

Who We Are

Canada is known around the world as a strong and free country. Canadians are proud of their unique identity. We have inherited the oldest continuous constitutional tradition in the world. We are the only constitutional monarchy in North America. Our institutions uphold a commitment to *Peace, Order and Good Government*, a key phrase in Canada's original constitutional document in 1867, the *British North America Act*. A belief in ordered liberty, enterprise, hard work and fair play has enabled Canadians to build a prosperous society in a rugged environment from our Atlantic shores to the Pacific Ocean and to the Arctic Circle—so much so that poets and songwriters have hailed Canada as the “**Great Dominion**.”

To understand what it means to be Canadian, it is important to know about our three founding peoples—**Aboriginal, French and British**.

(From Top to Bottom)
Métis from Alberta
Cree dancer



ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

The ancestors of Aboriginal peoples are believed to have migrated from Asia many thousands of years ago. They were well established here long before explorers from Europe first came to North America. Diverse, vibrant First Nations cultures were rooted in religious beliefs about their relationship to the Creator, the natural environment and each other.

Aboriginal and treaty rights are in the Canadian Constitution. Territorial rights were first guaranteed through the Royal Proclamation of 1763 by King George III, and established the basis for negotiating treaties with the newcomers—treaties that were not always fully respected.

From the 1800s until the 1980s, the federal government placed many Aboriginal children in residential schools to educate and assimilate

them into mainstream Canadian culture. The schools were poorly funded and inflicted hardship on the students; some were physically abused. Aboriginal languages and cultural practices were mostly prohibited. In 2008, Ottawa formally apologized to the former students.

In today's Canada, Aboriginal peoples enjoy renewed pride and confidence, and have made significant achievements in agriculture, the environment, business and the arts.

Today, the term *Aboriginal peoples* refers to three distinct groups:

Indian refers to all Aboriginal people who are not Inuit or Métis. In the 1970s, the term First Nations began to be used. Today, about half of First Nations people live on reserve land in about 600 communities while the other half live off-reserve, mainly in urban centres.



(From Left to Right)
Inuit children in Iqaluit,
Nunavut
Haida artist Bill Reid
carves a totem pole

Canada's History



ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

When Europeans explored Canada they found all regions occupied by native peoples they called Indians, because the first explorers thought they had reached the East Indies. The native people lived off the land, some by hunting and gathering, others by raising crops. The Huron-Wendat of the Great Lakes region, like the Iroquois, were farmers and hunters. The Cree and Dene of the Northwest were hunter-gatherers. The Sioux were nomadic, following the bison (buffalo) herd. The Inuit lived off Arctic wildlife. West Coast natives

preserved fish by drying and smoking. Warfare was common among Aboriginal groups as they competed for land, resources and prestige.

The arrival of European traders, missionaries, soldiers and colonists changed the native way of life forever. Large numbers of Aboriginals died of European diseases to which they lacked immunity. However, Aboriginals and Europeans formed strong economic, religious and military bonds in the first 200 years of coexistence which laid the foundations of Canada.



(Top)

Indian encampment, fur trade era

(Right)

John Cabot, an Italian immigrant to England, was the first to map Canada's Atlantic shore, setting foot on Newfoundland or Cape Breton Island in 1497 and claiming the *New Founde Land* for England. English settlement did not begin until 1610



Jacques Cartier was the first European to explore the St. Lawrence River and to set eyes on present-day Québec City and Montreal

THE FIRST EUROPEANS

The Vikings from Iceland who colonized Greenland 1,000 years ago also reached Labrador and the island of Newfoundland. The remains of their settlement, l'Anse aux Meadows, are a World Heritage site.

European exploration began in earnest in 1497 with the expedition of John Cabot, who was the first to draw a map of Canada's East Coast.

EXPLORING A RIVER, NAMING CANADA

Between 1534 and 1542, Jacques Cartier made three voyages across the Atlantic, claiming the land for King Francis I of France. Cartier heard two captured guides speak the Iroquoian word *kanata*, meaning "village." By the 1550s, the name of *Canada* began appearing on maps.