands sales and replacing treaties with techniques to promote civilization and assimilation.

This particular relationship between the different aboriginal groups and the Imperial authorities is the foundation of future aboriginal policy as agreements based on previous practice and convention. The Imperial Crown kept in mind previous crisis situations and hostilities and the assistance aboriginal groups offered as military allies. And in the last years of Imperial control, when each armed crisis
arose, a strong aboriginal presence was necessary. But with the decline of the fur trade and rise of an industrial economy, the opposite occurred, as a decline in furs also meant a shift in the responsibility towards aboriginal affairs. The once powerful aboriginal allies were perceived no longer as allies and were then seen as part of the responsibilities of the Colonial Office. The urge to civilize aboriginal groups became the final element of British policy. In its policies the Crown continued its responsibility to protect the rights and interests of aboriginal people, but the focus of the policy was to reduce expenditures, to increase assimilation techniques, and concurrently to acquire aboriginal lands. The intended purpose was to enable aboriginal people to share in some of the economic benefits as producers in aboriginal communities that were to be based on models of industrial and agricultural settlements. The central problem of implementing the policy was left in the hands of the Colonial Office and the floundering Indian Department (Leslie 1993:128-136).

The inter-related problems facing the Imperial Crown included the precarious position of the Indian Department along with rising cost within the Colonial Office. From the reduction in Imperial administration an instability in aboriginal/government relations was created. The Crown wanted to deal with the lack of cohesion in the Indian Department and to include a civilization project aimed at aboriginal communities, based on such methods as the abolition of annual presents and annuities. The steps taken were seen as effective means of achieving efficiency and remodelling aboriginal communities to protect and control them. Unable to fully
relinquish the Imperial reign, the Crown devised an aboriginal policy that combined a liberalism aimed towards philanthropic ideals along with a belief in Anglo superiority based on paternalism and pseudo-scientific theories of race. Several commissioned reports rooted the problems in operational cost, which became in practice the need to ultimately abolish the Indian Department and with it the "Indian problem".

The outcome of the civilizing program was a more costly, permanent, and expanded bureaucracy. As more steps were taken towards industrial and agricultural models for aboriginal communities, a focus emerged on such matters as accounting procedures. These became highly centralized as balances and advances, living arrangements, and band membership were recorded, travel was restricted, and individual land ownership was thoroughly questioned on the basis of aboriginal descent. Recommendations for financial assistance were adopted based on classes of persons who were entitled to receive treaty payments (RCAP1996, Vol. I: 268)

In the end, the only significant change was the establishment of several industrial schools. The attempt to end dependency on Crown funds actually proved to be more costly than anticipated. All in all, the measures for improved efficiency proved to be a contradiction of the goal of modelled self-sufficiency and led to the opposite of reducing the administrative cost. Much of the proposed improvements came from the sale of aboriginal lands that were expropriated for the purpose of colonial expansion and settlement. Through federal policy, the prevailing attitudes and ideas were fixed in an acceptable formula that prepared for the devolution of the
Indian Department. The pattern was set for the following decades of the early 1900s as old practices were applied to new situations.

The Entrenchment of Liberalism

The period of Imperial retrenchment which signalled the initial process of assimilation was marked by the dismantled mercantile system, beginning in the early 1840's and continuing to Confederation. The changing economic conditions of the period were most clearly demonstrated in the growth of agriculture and technology and in increased migration and settlement (Norrie and Owram 1991:223-224). The extent of settlement in North America by 1867 cannot be separated from the policies that had evolved and their effects on the aboriginal populations. The purpose of the several policies affecting aboriginal people reflected the myth of individualism that pervaded the Canadian economy and the centralization of decision making in the Indian Department.

It is from this period that the first definitions of the term Indian occur (Leslie and Maguire 1983:23-29). Building on previous patterns and existing legislation, Federal Indian policy adopted a uniform application as an instrument to transform aboriginal people into an unskilled or semiskilled workforce while forcing them into the mould of Anglo-Canadian identity for purposes of social control (Titley 1986:93). With the consolidation of the first Indian Act in 1876, the relationships
between the Canadian state and aboriginal groups as defined by the efforts to
civilize, which included the imperative to maintain and concentrate authority over a
fragmented aboriginal population. Legislation was provided to protect what was
perceived to be a vanishing race. The thrust of aboriginal policy was to equate
citizenship and assimilation with cultural characteristics. The goal was to achieve a
model community in close proximity to areas of industrial settlement in the hope of
spreading the benefits of civilization to aboriginal communities (Tobias 1976:15).
Included were demands for better treatment for aboriginal people from the social
gospel movement, including missionaries and religious sects. Incidentally, these
groups were also the influential and effective movements instrumental to
introducing the basis of the reserve system (Surtees 1969:92).

The division of powers between the Imperial Crown and the Colonial Office
ended the arms-length system that characterized aboriginal/government relations. In
an era that focused on the increasing importance of nationhood, the Colonial Office
left aboriginal groups outside the Dominion of Canada. Several policies accelerated
these events, including the ongoing attempt to discontinue giving annuities and the
consolidation of the Colonial Office. With the loosening of Imperial control, the
chance for aboriginal autonomy disappeared. The background for the increased role
of Colonial rule included changes in trade relations and the influence of the
American political scene. The American Civil War had ended, and a victorious
Northern Army threatened the British Colonies. An increase in trade with the large
American market and an expanding railway, along with increased immigration and
increased commercial activity, had the combined effect of isolating aboriginal people from the process of economic expansion and consolidation in the interest of nation building.

The assimilation policy, now entrenched in the Indian Department, was included in the transfer of Indian affairs to the Colonial Office. Of special consideration was the need to protect aboriginal lands from trespass and imposition. In 1850, "An Act... for the better protection of the Lands and Property of Indians in Lower Canada." was presented (Leslie 1985:100). Indian protection and civilization legislation was enacted in 1857 as an "Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes in this Province, and to amend the Laws respecting Indians" (Leslie and Maguire 1983:23-28). The desire to improve and protect aboriginal people came from a concern that settlers' involved in Indian affairs would lose sight of aboriginal interest and also a concern from aboriginal leaders that the new phase of aboriginal/government relations would leave them vulnerable to the interest of the Colonial government (Milloy 1992:61).

The event that was to prove that these concerns were not far off the mark occurred in 1849 along the north shore of Lake Superior in a violent clash between miners and the local aboriginal population at Mica Bay. Mining licenses were given to companies without the consent of aboriginal groups. After miners' provocations against local aboriginal people, a detachment of soldiers was sent to preserve order. Immediately following this incident legislation passed by the Legislative Assembly promoted safeguards for protecting Indian interests. The most noteworthy parts of
the legislation included guidelines to determine future eligibility to receive annual
presents and the first classification of aboriginality based on blood quantum and
male descent, both needed to determine band membership and Indian status (Milloy
1992:101). The first definition of an “Indian” which was included in these
provisions, set precedent for later assimilation policy and legislation.

The paternalism and racial segregation of aboriginal populations continued in
the years between Confederation and the First World War as the manufacturing and
services sectors of the economy grew. Disparate regional economies evolved as a
boom in agriculture stimulated policies surrounding a political union, which were
further enhanced by railway construction. Fuelled by the growth of industry in the
Central region, a national economy emerged, and an atmosphere of achievement
promoted a national policy that involved the appropriation of aboriginal lands
(Norrie and Owram 1991:300). The perceived need to protect aboriginal lands from
settler populations gave way to a new phase in aboriginal/government relations that
further neglected the interests and rights found in the earlier treaties. The key threads
of government policy were protection and assimilation, along with the goal of self-
sufficiency for aboriginal people as deemed under the auspices of the Indian
Department. A fiscal crisis arose in Indian Department which turned into a pressing
need to administer the Indian Act to maintain economic and social control over
aboriginal affairs. The priority of the national interest introduced expanding
responsibilities to administer the sale and ownership of aboriginal lands. The Indian
Department upheld the legal and political structures to ensure economic expansion
and the building of an industrial society at the expense of aboriginal concerns.

Aboriginal groups were expected to integrate into the national economy, but at the same time they became more isolated than ever from the political process, thereby furthering their marginal social and cultural existence.

Several more refinements were deemed necessary to further guide aboriginal peoples to adaptation into the cultural and political ways of Canadian society. Sterner measures were considered needed to define an appropriate relationship for aboriginals to the broader society. The result was that, in effect, aboriginal groups’ economic and political concerns were overshadowed. The Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 became the most significant legislation that led towards removing all distinctions of aboriginality in the eyes of the government and pushed policy towards the final goal of full assimilation. Of particular importance was the Indian Department’s ability to procure aboriginal lands under state control through direct allotment. An emphasis was placed on individually owned plots of land instead of on the often used aboriginal collective ownership of lands. This approach to land ownership was also to be placed on Me'tis settlements, years later in Manitoba, causing severe disruption and dislocation of the Me'tis communities (RCAP 1996, Vol. IV: 209).

Of particular note about this period is the pattern set by The Gradual Civilization Act, which became the precursor to latter termination policies. What followed was the strategy to eliminate Indian status and to make assimilation policy the centre of aboriginal policy. The response from aboriginal groups was acute,
arousing, and similar to the objections raised years later against the 1969 White Paper. The reaction by aboriginal groups to the legislation became a precursor to the 1969 White Paper as aboriginal leaders forced the government to have the most glaring aspects of the assimilation policy found in the Gradual Civilization Act repealed (RCAP 1996, Vol I: 272).

The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples highlighted some of the more profound aspects of the Gradual Civilization Act, mainly as obstacles to aboriginal/government relations (RCAP 1996). The right to vote became a key instrument within the Act to gain control over aboriginal populations and to undermine aboriginal culture (RCAP 1996:273). Aboriginal lands could be reduced in size without any formal surrender from aboriginal groups. Another element that was of particular importance for aboriginal women was the continued sexist and racist policy in the direction of government control over who was or was not an aboriginal person (ibid: 272). Of special emphasis was the patrimonial model of defining Indian status and the control over traditional patterns of land tenure. The intention was to cultivate a pattern of land ownership based on individual land holdings similar to patterns of land ownership practised by the settler population. Legislation, along with the prevailing attitudes of individual liberalism made possible a complete transition to the federal/provincial model of governance. This became possible by reducing the size and cost of the Indian Department. And by reducing the size of the aboriginal population, in many cases the wives and children of aboriginal men not registered with the Indian Department were automatically
removed from band lists. The assimilation process did continue well into the 1980's. It is only recently that the many women of aboriginal backgrounds affected by the Act have been given special reconsideration and finally allowed the right to vote in elections at the local band level.

The Gradual Civilization Act gave the Superintendent General extraordinary control over aboriginal people through his power to define who was or was not an aboriginal person. This power to define who is legally an aboriginal still remains with the federal government. Only the federal government can determine Indian status. Effectively, those ineligible to acquire Indian status are, for all legal purposes, assimilated and under provincial jurisdiction. The Act proposed an egalitarian thrust to what essentially was the neglect of aboriginal self-determination, in the effort to make possible a transformation from wards of the state to citizens of the Dominion. Although a person could apply for enfranchisement in a belief of being accepted into the wider society, in essence replacing one category of aboriginality for another based on citizenship, often came from legislation by coercion. The central administrative concerns were always an attempt to keep track of aboriginal populations in favour of descent through the male line and to instill the notion of individual land ownership and property rights. Arguably, the need to concentrate federal authority subjected to colonial rule the very people whose rights it was supposed to protect (Cardinal 1969:43-44). The Act solidified the tutelage of the Canadian state and presented a challenge to aboriginal leaders who were particularly concerned about the deterioration of federal protection under the treaties and about
further intrusion into their affairs. But the ideas and attitudes that were fixed in an
earlier mould in one sense guided aboriginal groups, and in another, hindered
attempts to change the nature of their oppression. In this vein, aboriginal leaders
continued to be discouraged about the twists and turns in policy direction.

On one level, the idea of fostering individualism was given further impetus
through the control of land, but, on another, some aboriginal people, especially
returning veterans from World War I, were not allowed the same privileges given to
other non-aboriginal individuals. After World War I the push for aboriginals to adopt
farming practices became more desirable from the government's perspective as a
means of encouraging self-sufficiency and thereby reducing the drain on federal
expenditures. As a growing and cumbersome bureaucracy made increasing demands
on the Indian Department and the public purse, surplus aboriginal land became an
important resource in support of the war effort. This provided the pretext to make
further incursions onto aboriginal lands (Titley 1986: 37-59). Access to aboriginal
lands without aboriginal surrender, and in breach of the several treaties made with
the aboriginal people from the prairies, became general policy. The increased
demand for land given to returning non-aboriginal soldiers became the pretext for
the control and sale of aboriginal lands on the uncultivated lands of the parries as
legislated under the Soldiers Settlement Act of 1917. Non-aboriginal veterans were
allowed to settle on appropriated lands as a reward for their dedication to the war
effort. Aboriginal lands adjoining municipalities were often given particular
attention (ibid). This measured control over aboriginal lands further indicated the
continual undermining of aboriginal concerns. Aboriginal populations were further deprived by the inability to allocate aboriginal lands to returning aboriginal soldiers. The prevalent aspect of policy in period known as the Greater Production campaign during the final years of World War I became the surrender of large tracts of aboriginal land accomplished in many cases without the consent of those aboriginal groups directly affected by the transfer (Taylor 1984).

The Entrenchment of Difference

In the Greater Production campaign, plans were made to further regional and national economic growth, aboriginal people were encouraged to abandon the chase and take up the plough. Newly gained agricultural land was pressed into service as the government intensified the extinguishment of aboriginal title and increased the administrative control over reserve lands. Old ideas were still prevalent. Unused lands, meaning those lands not used for agriculture and believed to be idle were targeted for use, although privately owned land was not affected, including large tracts of land owned by business interest (Titley 1986:18). The arrangements involved the surrender of lands while neglecting to consider the interest of aboriginal groups and previous treaty agreements, as few attempts were made to come to terms with the problems affecting aboriginal people. However, this period framed the concept of aboriginality in significant ways. The approach to solutions
involving aboriginal groups often meant the application of an ideal slated for all. Against this universal application of policy towards aboriginal groups was the apparent exclusivity of aboriginality that became the focus of the state. The transition to a corporate model suppressed aboriginal self-determination, and because aboriginal self-determination gave depth to claims against the state, based on the previous treaties, incorporation into the state required an alternate application that suppressed aboriginal aspirations on the basis of race, culture, and ethnicity. But as well, the transition to a corporate model gave rise to counter claims against the state. The denial of aboriginal rights became an issue that galvanized aboriginal leaders and gave a priority to aboriginal self-determination that was to be heard again in the not-to-distant future against assimilation policy (Titeley 1986:6-7). In this period there began to develop a concept of being Indian that was different from the ideas of the state, as an outspoken aboriginal leadership emerged from different parts of the country, with the notions of an aboriginal citizenship not totally compatible with the ideas promoted by the Canadian state (ibid).

Although aboriginal groups were partially engaged in traditional hunting and gathering lifestyles, they were becoming more and more dependent on a market economy, including wage labour in several key industries (Knight 1978). The economies of aboriginal communities, affected by World War I and well into the 1930s depression, at times accommodated to forms of government assistance. As was happening in other parts of the country, they also were affected by curtailed government revenues (Hedley 1991:2). Meanwhile, their social needs and expenses
for health services, education and economic relief increased (Taylor 1984:99-100).

While this pattern continued as policy, the control of aboriginal lands compounded the severe contradiction in policy of having to accommodate to forms of government assistance that were seen as counter productive by aboriginal people themselves. These inconsistencies left a large portion of the aboriginal population unable to become self-supporting. Meanwhile the goal of aboriginal self-sufficiency receded into the background as national interest became paramount. The gradual erosion of aboriginal self-determination continued with greater intensity along with the pressure to surrender land. While alone, such intrusions represented extraordinary powers of the state into aboriginal affairs, more draconian and prescriptive tactics were in store. As the full measure of assimilation policy reached its peak, more than ever the Indian Act began to take centre stage in defining aboriginality, and as policy the terms of aboriginal/government relations.

The Indian Act contains many contradictions and inconsistencies, including a range of legal distinctions concerning aboriginality. From the late 1800s to the 1980s the main intent of the legislation was to promote assimilation of aboriginal groups. In the 1941 legal definitions, included were those whose aboriginal ethnic origin were from both aboriginal parents, although a distinction was made between those from mixed marriages that favoured patrilineal descent. The category of Me’tis ceased to exist after 1941. The definition of the status Indian changed for those living off-reserve, who, from then on had no band membership. In 1951, a more complex legal definition was devised, which stated that those individuals who fell
under the Indian registry were entitled to Indian status, therefore, persons became ineligible for Indian status if their ancestors refused or were not allowed to enter treaties. Until 1960 Indian status had to be forfeited in order to vote in federal elections. One of the most common ways for women to lose Indian status was through marriage to a non-aboriginal. But as the Indian Act began to define aboriginality, because of the intricate emphasis placed on protection of aboriginal lands, it later came to be seen as a major source of protection and provided some political leverage as a basis for aboriginal demands (Weaver 1990:2).

A shrinking land base and communities decimated by epidemics and disease had taken their toll on the aboriginal population. Then by the first part of the twentieth century, the aboriginal population began to stabilize. But several concepts had become institutionalized from the administrative system inherited from the nineteenth century. The process of assimilation over the course of aboriginal/government relations became defined in the context of attempts to find solutions to social arrangements that were in the interest of political expediency and economic feasibility. A governing structure of state-sponsored band councils was firmly entrenched. Any semblances of aboriginal self-determination had effectively been placed in an institutionalized context to fashion social and political control.

Assimilation as a central policy goal demanded that language, custom, and beliefs, would be replaced by a form of self-reliance based on the liberal ideal of individualism and the rewards offered by a liberal democratic state. But with few exceptions assimilation failed to produce the uncompromising individualism in
aboriginal communities. Moreover, in the Great Depressions of the 1930s, liberalism also failed as witnessed in the efforts of many from the non-aboriginal population who were unable to collect the rewards promised from a liberal-capitalist system. The doctrine of self-reliance, intolerable and out of balance, created an uneasy fusion of accountability of public life and policies directed towards social programs. As liberalism experienced a shift, social policy and institutions designed to help those most in need came under attack as the unworthy beneficiaries of a misguided paternalism. A standard of results based on the myth of the individual guided the impulse to define differences and to find fault in the very institutions designed to produce the drive for self-reliance and equality. The situation facing the Indian Department to cope with adjustments placed credence in concepts of aboriginality that were required to make the transition to nationhood. Amounting to little change in actual social and economic conditions for individual aboriginal people, at best the high ideals of liberalism seemed irrelevant to the day to day needs of aboriginal communities.

The national priority to create a standard of results based on an industrial society demanded a social organization for moral improvement as solutions towards assimilation. Generally, policy served as a means to achieving the ideas and processes to encourage exploitation of resources as the central element towards economic wealth and national integration for the country as a whole ((Doern and Phidd 1983:25). The economy, as essentially capitalist and rooted in the belief in the value and efficiency of the market, required the rational pursuit of wealth as the basis
of individualism, compounded by the fact that the most victimized had to accept a belief in an ideal of equality. Aboriginal citizenship demanded a belief in a transitional period. The prescription for capitalist development and the ideas of efficiency were set in contrast to ideas of equality. In the historical drift of ideas and policy priorities, and within the context of a developed capitalist economy, federal authorities had reason to be concerned with any uncertainties created by an unresolvable aboriginal question. The source of this uncertainty was found in the area of international relations and profit-making, mainly because any uncertainty that existed in the domestic economy tended to decrease economic investment in the country. Liberal policy, based on the idea that those in equivalent situations should be treated equally, became based on the idea that those who are not in equivalent situations were to be treated fairly and reasonably, after profit margins were increased. The defenders of liberalism placed more emphasis on the ideals of efficiency than on equality. The general ideas of liberty, stability, national unity, and social economic integration, took precedence over demands for aboriginal self-determination. Inherent in the policy was the need to deal with uncertainties (1983:54). The denial of aboriginal self-determination became a strategy of repression that the Canadian state was to apply at the risk of instability, rather than economic uncertainty. This peculiar aspect of Canadian statecraft included all the elements of the self-determination principle, at the international level, but at the national level, also included the regulation of social and economic development of aboriginal communities. This approach extended the repression in aboriginal
communities by controlling the terms and definitions of aboriginality, thereby
establishing a firm control over aboriginal groups and continuing those categories
based on difference.

Administrative Enforcement

The beginnings of the administrative system dealing with aboriginal people
had several sources of influence coming from the ideas of philanthropists, business
reformers, politicians and the clergy. As administrative responsibilities progressed,
the ability to define the terms of aboriginality coming from these varied interests was
in the context of reforming the “inner spirit” and later in the 1900s included a
category of government officials as experts in the area of government policy (Owram
1986). The attachment to liberal values meant that in only the most pressing cases
was state intervention needed (1986:7). Assimilationist policy required social control
through state action, which was seen as being in the interest of society generally.
This required broadened state resources to increase regulatory functions in aboriginal
communities. During the period of the welfare state, after World War II, the rise of
the government official and the concern for the translation of ideas into pragmatic
policy was based on the principle of removing barriers for social and personal
improvement (1986:34-35).

The state, while popularly viewed as the institution that alleviates inequality
and injustice, is not neutral in terms of class interest. The era of the church-based, charitable, social gospel movement, and corporate interest from mid 1800 to 1900, is the precursor to the modern welfare state (Moscovitch 1981:17). In the history of aboriginal/government relations, the Canadian state is reluctant to claim its responsibility for certain aspects of its administrative role, especially related to treaty agreements. To do so would be to assume the full responsibility for all the grey areas of aboriginal self-determination and would include a recognition of a sovereign aboriginal citizen. Rather than engage in the negotiation of aboriginal self-determination, Federal Indian policy attached itself to the goal of an assimilated aboriginal citizen, one in line with the dominant ideas of liberalism.

Aboriginal groups attempt to resists assimilation policy because it is oppressive and because of the perception that self-determination is meaningful as cultural equality. This perception takes into consideration an equality based on notions formed out of a collective memory contained in treaty agreements. To take the argument further is to recognize that self-determination is also about cultural autonomy in response to a crisis situation created by the state. The state intervenes as a response to correct crisis situations that rest on social policy addressed as administrative mechanisms to enforce policy. Under these constraints, and as paramount to aboriginal assimilation, are the social and economic forms of the individual citizen in relation to the market (1981:10). In the early period of aboriginal policies those concerning aboriginal citizenship reflected an economic priority that was aimed at reducing cost and expenditures. In practical terms, this
meant the belief that aboriginal groups did not need to own property. The early policy was designed not in anticipation of widening state involvement but through political rule and a perception of aboriginal groups as a vanishing race. Later, state policy reflected not only a need for social control but also was a response to the idea of an equal citizen (Moscovitch 1981:54). Further more, the liberal ideal has been used to legitimize a sharp and increasing inequality by proclaiming the equality of all as one of its highest values, to the exclusion of a collective aboriginal community (Kearns 1981:28-29). Besides this, it is when state intervention became necessary for the continuation of capital accumulation, was made necessary to regulate workplace and household labour in the policies of the welfare state, these were then directed towards non-aboriginal and shortly afterwards aboriginal communities (Moscovitch 1987: 18). By the time of the welfare state, aboriginal groups were greatly dependent on wage labour and were subjected to the vacillations of the capitalist market. From this period on, aboriginal groups were increasingly subordinated under the tutelage of the Canadian state and found themselves constantly giving ground to legislated definitions of aboriginality.

Several areas of Federal Indian policy have become institutionalized and inherited from the administrative system of the 19th century. The scope of aboriginal/government relations and the areas that include definitions of aboriginality are found in the protracted manner in which the federal government administers services to aboriginal people. The most creative area where governments attempt to gain ground occurs when aboriginal groups and
governments are negotiating the terms for aboriginal self-government. Unfortunately for aboriginal groups the energy is often lost on an institutionalized procedure for expanded services. The transfer of funding mechanism occurring over the course of aboriginal/government relations is the results of the replacement of treaty agreements by assimilation policy. In response to changing definitions of aboriginality, the terms of aboriginal self-determination are lost because of institutionalized services administered under state defined categories of aboriginality. Aboriginal assimilation is defined in the context of the attempts to find solutions to problems that are in society’s interests and to make social arrangements designed to stabilize society. A process of rearranging aboriginality to fit policies that are directed towards aboriginal people in an attempt to fashion a political administration resulting in a form of social control. The way in which particular groups manage social problems reveals aspects of social transformation and the integration of groups into society. Assimilation policy is central to aboriginal/government relations and points to the role of the state and the position of aboriginal groups as part of an institutional arrangement.

The overall direction of policy for aboriginal groups at times includes elements of self-determination, but often through practical measures that are designed to foster Canadian nationhood in relation to a changing domestic economy overshadowed by international commerce. Most recently the case for this argument can be seen in the attempt to fashion a political agreement between industry, business, aboriginal leaders, and provincial governments. The implementation of
policy is channelled by the Indian Department to find solutions to economic
problems on aboriginal lands and aboriginal communities. The success of these
policies and initiatives has yet to be determined, but as conventional practices are
inherited from previous administrative systems, the autonomy of aboriginal groups is
less than guaranteed. Locked into administrative systems, and with philosophical
principles and practices, the patterns of these policies have always introduced a
series of administrative measures that reiterate previous strategies. Through the
institutional memory of administering aboriginal affairs the state looked into ways
to promote the disappearance of its administrative responsibilities through
assimilation policy. In this process concepts of aboriginality are formulated.
Aboriginal persons are given special status and protection through qualitatively
different form of integration that is carried out apart from other sections of society.
The evolving terms of aboriginality are the consequence of social change and
identity construction that are intrinsically linked to types of classification based on
qualitatively different criteria in a class-based society. The intrusion of the state into
various forms of aboriginal citizenship is a result of economic expansion. The Indian
Department upholds the legal and political structures that determine inequality and
give shape to aboriginality, and it will continue to do so, perhaps well into the future.

In sum, the thrust of Federal Indian policy as a program to protect, civilize,
and advance aboriginal groups reflects contradictions as reiterated in successive
policy measures which includes activities related to assimilation policy and
aboriginal self-government initiatives (Leslie 1985, Milloy 1992). In the early
development of Canada as a nation, the concept of self-determination was shaped by Colonial opposition to British rule and domination over trade and land ownership. As a consequence, the failure of the self-determination principle regarding aboriginal people within the modern nation-state is in effect a political expression that poses somewhat of a dilemma for the Canadian state (Asch 1993). The historical claim for self-determination is integral to the transition of legal and social relations created by situations of dependency that continue up to the present (Cardinal 1969). This markedly transformed social life began to evolve with the collapse of the fur trade and was furthered by decisive administrative factors that exemplified the economic disadvantages for aboriginal groups within the structure and nature of a new economic order.

Perhaps in no other way does the appearance of forms of aboriginality exist than with the rearrangement of aboriginal groups as factors in the economic and social organization of aboriginal communities based largely on government policy. The triumph of economic liberalism over pre-capitalist aboriginal societies was purportedly designed to shed the destitution facing aboriginal communities and to instill beliefs conducive to integration into the new capitalist order. Shortly to follow was the appearance of several concepts of aboriginality in various forms and guises. The spread of capitalism created the conditions for new forms of aboriginal ethnicity. The administrative system framed by an intractable economic system introduced a corporate model of self-determination as partial to the economy to accommodate self-sufficiency. The transition to state incorporation introduced the
persistence of forms of aboriginality that can be explained as an attempt to find clear criteria for definitions of aboriginality as phenomena engender by the nation-state.
ABORIGINAL ETHNICITY

The process of transforming aboriginal groups, including their demands for the right to self-determination has revealed that the problem inherent in ethno-nationalism was that of defining the relationship of a colonized people to the state (Connor 1973). As I have argued, the Government of Canada’s rejection of self-determination is part of the wider context in which the demands for aboriginal self-determination and state formation have been at variance. The process of transformation creates forms of an aboriginal citizenship that favoured the interest of the state (Eriksen 1993). Moreover, an aboriginal population stripped of its resources then formed a permanent underclass (Watkins 1977, Gagne 1994). The portrayal of aboriginal groups as internalized colonies subordinate to non-aboriginal groups, in some instances, presumes that all non-aboriginal groups benefit at the expense of aboriginal groups. Aboriginal groups are thus labelled as victims unable to determine their own futures. In the absence of a critical analysis of the state, this would mean that aboriginal groups are seen to exist as a disenfranchised sector of the wider economy and identified only by “significant” others. In such an analysis, by reducing aboriginal communities to one dimensional entities conveniently collected under an administrative bureaucracy and portraying the social life in those communities in a vacuum, is to limit the analysis. To a certain degree, powerlessness does exist under the political and economic structures of the Canadian state but only to the extent were that the vacuum is filled by resistance or by participation in state
suppression. The description of such a relationship as “dependent” would indicate an alienation of legitimate decision-making authority from actual community conditions. That is, it leads to a description of communities which are ripe with social pathologies and dysfunction, viewed as a dialect of individual experiences, cast in an image of constant turmoil, and backwards and limited in their abilities to manage their own affairs (Fisher 1976).

One approach to examining the relationship between the state and aboriginal peoples is that of the internal colonial model. In this model the relations between an artificially created ethnic group, consisting of the status Indian, is made dependent on a stratum of non-aboriginal others who confer the title of non-citizen upon the group as a whole. The very nature of the colonial relationship in the internal colonial model precipitates the formation of unequal social and economic organization. State policy characterizes aboriginal groups as disenfranchised, and powerless (Eriksen 1993). Thus, the internal colonial model characterizes aboriginal people as stateless or disenfranchised and leads to the suggestion that these groups have limited options in their relationship to the state, except to opt for separate institutions within the state. As a reference point the internal colonial model of aboriginal ethnicity can be used to describe the counter claim for aboriginal self-determination. Similarly, in the internal colonial analysis aboriginal ethnicity can include race and culture as reference points for self-determination. But in relation to the state and the powerlessness of aboriginal groups, attention to a class analysis is needed to give a full description of resistance or participation either as
accommodations or alternatives to state incorporation.

Additionally, state policy acts as a barrier to aboriginal demands for self-determination, as aboriginal groups in principle tend to resist assimilation. By using state policy as a vehicle to resist the client-patron relationship, the various forms of dependency on the state is highlighted. Within this logic, by focusing attention only on the relationship to the state, an argument can be made that accepting welfare handouts constitutes a form of resistance against the state. But in light of the intimate involvement aboriginal groups have with the state, such an analysis is of little use. If in fact state policy acts as a barrier to aboriginal demands for self-determination, it stands to reason that aboriginal groups would resist assimilation and the state’s intrusion into their daily affairs. With this said, it should be recognized. assimilation, while defined as the measured integration of aboriginal groups vis-a-vis the implementation of government policy, is often accomplished through acts of cultural genocide, restrictive language laws and the control of resources and production of wealth (Connor 1973). Such criticism of the liberal state draws closer to a thorough analysis of class relations as these affect aboriginal people. At times resistance to assimilation has included the emergence of political organizations and strategic initiatives aimed at state policy. But although aboriginal groups often view state policy as racist in spirit and intent, because of the unequal balance of power, they must become participants in a process which, in the end, is at odds with their goals (Carstens 1991, Boldt 1993). The fact that the allocation of resources is used as political leverage by the state to manage crisis situations and to
influence outcomes, reveals the dimensions of the process of constant change and redefinition in aboriginal/government relations, as well as in terms of aboriginality (Fleras 1988).

Ultimately, as long as aboriginal/government relations continue to reflect incompatible differences in social and economic power, the possibility of administrative, cultural, political, economic, or any change for all aboriginal groups is limited. The prospects for improved aboriginal/government relations are limited by such factors as state-imposed definitions of special status, as well and those limits that the state imposes on aboriginal control over resources, and in the areas of self-determination and treaty rights. Because of its relationship with aboriginal groups, the federal government undertakes policy implementation by transferring partial economic and social development to Indian reserves, usually to promote a positive image of aboriginal/government relations. The state stakes its position on the claim that unity is in the interest of society as a whole, and that it is fulfilling a principle of the liberal democratic ideal by meeting the everyday needs of aboriginal groups as administered by a large bureaucracy (Weaver 1981). These are often presented as institutional packages that are limited in scope and intent in the form of uncomplicated and palatable solutions to long standing social and economic problems.

Representational and administrative arrangements are designed to perpetuate an image of aboriginal groups hanging on to survival. These arrangements, which takes the forms of governing structures for fiscal and social policy, legislation, or
institutionalized funding arrangements, present a challenge for the various aboriginal groups who must determine whether such solutions are legitimate or contain a hidden agenda (Sawchuk 1998). As for concealed or ambiguous policy, the fundamental challenge facing aboriginal groups is to negotiate in terms that involve demands and interests that cannot be adequately served by the apparatus of government (Sawchuck 1993). At the end of the day, aboriginal groups are perceived by those around them as the principal agents responsible for the success or failure of any arrangements agreed upon. This perception of the government, on aboriginal reserves, or the general public, may include a view that Canadian state is motivated by the best intention to help the aboriginal cause. The risk of a political fallout from any short-comings in social, political, and economic policy, can be seen as unacceptably high to mainstream society, in such areas as current land claim negotiations, the recognition of treaties, or the role of special status, thereby making aboriginal groups vulnerable to harsh criticism or making them convenient scapegoats.

The analysis of aboriginality as a factor in ethnic identity must examine federal policy and the political solutions that are organized to control certain expectations. From the state’s perspective, aboriginality represents a process of integration into the capitalist system. Assimilation and self-determination, as conceptual terms in the context of state definitions of aboriginality, represents social problems as resolvable only through full incorporation of aboriginals into the liberal/capitalist state. Aboriginality, conceptualized through social policy as a
social problem, is often defined as a causal explanation, presented as factual
knowledge to understand high poverty rates, loss of culture, and community
disorganization. As a factor in the balance of social control, defining aboriginality is
part of a political process shaped by wider social and economic concerns. These
concerns are framed by certain perspectives on the nature of society.

An alternative to the colonial model is provided by the pluralist view of
society. This model looks at the structural conditions that shape the ethnicity of
multiple groups within the same social and political institutions. Pluralism attempts
to conceptualize those conditions where different groups are collated into a society
and governed by a single administration, as in the earlier colonial period of North
America. The coercive nature of pluralism meant that several segments of society
competing for scarce resources brought together a particular type of society in the
formation of ethnic relations (Kuper 1974). Individuals and groups continued with
their social institutions while held together by a colonial power. These groups were
at the same time incorporated into the dominant power structure through trade and
commerce. However, because of the difficulty experienced in gaining positions of
power, some ethnic groups are unable to assimilate into social and political
institutions. These groups find assimilation difficult because of racial and cultural
differences. In this model, pluralism creates an instability in society as cultural
characteristics are invoked as the reasons for the failure for ethnic groups to adapt.
The groups under pressure are believed to develop a sense of shared subjective
identity, peoplehood, and form distinct ethnic boundaries (Kuper 1974). The
limitation of the model is the inability to take into account the emergent nature of aboriginal relations to this date.

Finally, an elitist model of ethnicity also provides an explanation for social inequality. Elitist views of society are characterized by a marked disparity in power. Attempts from those outside of elite centres of power to take control are curtailed by differentials in access to resources (McAdam 1982). Elite forces are seen to cultivate a dependence through administrative structures by offering financial incentives to implement elite goals and to subordinate the opposing forces. In the history of ethnic relations in Canada, the barriers erected against those of non-British backgrounds to enter elite circles points to historical and structural conditions as indicators of structured inequality (Clements 1975, Porter 1965). In the elitist perspective the unequal relationship between an aboriginal leadership and the federal government is revealed by disparities in wealth and resources, including control over aboriginal lands. The administration of services and programs, as viewed by the state, becomes part of the politics of aboriginality and subject to regulatory measures (Tanner 1983, Hedican 1995). In terms of policy directed at social and political structures, important variations in defining aboriginality occur as some groups are given special considerations as legal categories while others are not. Distinctions are made in administrative policy not on the basis of cultural factors but with the consolidation of the many once autonomous aboriginal groups into new ethnic group formations (Muga 1989). When approaching issues of aboriginal ethnicity, the state does so either directly or indirectly under the assumption that
differences between groups exist be they cultural or otherwise. The proper
expression of aboriginality, from the elite perspective, is defined by socio-economic
variables resulting from structural conditions. In other words considerations of
cultural or political autonomy are not the primarily defining features attributed to
these various aboriginal groups.

From the foregoing discussion we can infer that aboriginal groups are forced
into segments of the labour force and are part of class and ethnic relations in a
capitalist society (Bonachich 1980). Under colonial power, this process occurs as a
condition for state formation. As a condition for the emergence of ethnic forms, a
more orderly relationship with the state is necessary to advance economic ideals.
Along side a decline in pre-capitalist production the aboriginal economy is drawn
into capitalist wage labour. The transformation from pre-capitalist to a capitalist
mode of production gives rise to the possibility of increasing labour cost. This
transformation from pre-capitalist to a capitalist mode of production makes the
state’s intervention necessary to protect the cost of labour. This intervention can be
accomplished by increasing social welfare programs in aboriginal communities. At
the same time, the state creates a lower level of social development with lower
wages which results in lower expectations and is further reflected by a lower level
of productivity. The elements in these social relations are coercive and especially
constructed to place aboriginal people in the world economic system and to facilitate
unrestricted access to valuable resources. The redefinition of aboriginality proceeds
as the exploitation of aboriginal lands and resources are furthered by the unequal
The manner and means of an aboriginal ethnic formation and the centrality of state policy facilitates the creation of aboriginal categories as an ethnic group and a racist division of labour. Aboriginal groups are thus integrated into a class and ethnic structure. But in this process social relations are transformed into social problems in a combined and contradictory strategy of assimilation and segregation. The inclination of the state is to try to find definitions of aboriginality appropriate to what is seen as a problem by making aboriginality conform to previous policy and practices. As part of state formation, the variation and similarity in aboriginal policy are aspects of class formation. The state is not entirely able to solidify these aspect of social relations in terms of the state’s definition of aboriginality. Aboriginality is then categorized as ethnic “behaviours” as the depictions of aboriginal groups are as victims, as marginal, as backwards traditionalists, or as disinterested communities awash in social problems. But as forms of oppression these categories are seen as fundamental political problems surrounding issues of sovereignty, political representation and self-determination. I suggest the meaning of aboriginality can be seen as a result of incremental social change that involves a historical process directed towards continuity of social classes and the position of the state.

The state is only able to make a partial accommodation to cultural autonomy. This is because some forms of aboriginality have not been easy to remove and allow a partial acknowledgement of self-determination. Assimilation policy, while thorough, has not been entirely successful. Keyes (1976) argues that there will
always be a significant number of cases within a group for whom a particular
definition of ethnicity does not easily fit. At best, all that can exist is an implication
of a common culture within the context of social interaction as ethnic groups
undergo alterations as incremental changes. He also suggest, that what is primordial
may amount to a shared descent and not any set of cultural attributes (ibid). Brass
(1976) argues that ethnicity is not a given, that is primordial or natural, but is a
process involving a selection of traits and characteristics to facilitate change.
Furthermore, he concluded that as a consequence of intergroup relations a clear
distinctions from others only begins with consciously chosen strategies when
competing for scarce resources, thereby creating unevenness in society and conflict
between various groups (ibid). Underpinning his argument is the idea that there are
more cultural distinctions than there are cultural groups, and these distinctions vary
over time as well as territory (Brass 1976). On a continuum, ethnic definitions
include ethnic categories which are characterized by ethnic markers recognized by
others. Ethnic communities share a sense of ethnic identity, while ethnic nationalities
are characterized by the pursuit of a corporate recognition. This emphasis on
distinctiveness conceptually places aboriginal groups existing outside of the social
conditions that are in place. Aboriginality is then defined as an aspect of fixed
identities in terms of race, culture, or ethnicity.

While the analytical categories of ethnicity offered by Brass and Keyes are
not in their entirety spurious, they do remind us that presently the concept of
ethnicity is part of contemporary social theory. Accordingly, aboriginality as defined
on the basis of the objective cultural criteria of ethnicity is confined to a narrow range of markers that involves the quest for economic and social goals and privileges. However, ethnic groups cannot be defined by cultural terms alone and this confines ethnicity to a narrow range of markers. This may lead some to ask if the class analysis of ethnicity can be just as muddled (Fridges 1975). Others argue that the conditions that determine ethnic change are associated with industrialization and a the rise of class society (Hechter 1976). The assumption here is that industrialization tends to level cultural and ethnic difference because the commonality resulting from their involvement in the labour force as unskilled labour receiving the lowest possible wage (ibid). Others argue that aspirations for aboriginal self-determination include objective and subjective factors in a context where class and ethnicity partially determine one another (Muga 1987, 1989). The focus falls on the role of the state and definitions of aboriginal ethnicity which occur at the expense of singling out class, that allow for the inclusion of an analysis of ethnic categories. Bedford’s (1994) concern in this matter is to point out a failure to consider a Marxist analysis of race, culture, and ethnic formation. Stress is placed on the importance of the practical relationship aboriginal people have with the state and why certain barriers addressing the aboriginal question and the role of progressive forces in society exist. According to Bedford, by examining the distinct relationship aboriginal groups have to the state and the imposition of state interests the pervasive features of contemporary aboriginal/government relations can be highlighted (ibid).
Edelstein (1974) commented on two societal types, heterogeneous in the private sphere and homogeneous in the public sphere. The individual in this model ceases to function in the public realm as an individual, and acts solely as a group member in areas of public life. Edelstein’s argument is that holding citizenship in legal and political spheres requires institutional practices of shared responsibility. Differences of social and cultural dimensions are maintained by the political and economic systems and one group is not favoured over another. Differences in political power arise, however, from differences in economic power. This analysis falls in line with the elitist perspectives, whereas the dominance of the capitalist mode of production and the lack of control over the local economy are the main reasons for the under-development of aboriginal economies. Meanwhile, cultural and political uses of aboriginal categories incorporate historical situations of ethnic interaction, as in the relationships between various aboriginal groups and other groups within the social system (Albers and James 1984). Ethnic interaction as state policy is an attempt to maintain legitimacy over the social organization imposed through increased integration between aboriginal groups and the state.

The analysis of Federal Indian policy in aboriginal/government relations was meant to identify those legal administrative categories that have been used to define aboriginal peoples as subjects of policy. To show how the activities of the state are linked to current conceptions of aboriginality requires a discussion of historical and social distinctions and the role of class forces. The distinctions that have emerged as a result of state policy provide a basis for understanding contemporary divisions.
between aboriginal peoples, aboriginal/government relations, and current attempts to redefine the social, economic, and political positions of aboriginal peoples.

By including certain types of classification the earlier Canadian state began to establish distinctions between Indian and non-Indian categories which were linked to colonial expansion and capitalist development. To fulfill the aspirations of nation-building, the government produced a policy of assimilation through “civilizing” techniques to establish the ultimate goal of eliminating certain categories of social relations as found throughout policy development and implementation. By the 1830's, clear criteria had been established through a series of special committees and assemblies devoted to this “civilizing” impulse. Most remarkable were the attempts to assimilate aboriginal populations while isolating them from the wider society. These attempts, which resulted in the failure to achieve full assimilation, were grounded in the contradictory principles of self-determination and integration and guided by the liberal-democratic ideal.

The premise used to rationalize Federal Indian policy is rooted in the liberal democratic tradition. Essentially, this tradition is concerned with the relationship between the individual and the state, and with problems related to the distribution of wealth in a capitalist society. In relation to ethnicity, a relationship can be made between the formal equality of political or legal status and the inequality of social circumstances. Canada, as an emerging state, transformed the experience of aboriginal people by assuming responsibility for the distribution of wealth and social advantage as it sought to further capitalist development while attempting to limit
some of its adverse social consequences. Canada’s Indian policy, while attempting to protect and “civilize” aboriginal populations, did so with the specific aims of decreasing the role and responsibility towards aboriginal concerns as outlined by treaties. An extensive corporate memory of paternalism remains in the public record as codified in various reports to the Indian Department. The public record, in the form of various reports to the Indian Department, provides a rich source of evidence of the state’s ongoing paternalistic attitude towards aboriginal groups. Shadowed in these successive reports are the protective (civilizing) features and the mechanism of the assimilation process that resulted in the state’s exclusive dominion over aboriginal people and aboriginal lands. The government’s determination to define aboriginality under the guise of protecting aboriginals from exploitation, also finds new meaning as privileges of citizenship that transpire into new concepts of being Indian, because of the severe contradictions in liberal policy.
MODERN ABORIGINALITY

The modern era of aboriginal/government relations is characterized by the articulation of the “Indian problem” through the replication of services and an adjustment to aboriginal administration and political responsibility at the local level. The increased capacity for local aboriginal control included the extension of programs and services shaped by the definition of the so-called problem between the early 1940s and through the 1970's as the Federal government attempted to render Indian policy more palatable to an increasingly aware public. The period was characterized by and attempt to terminate Indian affairs and also by an increase in the politicalization of aboriginal organizations. This politicization occurred mainly because of the failure of programs and services developed through the Indian department. This pivotal period in aboriginal/government relations was reminiscent of earlier policies in which services and programs were reduced to control cost through integrating aboriginal people into mainstream Canadian society. Though a process of consultation occurred it was limited in scope and a model of economic and culture of dependency. Out of the shadows of a dialogue with aboriginal groups came the development of the 1969 White Paper.

The rejection of the White Paper has shaped modern concepts of aboriginality. The concept of aboriginality imposed by the state was beginning to permeate the consciousness of aboriginal communities in various ways. What followed into the post World War II period was a form of aboriginality symbolized
through the welfare state. Aboriginal groups countered government interventions into their affairs with an articulation of self-determination that was at once based on criteria associated with the modern nation state, but also included reminders of earlier patterns of aboriginal/government relations.

In the post World War II period, aboriginal/government relations were pursued in a context marked by the governments desire to improve the social conditions of aboriginal communities. This was spurred by a heightened public awareness towards civil rights that was reflected in the critical attitudes towards policy found in the Indian department itself. The relationship of aboriginal people to society and the dominant political processes appeared to be the place to start negotiating for a different kind of relationship than previously sought. This was seen as an important for both the Indian Department and several aboriginal groups (Sawchuck 1998). The developments that occurred were influenced by the acknowledgement of the Indian agenda that began to emerge as expressions of a separate and collectivist North American Indian identity, as the original citizens that once had sovereignty over their destiny.

It was not until the early 1940s that aboriginal leaders convened in the nation’s capital for the first time (Leslie 1993:6). The first comprehensive statement to federal authorities from an aboriginal viewpoint addressed several issues including the violation of treaty agreements, the lack of agreement in land claims settlements, and control over local government. Urgency was expressed for better social conditions by improving roads, sewers, housing, employment opportunities.
along with social and economic development (1993). The response from the federal
government tended to agree with some of the demands, and to a certain level,
agreement with the self-administration of some of the services used by aboriginal
people, especially in areas that other citizens had wide access. The acknowledgment
by the state of a greater role for self-determination in aboriginal affairs was
diminished by the insistence to have control over the reins of a limited approach to
self-government. Along with allowing more administrative responsibility and a
design to transfer federal jurisdiction towards the provinces occurred hand-in-hand
with the aim of full-citizenship under federal jurisdiction and social services under
the control of the provinces.

A new Indian Act was passed in 1951. While under development over a
period of several years the new Act took into consideration the increasing poverty
and destitution facing aboriginal communities on the reserves. A special Joint
Committee and the House of Commons prepared the report that would introduce
amendments to the Indian Act (Leslie 1993). Included in the amendments were
suggestions from several advisory committees and experts in the field of aboriginal
social issues. They strongly suggested representation by aboriginal groups could
offset the marginal position of aboriginal people. The aboriginal groups presented
their outstanding issues involving treaty rights and specific rights in regards to
hunting and fishing, and tax exemptions, arguing these were fundamental “as
guaranteed under the spirit and intent of the original treaties” (1993:8-10). The new
Indian Act itself was almost a replica of nineteenth century policy but contained
some aspects that indicated some concerns with departmental policy. While the Act itself did not represent a significant departure, the policy on band membership was changed and a new legal definition of Indian status was introduced (1993:15). Also introduced were proposals to terminate the Indian Department in twenty-five years and convert Indian reserves to municipalities. The revamped Indian Act favoured previous assimilation strategy that included the concept of aboriginal integration not much different than previous attempts. Any variation consisted of an emphasis on individual initiative and equal rights that were to lead up to the right to vote in federal elections.

From the perspective of the federal government, their moral and legal responsibility continued with the protection and promotion of aboriginality through mechanisms of social control. The only shift in focus was mainly to emphasize the transition from wards of the state to full citizens. A greater number of bands were under the supervision of the Indian Department, but with the increased sensitization of the plight of aboriginal people, and their resistance to cultural assimilation, the problems for a concerted effort to assimilate aboriginal populations were fully exposed. Fuelled by embarrassment at the national and international level, agreements between the federal and provincial governments became the guiding means to relieve mounting dissatisfaction and tensions between the federal government and aboriginal groups. Integral to the process were provincial programs designed to improve social and economic problems through the allocation of federal resources. By introducing training programs to local bands, the goal of enhancing
local decision-making powers in certain areas became possible, but only with selected bands. The goal on the part of the federal government was to promote local self-sufficiency and to introduce concepts of cultural and economic integration through community development projects. Ideally, aboriginal communities could retain aspects of their traditional culture while assuming greater responsibility as Canadian citizens. Generally, however, the process hinged on the reiteration of basic principles of old policy, including restrictive membership rights and the continuation of government control over land sales through the control of band government and the local economy, all legislated under a new Indian Act (Leslie 1993:20).

Claims for aboriginal sovereign nation status were denied because of the potentially disruptive impact an independent status for aboriginal groups would cause in society. Meanwhile aboriginal communities were destitute and social conditions where in a state of crisis proportions. In some areas the Indian Department sought agreement with the aboriginal agenda. In these cases the official government views coincided with aboriginal demands for improved education, enhanced social welfare, and increased band government powers. Overall, the policy tended to correspond with provincial government services and the allocation of revenues under provincial jurisdiction. The main obstacle for both the federal and provincial government’s was the federally legislated responsibility for Indians and lands reserved for Indians, which made the provinces reluctant to enter into agreements with the federal government. Again, as demonstrated earlier, this was so
mainly because of the financial cost, but in an interesting twist, the need to consult aboriginal groups for compliance over economic development was included. The participation from the provinces centred around civil rights and social welfare issues because of the increased migration of parts of the aboriginal population to urban centres. The difficulty of providing an increase in financial and social obligations from the provinces was conveyed as conflicts in provincial and federal responsibilities.

After World War II, a new direction in policy stemmed from the viewpoint that the current policy of assimilation was a failure and that resources were needed for an increasing aboriginal population largely dependent on inadequate social welfare programs. The dissatisfaction coming from the general public and aboriginal organizations also became the catalyst for a new perspective based on a reconstruction of national policy that focussed on expanding social and economic programs (Owram 1986:285-317). A solution to the deplorable social conditions on reserves was sought with the increased involvement of provincial jurisdiction. This was to include a model of municipal government which had the same services commonly available to the rest of society, but which were administered to ordinary citizens through the provincial governments. The underlying interest in changing federal/provincial jurisdictions was a desire to produce continual economic growth and prosperity through centralized fiscal control, and to assert the importance provincial involvement in the delivery of services to aboriginal communities (Doern and Phidd, 1983:228-231). In line with the liberal/capitalist approach to stabilize the
economy and to legitimize capital accumulation, fiscal restraint became the 
buzzword to sustain dominance and the unequal representation in the federalist 
system. (ibid).

Federal/Provincial relations had an important impact on the direction of 
aboriginal policy which later added fuel leading up to the rejection of the 1969 White 
Paper. The role of the liberal state and its responsibilities represented an interaction 
between ideas and social forces to sustain unequal power and income in society 
(Owram 1986). Under the demands of new departments and agencies, an increase in 
the bureaucracy indicated a more interventionist role for the civil service in 
aboriginal affairs while aboriginal autonomy increased. The effects on government 
policy, legislation and administration not only created a complex support system 
which required an understanding of the political and bureaucratic nature of 
government, but operated within a context that grew out of rising expectations and 
an awareness that aboriginal people were less than adequately served. 
Recommendations were forwarded, while keeping in mind the special legislative and 
political conditions of aboriginal groups as having unique qualifications as special 
citizens of the state. In addition to normal rights and duties as citizens it became 
important to include certain additional rights specific to aboriginal people. This 
focus often included increased aboriginal involvement with provincial agencies as 
practical measures, but also keeping intact the separate legal status while promoting 
the socio-economic advantages commonly available with the rest of society (Weaver 
1990:79). By taking the position that social integration was not in the domain of the
federal government aboriginal self-reliance could proceed as a continuous operation through provincial and federal agreements. The role of the Indian Department was to be more flexible as an advocate for progressive change. The culmination of public opinion and increased pressure to liberalize the Indian Act promoted the need for the continuation of the Indian Department, but not without a serious examination of policy formation. Federal Indian policy was to be far-sighted, not incremental, with the intention to limit the Indian Department’s ability to shape policy (1990:82).

Two diverging paths grew out of this new ethos. On a public level, the tendency was to raise expectations through public consultations. The second approach embarked on a different exercise to overhaul the Indian Act with a thorough review of the Indian Department and the goal of finally ending special status for Indians. It was argued that the Indian Act as legislated discrimination should be based on a system of values favouring individualism and legal and political equality. In this view, special aboriginal status was considered to be groundless (1990:88). This became a sticking point and subsequently aboriginal leaders used this as a challenge and presented counter proposals to focus public attention on the continuing mistreatment of aboriginal people and the lack of trust in the federal government.

Aboriginal groups have a special relationship with the federal government, an exclusive mandate that includes responsibilities found in the Canadian constitution under the Indian Act. The responsibilities of the federal government include the provision of healthcare, education, and housing The provincial role is limited but not
without privileges and overriding clauses. A Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons advocated for greater provincial involvement during their deliberations on revising the Indian Act. The federal government was then required to shift responsibilities to the provinces. Generally, the provinces resisted but had fewer qualms if the transfer of services included the rejection of special status. Were aboriginal people to become ordinary citizens, the apprehension about stepping into the federal role would be less objectionable. The province’s main reason was a desire to increase jurisdiction over aboriginal lands for resource development. Aboriginal leaders challenged any attempts to transfer their historic obligations and steadfastly rejected any attempts that would jeopardize treaty rights. Any discussion without their consultation represented a pretext for the gradual erosion of their rights over lands and resources that would be against their desires for self-determination.

Previous experience had shown that government decisions without aboriginal representation resulted in intolerable situations for aboriginal groups. Recent situations and concerns supported their arguments, especially the transfer of education resources to the provincial level and the enforcement of provincial child protection policies that resulted in the widespread apprehension of aboriginal children and placements in non-aboriginal homes and child welfare agencies. Any implication of change without aboriginal input, benevolent or not, often affected aboriginal identity through redefining Indian status and undermining treaty rights. From the aboriginal perspective any dialogue between the federal and provincial government was seen as nothing more than collusion where the state’s interest
favoured the increasing role of the provinces. Although the extension of provincial jurisdiction was of a general sort, any overlap of services were in the direction of provincial matters involving, health, education and social services. But in either situation the authority remained with the federal or provincial government, leaving no room for aboriginal self-determination. In the end the result was the neglect of aboriginal concerns and no consultation over the transfer of services. The federal government continued to assume financial responsibility, and to control cost, while part of the financial responsibility was shifted to the provinces. The process involved phasing out services where it became possible in the short term, or in the a long terms. discontinuing services by aligning federal programs with provincial programs. In effect, the facilitation and integration into provincial institutions represented an acceleration of the assimilation process.

Ideally, the federal/provincial process was to accomplish a new tripartite relationship with aboriginal groups as a framework to negotiate responsibilities and to reach agreements on services and expenditures. In actuality, it became more of the same as aboriginal groups were excluded from the process and the provinces gained more jurisdiction over aboriginal lands and resources. The shifting responsibilities continued as the provinces gained a central role in the development of future Indian policy. Aboriginal people continued to be excluded from any meaningful participation, and the “Indian problem” continued, accentuated by economic and social disadvantages. The custodial arrangement remained and the repeal of the Indian Act loomed large in the minds of the Indian Department as well as the scheme.
to phase out the Indian Department and create an ordinary aboriginal citizen.

The architects of the 1969 White Paper sought to unilaterally transfer responsibility to the provinces. It was to have an impact on aboriginal/government relations reaching far beyond that anticipated by the federal government (Weaver 1981). The termination of special status was the key ingredient in policy formulation. Several plans were developed to implement a program as a cumulative examination of the Indian problem (1981:186) and as an exercise in the rationalization of policy management (Doern and Phidd 1983:234). From the aboriginal perspective it had mainly destructive overtones and undertones. Projects were planned and initially designed to reduce dependency, but like most initiatives from the federal level failed to address the concerns that aboriginal leaders had been pressing for over a long period. Land claims settlements remained unchanged. Instead, practical measures of a liberal/capitalist variety were put in the of place any long term broad social development programs that centred on wide scale social change to policy. Relocation projects were designed and implemented in several aboriginal communities. Well aware of the difficulties, the federal government seemed secure in their control of determining the direction of the relationship between aboriginal people and others. Development projects directed economic, political, and social affairs and so determined their future.

Aboriginal communities were in dire need of economic resources to upgrade and to established newer settlements as chronic unemployment and violence on many reserves had reached epidemic proportions (Driben and Trudeau 1983). From
the viewpoint of the federal government, the approach to developing aboriginal communities could proceed with technical solutions that would lead to beneficial change and encompass the broader issues of a liberal democratic society. The aboriginal community was a weakened form of social life, inconsistent with national priorities of established and successful political and economic entities. Again, any special support would have to consider special status as an artificially created environment, as counter productive and doomed to failure. In some views, aboriginal culture and society were an obstacle to development (Weaver 1981:196). Many of the initiatives had devastating consequences (Driben and Trudeau, 1983). Greater involvement with government officials increased dependency. Many programs were implemented without clear objectives or guidelines, other than to promote the ideal of self-sufficiency. Relocation projects were established near larger centres where employment opportunities often proved illusory (Weaver 1981:31). It was only a matter of time before the short-term make-work projects ended because of government reductions and downsizing exercises, thereby making aboriginal people even more vulnerable and dependent on the nearby municipalities and an increased dependence on social assistance.

The terms of aboriginality were further refined. Not all aboriginal people were treated under the Indian Act. Since all aboriginal groups could not be equally represented, therefore only those with a unique treaty claim were deemed resolvable. The Inuit had always been placed outside the legal and constitutional foothold in aboriginal history. The Me’tis remained outside the mainstream view, as an invisible
culture, treated from within their respective provinces like any other citizen. The federal government’s views and perceptions conditioned its policies and rejected any insistence of unique cultural or territorial status, either based on documented treaties or any other historical grievances. Policy remained in the mould of finding solutions to economic problems in order to promote values consistent with the liberal values of nationhood. The preoccupation with history, treaties, and special recognition of aboriginal title would have to be replaced to prepare aboriginal groups to enter mainstream society. Therefore, a more sophisticated approach to integration and citizenship was needed. Meanwhile, problems connected with the loss of control over aboriginal lands, increased social pathologies and very few economic opportunities provided aboriginal people with a different view of society; one of increased dependency on the state and a paternalism inherited from generation to generation, of poverty, powerlessness, and despair.

The driving force of the federal government’s approach centred on the argument that aboriginal problems were essentially of an aboriginal design. The only solution, from the federal governments stance was the government taking the initiative to solve the aboriginal problem. The conflict between the federal government and the provinces over the issues of jurisdiction had created a political vacuum that needed to be filled. Through the practice of systemic racism and a bureaucratized system of discrimination and inequality, aboriginal/government relations posed several problems. Aboriginality had with it a legacy of uncertainties that remained at the constitutional level. The approach to the problem was as usual
to simply restate previous policies. It was better that aboriginal people remained as wards of the state, because if treated like citizens in the full sense of the meaning, there would be no need for wards and instability would follow (Taylor 1984:150). As a consequence of the historically rooted and racist practices of the Canadian state any real advancement in the lives of aboriginal people took second place. The inescapable constraints of the reserve system and bureaucratic control fostered an individualism that can be described as a freedom to starve. Fewer choices were available other than the aggressive promotion of transforming the social and economic organization of aboriginal communities into aboriginal citizens, which envisioned government plans to ultimately assimilate the individual through the complete consent to be dominated.

Social policies are often adjustments that legitimize access to regional and territorial resources that are needed to sustain economic growth (Doern and Phidd 1983:36). The need for available labour is included in the descriptions of unequal social relations that accord a privileged role to the state as conditioned by an access to a particular type of labour. This system favours the wealthy and powerful. The distribution of wealth is not equal as most of the redistribution goes to those with the highest income, although some benefits do go to those of the lowest income. Several sectors are separated by space and geography, as a difference in economic and ethnic groupings (Bouchard 1991). The state cannot deal with such complexity and the labour market is split into distinct sections. From this argument we can see that for aboriginal groups there is a requirement for an ongoing discourse with the state.
Intervention by the state is achieved through programs designed to construct and stabilize the economic structure, which is characterized by the continuing dominance of the federal government over the provinces. The dominant ideology of equality of opportunity and private enterprise, which suggests that no individual or group can exert any significant measure of control over incomes, commodities, or employment, favours the argument that the state is limited in its capacity to redistribute wealth to any particular group. In this idea, the state is perceived as neutral but in fact operates from a perspective that favour the interest of the dominant class. By keeping the majority of the aboriginal population dependent on through structural unemployment, and acerting that each individual is responsible to themselves, or victims of their own making, this leads to a limited view of aboriginality and citizenship that is based on a form of domination over social life. In an era of special rights two alternatives can be pursued; to dismantle the various barriers or; to implement the provisions of special status through a form bureaucratic adminstration. Any alternative view would include changing the unequal social relations, permanently.

Progressions to Modern Aboriginality

The dominant ideas of individualism and market forces have been useful as a guide for understanding the policy of assimilation that have perpetuated or in some
cases worsened the conditions of aboriginal communities in the modern era. In an essay on the nature of the liberal state, MacPherson employs a persuasive criticism of liberalism and outlines a theory of possessive individualism as a contractual relationship with others (MacPherson 1962). By the nineteenth century, liberal thought contained a deep-rooted insistence that individual freedom is a function of possession based on a proclivity to be insecure about the ownership of property. As the basis of protective measures the possession of material goods was to maximize individual wealth through the exercise of power over others. Society is a collection of individuals seeking power over and at the expense of others. Individual survival becomes the basis of society given as natural and intrinsic to the human species. Survival, expressed as the freedom to have, is based on the only resource available to all in the form of property ownership and service of labour. Those that serve well do so because they have more motivation to be secure by owning property. Therefore, to be secure or to maximize security means that inequality is inevitable. The catch is that state intervention must be curtailed through laws to attenuate the threat posed over the individual. A state with unrestricted power therefore has to curtail itself through the franchise. An opportunity not afforded to those outside the dominant society, especially dispossessed groups such as aboriginal groups.

By the mid twentieth century a new model of liberalism was needed, one that took into account the changing circumstances of the rising militancy of the working class, and to alleviate the inhumane conditions affecting them which in effect had a debilitating effect of resulting in the freedom to work or to starve. Because of the
democratic movement and an increased share in social production and government, through the franchise, society was improved. The desire for a better society was based on an expanding capitalist market that demanded a lesson in self-reliance directed towards aboriginal groups. Because the right to dispose of property was supposedly a voluntary contract that often left one out in the cold, aboriginal groups having less political weight, had no contract at all. Meanwhile, the spread of individual gain was to improve aboriginal society by encouraging the owning of private property, effectively levelling out wages and economic uncertainty. The failure to effectively increase aboriginal participation in the democratic process was the result of unequal social relations that remained in place after the nineteenth century, and in the form of the parliamentary system favouring the ruling class. Aboriginality, as a product of social inequality favoured those having power to become more forceful in a competitive system, which excluded most aboriginal people as the competition between elites became the only means to succeed. The elite control of supply, production, and consumption created the demand for aboriginal lands. In the modern period, this was often accompanied by allowing a limited form of consultation on a range of issues and concerns already decided upon.

To compliment this perspective on individual rights in an age of inequality, an examination of the development of aboriginality should include an understanding of how people pass on meaning and value in oral texts. This provides an outlines of the political expression of aboriginal/government relations through the ideas and
motivations of the early treaty process (Chamberlin 1997). Prior to the modern period, each group involved in the treaty process, the British, French, and the various aboriginal groups, had representation in a separate polity that was capable of reaching an understanding of each others motives. The mechanism for determining their relationship was in relation to their concepts of territorial rights. Aboriginal groups and the British Crown essentially had the same goals but did not use the same concepts for reaching a decision about the use of the land. All of these groups had extensive knowledge and experience with the intricacies of negotiating land possession and territorial rights from their earlier experiences as self-determining nations. This often involved a recognition of the protocol for treaty negotiations and the official seal of written texts and/or oral accounts. Each had their own concepts of tradition and authority explained by the fact that both the British Crown and aboriginal groups entered into negotiation within the similar pretexts of accommodating change and getting what was best for their respective constituencies. Both were able to consider the management of treaty negotiations and their respective interests in terms of peace and prosperity. In these earlier times aboriginal groups did not enter into treaties as powerless victims only to be defrauded of lands and resources. The recognition of aboriginal title was implicit in the negotiation process and, in the final analysis, the perception of one to the other was always about ownership of the land.

With the consolidation of colonial rule the influence of aboriginal groups declined. As this proceeded oral texts, once regarded as significance in the treaty
process, was subsumed as inferior from the perspective of the state. This forshadows
the future of aboriginal/government relations. Along with a rise in the incidence of
disease and poverty, the idea of a degenerative aboriginal state is later embodied in
the political and legislative strategy to dispossess aboriginal people from their
historical ties to the land. In the recognition of political stability, as contained in the
original treaties, came the belief that the duty of the state was to promote the ideal of
advancement through protection and assimilation, or until aboriginality ceased to
have any meaning. A fundamental political character of aboriginal/government
relations was that of moral subjugation, an essential element of the liberal ideal, that
has influenced policy towards aboriginal people. In this view it was held that the
individual was inherently incompetent, but when considered collectively, inspired a
humanitarian zeal.

By the 1950's, aboriginality as a political and ideological construct was based
on small band organization, a homogenous social entity reconstructed under the law.
The administrative practice towards aboriginal groups opposed any claims to land
and was generally destructive of local political systems. In instances where a
moderate acquiescence with government views occurred, a degree of self-
government was acceptable. This generally reflected the dominant ideology as these
groups were shown to be models of progressive economic development. Policy
efforts designed by the dominant institutions, which often countered the efforts of
aboriginal involvement in decision-making, furthered increased the marginal
position of aboriginal communities. The internal management of local affairs by the
Indian Department exercised a wide control over most aspects of aboriginal life, but a rising aboriginal self-identity, that used the rhetoric of sovereign and self-determining aboriginal groups, was quickly becoming a central theme in aboriginal/government relations.

After the release of the 1969 White Paper, criticism of the approach to policy and aboriginal relations revealed the inconsistencies in the liberal ideal, while rejection to it from aboriginal people reverberated across the country. The viewpoint that aboriginal communities represented closed communities relegated to the background was no longer acceptable. A variety of government agents had attempted to shape social reality by superimposing aboriginal categories into social relations, all of these remained as poor conceptualizations of aboriginality as expressed in the demands for aboriginal self-determination. The state attempted to categorize aboriginality on the basis that aboriginality is an instrument of group classification, designed to comply with the liberal ideal. Political, not civil purposes, served to meet its ends. The attempt to strengthen political control mixed rhetoric with rationality. In its presentation of the White Paper the government expressed a willingness for discussion which was lacking in practice. Aboriginal groups were left out of the process and their input was not at all considered important. The value of any participation was open to selective interpretations. Any aboriginal demands were seen as either remote or were discredited (Weaver 1981:195). To elude any undesirable political consequences the public response was gauged to set federal priorities around the goal of consistency in the face of economic uncertainties. The
federal government simply resisted aboriginal involvement by refocusing any issues away from aboriginal concerns towards public demand and the ever ambiguous “other interests”.

The ideas that formed early aboriginal/government relations were essentially the same that informed the contemporary relationship, designed mainly to maintain the state’s political authority and stability of the economy. The articulation of aboriginal demands was used to reinforced what were mostly convenient interpretations of justice in society through the destruction of aboriginal communities. Although the White Paper was formally retracted because of aboriginal demands, the government continued to deny aboriginal title for land claims settlement and continued the racist and discriminatory membership policy affecting aboriginal women (Weaver 1981:198-199). In several substantial ways the issues that added friction to aboriginal/government relations, as those that surrounded special recognition and a category of aboriginal citizenship, were presented in terms of individual rights that influenced the direction of state services, but indirectly strengthened the state’s role.

For well over a century, Federal Indian policy has provided as a comprehensive design for the development of a system of social relations dominating over a diverse range of aboriginal people and communities. Informed by attitudes of Anglo supremacy and ideologies of racial inferiority, aboriginal groups were described as subordinate and uncivilized in need of a guiding hand. From the creation of several categories of aboriginality by grand philosophical ideals, these
categories provided the means to substantiate a division of social relations based on
social and political development that became institutionalized as state definitions. In
the foreground, the concept of aboriginal ethnicity was seen as inherent in the
individual, and in a broad sense, in the nature of national origin. Aboriginality in the
historical context is about the division of aboriginal groups into socially significant
categories as configurations of a patriarchal and racist divisions of labour. Along
with this chronology of institutionalized patrimony was the dominant institution’s
interface with capitalist notions of private property as categories based on descent
became socially significant (Cannon 1998:10-11). Liberalism and the ideal of
individualised distinctions recognized and affirmed a sexual division of labour and
created an illegitimacy that emphasized paternity in the face of societal decline.
Coinciding with the ongoing civilizing agenda of early Indian policy was the
continuation of these policies in the later revisions of the Indian Act. Influential, was
the objective of establishing a fiscally sound policy that sought to terminate the
special relationship that aboriginal groups had with the federal government.
Meanwhile, as aboriginal groups became increasingly politicized by the 1960's civil
rights movement, the effect was to create a category of aboriginal citizenship that
sought a new self-awareness as espoused in the modern cultural revitalization
movement. By the 1950s and 1960s the concept, while originally constructed by
racist and sexist attitudes, was now developed and incorporated into cultural
descriptions of aboriginality by aboriginal people.
SELF-DETERMINATION AND TERMINATION

The year 1969, a milestone in aboriginal/government relations, unfolded in the context of resistance and containment. The charged atmosphere in aboriginal/government relations required a response from the federal government that was more palatable than that which was fostered in the 1940's. The federal government attempted to manage the resistance to the White Paper while aboriginal leaders galvanized their communities and fanned public debate. The federal government’s approach to manage rising costs and obligations, at a time when aboriginal demands for self-government was heightened, offered no evidence for a substantial change in Federal Indian policy. For the first time aboriginal leaders galvanized by the lack of acceptable federal objectives were able to heighten the demand for self-determination. Aboriginal communities across the country were plagued by one of the highest unemployment rates and the lowest standards of living in the industrial world. In this context they began forwarding their demands to the federal government through civil demonstrations and the public airing of grievances. The economic and administrative pressures of federalism required a policy approach that in the end was considered by aboriginal groups as a policy of the termination.

The persistent demand for aboriginal self-determination was often construed as a demand for fundamental changes in the social and political order at the local band level. The demand for aboriginal self-determination at the federal level was conditioned by the view that aboriginal self-government was equal to the provinces.
as part of the original constitutive units. This refined the dialogue and debate on the aboriginal question in several ways. At the time of the White Paper aboriginal people represented anywhere from 1% to 3% of the population, depending on which category of aboriginality was used. This became more obvious to federal authorities when it was concluded that the population was not culturally or legally as homogenous as previously thought. In addition, aboriginal people had the highest birthrate in the country. And with half the population living on remote reserves where economic standards were well below the rest of the country. The general dissatisfaction with the state of aboriginal/government relations was further aggravated by an aggressive off-loading of federal programs and fiscal policies aimed at deficit reduction.

With the failure of earlier assimilation policy, the preparation for a “New Deal” approach to solving the plight of aboriginal people involved a period of program evaluations. The purpose of Federal Indian policy began with expectations that found their support in the United States’ were termination of special status for aboriginal people had begun in the early 1940’s. Seen as a “fix all” solution, the policy from south of the border the was based on modern practices and institutional tactics that were secure in the assumptions of the American Dream as a solution to replace language, custom and tradition (Beatty 1946:403-404). A doctrine of self-reliance was reflected in the rhetoric of aboriginal people taking responsibility solely for themselves. A new form of aboriginal/government relations that was based on the full incorporation of the aboriginal population into the nation state. Immediately, as
in the United States, this approach was fraught with difficulties. In Canada, the fact that aboriginal groups continued to demand and be seen and treated as a distinct groups existing outside mainstream society, at the onset as ideologically and legally restricting. By this time the federal government’s had an understanding that this emphasis on promoting equality was especially made difficult by placing limits on resources. As well, the influence of the civil rights movement in the 1960's emanating from urban centres in the US contributed to a growing awareness that the termination policy was a racist program designed to continue the practice of assimilation, by a young and often militant aboriginal leadership.

The dominant political ideas of liberalism guided the policy towards aboriginal groups and issues, often in an aggressive fashion. The ideas of efficiency and economic stability became fundamental political factors for national policy, characterized by an economy in decline and with high rates of inflation throughout the 1970's. A debt ridden government with a growing deficit gave the development of social programs low priority. The federal government vacillated between the stabilization of social programs to more severe austerity measures (Doern and Phidd 1983). The result was that an already poverty stricken aboriginal population was without the means to advance towards any economic or political renewal (Cardinal 1969:66). Rigid cost control made the exchanges between aboriginal groups and the federal government unbearable. Cloaked in a strategy of economic development, budgetary and administrative pressures were used in an effort to implement a policy of transferring reserve lands from a system of collective ownership to individual

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ownership. Under this policy individuals would obtain full ownership of parcelled lots in a strategy that would allow individual lot owners the option to sell on the open market. In other words, the new property regime would cease to include any measures guaranteed to protect aboriginal title. In the end, the intentions to parcel out lots was blocked, but the federal government continued to incrementally advance their policy on a band by band basis (Rudnicki 1987:85). In doing so, selected bands were pressured and encouraged to enter into programs that were under provincial jurisdiction. Furthermore, in areas were land settlement treaties were never signed, the federal government followed a policy as termination of aboriginal title. At the time the negotiation of land claims was portrayed as a relatively minor concern. In this policy self-government was seen as a form of municipal status that maintained that there was no constitutional basis for aboriginal rights.

With the release of the White Paper the full extent of the plans to pursue a policy of termination of aboriginal rights through the elimination of special status was revealed. The reaction to the policy as seen by aboriginal groups has been described as one of despair instead of hope (Waubagesig 1974:5). Whereas self-determination was to provide a range of powers constitutionally defined, it became recast in the mould equal citizenship. The promise of an effective process of consultation was never realized. Advice offered by aboriginal groups on changes to the Indian Act and the recognition of special status were never entered discussion. It was left to the aboriginal leadership to put together their own ideas regarding opposing federal policy. They accused the federal government of double-speak and
by pointing out the glaring inconsistencies in the policy, the focus of the attack was
the legislative and constitutional recognition of Indian status. The lack of
understanding shown by the federal government, which had largely dismissed land
claims and treaty obligations, was seen as discriminatory, offensive and a perfect
example of the systemic racism that had been going on for years. The policy
statement that seemed to be the most progressive, recommendations to enhance
services for those aboriginal communities furthest behind, was seen as yet another
attempt to divide and conquer, rather than advancing economic development for all
aboriginal communities. The recommendation for combining local government and
provincial jurisdiction fell short of aboriginal aspirations for equal constitutional
recognition. On the surface, the arrangement offered a glimpse of hope for destitute
aboriginal communities, but, because of the deterioration in negotiations, it went
nowhere. Until the federal government demonstrated a commitment to ensure that
social, political, and economic well-being became possible, the plan was not
acceptable. From the aboriginal perspective the only reliable principal was found in
the lawful obligations and promises found in aboriginal and treaty rights. Although
the control over aboriginal lands remained a critical issue in the aspirations of
aboriginal people as citizens plus. It should be added that while acknowledging their
lawful obligations the federal government did not believe that these were very
significant of extensive.

The federal government fell wide of the mark in it’s assessment of treaty
obligations, but could make inroads in their attempt to abolish the Indian
Department. The devolution of the Indian Department took on a significant aspect in the wake of the White Paper. In 1970, Deputy Minister Munro produced a follow-up to the White Paper which emphasized the correctness of policy direction. Only a greater effort to convince aboriginal people what was best for them was all that was needed. The elimination of special status was still desirable, but no force would be necessary if a scaled down version of self-government was agreeable to aboriginal groups. As a general agreement, the recognition of protecting aboriginal and treaty rights was not to be included. An informal process occurred with the provinces, which at this point, had acquired more responsibility for the finances designated for aboriginal people. The policy created to define aboriginal rights was to be contained through a policy by policy approach, in order to gain political leverage. Contrary to the federal government’s intentions, the entire exercise increased the political leverage for aboriginal people and presented a clear direction to argue for aboriginal rights. This was aided by increased funding for political organizing that in the end set-out different expectations than those outlined by the government (Cardinal 1969:126).

The White Paper remains in the collective conscious of aboriginal people and as a benchmark in the discussions of changes to aboriginal/government relations. The 1960's was a period of building strong national political organizations. The 1970's witnessed united political activities and acquiring greater influence. In terms of affecting actual change, several advances were made as stable funding arrangements and the recognition of aboriginal groups as a distinct peoples was high
on the discussion list. On the international level, an ideology of a Fourth World peoples struggling against internal colonialism within various modern states took hold and added strength to political movements (Manuel and Posluns 1974). As a counterforce to the federal governments trench warfare approach to aboriginal issues, the fore-runner to the present day Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Native Indian Brotherhood (NIB), came into prominence. This process was not without difficulty, a split occurred in the internal organization of the NIB regarding treaty rights for status Indians and the aboriginal rights affecting non-status Indians and the Me'tis.

The 1980's witnessed the abandonment of government attempts to specify specific constitutional rights. The Penner Report (1983) recommending support for self-government, forwarded the presence of an aboriginal voice at constitutional discussions as found in the Charlottetown Accord. The failure of the Charlottetown Accord occurred for several reasons. In particular a debate arose over the question of whether or not aboriginal rights referred to rights existing from time immemorial or new rights. The AFN lobbied for the constitutional protection of aboriginal and treaty rights and to include Indians, Inuit, and Me'tis within the constitutional definition. They opposed the inclusion of gender discrimination under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Some of the aboriginal organizations opposed the section that prohibited discrimination based on sex on technical grounds, arguing that a judicial decision from the courts on the Indian Act would set a precedent by creating a legislative distinction between Indian status and band membership, and which would
infringe on the ability to define band membership (Weaver 1981).

The Dilemma of the Just Society

In the later part of the 1970's, the trends in aboriginal policy indicated two
levels of priorities, a long-term objective of extracting primary resources and a short
term objective of job-training. The basic elements of these objectives were the
development of an ethos of self-reliance and the integration of aboriginal peoples
into universal federal as well as provincial programs. Little was actually achieved
other than distracting attention away from better services on the reserves. The
approach became more specialized with an attempt to accommodate the decision-
making process at the local level in order to eliminate obstacles for reaching
developmental goals.

The desire to achieve economic results tied to the competitive market
economy, stretched the internal and external resources of aboriginal communities
and introduced several disadvantages for aboriginal people. In one sense, aboriginal
communities viewed the control over their resources as stemming from aboriginal
rights and historic agreements. Limited access to resources meant that they were
unable to address the obstacles which marginalized the economic life of their
communities. While other citizens had acquired opportunities to better their
situations, aboriginal groups had to contend with oppressive legislation that
diminished opportunities in their communities. Counter to producing the same results afforded to others. The decisions aboriginal groups had to make were based on past experiences with the state that served to confirm that the routine of community life was enforced within a wall of legislated ideology. In other words the democratic rights afforded to other citizens were not necessarily available to aboriginal communities.

The characterization of aboriginal communities is that of a local community adapting to the dominant Canadian institutions. This adaptation included a growing dependence on transfer payments. Payments associated with political domination and a persuasive ideology which justifies the appropriation of aboriginal lands and resources. Over time aboriginal communities were excluded from the main economic structures of society but became involved in the long-term provisions of the welfare state. Subjugated, like others in society, to the domination of elites the system of domination created a dependency affecting individuals and groups. The role of the Indian Department reflected the dominant ideas, in that it adopted the existence of a routinized view of aboriginal issues and the organization of efficient procedures to manage aboriginal affairs. The latter procedures involved organizing local band government and aboriginal political organizations, who sought to standardize procedures in terms of business methods (Lithman 1983:152-153). The aim was to maintain a level playing field and bring about fiscal restraint and capital accumulation.

The policy goal was to promote deficit cutting by reducing program
expenditures related to aboriginal people. Under the Nielsen Task Force Program Review in April 1985, all federal programs were subjected to a rigorous cost/benefit analysis. The slowness of pace and limited success in aboriginal/government relations reflected both the controlled conditions and also the limited strength of aboriginal groups. The low priority given to aboriginal self-government negotiations by the federal government were contrasted to the recommendations given by the Nielson Report to accelerate cuts or capping expenditures to programs which were not directly under the control of the Indian Department. Fiscal restraint was implemented in all programs affecting aboriginal programs. These outcomes were to counter government expenditures which had usually been attributed to the socio-economic inertia on Indian reserves (Canada 1986:21). The development of aboriginal policy included several sectors of the Canadian establishment including the private sector interest, who advised on policy affecting economic interests (1986:4). Program assessment and review identified government priorities for the next millennium including the privatization of services in the form of block transfers to local band governments. To contain the expected outcry from aboriginal groups recommendations including controlled partnerships was seen as one way of meeting the objectives of the devolution of services to aboriginal communities. An emphasis on entrepreneurial expertise included engaging aboriginal groups to identify and coordinate efforts to establish agreements with provincial governments and programs (1986:47). What especially concerned the federal governments constitutional commitment was found in Section 35 of the 1982 Constitutional amendment that
delineated the steps to be taken towards achieving aboriginal self-government. The recommendation to place financial objectives above an inherent right to self-government required clarification in all program objectives which vaguely included a discretionary approach towards aboriginal descent (1986:29-30). Tight fiscal control offered little flexibility under the inherent rights agreement as the bulk of block funding transferred to individual band administration was subjected to partial or inadequate funding agreements, reflecting the power of the federal government to influence the scope of aboriginal self-determination.

The pressure to monitor government activity was needed to sustain a dialogue for aboriginal self-government. The new fiscal relationship became an avenue for economic innovation and introduced a policy predicament. Following the dominant individualistic orientation, any claims to self-government was perceived as outside the constitutional framework, and could only be pursued if aboriginal rights were extinguished. A piecemeal attempt was made to extinguish aboriginal rights with the view of aboriginality as an individual affair. Benefits enjoyed by most other citizens were contingent on the political will of federal and provincial bodies for aboriginal communities. Political self-sufficiency, as the ability to set goals and act without seeking permission continued to work consistently in favour of self-guided paternalism and dependency. Again, this was pursued by limiting aboriginal control over the mechanism of administration and government and continuing the denial of aboriginal self-determination (Asch 1992:50). In light of the debate on national unity and decentralization, the federal government unilaterally changed the goal of
aboriginal self-determination, and sought to ensure it remained outside the control of aboriginal groups. The goal of aboriginal self-determination was precariously placed between the national unity debate and the restructuring of the federal system in times of deficit reduction and government downsizing.

The practice of the political subjugation of aboriginal people persisted in as much as the economic and social disruption caused by such practices remained unchanged. For example, access to services and support generally available to others was denied to aboriginal people up until the 1960's. Prior to the emergence of social security programs, social relief was based on rationing basic staples which found its beginnings in the British Poor Laws. Aboriginal people became involved in a ration system were funds were confiscated from band trust funds through the federal government (Moscovitch and Webster 1995:210). The punitive and oppressive legacy of the ration system was replaced by the Canadian Assistance Program in 1966 when the federal government demanded the provinces sign on the social security programs and extend services to aboriginal people. Until World War II, aboriginal people were excluded from federal and provincial welfare services because of racism and discrimination and the legacy of government paternalism (Guest 1980 168-172). Reforms to the current social assistance program continues to be ignored as the federal government stance consistently maintains that social assistance is under the jurisdiction of the provinces, but provides funding as a matter of policy, while at the same time the provinces assert their stance of federal responsibility for aboriginal people.
Aboriginal communities maintain one of the highest rates of welfare dependency in the country. These costs are expected to increase at a uniform rate independent of the general economic conditions (Moscovitch and Webster 1995:224-225). Social assistance in the form of financial relief is not part of aboriginal treaty rights, but is structured historically as an institution and perhaps, as part of the staple economy for aboriginal communities. No efforts towards self-government or any other funding arrangement has come close to changing the dire economic conditions on most reserves. The current administrative arrangements see no departure from this practice. While the federal government terminates provincial reimbursements for aboriginal recipients, aboriginal jurisdiction remains unanswered and there is no clarification on the status of residency and those classified as on-reserve or off-reserve residents, at either levels of government. The situation has moved from one of colonization and dependency on a ration system to one of dependency on social assistance (1995:231).

In the vacuum that has been created, political rights, like social and human rights, are fundamental for democratic participation and the well-being of the aboriginal community. In the development of aboriginal rights, the Canadian state has played a pivotal role by creating a body of legislation and social policy, often by limiting the democratic rights of aboriginal people. Meanwhile, the elimination of government deficits has become the number one priority for federal and provincial governments, mainly by targeting social programs that affect the most vulnerable in society. Evidenced by provincial workfare programs presented as proposals to force
welfare recipients to accept labour in exchange for social assistance represents the latest excursion into the provincial and federal mandate to control on-reserve populations. These policy recommendations from the federal level were revealed in the Nielsen Task Force on Indian and Native Programs (Canada 1986:35-37). By providing subsidies through workfare schemes, a cheap pool of labour is available for business and has the effect of keeping wages down and increasing profits for the wealthiest sector of society. Concurrently, the transfer of social programs to provincial governments is in line with developing economic policies with downsizing of government expenses keeping in mind the discipline of the market and corporate interests. The neo-liberal agenda that emphasizes free market ideology and minimal government interference requires the federal/provincial arrangement to be altered in order to reduce the national debt by reducing social spending not only in aboriginal communities but in other sectors of economy affecting working class people. In recent years, beginning in the early 1970's, a convenient myth of the fiscal crisis has been instilled in the public consciousness, while the actual cause of a government created debt lies in the high interest rates and large corporate tax breaks. The crisis although created by government, instills the logical conclusion is that government must take the lead in reducing the debt, no matter how painful for the average citizen.

The dominant discourse of debt reduction is to rollback the welfare state together with the lowering of wages and less taxes. The strategy is to lure capital by restructuring production through lower wages and lower production to eliminate
conditions of economic uncertainty. State policy attempts to assist the security of the
domestic economy by introducing flexibility in the workforce through national
economic policies that are reconstituted in relation to the international economy
(Workman 1996:12). Prompted by global developments in this strategy, the
involvement of foreign investment and fiscal conservatism requires the rejection of
social welfare assistance (1996:15). These policy dimensions involve the unfettered
access to aboriginal lands (1996:16). As part of the effort towards economic
development and under the federal and provincial governments, attempts at fiscal
and monetary restraint are reflected in the reorganization of Indian and Northern
Affairs Canada (INAC), including the decentralization of resource industries and
regional development that is compatible with international trade. Since the 1969
White Paper, the policy of declining aboriginal rights has coincided with the gradual
erosion of the Indian Department to the point of off-loading fiduciary obligations to
the responsibility of the provinces. By increasing the responsibility of the provinces
in aboriginal affairs, the dismantling of INAC increases the political role of the
provinces over aboriginal governments, which then moves towards a more municipal
style government, and a shift towards individual ownership of lands and private
property, analogous to corporate interests. The end result is the increase of
government control over aboriginal lands and resource extraction.
CONTEMPORARY CONTOURS OF
ABORIGINAL/GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was formed to investigate the evolution of aboriginal/government relations. A conscious decision was made to hear from all aboriginal peoples; status Indians, Inuit, Me'tis, on-reserve and off-reserve Indians and non-status Indians. After five years of hearings and research, over four hundred recommendations were put forward within a framework that sought to accommodate all aboriginal groups into a workable framework for treaty negotiations. This was a generic approach that focussed on the aboriginal nation as the basic unit of political authority, rather than the aboriginal community. A broad definition of aboriginal membership was recommended which included those without direct links to aboriginal communities. This was in contrast to the federal government’s approach, whose criteria and practice centred on Indian bands as individual communities as the basic unit which may exercise the right of self-determination. The Commission concluded that a sizeable body of aboriginal people who share a sense of identity, and thereby, as aboriginal people, constitute the predominant population in a given territory or territories, as aboriginal nations (Vol. 2:166). To recognize aboriginal groups as self-determining nations a process of internal organization and a formal recognition by both the federal and provincial governments is necessary. In practical terms, the cooperation of the Canadian state remains a requirement or perhaps a source of frustration for aboriginal groups.
The Commission’s report was influenced by the rise of fiscal conservatism that placed the Commissions recommendations against a changed political and social background. The Commission’s recommendations included strong criticisms of prevailing policy, legislation and conduct, which were largely aimed towards the federal bureaucracy. Midway through the investigations the Liberal government, as the government of the day, adopted several alternative policies by imposing financial transfer agreements and implementing program review initiatives. The pressures of the Liberal government’s reforms for the dismantling of it’s fiduciary responsibility and the devolution of services for aboriginal people resulted in modifications to the scope of the Commission’s inquiries. The Royal Commission Report suggest that the federal government has unavoidable fiscal responsibilities that derive from it’s mandate to negotiate with and to protect the interest of aboriginal peoples. Further recommendations of the Commission suggested that the opportunity should be provided for all aboriginal groups to engage in treaty negotiations, and/or the development of an aboriginal constitution to determine aboriginal membership and nation status. The federal response included a general agreement to the remove all unilateral policies related to fiscal relations, governance, lands and resources. The request for discussions on land reform at the local level was shortened to include a piecemeal approach whereby individual aboriginal communities were the starting point for negotiations, which in effect fragmented the aboriginal response.

From the perspective of the federal government the underlying impetus for change was a balance between individual and collective rights covered by several
recommendations that included the need for aboriginal groups to adjust to the mainstream economy. A renewed relationship with the Canadian state was contingent upon the revenue generating capacities of aboriginal groups presented in the context of a protected third party interest. Lands and resources were presented in the context of a protected third party interest that were associated with the integration of aboriginal groups into existing economic system. Aboriginal groups recognized that as these reforms detracted from their historical treaties and were the basis for the underdevelopment and dependency found in their communities, for these was no increase in the protection of lands and resources or mechanisms to meet short-term needs.

The right of self-determination is a major premise upon which much of the Commissions report is based. According to the Commission, self-government and self-determination are separate but related concepts, efforts at self-government should be a choice for aboriginal groups (Ottawa 1996, Vol. 5:120-121). Self-determination entitles aboriginal groups to negotiate the terms of their relationship to the Canadian state and to establish governmental structures that are appropriate to their needs (Vol. 2:166). The RCAP recommends that treaties should to be defined as social contacts that have enduring significance, when fundamentally placed in the context of Canadian law, that they were similar in form to the union established between former British colonies when they entered into confederation as provinces (Vol. 2:20-21). In this respect constitution-building began much earlier than 1867 and reflects the relationship between aboriginal people, the French and the British
settlers, and the Crown. In such a case, aboriginal groups have a special relationship to the Canadian state that is described in the Canadian courts as one of a kind or *sui generis*. The Crown as the protector of the sovereignty of aboriginal nations in Canada, is a fundamental feature of the constitution. The Royal Commission goes on to argue that there may be a legal requirement in the form of the Crown’s fundamental fiduciary obligation for federal and provincial governments to assist in repairing the damaged caused to aboriginal nations (Vol. 2:311). These issues have been the major stumbling blocks in aboriginal/government relations for years. As an assessment of policy direction and the consequence of reforms to legislation, the overall response from the federal government to RCAP became another lesson in disappointment and disillusionment for aboriginal people.

The preoccupation of treating aboriginal groups as interest groups or racial and ethnic minorities has both economic and political causes. The commitment to individual liberalism in public policy has only created contradictions that increasingly made aboriginal political aspiration vulnerable to the dominant class structure. With the development of market mechanisms a degree of compromise was made implicit in federal policy. This does not represent a capitulation to the dominant class forces and the Canadian state, nor a rejection of liberalism, however, it does present a challenge for aboriginal groups to align with the democratic rights of other aboriginal groups and other segments of society. The dominant institutions and ideologies of the state and the ethos of liberalism have influenced the historical trajectory of aboriginal groups by creating a special status for aboriginal people.
With this in mind, aboriginal aspirations cannot be seen as separate from the interests of other segments of Canadian society. Recognizing interdependence of other segments of society presupposes a mutual predicament and the opportunity for cooperation in the wider social context of an industrial class based society.

Federal initiatives like the 1969 White Paper added to the deterioration of aboriginal/government relations in proportion to the resistance and revitalization of aboriginal politics and culture. The revitalization occurring in aboriginal communities has not included an absolute rejection of established values of liberalism or the capitalist system, nor did the resistance to the White Paper solve the problem of decolonization. Resistance to the White Paper involved the rejection of the colonial stereotypes that reflected the state of oppression in aboriginal communities, and led to an aboriginal agenda that included overtones of separateness. This tended to increase aboriginal solitude within a neo-colonial framework by focussing on the opposition to assimilation. Instead of accepting an obscure appropriation of identity, opposition to an inappropriate identity was raised in the consciousness of aboriginal people.

The restructuring of an aboriginal identity occurred forcibly through an institutional framework with significant effects on perceptions of aboriginal people and group membership (Sawchuk 1985). The effects of the legislated definitions and constitutional amendments have raised the relevance of aboriginality by increasing the powerlessness of aboriginal groups in a divide and conquer fashion. State defined concepts of aboriginality bear little resemblance to pre-contact concepts and
structures of governance. Imposed from above, an over a long history of oppression and influences from cultural and economic spheres, the ideological and political social formations imposed on aboriginal populations cannot be presumed solely on economic factors, but significantly involving state coercion representing ruling class interests. The coercive nature of market relations subjugated aboriginal people to wage-labour, while the regulation of other aspect of aboriginality was achieved through the coercive nature of the state. The latter included policies affecting women, ethnic and racial categories, and the natural environment to the capitalist system. A Marxist perspective diverges strikingly from liberal views by situating specific state activities within the developmental logic of capitalism (Resnick 1990).

The unique relationship between aboriginal people and the land had to be broken. Land was alienated as aboriginal groups were located on specific territories and each culturally distinct community became subject to the ideological realm of individualism. Aboriginal people did not represent a large enough labour force, so little else was offered other than extermination or assimilation. As assimilation policy proceeded, special status was attached to social categories of aboriginality. Another solution to “Indian problem” was to isolate aboriginal groups on a shrinking land base, segregated from the surrounding society, until it became possible for incorporation into the system of social stratification. Some aboriginal people were coerced and did leave their original communities. However many resisted the pressures of assimilation and remained in their communities. Those determined to rectify the lost connection to their ancestry are in the thousands, as evidenced by the
number of individuals reinstated under legislation (Bill -C 31) designed to restore a
new category of aboriginal status to those who lost their membership because of
sexist and racist attitudes. Many aboriginal groups have maintained a sense of
identity and have developed their organizations over several generations, despite
being forced to accommodate to ideological and legal restrictions. Non-status
Indian's have also maintained a sense of identity and have returned to aboriginal
their communities, but without legal status, have remained outside the constitutional
framework and without access to many of the valuable resources afforded to those
within the legal definitions of aboriginality (Sawchuk, 1985).

The overall conceptualization of aboriginality remains problematic for
aboriginal people. The ability to govern at the local level is marked by a
fragmentation characteristic of a modern capitalist state. In the modern redistributive
state, in stark contrast to the modern standards, many aboriginal communities cannot
be considered to be successful. This manifests itself in a period of unprecedented
economic growth. Moreover, the establishment of government services and political
structures has turned increasingly towards a labour intensive bureaucratic enterprise
within the Indian Department and at the local band level. Local bands are asking for
more staff positions as a blurring of distinctions between government personnel and
band administration has contributed to the intensification of local and state
management, and the emergence of a bureaucratic hierarchy of labour.

The administrative containment of aboriginal groups are further
circumscribed by two assumptions about the judicial category that define
separateness. The most apparent is the myth of the benevolence of the state administering services to a disadvantaged racial minority, and that aboriginal people are for all intents and purposes are part of the Canadian mosaic (Chartrand 1993). This judicial category defines aboriginality as codified in the erratic legitimacy of constitutionalized categories of aboriginality based on race. The emergence consciousness of aboriginal groups remains as an enduring strength and the basis of establishing a common purpose for aboriginal groups in the face of harsh realities (Barsh 1980). As an ethnic movement, aboriginal goals and strategies have followed the movement of the contemporary civil rights movement. Aboriginality as an aspect of ancestry and culture, though not genuinely racial, generally are presumed equal under political and legal circumstances (1980:244). As political equals, race is incidental because of a failure to recognize a commonality of political rights. However, race has becomes a feature of the contemporary political debate in a way that threatens to limit the opportunities of aboriginal peoples.

Given the historical premise of the state and the refusal to extend political rights as territorial and collective rights, the nature of political power is revealed. Along with the coercive function and the attempt to control territories and aboriginal people, the Canadian state spent 60 million dollars on the Royal Commission. Should this money have been spent on a thousand houses, or on an investigation into the collective rights of aboriginal groups to decide on the strategic course of action? That such decisions are not open to scrutiny, when the current standards of life in aboriginal communities remain unchanged, points to the dominant position of the
state. Royal Commissions often collect dust and usually extend in one direction, that is, to maintain authority over social policy and to assert legitimacy (Resnick 1990:134-137). While dependency on the state has seeped into all aspects of aboriginal life to date, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples represents the largest venture in which aboriginal groups have been able to participate in the democratic process.

As an alternative to the liberal ideal and as a guide for aboriginal self-determination, the Marxist approach offers a critical view of the liberal state. Marxism is useful as a critique of the monolithic state as it deepens our understanding of aboriginal societies and their incorporation into the modern capitalist state. It provides a relevant analysis of the transformation of aboriginal people in the context of international markets and the capitalist economy. A central problem of Marxism is to go beyond an analysis of the monolithic state and to recognize the different types of capitalist states (ibid). Also, it offers an analysis of imperialism and decolonization and provides a criticism of the cultural-ethical problem, however, marxism falls short as an examination of the changing aboriginal values and the recognition of local aboriginal

Howard Adams (1989,1995) argues that present day aboriginal liberation is limited to a form of nationalism and cultural autonomy which cannot bring in full self-determination. A political consciousness of worker exploitation does not exist within the aboriginal population. The rise of an aboriginal capitalist class that is supported by the state is one reason why a counter-consciousness in aboriginal
populations does not surface. While most of the aboriginal population is kept in low-
wage employment or dependent on welfare, the state is more apt to impose a
capitalist ideology that extends through state funded aboriginal institutions, such as a
on-reserve police force, schools and the local bureaucracy. In Adam’s view it is the
source of oppression in the dominant state structures of capitalism that needs to be
replaced. The full reality of oppression is not addressed by an aboriginal leadership.
whom, Adams argues, are actually collaborators in the oppression of the aboriginal
population (Adams 1995:204). In his view leading aboriginal political organizations
are the promoters of colonial aims and ideology. At best the aboriginal leadership is
able to focus anger at the highest level of the government, away from the frustrations
of everyday life. Since all the major political parties function in similar if not an
identical fashion, as profoundly capitalist, only from the perspective of an aboriginal
nationalism that goes beyond the oppressers nationalism can a counter-culture
emerge that is capable of understanding the capitalist ideology. The civil rights
movement did not go far enough to influence the day to day issues of survival
facing aboriginal communities. As such aboriginal nationalism must go beyond race
and heritage and include elements of the class struggle.

When outlining this dilemma of the relationship between aboriginal groups
and the Canadian state, the role of state policy in the modern era is crucial. The
Royal Commission represents a limited approach but not necessarily an example of
collaboration; political rule and economic determinism are the overlapping factors.
An aboriginal leadership that keeps one foot in the door of government and one in
the aboriginal community is part of the social control mechanisms of the state. None
the less, conformity within aboriginal populations is sustained by the universalistic
free-market ideology. What is lacking in the aboriginal leadership is a critical
understanding of the central features of state control as a function of capitalism and
ruling class ideology. Without this kind of knowledge the failure to find a solutions
leads to nothing more than a criticism of separateness.

The deep lying characteristics of aboriginal/government relations have been
passed down from generation to generation. Authority and belief become
commodities without paying heed to social transformation and the burden of moving
into new and unique aspects of culture and change. A criticism of liberalisms, with
it’s emphasis on the limited character of the aboriginal citizen and the democratic
impulse, requires an in-depth analysis of social change which takes into account the
way aboriginal groups are subordinate to by state authority and subject to the interest
of a ruling class. A critical analysis suggest that aboriginal political equality rest on
achieving the ability to increase their authority in democratic institutions in their
communities. The focus should be to improve social conditions and further long-
term strategies to deal with current problems between aboriginal governments and
other social forces in society, such as the powerful labour unions.

The history of political discourse in Canada has lacked an intimate analysis
of the role of aboriginal/state relations. The role of Imperial powers in the early
formation of Canada was later followed by the rise of nation-building and the
stirring of a nationalist ideology. Provisions of aboriginal self-government were
excluded from state formation which was in step with the increased importance of
government and state entities in aboriginal affairs. The increasing dominance of the
provinces as geo-political systems of state rule occurred intermittently through the
dispossession of aboriginal lands, the political dominance of the early settler
population and, much later, with the political dominance over social formations
within aboriginal communities and elsewhere. The social predicament of aboriginal
groups is intertwined with a ruling class minority that presumed to safeguard the
rights of the individual citizen. As the governed enter into the multicultural society.
the rise of aboriginal politics and organizations intensified the activities of state
power. The concepts of assimilation and citizenship are forms of imperialism and
national liberation, pointing precisely to self-determination as a twentieth century
phenomena. What a Marxist analysis can offer is a focus on the structural changes in
the capitalist mode of production and the centralization of state power in the process
of capital accumulation.

The legitimacy of aboriginal self-determination challenges the legitimacy of
state power and the regulation of economic control. As the objects of social control.
the interaction of aboriginal groups and the state are open to interpretation in a
historically created world. Aboriginal separateness can be interpreted as a form of
alienation, as aboriginal groups are not only separated from economic resources, but
also from relationships within and between aboriginal communities and other groups
in society. The state isolates the individual from economic and non-economic
resources. In the transitional aboriginal society, a criticism of political domination
and the interaction with capitalist ideology provides a criticism that can penetrate the shadows of the monolithic state. But, the economic and social milieu of the state continues to obscure the intensity of the class struggle. For instance, it could be argued that aboriginal political organizations may inadvertently contribute to the extension of major social reforms and social control. Outside of an alternative framework, state defined aboriginality continues to foster the liberal notion of equality and to integrate the aboriginal citizens and aboriginal communities. The value of a criticism of liberalism and the contradictions of state institutions explores the limits of social policy.
CONCLUSION

Shortly after the release of the White Paper an acrimonious remark by Harold Cardinal, “the only good Indian is a non-Indian”, alerted aboriginal people to a brand of politics that took into account the full extent of assimilation policy. A few years earlier George Manuel professed a variant of the original citizen in the theme “For the first time in all known North American history there now exists an Indian sense of identity and common interest with other Indians, from the icy waters in the Arctic to the burning deserts in the Southwest and beyond.” These were two leading figures in the “First Nations” movement. Aboriginal people had found a common expression through similar experiences that originated in the nineteenth century, and their aspirations were encouraged by the expanding opportunities of the twentieth century. Nearly a half century since these views were expressed, the impositions and boundaries of aboriginal affairs continue to set limits on the goal of self-determination. The formative years of aboriginal policy offer a glimpse of the future as an evolving concept of aboriginality continues to push the limits of social programs and ideas of equality.

At the core of the attack against discrimination and demand for aboriginal self-determination is the desire for control over aboriginal communities. These demands involve a criticism of some of the highest ideals of liberalism. Federal Indian policy, and the administrative apparatus designed to implement policy, are meant to accommodate aboriginality and to deflect tensions in
aboriginal/government relations. Currently, Federal Indian policy has become discredited because of its failure to meet day to day needs of aboriginal communities. After years of attempting to remove the “Indian problem”, the need to pursue economic self-interest and the economic consequences of an unequal system seemed to fit with the unsuccessful application of defining who is an aboriginal person. Finding criteria for distinguishing aboriginal membership for employment possibilities and band membership, while probable, often proves to be elusive. The Treasury Board of Canada, the agency partly responsible for determining the criteria for employment equity programs, follows a method in which individual are allowed to declare their aboriginal identity. This broader approach should be, and often is, supported by the aboriginal community. If self-government initiatives are to fare better, the system of unequal income distribution that is central to absorbing aboriginal groups into state formations, needs to be changed.

An emerging sense of aboriginality has prepared the ground for a critical analysis of aboriginal/government relations. Conceptualizations of aboriginality has occurred in the vacuum between left and right politics. It allows for an analysis of the failures and shortcomings of liberal strategies by drawing attention to the evidence of patterns of inequality which emerge from the implementation of misguided programs of assimilation and the application about misconceptions about race, ethnicity, gender and class. Fundamentally, an analysis of the liberal ideal and aboriginality invokes an examination of the degree to which individual family and community life was shattered. Ultimately, this transformed social life points to the
fact that self-sufficient aboriginal communities do not exist. The present pattern of social inequality cannot be accounted for by reference to ethnic categories, but must take into account the structure of economic life.

In the quest for profits by other social interests, aboriginal people are placed in a disadvantaged position in their relation to the forces of production through the alienation of aboriginal lands. Aboriginal people are not simply a product of the environment but are active human agents that impact on the environment in complex social relationships. Aboriginal people, as producers of surplus value within the social process find exploitation of lands, resources, and their labour, as inherently contentious. The issues that surround aboriginality while on the one hand highly contested and politicized, on the other hand are easily defused by the liberal ideal when it is evoked to legitimize the inequality found in society. This serves to reproduce the social and political dislocations perpetrated by federal policies, and can be effective in attempts to depoliticize aboriginal people.

The role of wage labour has become a major concern for the well-being of aboriginal groups. While concepts of aboriginality have served the interest of profit and political stability, they are hardly fine-tuned instruments of manipulation in the hands of socially dominant groups. Aboriginality produces an anti-authoritarian sentiment that is ill-suited to certain types of bureaucratic administrative practice, and fosters an opposition of the most glaring limitations of liberalism and capitalism. Aboriginality, as described here is a complex and contradictory terminology that takes different forms in different periods of aboriginal/government
relations. Historically, aboriginal groups have consistently responded to the implementation of federal policies and, at times, have called into question the adequacy of economic institutions. Based on the destructive effect of assimilation policy and the state’s willingness to regulate social interactions, a different kind of aboriginal consciousness now exists that takes into account the historical record of inequality in liberal institutions. Whether this represents an alternative that is in fundamental opposition to dominant ideas is less than certain. One thing is certain, aboriginal groups have found that bureaucratic control by the dominant government is inevitable and that the dominant government will continue to be oppressive.
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