

June 21, 2014

Tomorrow is June 21st, National Aboriginal Day, a day recognizing and celebrating the cultures and contributions of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people of Canada.

I hope that you will take some time to learn more about Aboriginal issues or possibly join some of the celebrations of this true Canadian culture.

When annually sending this message, I focus on an aspect of Aboriginal issues that may not otherwise be seen in the news. This year I want to focus on history as a window into the context of Aboriginal People's first engagement with new Canadians as they arrived from Europe and an example of the decline in that relationship, that has since lead to many problems. My intent is not to lay blame; but rather to learn from past mistakes and successes to advance our relationships for the benefit of all Canadians.

Aboriginal People are neither inferior nor superior to other Canadians. So why do Aboriginal People continue to occupy the bottom step of so many social issues in this country? In fact for many years following European immigration to the territory we now call Canada, it was Aboriginal People who were far better able to succeed. So what has changed and how do we get back to all Canadians succeeding?

I am going to very ambitiously recommend this year, two Canadian history readings to help increase awareness of the context, history and current state of Aboriginal People in Canada:

- Hackett Fischer, David; *Champlain's Dream*; Simon & Schuster (2008) – This history of the French explorer and early settler in Canada is a wonderful view into the early European settlement in Canada and the relationship between Samuel de Champlain and Indians (First Nations People). Champlain did not believe Indians to be inferior to Europeans. He found them, Fischer writes, “to be the equal of Europeans in their intelligence, and superior in physical strength and the proportion of their bodies.” Champlain envisioned a new world, which was better than the “old world” he left behind, one which was a collaboration of European and Indian cultures. Unfortunately, Champlain's view of Canada did not continue to unfold into the partnership of equals that he envisioned.
- Daschuk, James; *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*; University of Regina Press (2013) – *Clearing the Plains* is truly a history book with Daschuk's main objective being to “identify the roots of the current health disparity between the indigenous and mainstream populations in western Canada”. In researching this history, the first important point of discovery is that Aboriginal People were not an inferior race waiting to be overtaken by Europeans. Instead, a series of events, some planned and others not, put Aboriginal People into a state that is taking generations to overcome.

Hopefully these histories will help us identify good ideas from the past and avoid making the same mistakes as we forge ahead with a more positive Canada, inclusive of all, especially the original Canadians.

All the best to you on June 21st, National Aboriginal Day.