

Title: 0021-Our Voices-European Impact on Cree Culture  
Bird Number: 406  
Recorder: Louis Bird  
Date Recorded: 1990-91  
Transcriber: Brian Myhre  
Date Transcribed: January 16, 2003  
Language: English  
Culture: Cree (Omushkego)  
Transcript: Proof

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The last the tape that I finished a while ago was tape number two. Now this is tape number three, or interpretation of tape 2200. On the tape number two or 2200, interpretation of tape number twenty-two.

I remember finish saying that they imprinted ideas which were imposed upon our Elders for the last three hundred and ninety years by the fur traders, by the missionaries as a long term effect which is a very negative effect today in 1990. Because since 1969 over twenty-five years over twenty, nearly twenty or thirty years ago our native leaders were not recognized, native leaders I mean chiefs of communities, native communities or communities that has been established by the Europeans or the natives is still remain with us. These ideas. These imposition ideas. Like a Christianity. Like a patronization from Europe culture to the native culture has not yet been over. Because it hasn't been made to change. They follow-up to civilize the First Nations were not done properly. Not because there was, there was a time or there was a chance, it's because there was no time and there was no chance. Because the Europeans to preoccupied with themselves and for themselves and their foster countries or their motherlands for them which were facing difficulties amongst themselves.

[sound of dog barking in the background]

I am sorry about the puppy. I had to go release it because it was lonely after the little children run away. Now to continue my discussion about the impact of the fur trading and the impact of the European culture on our area First Nation is that what has been imposed upon the, our ancestors, is still with us. Which is three hundred years old. And it hasn't, there hasn't been much of a, much to a, to advance the knowledge of our our people by the European who have imposed upon their ideas upon us. The education has been very poor for our communities. And the education institute that applies to European did not apply well to our to our culture. Actually it totally contrast. It is totally different because our culture education is, is practical and, it's experimental learning from the early child, it was practical. What the young kid learn when he is small and that's what he carries for the rest of his life. He or She. And there is no other culture, there is no other cultural education required for the for the First Nation to survive. To live. Or to make living, or to enjoy life. The season.

But as the European came, when they brought in their own culture and not taking over the land, taking the responsibility for the First Nations. They have nothing else to offer but their own culture's education system. All their institutes which all them alienate the First Nation culture. And it has been applied that for for about three hundred years now in the Hudson Bay and James Bay area. But the three hundred year old system that was used and that was appreciated by the Europeans is still with us. Which was a authoritarian system and that was, that was the kind of system our forefathers were were imposed upon and exposed upon. And that's what, cause I said in the other tape, that's what, it's the only system, the only system that they see they can imitate or adapt very easily or try to apply it in their own culture. Which was already, their culture was already total opposite from the European. Which the European at that time managed to work together and managed to force each other to work together. But our natives in three hundred year ago were not able to force each other to go against. Somebody else will. Out First Nation forefathers were still independent from each other. Each family Which was suitable for the area, for the district, for the country. On the country, on the continent where they live which which has existed for ten thousand years at least they say, before the European finally sailed upon this land.

And that is truly is obvious there. Once the Europeans have took over land and claim it, they were very busy trying to establish themselves, to establish the catch up with the rest of the country forming their own government system and all that stuff. And break away from the mainland and institutions that they run away form. They begin to apply it on the native people. And now, now is a time in twentieth century, 1991, the native people have been give this opportunity. To have the freedom for self-examination or a freedom of choice, or to catch-up with the rest of society. And now it's the natives themselves who will apply the same message European use upon them when the first Europeans managed to, to pull the carpet under their feet so they don't have anymore land. It's our, it's our people, it's our culture, our ancestors. None. This is an illegal aspect of a of a situation. The spiritual aspect happened almost one hundred and fifty years ago. And now we have people who are left to apply these European or Oriental or different culture system, all their institution to try to apply it themselves against each other. And at the same time, using the same name as a First Nation to ask financial support from the center of government and the provincial government. And called, and tried to establish themselves as a nation, first nation which yet cannot be explained exactly what is the First, self governing mean? Which only the Federal and Provincial government understand to be the municipal government under the umbrella of the Federal government.

And that is what I see today. And that is, most people understand that amongst themselves today. Even though we understand some of us, we do not explain to our own individual members, those who those who do not have the opportunity to understand or those who don't care to understand, but simply enjoy life and enjoy what what is ever what is given to them, whatever service they can get from the outside, because they have lost their own self-sufficiency and self-determination and their own land. That is what its, it came to be amongst our First Nation in the in the Bay area. As I see, what is happening now, is the young people, the young leaders who came, enjoy so much as, so much of this establishment. Which is, which is about seven thousand years old for the Europeans, which has been applied here for the last five hundred years and which has been granted to the native people to begin the process and practice their word they call Self-Government, funded by Federal and Provincial government. Finance by Federal and Provincial government.

All these things are happening today. And we saw the young leader, that's the only thing they can get is a Federal and Provincial funding. And not much exploration yet how the native people themselves can form their own company and explore their natural resource and their own, their own effort. They will have to go through the federal and provincial authority in order to be able to touch the ground which is actually theirs for a long time. And just because of the simplicity of the of the treaty making which has given the Europeans to possess and to exercise possession of the land which really belong to the First Nation of the area. However long it takes for us to understand this or as long as we keep asking the provincial and federal government representative to give us permission to use the land, we will be showing them we have given up our land. Unless someday that we just talk to the government and just let them know we want to use the natural resources that belongs to our land, then the real really renegotiations should start, and the real, the true negotiation for the land will begin. Not before. And the only time that people can do that is just if they just leave the Federal and Provincial assistance. Walk back into the wilderness and start making living there as their grandfathers. Regardless, even if they face the debit, they will surely mean what they mean business. I know there is twenty-five million people in Canada and only three hundred and eighty thousand treaty Indians existed in Canada. And those are the ones that want to speak. These are the one who will do this. But those non-status Indian people across Canada, if they join in that would be a very great impact. There is one community begin to exercise something which they been succumb to by using all Whiteman institution and legal terms, and legal institution and paid the government to fund those things, they will always submit to the different government, to provincial or federal or municipal government. They will never get away from this patronization which has been imposed upon them for the last three hundred year with, within the bay area.

Is there such possibility? No, there is no such possibility. We have, we the First Nation are too far gone in adapting and embracing the European system. Total European system. We

still have the First Nation idea of self-government. The idea which never, which we never, which we have ceased to exercise. The only thing that we exercise as First Nation is the language. And also in part of the Canada where we allowed to practice of gathering and sustaining from the land. But to call this land our own in terms of Whiteman language in the legal system and also in institution, we speak forked tongue. I guess this is what the old United States First Nation mean when they say, "You speak forked tongue." Now I understand what that means because I have lived through it now. And this is my idea. And this is what I am trying to explain to some people who will listen to me, my my own people. Explain this or saying this in Whiteman's language, I feel very foolish. I should be speaking in my own language. And talk to my own people and give them my ideas as if I were to adapt and recognize the Whiteman institution, which is a freedom of speech. Or did we have a freedom of speech before the European? That is another question. Was it? Yes, we did have at least freedom of exercise. Freedom to live as you please, or as you could survive. As one could survive. But the freedom of speech was not recognized because of the ancestral practice of spirituality was very well guarded how you, how you speak in front of the, those who have spiritual powers, shamans. Medicine man or the great hunters or the proud people which mostly made out of the Cree people as so proud. One wrong word and they could be offended and if and if there were any shaman left in them they would apply their power to retaliate.

[Bell ringing in background]

Everything seems to interfere with my recording. Puppies outside. Grandfather clock within and the old tape I want to use to record. Still, nothing from now on is going to stop me from expressing my ideas. Whether anyone single person will listen or not listen. But I am going to leave those ideas behind me. I am going to leave this world soon too. Never did explain that I wish to say or to fully understand were we stand or to accept the changes that are coming upon my life. I could only hope that the next generation will adapt to itself to the new changes. To adapt of modern technological world that come to exist now. I only hope for their best. I only hope for their survival. I only hope they would join in experience prosperity the land can provide to them which once belonged to their forefathers.

As for myself, after looking back, my fifty years of life, seem that I remember, I could remember I have not accomplished nothing. I never once try to accomplish anything. All I ever did was try to live through the days of my life. Try to exist the days and the situation that arises in my life and I only look back and try to remember the past and always wonder what's next. Whatever the future may hold in my days I now resign to it. Let it happen. I alone cannot stand in it's pathway all the changes that may come from tomorrow to the next day to the next week to the next month, to the next year or to the next decade if I live to see those times. I could only remember my father's, my grandfather's stories. I could only pass those stories along so they can be heard for those who want to listen to it. But I cannot impose upon those things, upon the future generation. Nor will I stand in their way if they wish to join the modern world, the modern living, the high tech life that come to exist in the last decade. And the future world that will come to exist. Whatever our population, our people in the world will make this world become. Whatever life they made it become. Whatever kind of life they're going to made it become. They will not be my obstacle. I will not be the obstacle for those things. If I have to be true to myself that the Great Spirit which my grandfathers have recognize amongst themselves in which the Europeans have brought in, in their religion as one god for all. Which I have been born to, I shall remain. Until the last breath of my life and until the last remaining memories in my in my head. I only ask God to give me the clear conscience at the last moment the last moment I'm heard. I now prepare, [audio faded...244 - End of Side A]

[END OF SIDE B, 1 of 2]

TAPE TRANSCRIPTION: LOUIS BIRD ORAL HISTORY PROJECT – 45 MIN.

Tape:                                 Recoding: CRLS 21 – Bird 406  
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[NOTHING ON SIDE B]