

The Métis in the 21st Century Conference

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Saskatoon

Day 3 – Tape 1

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Evelyn Peters: It's hard to document Métis urbanization because we don't have a good sense of when most Métis people became urban, what are the current patterns of comparison to previous patterns. There's some indication that Métis have been more urban than First Nations people for quite a while. There was the 1956 survey in Manitoba that suggested that even at the mid-century, okay, about two-, about a third of the Métis population was urban. But the other thing that's interesting is that over the last decade, the Métis population has only increased, in the proportion who live in cities from 60 to 68%, and in the last five years that increase has been only 1 or 2%. So on the one hand Métis are more urban than First Nations people, on the other hand they're not urbanizing at a huge rate in the last decade. And, again, I think that raises some questions about attachment to rural areas among the Métis population and **[unclear]** from the census. The percentage of the increase in the Métis population in urban areas is substantially higher than the percent of the increase in North American Indians. In cities, as in provinces, the Métis population now represents a very substantial proportion. Okay, so for example, in Winnipeg 56% of the Aboriginal population is Métis, and that's an increase of almost 14% over the last decade. So there's some, some interesting implications here for the politics of representation for urban Aboriginal people associated with that kind of an increase.

If we look at socio-economic characteristics in cities, and here the picture I present is slightly different than Andy's, if we look at a variety of socio-economic characteristics, Métis generally do better—and this is not urban, particularly, this is in Canada—Métis generally do better than North American Indians, but they fall quite far behind all non-Aboriginal people. And this, this kind of pattern you find in every single city. At the same time,

there's some enormous variations. So, okay, so for example, an average income of almost sixty thousand in Winnipeg compared to an average income of about twenty-four thousand in Toronto. And if you look at the statistics across all of these socio-economic characteristics, there's not any clear picture that emerges. In general, the Prairie cities maybe seem to be worse off, but then you get things like really high participation in university education in some of these Prairie statistics. So, again, I think it points to variation by city, but it also points to some heterogeneity within particular cities, okay? So you get some Métis populations that are not very well off, you get some Métis populations that are quite well off. Okay, so that you get a growing percentage earning forty thousand or more and possibly be part of the middle class. So it's hard to generalize across cities and it's even hard to generalize within cities, because Métis represent a fairly heterogeneous, heterogeneous population.

Let me just look at one final element, and that is distribution within cities. And I won't go into the dissimilarity index because it's complicated, but, even more, it's, it's a lousy indicator, but it's used a lot. Except to say that, in general, the dissimilarity index shows that Métis people are slightly less concentrated in cities than most North American Indians. But, overall, there's not evidence of that kind of ghettoization that you see in the popular media, either for North American Indians or for Métis people. When you get indexes like, you know, .45, .58, and most of these are in that range, that's a, that's a relatively moderate level of segregation. Let's look at it in a way that I think is a lot more straightforward. These are dissemination areas, which are relatively small areas in the city, and this looks at the number of areas with these proportions of Métis people. Okay, so, 0-10, 10-20, 20-30, and 30 and over.

So the proportion of this small area that's Métis. Most cities and most Métis people—okay, let's start over again. Most Métis people live in areas where they make up 0-10% of the population. Okay, if you look at these numbers, the dissemination areas, that's most of the dissemination areas in the city. The only cities where you get dissemination areas where Métis make

up 30% or more are Winnipeg and Edmonton. And let me just pull out those maps quickly to show you where those areas are. Okay, that probably doesn't help you, but if I point it might. One of the 30% areas in Winnipeg is this area. And I, maybe somebody knows what that is. This is the river. Okay. It's near Marquette. Where is this? No, Portage la Prairie is over here. Where is it? Okay, okay, okay. That area has 30-40% Métis, okay, but most of the rest of the rural fringe here is 0-10, sorry, 1-10%. If you, if you look at the other, the, in Winnipeg the census tracks where the Métis make up 30-40%. This one, this one, and this one. And I'm sorry that **[unclear]** ... because you have the river here. And then you have the, you have the. And then you also have a number of areas where the Métis make up 20-30%, right around here. But they don't make up the majority. I mean, 30-40% is quite high, but they're not the majority of the, of the population. But they are in an area with a number of other areas that have a high Métis population.

In Edmonton, there are two areas where Métis make up 30-40%. The core of Edmonton is here. It's this area and this tiny little area here, so there aren't any areas within the inner city where Métis make up either 30 or 40%. But, okay, this is really ... **[chatter with audience]**. So there are some areas of relative concentration within cities, but there aren't any areas yet where Métis make up over half of the population.

Okay, and this is the conclusion and it didn't come out in, in the, in the binders, so I have copies if somebody's interested in. The population statistics, they say, are just that, it depends on what people do with them. But clearly the change in the Métis population over time means that there may be shifts in the relative balance of power and there may be some implications for the politics of representation. The second thing that I found really frustrating is the relevant lack of data on Métis people before the last decade. There's some wonderful historical research about original Métis communities, but what happened to Métis communities in the 1930s, the 1940s, and the 1950s? And that, I find, is really frustrating because I want to get a sense of what the trends are. We have a good sense of what, where

Métis people are now, but where were they thirty years ago? And, and, and I would hope that that starts to change. There's some pe-, some places where Métis people are, are a relatively significant part of the population, most Métis people live in areas where they are a minority. So most Métis people in a contemporary situation formulate their identities in areas where they are a minority population, and I wonder what implications that has for the emergence of Métis identities. Do Métis identities that are created where Métis are a minority look different than Métis identity, identities that emerge from homogeneous, stable, long-standing communities, okay? And finally, there's a lot of heterogeneity—there's class heterogeneity, there's heterogeneity in terms of socio-economic status, there's heterogeneity in terms of residence, rural and urban, there's clearly a lot of heterogeneity in terms of Métis histories, and it creates a major challenge to political organizations representing Métis people, to meet the aspirations of a variety of people, and it creates a major challenge for politics and legal scholars to address this kind of heterogeneity. Thank you.

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