

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Yukon Territory has experienced dramatic political and administrative changes over the past two decades, including the achievement of partial responsible government and the devolution of some federal departmental responsibilities to the territorial government. No changes, however, have been as important as those relating to the First Nations. The completion of the land claims negotiations and an accelerated program of re-establishing aboriginal self-government have empowered Yukon First Nations and altered fundamentally their relationship with the Territorial Government.

First Nations issues have considerable prominence in the Yukon Territory, more so perhaps than any Canadian jurisdiction other than the Northwest Territories. This is a comparatively recent development, for as late as the early 1970s aboriginal concerns and needs did not have a central place on the territorial agenda. The evolution of political and administrative systems to accommodate the First Nations was not without difficulty, and significant tensions remain within the Yukon political and administrative systems. There is now a strong expectation that the land claims settlements will resolve, once and for all, outstanding grievances and meet all First Nations needs, an unlikely outcome of the very complex agreements.

First Nations people, constituting approximately 1/3 of the Yukon's population, have been able to turn to the territorial government for a wide variety of programs. While many of these initiatives are now being returned to aboriginal control, the territorial government has been, and remains, active in providing specially developed programs in such fields as education, health care, community development, social welfare, language preservation, and recreation. The territorial administration has been willing to test cooperative management regimes and has generally been supportive of efforts at devolution and self-government. Concern about First Nations needs and opinions can be seen throughout the territorial administration, and is reflected in hiring practises, a commitment to consultation with First Nations, and the high priority that has been assigned to aboriginal issues (particularly the resolution of land claims).

First Nations have greater claim to the attention of the territorial administration in the Yukon than in most other parts of Canada. This has resulted in strong, but not uniform, support for land claims and considerable enthusiasm for aboriginal self-government (which has been pursued alongside a territorial effort to gain great authority for the Yukon government). In the process, the Yukon government and First Nations have provided an important model -- albeit one that is specific to the unique circumstances of the Yukon Territory -- for the relationship between aboriginal peoples and the broader government and administration.

There is a temptation to generalize from the Yukon example and to assume its applicability in other jurisdictions. Such generalizations must be made with great caution. The unusual constitutional and fiscal status of the Yukon government, which leaves considerable authority in the hands of the federal administration and which does not yet include constitutionally guaranteed responsible government, limits the applicability of the Yukon example. Moreover, the land claims in the Yukon (as elsewhere in the North) have many characteristics that may well be unique to the northern setting, particularly on such issues as co-management of resources. The current relationship between First Nations and the Yukon Territorial Government represents the culmination of a quarter-century of extremely difficult work, and often acrimonious disagreement. The relationship places a significant priority on dealing with First Nations issues, and on consulting regularly with First Nations. The result has been the development of a territorial administration that is flexible and responsive in its approach to aboriginal concerns, although not always to the satisfaction of the First Nations and occasionally to the consternation of sectors of the non-aboriginal population.

An new era has emerged in First Nations - government relations in the Yukon Territory. The implementation of aboriginal self-government and the resolution of land claims have provided a level of certainty to the First Nations that is available in few other places in Canada. This relationship is, however, very much a work in progress. The implementation stage will, undoubtedly, bring major successes and a number of problems. A significant dark cloud on the horizon is the changing fiscal approach of the federal government, a matter of grave concern to government-dependant areas like the Yukon Territory. Tensions remain within Yukon society and between First Nations and the territorial government, and political agreements; changes to administrative arrangements will not quickly dissolve attitudes that have developed over decades.

First Nations in the Yukon and the Yukon Territorial Government have capitalized on the territory's unique situation and have laid the foundation for a new, different and real administrative partnership. While observers from other parts of Canada can learn from the Yukon situation, it would be misleading to suggest that the administrative, legal and governance arrangements are broadly applicable. What the Yukon experience does illustrate is that seemingly entrenched opinions and considerable opposition to land claims and self-government initiatives can be overcome and that a regional society can be brought to the realization that the empowerment of the First Nations works in the best interests of the entire region.

A cautionary note must be added, however. There has been, in the Yukon, a tendency to see formal agreements as the culmination of the process of rebuilding the relationship between First Nations and other territorial residences. While the land claims settlement and individual self-government

agreements are of great importance, they are unlikely to provide instant solutions to what are serious economic, social, cultural and political challenges. Legal agreements have been accorded great authority in the thinking of Yukoners, aboriginal and non-aboriginal alike, and there is a strong sentiment that suggests that these arrangements should be the final stage in the long and difficult journey of establishing a new First Nations - government relationship. It seems clear, however, that land claims settlements and self-government provisions represent an important milepost, but are certainly not the last step. A sustainable, mutually-beneficial and acceptable relationship between the First Nations and the Yukon Territorial Government will emerge when the legal agreements take administrative shape, when specific initiatives emerge which begin to address existing problems, and when the new administrative approaches are widely accepted by all Yukoners as being an appropriate governmental response to the needs of the Yukon and its residents.

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A circular stamp, likely a library or archival mark. The top half of the circle contains the numbers '8' and '9' separated by a vertical line. The bottom half of the circle contains the year '1937'. The center of the stamp is mostly blank with some faint, illegible markings.

A REPORT FOR

KEN COATES

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SUMMARY

One of the greatest disruptions in the lives of the First Nations people of northern Canada in this century was the transition from the traditional way of life on the land to life in communities, centres whose location has often been dictated not by traditional land use patterns, but for reasons of administrative convenience. The Yukon provides a good example of the causes and results of this process.

Until the Second World War, the First Nations of the Yukon retained the greater part of their traditional way of life on the land. After 1945 this way of life was extensively disrupted, the historic dependence on what the land supplied being replaced to an ever-increasing extent by dependence on government. Yukon elders identify the building of the Alaska Highway, which was first opened in November 1942, as the main cause of this process. However, the highway was more symbol than cause, for the major force behind the transition to community life was the advent of an array of government social plans, beginning with the old age pension (1927 and after), the Mothers' Allowance towards the end of the war, and government housing, education, health, employment, and other programs which were introduced after 1945. The highway simply made it easier to bring these programs to the people, or, as often happened, to bring the people to the programs.

This report examines the nature of post-war community formation in the Yukon Territory, considering both the multiple forces which encouraged Native peoples to move

into villages and the social and cultural consequences of moving into year-round settlements. While there is considerable evidence to suggest that the federal government encouraged this migration, the report argues that other forces--the changing economy, the Natives' desire for access to government services, and the transformation of territorial society--also drew First Nations people to the villages. This process, while less dramatic than the large-scale relocation of the Eastern Arctic that have attracted so much attention, had sweeping implications for the Native people and were, moreover, similar to internal migrations and changing settlement patterns that occurred across the Canadian North.

The report offers a series of recommendations to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

1. The Commission should recognize that Yukon Native villages are at different stages of development, and that the communities' ability to respond to new initiatives (including self-government provisions) will be influenced by the developmental process.
2. It is important that these stages of development be taken into account when considering the likely pace and nature of establishing self-government at the village level.
3. The Commission should recognize that the process of Native village formation in northern areas, including the Yukon, is relatively recent and is tied to changes in the post-war period.
4. Contemporary communities reflect many different influences and processes; it is important that these differences and processes be understood as the villages figure prominently in land claims settlements and self-government arrangements.
5. The process of creating permanent villages has left a legacy of bitterness, particularly among Native elders, that needs to be addressed.

6. Local village histories, based on oral testimony, should be prepared so that the communities have a stronger basis upon which to understand their emergence and transformation.
7. The Yukon example provides an illustration of a widespread northern process of village formation that deserves to be better understood but which is currently being overshadowed by the attention given to the dramatic and large scale relocations in the Eastern Arctic.
8. The process of village expansion emerged from multiple forces, and was not due the actions of specific government individuals or policies. A search for a "scapegoat" would detract attention from the myriad influences which contributed to the expansion of Native villages.
9. There is a tendency to see such developments as being peculiarly Northern. Further research is necessary to determine the degree to which the identified pattern of post-war village formation is replicated across the country.
10. The relocation process raises questions about the long-term relationship between Native and non-Native peoples, and about the prospects for a viable, mutually-beneficial relationship between First Nations and non-Aboriginal peoples.
11. Aboriginal communities carry the burden of their past, and live daily with the consequences of decisions and actions take many years ago.

INTRODUCTION: RELOCATION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

One of the most tragic and perplexing problems to beset aboriginal peoples in northern Canada in the past fifty years has been the transition from life on the land to life in communities and the erosion of the opportunity to make a living (particularly from the fur trade) off of the land. This process and its results has been cited as the main cause of the social ills that have plagued aboriginal people in the past two generations. While quantification and the assignment of cause and effect to social problems are fraught with risk, there is very little disagreement, outside government, that the move from the land to communities after 1945 had a highly disruptive effect on the aboriginal people whose way of life was so dramatically changed. The First Nations people themselves remark on this; a Yukon elder noted in an interview "I do blame the highway . . . Before the highway was here they [her people] used to visit one another, help one another . . . the white people moved in and moved us out . . ."¹

The process was not unique to the Yukon; it occurred throughout northern Canada. A study of the process as it occurred among the Fort Hope Band of northwestern Ontario asks the questions "How do a people become wards of the state? How do ghettos appear in the

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Interview with Jessie Scarfe, Whitehorse, May 1993.

middle of a pristine wilderness?"² The same questions can be asked of the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

The answers to these questions are relatively simple, for there is no mystery to the means by which aboriginal people came to live in small communities instead of on the land, though the government's motives in bringing this about are certainly open to debate. What is also clear, and remarkable, is how swift the process was. As late as 1945, at the end of the Second World War, the majority of northern aboriginal people in the Yukon and the rest of northern Canada lived on the land, drawing their sustenance and cash incomes from the results of their fishing, gathering, hunting and trapping, and connected by the continued reliance on river travel as the primary means of transportation. While the cultures of the north had undergone significant changes in the years following the arrival of non-Natives in the region, social structures, community values, and patterns of seasonal movement remained relatively intact, although not without substantial transformative pressures.

This is an important point, for written into the popular folklore of the north is the idea that the coming of outsiders quickly and irreversibly changed the lives of the First Nations who had lived there for millennia. As far as the Yukon is concerned, this is simply not true. Before 1890, there was only a handful of non-Natives in the Yukon, a few traders and gold-

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Paul Driben and Robert S. Trudeau, *When Freedom is Lost: The Dark Side of the Relationship between Government and the Fort Hope Band*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983). The quotation is from the cover of the book.

seekers.³ When large quantities of gold were found in 1896, outsiders flocked to the Yukon, whose aboriginal population was reduced by disease throughout the 19th century to about a third of its pre-contact size.⁴ Despite this dramatic and terrible loss of numbers, the aboriginal people who survived the onslaught of disease found that their way of life was not changed in its essentials by the coming of nearly 40,000 outsiders. There were two reasons for this: in the first place, the gold rush lasted for only two years, from 1897 to 1899. The population of the Yukon peaked in 1898 at about 40,000,⁵ and then began a rapid decline.

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On the early history of the Yukon see the following: A.A. Wright, *Prelude to Bonanza: The Discovery and Exploration of the Yukon*, (Whitehorse: Arctic Star Printing, 1980), Melody Webb, *The Last Frontier: A History of the Yukon Basin of Canada and Alaska*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), K.S. Coates and W.R. Morrison, *The Sinking of the Princess Sophia: Taking the North Down With Her* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990), William Ogilvie, *Early Days on the Yukon & the Story of its Gold Fields* (Ottawa: Thorburn and Abbott, 1913). For a general history of the region, see K.S. Coates and W.R. Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun: A History of the Yukon Territory*, (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1988).

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Various estimates of the pre-contact population of what is now the Yukon have been made, all of them based on assumptions that are difficult to validate. A figure of 7,000 to 9,000 seems reasonable. The question is discussed in K.S. Coates, *Best Left as Indians: Native-White Relations in the Yukon Territory, 1840-1973*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), pp. 7-15.

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The first census was not taken until 1901, so statistics from before that year are speculative. On the constitutional history of the Yukon, see S. Smyth, *The Yukon Chronology* and K. Cameron and G. Gomme, *A Compendium of Documents Relating to the Constitutional Development of the Yukon Territory*, volumes I and II of *The Yukon's Constitutional Foundations* (Whitehorse: Northern Directories, 1991).

reaching a low in 1921 of just over 4,000, of whom 2,500 were non-Native and 1,500 aboriginal. Until 1942, when the Americans arrived to build the Alaska highway, aboriginal people were not a marginalized and ignored fragment of the population, as was the case in some of the provinces; rather, they made up a large and significant minority of the Territory's population, even though they were shut out from its political life.⁶

Second, and much more important as a factor in preserving the aboriginal way of life, was the effect of the distribution of the Yukon's population. The chief industry of the Yukon throughout these years was mining, both around Dawson City during the gold rush and after, and in communities like Mayo and Keno in the 20th century. This meant that the non-Native population was restricted to the old Klondike mining region, a few other small mining communities, and a strip along the Yukon River corridor reaching from Dawson City to Whitehorse, a village of only a few hundred before 1940. These places took up only a very small fraction of the total land base of the Yukon, and the aboriginal people could, and did, easily avoid them. It is true that residential reserves were set aside for aboriginal people near Whitehorse, Carmacks, Mayo, and other communities. But these were not reserves like those in southern Canada. They were tiny, and the aboriginal people had no legal permanent right

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The lives of three Yukon aboriginal women are beautifully portrayed in Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990). On the history of the aboriginal people of the Yukon, see Catherine McClellan, *Part of the Land, Part of the Water: A History of the Yukon Indians*, (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1987), and Catherine McClellan, *My Old People Say: An Ethnographic Survey of Southern Yukon Territory* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975).

to them. They were designed to give them somewhere to live near towns when and if they chose to do so, and to keep them out of the white communities, where they were welcome only to come and trade, but not as residents.

Many of the people who lived on these reserves did so for only part of the year. The rest of the time they spent on the land, hunting and trapping. Some did seek work for wages in the non-Native economy, but often such work involved activities like cutting wood for the steamboats which plied the Yukon. Work of this sort was seasonal, and fitted into an aboriginal pattern of living of which the most important part was still hunting and gathering. Very few if any Native people participated full time in the wage economy, nor were they welcome to do so. Some did live full time on the residential reserves, but these were not the people who were economically active. Missionaries endeavour to keep the Natives on the reserves, and were successful to a point, but most remain relatively mobile and tied to the cycles of nature. Thus the aboriginal people of the Yukon in this era were not tied to the dictates of a bureaucracy, nor were they trapped by an economic system over which they had no control. Rather, they took from the system what they needed--periodic wage labour for cash to buy supplies--but their main efforts were directed towards traditional pursuits.

Not even the coming of the Alaska highway and the other World War II defence project changed this pattern in any fundamental way.⁷ Popular descriptions in the Yukon

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On this subject, see K.S. Coates and W.R. Morrison, *The Alaska Highway in World War II: The U.S. Army of Occupation in Canada's Northwest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), particularly chapter 1 "Prelude to Occupation," chapter 3 "The Native People and

would have it that the Alaska Highway overturned the way of life of the aboriginal people completely. The strength of this belief is shown by the fact that thirty years after the end of the war, when it was proposed to build a gas pipeline down the Mackenzie valley, several First Nations witnesses from the Yukon testified before the Berger Commission that the Alaska highway had devastated their communities, and urged the Dene of the Mackenzie valley to oppose the pipeline lest it bring about similar damage to their communities.⁸ It is true that some Yukon communities were badly hit by the diseases that accompanied the highway construction. The community of Teslin was swept by epidemics in the winter of 1942-43, and so many children and elders died that the total aboriginal population of the southern Yukon actually declined that year, as deaths outnumbered births.⁹ Yet as with the gold rush, the highway, though damaging to the aboriginal people, did not bring about an immediate and fundamental change in their way of life. Like the mining activities, highway, airport, and pipeline construction were confined to narrow corridors, which the Native people

the Environment," and chapter 5, "Men, Women, and the Northwest Defense Projects.

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The place of the Alaska Highway in the consciousness of the Yukon is discussed in Coates and Morrison, *The Alaska Highway*, chapter 5, and in K.S. Coates and Judith Powell, *The Modern North* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1989). See also Julie Cruikshank, "The Gravel Magnet: Some Social Impacts of the Alaska Highway on Yukon Indians," in K.S. Coates, ed., *The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985).

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J.F. Marchand, "Tribal Epidemics in Yukon," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 123 (1943).

could avoid if they wished. Some did take jobs with the construction crews, particularly as guides in the early stages of the work, but if they wished to continue hunting and trapping there was nothing to prevent them from doing so.

This situation changed dramatically in the three decades following the end of the war in 1945. By 1975, harvesting no longer remained the mainstay of aboriginal existence (although harvesting retained considerable importance as a source of food for Native peoples); instead, government transfer payments provided the economic foundation for most northern Native peoples, including those of the Yukon. Similarly, the long-established tradition of moving across the land on a seasonal basis, sometimes with periodic stops in communities, had been replaced by the year-round occupancy of small villages. The transition was marked, as well, by significant changes in aboriginal cultures; language proficiency among the young dropped off precipitously, elders lost many of their traditional functions, community social conventions eroded, and the essence of aboriginal life came under attack. There is no denying the reality of this process, described repeatedly by elders and political leaders, documented by academics and popularized by journalists and filmmakers, although debate about the timing, intensity and long-term impact of the changes will continue for many years.¹⁰

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For a fuller discussion of this point, see K.S. Coates, *Best Left as Indians*, part four "Yukon Indians and the Changing North, 1950-1990."

Numerous explanations have been advanced to account for this fundamental alteration of aboriginal life, including the important role of expanded highway development and the consequent movement of Native people to highway communities. The interpretation put forward in this report focuses on the dramatic change in the role of the federal government, particularly the Department of Indian Affairs, in the years after the war. The government, it is argued, had largely ignored northern aboriginal peoples before the war, but adopted an aggressively interventionist stance thereafter. This new approach, marked by a plethora of government initiatives, by increased attention to education, numerous transfer programs, and bureaucratization of aboriginal life, was the primary cause of the rapid transition of aboriginal life in northern regions. There were, of course, other elements involved, including expanded resource development in the region, a much larger non-Native population, the introduction of new means of communication (including radio and television), changing national and regional values, and declining fur trade markets, all of which also help to account for the sweeping transformation of aboriginal cultures across the North.

While the agents of change are easy to identify, the motives for change are more debatable. Was it the policy of the government, as is often claimed, to "destroy" the aboriginal way of life?¹¹ Was assimilation and the death of a distinctive Indian identity--a

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This charge is made in many quarters. For a particularly eloquent contemporary version, see Thomas R. Berger, *A Long and Terrible Shadow: White Values, Native Rights in the Americas, 1492-1992*. (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1991), p. 137--"Despite our attempts to separate Native people from their language, history, and culture . . ."

process sometimes referred to as "cultural genocide"--the goal? Certainly the notorious white paper proposed by the federal Department of Indian Affairs in 1969 (when Jean Chretien was Minister) had the assimilation of aboriginals into the larger society as an ultimate goal, one which was to be achieved through the eventual dismantling of the reserve system. Yet it can also be argued, as is done in this report, that what happened to the aboriginal people of the Yukon and elsewhere after 1945 was the logical result of the application of the Canadian welfare state, heedless of the impact it might cause to the people it was designed to help.

The post-World War II welfare state was founded on the assumption that the state could and should take a lead role in ameliorating the social and economic condition of its citizens. The government, under this construction, was to undertake legislative and administrative measures to increase the quality of life of people living below national standards. As the Canadian welfare state expanded, numerous programs and initiatives, from housing projects to business loans and cultural activities, were established for First Nations people. It has become commonplace to criticize the heavy-handed paternalism of the federal government in the management of indigenous affairs after World War II, and to blame the ideology of state intervention as being responsible for major shifts in First Nations culture and life. While the hand of internal colonization clearly had a significant impact of indigenous societies, the initiatives were not unceasingly negative. The liberal welfare state did bring greater participation in residential schools, incentives to increase involvement in the market economy and other such transformative measures, but also provided more secure supplies of food and supplies, opportunities for advanced education, and government-

provided housing. The point here is simple: the post-war welfare state brought many changes to the indigenous people of the Canadian North, but it is misleading to present a picture of this effort, and the ideology underlying it, as being unrelenting negative in impact.

As this report will demonstrate, the road to social dislocation in the Yukon was paved with the best of non-aboriginal intentions. The timing of the transformation of aboriginal Native life in the territory was not completely tied to conditions in the north. Motives were, here as in most places, mixed. On one hand, social reformers wished to use the authority of the welfare state to bring prosperity, improved health care, better education and greater opportunity to the mobile Native peoples of the Canadian North. For other promoters of the "new North," the incentive for greater involvement in Native life was to establish the foundation for the economic development of the vast northland and to ensure that aboriginal peoples were not an impediment to that development.

The reason that the great change dates from 1945 is that this was the beginning of the post-war welfare state. Before World War II, the only national welfare plan was the old age pension, introduced in 1927, and it was not universal; one had to be indigent to receive the \$25 per month, and since it was a joint federal-provincial plan, it spread only gradually across the country. The first universal plan was the Mother's Allowance, or "baby bonus," which dates from 1944, and which was followed by the entire cornucopia of plans--the Canada Pension Plan, assistance for higher education, unemployment insurance (which predated the baby bonus, but was not initially universal), health insurance, and the rest--

which are supposed to keep Canadians from want and misery (and which, we all too often forget, substantially achieved that goal).

It was only natural that a series of well-intentioned post-war governments, steeped in the tenets of liberalism (one of the most powerful of which is that new ways are always better than old ones), should want to extend these benefits to the aboriginal people of the Canadian north. Did they not have as much right to the baby bonus, education, and the rest of the benefits as every other Canadian? Should they not want to live in the same way--in modern houses rather than drafty tents--as other Canadians? Though the opinion had been widely held before the war, especially among civil servants, only a few observers, like Vilhjalmur Stefansson, would have argued that the aboriginal people were "best left as Indians," outside the umbrella of the welfare state.

But government programs and benefits, as the political right likes to point out, have strings attached. In order to provide modern services to the aboriginal people of the north, it was best if they were all in one place instead of scattered in the bush. The logic is fairly straightforward. In order that the Natives would not "waste" the benefits of the welfare state by doing what they thought best with them, it was essential for the government to regulate their lives to an unprecedented degree--if the government provided housing for Indians, officials had the right to decide where to build it; if the government provided food, it would attempt to tell them to eat; if the government provided education, it would set the curriculum

and decide the language of instruction. This, as this report will point out, was a logical and all but inevitable part of social engineering.¹²

A major element in the government policy regarding aboriginal people, and one which is currently attracting increased attention, was their relocation into new communities established by the government. Among the Inuit of the Eastern Arctic, for example, government-sponsored relocations resulted in the removal of significant numbers of people from northern Quebec and the Keewatin district of the Northwest Territories to newly constructed villages in the Arctic Islands. Much the same thing happened, on a less dramatic scale, from Aishihik Lake, Yukon, to Haines Junction. In recent years, aboriginal demands for apologies and compensation, now countered by defensive statements by the civil servants responsible for the relocations, have drawn significant public attention to the removal process and has alerted observers to the reality that substantial shifts in population, particularly to lands far removed from traditional territories, had a considerable impact on the aboriginal peoples involved.

This process has not been confined to Canada, nor has it been confined in this country to one racial group--the transfer in the same period of non-aboriginal people from the Newfoundland outports to larger centres where their health, educational, and other perceived needs could be more efficiently cared for is another manifestation of the same phenomenon. While its critics have castigated the Canadian government as uniquely insensitive, the liberal,

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See Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985).

government-centred actions and motivations which led to resettlement are a worldwide phenomenon. While it is important, as this paper does, to consider specific examples if we are to understand the motivations and implications of these relocations, it is also crucial to recognize the broader patterns involved. The relocation of aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples is not at all unique either to Canada or to the 20th century. From the time of initial contact between Europeans and indigenous peoples, and particularly once the militarily-powerful newcomers had asserted their domination over the original inhabitants, Europeans had routinely induced, and sometimes forced, indigenous peoples to vacate their traditional lands in favour of other locations. Not even the benevolence is new, since Native people were routinely displaced in former eras with the excuse that they were thus being "protected" from abuse by non-Natives.

The newcomers' interest in valuable tracts of land, particularly those territories required for agricultural development and urban expansion, combined with the European assumption of superiority over the indigenous peoples, created a potent mix. Literally hundreds of times across the expanding settlement frontier of the Americas, aboriginal peoples were forced to vacate traditional lands, either by military force or by the sheer weight of the settlement enterprise, and seek new territories. This process resulted in a legacy of conflict along the settlement fringe, involving both indigenous-newcomer tension and struggles between the aboriginal peoples forced to leave traditional territories and the indigenous inhabitants of the lands to which they fled. The forced relocation of aboriginal peoples occurred at various scales, from the dispossession of an extended family to make

way for a farm, fur trading post, or other project to major initiatives to uproot entire communities and peoples to open a path for non-Native occupation.

In many other lands, from Australia and New Zealand to Brazil and the former Soviet Union, indigenous peoples were uprooted from their traditional territories and forced to relocate to other sites chosen by newcomer governments. These relocations had numerous justifications: clearing the way for hydro-electric development in Northern Manitoba, providing an opportunity for the Russification of the indigenous people in Eastern Siberia, gathering families for administrative and educational convenience in the Northern Territory of Australia,¹³ and opening a path for the often ruthless gold miners of the upper Amazon River basin. In country after country, the continued occupation of traditional lands by indigenous peoples has been seen as a barrier to the "improvement" of the aboriginal communities and to the efficient development of the lands in question. Time and time again, and not just in the 20th century, governments and other agents of the newcomer populations have made a concerted effort to remove indigenous peoples to more "suitable" locations.

To the degree that these process have attracted attention, commentators have preferred to focus on the large scale, dramatic relocations. Thus, in the case of the United States, considerable attention has been paid to the "Trail of Tears" migration during the Presidency of Andrew Jackson in the 1830s.¹⁴ Seemingly mass death and misery is of more

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A comparative study may be found in Noel Dyck, ed., *Indigenous Peoples and the Nation-State: Fourth World Politics in Canada, Australia and Norway* (St. John's: Memorial University Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1985).

interest than the slow decline of less well-known peoples. Similarly, Canadian attention has generally been limited to the major shifts, such as the relocation of entire communities in the Eastern Arctic and, more recently, of the experiences of the Innu people of Davis Inlet, Labrador. The more dramatic population movements contain key dramatic elements: the personal trauma of dislocation, debate about motivation (altruism, racism, self-interest, or group interest), and the often striking difference in surroundings, as well as the lingering questions about the appropriateness of such government-directed initiatives.

While not wishing to take anything away from the importance--cultural, social and symbolic--of the major relocations, it is vital that attention also be given to the numerous smaller, less dramatic government-influenced shifts in aboriginal settlement patterns. The major relocations are generally few in number and therefore of comparatively minor impact. It is possible, although this point has yet to be conclusively proven, that the less noticeable alterations in aboriginal habitation, which may be connected to specific government initiatives, had a cumulative impact far greater than the more impressive and substantial shifts of entire communities.

The events in the Yukon described here, unlike the trail of tears, are not well-known across the world or even across Canada. No journalist wrote exposes of them, and historians

The trail of tears is the name given to the episode in which a large part of the Indians of northern Georgia were forcibly removed to Oklahoma, despite treaties guaranteeing their land rights and even a decision of the United States Supreme Court upholding their rights.

have only recently begun to study them. Yet, though they were on a small scale, they were still dramatic in their scope and completeness. At the end of the World War II, the vast majority of northern aboriginal people spent most of the year on the land, at fishing and hunting camps or on traplines. Their communities or villages were where they had always been, in sites of their own choosing, which the elders now remember with affection; as Sid Atkinson of Ross River put it, in the "old village, people got along fine."¹⁵ Twenty to thirty years later, the vast majority of northern aboriginal people spent most of the year in small, government-constructed villages, using these communities as a base for continued (but declining) harvesting activities. In most of the North, there were no dramatic, wholesale relocations of communities or peoples. Instead, a series of relatively minor, rarely interconnected government policies created an administrative context in which it became increasingly important for aboriginal peoples to live in the new communities year-round. Accounts of this process may lack the drama and intensity of the more sensational relocations, and identifying the full impacts and implications of the initiatives may be rather more difficult than, say, the removal of an entire community from northern Quebec to Ellesmere Island. Nonetheless, the process of northern village establishment or re-formation is of fundamental importance in understanding the transition of the post-World War II, and hence of comprehending the current state of many northern aboriginal communities. Nearly

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Interview with Sid Atkinson, January 1988.

thirty years after his community was moved, Sid Atkinson said "even right now, they say it was better on the other side."¹⁶

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Interview with Sid Atkinson, January 1988.

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES IN THE NORTH

Understanding the process of community formation, and specifically the role of government initiatives in shaping or influencing the development of aboriginal communities, is of considerable significance. There is, at present, tremendous emphasis being placed on community empowerment, both as a means of transferring administrative control to First Nations and of ensuring the survival of indigenous cultures (although it is important to note that the land claims process in the Yukon is predicated on a more general empowerment of tribal councils and the Council of Yukon Indians). Communities have taken on a central role in the entire self-government process, and in the reconstruction of aboriginal-government relations in the 1990s. This process of community empowerment has much to commend it, but there is a risk in proceeding without a complete understanding of the historical processes which governed, and govern, the formation and structure of contemporary communities.

The Euro-Canadian concept of community is, understandably, a relatively new one for northern aboriginal peoples. This does not mean that aboriginal peoples in the region lacked a sense of identity or connectedness to a larger group. Rather, it is simply to highlight the prominence of mobility among aboriginal peoples under the Second World War and, in some instances, beyond. Across the Canadian North, Athapaskan, Ojibway, Cree, Inuit and other indigenous peoples maintained strong, coherent cultures which rested substantially on continued movement across the land. People came together several times a year, typically during key hunting or fishing cycles, during which time they engaged in numerous cultural

activities, ceremonies and rituals; many of the travels were, in fact, motivated by social and cultural imperatives. Indigenous lifestyles required that the peoples not stay together for too long, lest local food resources run short. Having coming together for short, intense and vitally important gatherings, the people would then disperse to traditional territories. This pattern of mobility, well-documented in the literature, was a defining characteristic of indigenous cultures in the North. Group identity was maintained through the gatherings, and the ceremonies attached thereto, which ensured a continuity of culture and a means of connecting individuals and families to the larger culture. They had a sense of group or communal identity, but they did not form a community as Euro-Canadians understood the term, with all its connotations of local organization and self-government.¹⁷

The argument to be advanced below, put briefly, is that the post-World War II period witnessed the reconstruction of aboriginal cultures and the transition of northern peoples from mobile to more sedentary lifestyles. This process occurred for a variety of reasons, including the development of variety of government initiatives which encouraged lengthy, if not year-round, residence at a specific site. When this process was capped by the establishment of elected Chiefs and Band Councils, these new communities (some of them located on traditional meeting places) found themselves with structures for political expression and administration. There is no value in engaging in an extended discussion

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See J.W. Vanstone, *Athapaskan Adaptations: Hunters and Fishermen of the Subarctic Forests*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1974), and W.C. Sturdevant, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, vols. 5 and 6 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1984).

about the merits or demerits of this process of community formation; the details as it relates to the Yukon Territory will be discussed in the following pages.

If the assertions offered above are sustainable, in part if not in full, then new questions emerge about the contemporary emphasis on community empowerment. In terms of political and administrative structure, cultural composition, specific location, and other characteristics, the northern aboriginal communities of the 1990s are typically creations of the post-World War II environment. They are not "traditional" except in the most narrow sense of that term, and may not be imbued with aboriginal cultural values, depending of course on the individuals and specific settlement involved. The current preoccupation with community empowerment may, for northern areas in particular (although similar processes were at work across the country), be based on the assumption that these communities are the embodiment of traditional First Nations values when they are, in fact, substantially creations of the post-war world.

Consider, by way of illustration, a hypothetical case. Community A did not exist as a specific settlement in the years before World War II. Shortly after the war, and for reasons of administrative convenience, the government decided to offer its growing list of services to the peoples in the region at the new site selected for Community A. Aboriginal peoples wishing education for their children (without having to send them to residential school), government housing, the baby bonus, or any of the rest of the support plans that government had to offer were best served if they moved to this site. There were other, non-government inducements. The location of Community A capitalized on new transportation routes

(particularly highways), and therefore on the economic opportunities available. The growing number of non-Native enterprises and services, therefore, served as an additional attraction. The aboriginal peoples in Community A, though represented in a single band council, came from several different cultural groups and from a wide geographic area. Although Community A had, over time, a sizeable aboriginal population and an increasingly active band council, it was not a community in an aboriginal sense, nor could the people call on a long tradition of community activity to help them through the difficult times of the post-war era. In this hypothetical case, the settlement that is now the focus for community empowerment is very much a new creation, owing more to the forces for change following World War II than to aboriginal customs and assumptions.

This is not to argue against community empowerment or the transfer of governmental powers to villages, a process which contains considerable merit. Unless the process of community empowerment occurs within a specific cultural and historical understanding, however, the new initiatives might well fail to meet established objectives. The intention herein, therefore, is to consider the evolution of village life in the Yukon Territory after World War II, using the Yukon as an illustration of processes which were nation-wide in application and impact. A reconsideration of the evolution of village life in northern Canada will illustrate the forces which brought about a new settlement pattern, and which thereby transformed aboriginal life in the region.

THE YUKON IN TRANSITION, WORLD WAR II TO 1973

The post-contact history of the Yukon Territory has been shaped by a series of dramatic events: the expansion of the fur trade, the discovery of gold in the Klondike River basin, the departure of most of the non-Native population between 1900 and 1920, the construction of the Alaska Highway in World War II, the presentation of the Yukon Native Brotherhood (later amalgamated with the Yukon Association for Non-Status Indians to become the Council of Yukon Indians) land claim in 1973, and the achievement of self-government by the Yukon Territory in 1979. The ebb and flow of Yukon development--with massive migrations of people from 1897 to 1905 and again from 1942 to 1946--created a boom and bust atmosphere in the territory. The pattern, however, changed dramatically after World War II.

During the Second World War, the Canadian government permitted the United States Army to undertake a number of major military construction projects in the North, including the Alaska Highway and the Canol pipeline project. These projects transformed the region, particularly the Yukon Territory, providing new road access, improved airplane and telecommunication links, and restructuring the settlement pattern in the territory. Less directly, but of vital importance, the war-time experience also convinced the Canadian government that it had to take a more active role in the administration and development of its northern regions, lest its inactivity result in sovereignty by default to the Americans.¹⁸ This

new Northern agenda coincided with a striking change in the Canadian approach to social policy. The war years had seen a marked shift in governing assumptions, and the emergence of the first cornerstones of the welfare state. This, in turn, sparked an even more aggressive approach to the provision of social welfare services to Canada's poorest residents, the aboriginal peoples.

In the Yukon Territory, these processes joined with the rapid expansion of the resource sector. The post-war period, one marked by massive industrial expansion across the continent, saw new demand for base minerals, stimulating a massive expansion in mineral exploration activity in the region. Workable discoveries came slowly, with new mines opening up near Whitehorse and, in the 1960s, at the new community of Faro; work expanded at some existing properties, including the Elsa-Keno Hill area, although this was partially offset by the decline of the Klondike gold dredging operations in the 1960s. This expanded resource activity resulted in the construction of a network of new roads, entire new communities, and an expanded service and communications infrastructure.

The modernization of the Canadian North brought sweeping changes to the Territory. The Yukon's population increased steadily, from slightly over 9,000 in 1951 to over 18,000 in 1971; the status Indian population in the territory increased in this period from less than 1,600 to almost 2,600. Because of its strategic location on the Alaska highway, Whitehorse

emerged as the dominant community, replacing the Dawson City as the capital in 1953 and destroying the old riverboat system which had been the lifeline of transportation in the Yukon since 1898. By 1960 over half of the territory's population lived in Whitehorse (the figure today is about 20,000 out of a territorial population of 28,000). Changes could be seen in other areas as well: regular jet air service to southern centres, cable television, commercial and public radio. During World War II, the region had with considerable accuracy been seen by outsiders as a rustic frontier, a northern backwater protected by distance from the major forces of the 20th century. Even as late as 1942 the Yukon had, despite the fact that trains had run to Whitehorse since the beginning of the century, still been quite isolated. The reason that so many aboriginal people suffered from disease in Teslin in 1942-43 was not that they had never had contact with non-Natives before; it was that Teslin was so isolated before 1942 that by the time non-Natives got there they were rarely in the infectious stage of whatever disease they had picked up in the south. When Americans got on planes or trucks in Edmonton and arrived in Teslin a few hours or days later, disease spread like wildfire. By the 1960s, the increasing but highly transitional non-Native population, the rapid expansion of government operations, and the expanding mining and tourism sectors had turned the Yukon's past into a marketing device and brought the Yukon into the mainstream of Canadian society.

Though most Yukon First Nations people who are old enough to remember World War II cite the building of the Alaska Highway as a major turning point in the history of the people, and although many blame it for their present problems, one of the elders interviewed

for this study actually worked during the war for Bechtel-Price-Callahan, a major contractor on the highway. Jessie Scarfe, now of Whitehorse, whose mother was from the Yukon, had lived outside the Yukon, but came north during the war to work for the contractor: "I was working in the pay office, figuring out people's time, writing out the cheques . . . they were good to work for."¹⁹

Yukon Native people found themselves adapting, yet again, to a new Yukon and to a new role for themselves within territorial society. Before World War II, traditional aboriginal pursuits, including fur trapping, hunting, fishing, and guiding had provided regular and dependable, if not lucrative, sources of income, ones which could be tapped when and where the people wished. During and after the war, these economic underpinnings were ripped out from under the aboriginal peoples. The precipitous decline in the fur trade stripped this vital sector of much of its utility, and denied aboriginal trappers a major source of income. Similarly, changing non-Native attitudes about wild game resulted in the banning of the sale of wild meat shortly after war's end and in the establishment of new conservation regimes, including the creation of the Kluane Game Preserve (later Kluane National Park Reserve), which further restricted aboriginal options.²⁰ The construction of roads eliminated

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Interview with Jessie Scarfe, Whitehorse, May 1993.

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The modern campaign to ban the use of fur in clothing is a contemporary manifestation of this "conservationist" impulse. For a vigorous defence of the aboriginal point of view, see T.R. Berger, *A Long and Terrible Shadow*, chapter 10: "The Last Redoubt: The Survival of Subsistence."

the need for steamer travel along the main territorial rivers, and thus eliminated the market for aboriginal log cutters. Aboriginal peoples continued to hunt for sustenance, but many crucial elements of their intersection with the wage and cash economy disappeared rapidly after the war.

Aboriginal people in the Yukon found themselves on the outside of the emerging industrial and government-driven economy, and on the margins of the changing territorial society.²¹ Before the war, the nature of the economy and the general reliance of aboriginal skills had often pulled aboriginal and non-aboriginal people together, if only for reasons of self-interest; after World War II, that pattern began to break down, although it did so more slowly in the small communities than in Whitehorse. Racial stereotyping and racism were widespread, placing severe limits on the ability of Native people to mix with non-Native residents. One government official described Yukon Native people in less than flattering terms: "Being representative of economic and culturally deprived minorities everywhere, they are clannish, shy and suspicious. Cleanliness standards are low. Abuse of alcohol is endemic and many adults have served gaol terms for drunkenness, fighting and petty theft."²² Aboriginal people responded to the new realities, in part by capitalizing on support through

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K.S. Coates, "On the Outside in Their Homeland: Native People and the Evolution of the Yukon Economy," *Northern Review*, no. 1, Summer 1988.

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Department of Indian and Northern Affairs File, hereafter IAND, 801/1-1, vol. 2, Battle to Gibson, 15 November 1966.

the 1960s for Native organizations. By the mid-1960s, Native leaders like Elijah Smith were organizing the communities to argue for aboriginal land rights. This resulted--with government encouragement and financial support--in the establishment of the Klondike Indian Association in 1966 (the organization was the predecessor of the Yukon Native Brotherhood) and the development of a formal land claim. The tabling of the *Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow* in 1973 marked the beginning of a twenty year long process of land claims negotiations that would deal with many of the issues arising out of the dislocation of Yukon aboriginal peoples in the years after World War II.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND YUKON NATIVE PEOPLE

The specific policies related to the development of new aboriginal communities emerged out of a general administrative context. The federal government was, in the years after the war, perplexed by the "problems" of indigenous peoples and was seeking new ways of responding to the many needs and interests evident across the country. Northern Native peoples presented a particular challenge, because the standard approaches of agricultural or industrial training seemed to be of little potential value in sub-Arctic and Arctic regions. But government officials, some of them suffused with the zeal of interventionism and fueled by

the self-righteousness of the secular missionaries of the welfare state and others simply doing their jobs, were determined to take a more active role in dealing with the needs of indigenous peoples. The immediate post-war period witnessed a flurry of activity, including the establishment of the Mother's Allowance, pensions, business development loans and other such initiatives.

The Mother's Allowance, or baby bonus, is a good example of the beneficial and the darker sides of these government programs. The baby bonus provided a monthly payment, initially \$5 or \$6, depending on the age of the child, to the mothers of minor children. Unlike the majority of Canadians, including Native people south of the 60th parallel, indigenous peoples in the Yukon and NWT were issued payment in kind, for fear, as one bureaucrat said, that "if the allowances were paid in cash, they would not go to the benefit of the children."²³ The allowances were paid in foodstuffs and specified dry goods, and not just anything the recipients might fancy, since it was realized that the allowances could also be used as a means of ensuring approved eating habits. Thus a list of foods which could be distributed under the plan was provided to all stores and trading posts in the Yukon. Sweetened canned milk, which might be used to make candy, was forbidden, while non-sweetened canned milk was on the list. Commercially prepared cereals were taboo, while rolled oats was approved. As well, the government used the allowance as an effective means of ensuring the children's attendance in school. Although the legislation permitted the withholding of the payment

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Yukon Territorial Archives, YRG1, series 4, vol. 33, file 689, D.C. Rowat to G.A. Jeckell, 4 June 1945.

unless the child attended regularly, this provision was not initially imposed in the Yukon. By the mid-1950s, however, the government expected full compliance. As one observer wrote of the situation in Teslin, this policy has an important impact of seasonal movements: "Other parents are sending their children to the Territorial School and making the vast sacrifice of staying here instead of being on their trapping grounds where they could live much better, until better provisions could be made for their children."²⁴

The federal government, and particularly the Department of Indian Affairs, found itself facing a dual agenda: bringing national policies to bear, often for the first time, in the Yukon Territory and helping the indigenous peoples adjust to the rapidly changing circumstances extant in the region. Yukon Indian Agent Allan Fry recalled that "the fifties and sixties were damned tough times for Indian people. The fur market had gone to hell, the riverboats and the associated life along the rivers to which Indian people had accommodated reasonably well, had given way to highways and the highway settlements, and a whole lot more white people with no understanding of Indian people had come into the country. Overwhelming change was underway. Hopelessly misguided though government might have been as to how to go about it, the policy of government quite simply was to help Indian people adjust to it all and learn to live as best they could in new ways."²⁵ The federal

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National Archives, Record Group 10, DIA, vol. 6478, file 933-3, part 1, Father Drean to R.J. Meek, 24 February 1950.

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Allan Fry, letter to the author.

government's approach was one of well-intentioned benevolence; the officials were not at all clear of the likely implications of their actions, but preferred action over inaction.

VILLAGES AND GOVERNMENT POLICY

Within the general context of government policy for aboriginal people in the Yukon, new initiatives for housing and village development emerged. Unlike the sweeping and dramatic initiatives of the Eastern Arctic, the policy evolution in the Yukon was piecemeal and episodic. The priority given to the removal of aboriginal people to village sites varied according to the Indian Agent in office and to the nature of government priorities in a particular period. As Alan Fry observed, "As for the 'residential reserves' or villages, these were not some grand design by government to gain control of Indians. Some of the sites date from use in earlier days but many came about as Indian people, by choice, began to camp in proximity to later day highway settlements. As the camps became somewhat permanent, land was set aside where houses could be built. Encouraging further people to move to these sites, or to relocate to those which seemed to offer better economic opportunity, may have been misguided but it was hardly a grand design by government to force people off the land."²⁶ At the same time, however, it is evident that government did believe that the reserve system would carry considerable administrative benefits. As W.S. Arneil wrote in 1953, "The establishment of these Reserves will assist us to improve the living conditions of the Yukon

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Ibid.

Indians and will also improve our supervision and administration which will undoubtedly be in the interests of all concerned."²⁷

Fry's point is an important one. There is, in the case of the Yukon, no great "smoking gun," no single policy initiative which charted a general policy by which Yukon Native people were forced to leave their traditional lands and move to a central village. Government did become more interested in specific groups of Native people when their lifestyles came up against broader economic developments, but only rarely was there a broad sweeping plan for action. Instead, in an inconsistent and uneven fashion, through numerous small decisions and administrative actions, the federal government moved along a general if ill-defined line. There is considerable evidence that these initiatives were deliberate and, for some officials, well-considered; in other cases, as with the application of the regulations concerning Mothers' Allowance, the re-enforcement of village settlement was a consequence of, rather than a motivation for, a specific government policy. Importantly, the general thrust of government policy, combined with non-governmental forces, had sweeping implications, and substantially recast aboriginal life in the territory.

The first land allotments for Yukon Native people were set aside during the Klondike gold rush. The rapid population decline after the rush, coupled with a general concern that Native people might be given valuable mining lands, ensured that no general effort was made

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IAND, 801/30-0-01, vol. 1. Arneil to Indian Affairs Branch, 10 November 1953.

either to sign a formal treaty with Yukon aboriginal people or to allocate a large number of substantial reserve sites. Instead, the government set aside a series of residential reserves, small sites near communities and trading posts, most of which were occupied on a seasonal or occasional basis.

After World War II, Indian Agent R.J. Meek requested, and received authorization for, a number of new residential reserve sites, generally near the Alaska Highway and branch highways. There was, similarly, a request for the more formal recognition of Indian reserve lands, so as to protect the small sites from encroachment by non-Natives.²⁸ As pressure on land increased, so did the desire to regularize the use of the sites. The initial lands were, for example, set aside for the use "of the Indians of the locality," rather than for the purposes of a specific band. This was changed officially in 1953.²⁹

The process did not produce a substantial reserve system in the Yukon. The properties were not large reserves; of the 21 properties identified for Native use in the early 1960s, only 6 were larger than 250 acres. The lands were, instead, "merely reserved in the records of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources for the use of the Indians for so long as required for that purpose."³⁰ According to the government, Native

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IAND, 801/30-0-01, vol.1, Meek to Arneil, 2 February 1953.

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IAND, 801/30-0-01, vol. 1. Arneil to Indian Affairs Branch, 10 November 1953.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Brown to J.H. Gordon, 9 June 1954.

peoples living on reserves were "squatters on the land."³¹ The allocated lands, some dating to the late 19th century, were not always occupied; well into the 1950s, many groups remained seasonally mobile and had not yet been allocated a specific settlement site.³² The legal status of the reserves also remained in doubt for many years. As W.C. Bethune, Superintendent, Reserves and Trusts, observed in 1956, "In keeping with their policy, the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources simply reserve lands in the name of the Indian Affairs Branch insofar as the Yukon and Northwest Territories are concerned. This reservation is made by that Department making some type of entry in their Land Register and advising us by letter. This Department therefore has no title and merely uses the lands at the pleasure of Northern Affairs. These lands, therefore, can never come legally constituted Indian Reserves."³³ In 1970, for example, a senior federal official expressed the opinion that "this land [referring to the Whitehorse reserve] is not now, nor ever has been, an Indian

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Jones to Deputy Minister, 29 June 1955.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Summary of Bands and Lands-Yukon Territory, c. 1957.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Bethune to Senior Administrative Officer, 9 November 1956.

Reserve within the meaning of the Indian Act."³⁴ This, not surprisingly, created a variety of problems related to the establishment or disposition of allocated lands.

The establishment of the reserves typically proceeded with, at best, informal discussions with the First Nations affected. Reserves were added and cancelled based on officials assessments of their use and value. The creation of the Upper Liard reserve is a good case in point. The process originated with the summer movements of the Kaska people of the Frances Lake area. The Frances Lake group lived in the bush for most of the year, but travelled in the summer to purchase supplies at Watson Lake. Indian Supt. R.J. Meek was directed to stake out a reserve at Upper Liard, which was also occasionally occupied by several members of the Watson Lake Band. This conflict was dealt with by directing the Indian Agent to transfer the Watson Lake band members to the Frances Lake band. The resulting Band was an unusual mix: "In round figures, there are 200 Indian people in the village or working out from it. These are mainly members of the Liard River Band, with a few being members of Teslin and Ross River and even one or two of Tahltan. It is the main village of the Liard River Band which numbers something just over 400 in total. It is by no means regarded, however, as the ancestral site or the centre of culture of the band by the non-resident members. Many have no particular connection with the village at all. The Liard River Band is an amalgamation of minor smaller bands of common culture and

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IAND, 801/19-4, vol. 5, Hunt to Assistant Deputy Minister, 30 November 1970.

dialect....Associated with the Upper Liard village are a few families in the district who have moved away from the village for various reasons. While they do not form part of this community at this time, their relocation from the village was significant. Three or four families live on the airport road out of Watson Lake. Ostensibly they moved out of dissatisfaction with the village but we suspect possible other motives."³⁵ A similar process was followed for the Pelly and Ross River bands--described as having the "lowest living standards of any of the bands in the Yukon"--which were encouraged to amalgamate. An area was staked at Ross River for the common use of the two bands.³⁶

A recent study by Martin S. Weinstein of the history of the Ross River band³⁷ confirms a number of the themes of this report. Weinstein's study shows that the Ross River people maintained a traditional lifestyle until the Second World War, when "the band was thrown into immediate upheaval by the arrival of 3000 men into the area for the construction of the Canol pipeline between 1942-1944." The band experienced epidemics, a decline in game and fish stocks, and exposure to alcohol and sexual abuse; however, "the men and

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IAND, 801/70-2, vol. 1, Fry to Indian Commissioner for B.C., 1 March 1965.

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IAND, 801/30-0-01, vol. 1. Arneil to Indian Affairs Branch, 10 November 1953.

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Martin S. Weinstein, *Just Like People Get Lost: A Retrospective Assessment of the Impacts of the Faro Mining Development on the Land Use of the Ross River Indian People*. (Report to the Ross River Dena Council, June 1992, n.p.)

trucks left as quickly as they had arrived."³⁸ Weinstein makes it clear that the real change in the people's lives occurred after the war, as a result of the coming of the welfare state: "Ross River Indian life returned, relatively un-disrupted, to previous economic patterns . . . One major change, however, had been the development of government social welfare programs, such as Family Allowance, Old Age Pensions, and welfare programs. These programs were largely administered through the mail, making access to a post office a new consideration in the round of travel . . . Many young couples with dependent children left for the new highway communities . . ."³⁹

It is hardly surprising, given the rapid and government-initiated nature of the amalgamation process that the arrangements subsequently caused considerable dissatisfaction. This was particularly true in the case of the Liard River Band, which faced several attempts at reorganization in the early 1970s.⁴⁰ At the same time, continued population shifts resulted in several Native-initiated proposals for amalgamation, including the 1972 request that the Champagne Band and Aishihik Bands be permitted to merge.⁴¹

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Just Like People, p. 64.

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Ibid., p. 65.

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IAND, 801/1-1, vol. 2, Ciaccia to Smith, 23 May 1972.

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IAND, 801/1-1, vol. 2, Kirkby to Chapman, 12 April 1972.

Not all government officials were pleased with the established approach to the designation of residential reserves. M.G. Jutras, writing in 1955, argued that the Natives should be granted land in fee simple, stating that "It is thought that in this way, the Yukon Indian might be integrated into the Non-Indian population in a shorter time than by segregating them by placing them on a reserve."⁴² Other officials shared Jutras's concern; as one wrote in 1958, "On the other hand, lack of reserves results in lack of opportunity to build up band funds. The Indians of the Yukon Territory are likely to demand, in time, that they be treated the same as their brothers to the south and the east, and as times goes on the most desirable areas will have been picked up by non-Indians. While arguments can be advanced for and against the creation of reserves, I am inclined to feel that we should not embark on a policy of setting aside large reserves in the Yukon or changing the status of the relatively small areas reserved for the use of Indians. While this will carry with it the disadvantages already referred to, lack of band funds can be taken care of through the Welfare appropriation."⁴³ Another official observed "Unless reserves selected contained valuable deposits of minerals, stands of timber or comprised strategic locations having a high market value, they would be of little value. The Indians would not likely live on them. To encourage segregation would be a backward step and, in addition, residence on reserves

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Quarterly Report, 1 July-Sept 1955, M.G. Jutras, and Fortier to Acting Minister, 27 November 1957.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Jones to Nielsen, 24 July 1958.

would have the effect of disenfranchising the occupants."⁴⁴ W.E. Grant, Indian Superintendent, expressed particular concern that the delay in setting substantial land allotments aside for the Natives would create difficulties in the near future: "It is my duty to point out that desirable land is being purchased very rapidly. If the future interests of the Indian people are not protected we will be inviting criticism and even worse it will not be possible in a few years to purchase land which will be of any immediate value."⁴⁵

The creation of aboriginal reserves became a matter of debate on a number of occasions, as in 1957 when a small number of Yukon Natives were sworn in to vote in an election on the basis that they were not living on formally constituted Indian reserves. The federal government indicated little enthusiasm for creating new reserves, except in such cases where "reserves are necessary to provide housing accommodation, to provide schools for children or to group the Indians in order to train them in an occupation....[T]he reservation system has been one of the factors which have delayed the integration of the Indian and his economic development. It is generally agreed that an Indian, to earn his living, must seek work outside the Indian Reserve."⁴⁶ The government did, in this instance, move to allocate

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Memorandum to the Deputy Minister, 19 September 1958.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol 2., Grant to A/Indian Commissioner for BC, 31 May 1961.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Fortier to Acting Minister, 27 November 1957.

reserves for eight Yukon bands, leaving aside those groups which did not have a clearly identified reserve site and "those for whom no lands have been set aside and live as squatters on territorial or private lands."⁴⁷

The issues of land allocations and the expansion of village developments were closely linked. In 1958, a series of official meetings--which did not, incidentally, include any aboriginal people--drew increased attention to the land question. A Whitehorse meeting, held in December 1958 and including politicians, government and church representatives, discussed the process of setting aside residential reserves near established non-Native communities and observed that the process "is segregating the Indian, rather than integrating him into the community. In outlying areas, it is no doubt necessary to set aside land for their use." The meeting also resolved that "inasmuch as no treaty exists between the Indians of the Yukon, and the Government of Canada, it would seem desirable, with the consent of the Indians of the Yukon, to make some arrangements regarding individual and Band land allotments at this time as a measure of security."⁴⁸

From the administrative perspective, the creation of official residential reserves carried considerable benefits. The Department of Indian Affairs was not, for example, authorized to construct housing for Yukon Natives on private or regular Crown land; instead,

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Jones to Deputy Minister, 14 November 1957.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Meeting to discuss the welfare of Yukon Indians, 20 December 1958.

the homes had to be constructed on reserves. As Director H.M Jones observed in 1955, "It is not possible for the Department to exercise any control over the housing accommodation available for those Bands who are not on lands specifically reserved for their use. To facilitate a welfare housing program, specific recommendations have been submitted for the acquisition of areas for those Bands without lands, as well as for the acquisition to more practical sites than are presently reserved for some of the remaining 10 Bands."⁴⁹ The movement of several families from Champagne to Haines Junction, where more work was available, instigated consideration of an additional reserve in the highway community: "Some thought might be given to the establishment of a small Indian reserve at Haines Junction to provide building space for these Indians."⁵⁰

As the reserve network expanded, and as the range of government programmes grew, administrative requirements lead government officials to "encourage" aboriginal people to relocate to the more accessible sites. Thus, the people of Aishihik (about whom it had been written in 1953 "The Indian settlement at Aishihik was established many years before the building of the R.C.A.P. airfield and it is very unlikely the Indians would move away"⁵¹) were urged to relocate at Haines Junction and the younger people at Champagne were

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IAND, 801/30-001, vol. 1, Jones to Deputy Minister, 29 June 1955.

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IAND, 801/30-5, Meek to Arneil, 13 October 1953.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Meek to Arneil, 8 October 1953.

"encouraged to locate on the Haines Junction Reserve to improve economic opportunities and to be closer to services."⁵² Efforts were also made to shift the White River people to "close to the highway and services," and the Ross River Natives, deemed to be a "welfare problem," "are to be encouraged to move to Upper Liard Bridge permanently and to transfer to that band."⁵³ Similarly, the abandonment of the Fort Selkirk site, on the Yukon River, and the move of the Pelly River Band to Pelly Crossing, on the Mayo Road, provided both Natives and officials with greater access.

In the process of establishing specific sites for aboriginal villages, and then encouraging Native people to move to the identified sites, relatively little attention was paid to cultural unity. The Yukon First Nations were not a unified group, sharing a common culture and language; instead, there were a number of different cultures--principally the Han, Gwitch'in, Tutchone, Tagish, Kaska, Inland Tlingit--within the district. The groups created by the Department of Indian Affairs, while having a certain geographic logic, often lacked cultural integrity. There was a strong initiative undertaken in 1961, under Indian Superintendent W.E. Grant, to bring related groups together; meetings were held around the territory (including White River and Beaver Creek, Frances Lake, Watson Lake and Liard and Francis Lake Bands, Casca and Nelson River Bands), resulting in public votes to support amalgamation.⁵⁴ Thus, the peoples of Champagne and Aishihik were amalgamated into the

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, Jutras, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, reserves - Yukon, 9 June 1958.

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Ibid.

single band in the early 1970s; the Upper Liard-Lower Post band included people from five different bands. The Kwanlin Dun band represented a merger of the groups from Whitehorse and Lake Laberge, and also had members from different nations throughout the territory.

The Kluane band brought together groups from Snag, Burwash and Kloo Lake.

The examples used to this point suggest that the creation of residential reserves was designed solely to draw aboriginal away from traditional locations and to create administrative centres of particular use and convenience to the Department of Indian Affairs. While this was a consideration, as various officials observed, it was far from the only criterion. The federal government also moved to set aside land in more isolated locations if there was evidence of continued aboriginal use, particularly the construction and occupancy of a house. Thus, for instance, W.E. Grant applied for a 26 acre parcel of land at Mile 687 of the Alaska Highway. His reason: "Several Indian families are actually residing on this land and I am considering it advantageous to secure the parcel before some non-Indian applies for it."⁵⁵ In a similar vein, a small parcel of land was set aside at Squanga Lake in 1971, expressly so, as E.J. Underwood wrote, "that these people do not lose their homes."⁵⁶

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Minutes of these meetings are found in 801/1-1, vol. 1.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, Grant to Indian Affairs Branch, 22 December 1961.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 3, Underwood to Regional Director, B.C.-Yukon Region, 1 February 1971.

Likewise, a small reserve was established in 1970 at the north end of Aishihik Lake to safeguard the homes of several families and to provide permanent protection for an aboriginal cemetery.⁵⁷ Other uses, such as harvesting or seasonal occupation, were also taken into account: "The new Indian Reserve at Klukshu fishing station was set aside for the Champagne Band to catch ascending salmon during the month of August every year. This reserve was surveyed in 1951 by Mr. J.B. Walcot, D.L.S. It is quite satisfactory in every way and serves the purpose indicated."⁵⁸

In the larger centres, aboriginal population growth added to the imperative to create new or larger residential reserves. This was particularly true in Whitehorse, which attracted significant numbers of Native people from throughout the Yukon Territory. As communities developed or expanded along the Alaska Highway, particularly at Watson Lake, Teslin, Haines Junction, and Burwash, and along the Mayo Road, aboriginal people were drawn for economic or social reasons to the settlements. This, in turn, compelled the government to act, particularly if and when the Department wished to develop housing and other projects. Developments around Watson Lake illustrate the process. The growth of the town had stimulated an influx of Native people, most of whom squatted on private property and could not be provided with government housing. W.E. Grant, Indian Superintendent, commented

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IAND, 801/30-0-01, vol. 3, Yates to Acting Director, 11 June 1970.

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IAND, 801/30-5, Meek to Arneil, 13 October 1953.

in 1962 that "As Watson Lake is the hub of south-east Yukon it is the centre for a considerable amount of employment and if the land requested is obtained it is certain that at least 15 to 20 families will move there in the next year or two. A conservative estimate of the Indian population at Watson Lake in 1966 would be 275-300."⁵⁹ A.E. Fry, Grant's successor pressed Ottawa to authorize the assignment of a parcel of the Watson Lake property. He observed "As more and more Indian families are moving to this area it is imperative that we have the area to develop a community. We are reluctant to provide badly needed housing because no title to the land has been obtained."⁶⁰

Even in the early 1950s, when the restructuring of residential patterns was at its peak, the Department protected existing land allocations. The effective closure of Fort Selkirk after the war resulted in the shift of population to Mayo, Minto, Carmacks and Dawson, and to the creation of new residential sites (including Pelly Crossing). The once bustling village of Fort Selkirk was reduced to a single family. Despite the dramatic change in status, Indian Superintendent R.J. Meek wrote that "In view of the fact that it is still used by at least one Indian family I would recommend that this Indian Reserve be confirmed."⁶¹ At the same time, Meek recommended that the McQuesten site, though unoccupied, be confirmed as a

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IAND, 801/30-0/1, vol. 2, Grant to Indian Affairs Branch, 14 May 1962.

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IAND, 801/30-1-24, Fry to Indian Affairs Branch, 28 May 1963.

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IAND, 801/30-13, Meek to Arneil, 21 October 1953.

hunting and fishing location, and the Lake LaBerge Band's former residence site be retained as a "fishing station and stopping place."⁶²

It is impossible to separate the impacts directly related to the transition to village life from the myriad changes that transformed aboriginal society in the Yukon Territory after World War II. To suggest that some, let alone all, of the social, cultural and economic alterations that occurred can be traced to this process would be to overstate the case considerably, just as any single cause explanation typically misrepresents a complex, multi-faceted situation. While there is no doubt but that the transition to village life affected aboriginal peoples in the Yukon, it is difficult to divide these effects from those related to residential schooling, a desire for access to medical care, the adoption by some of Christianity, the collapse of the fur trade, the increasing bureaucratization of aboriginal life, and the many other forces of dramatic change active in the region in this period.

This said, it is evident that the new villages contained many cultural, social and political aspects that were not present in the pre-World War II social world of Yukon First Nations. Several of the Yukon reserve communities, including several of the mixed-culture settlements, quickly encountered serious social difficulties, vastly in excess of any problems experienced in the pre-village era. Consider, for example, Alan Fry's description of Upper Liard, one of the more severely impacted aboriginal villages: "Upper Liard is a village of problems. The people are apathetic, unskilled and often unemployed. Children are poorly

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Ibid., Meek to Arneil, 20 October 1953.

cared for. Severe drinking is wide spread, reaching down to the *younger* school age group. While the adults drink, night after night, the school children wander the villages, sometimes until day break. Violent strife frequently breaks out in manifestation of the ever present hostility between factions and families, husbands and wives. There have been killings. We have reason to expect more."⁶³

The difficulties at Upper Liard persisted for years, limiting the effectiveness of the band council, and contributing to the continued social problems in the settlement.⁶⁴ Writing about Upper Liard in 1965, Indian Superintendent A. Fry observed: "In summary then, we have a village of 200 souls, mainly in very large families with a lot of idle single men about, with no useful community organization and strengths, little cultural heritage, a poor economic opportunity, very low educational levels, no skills training, poor housing and an alcohol problem which sees a great percentage of what little does come into the community wasted in the purchase of liquor and payment of fines."⁶⁵

The First Nations of the Yukon were well aware, both at the time and subsequently, of the effect of moving the communities. A series of interviews⁶⁶ conducted in the spring of

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IAND, 801/7-1, vol. 1, Fry to Indian Commissioner for BC, 9 November 1966.

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IAND, 801/1-1, vol. 2, Smith to Chretien, 11 April 1972.

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IAND, 801/7-2, vol. 1, Fry to Indian Commissioner, 1 March 1965.

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Some of the interviews were conducted by members of Northern Native Broadcasting, Whitehorse in May 1993, and the rest in January

1993 among elders whose memories went back well before World War II shows that these moves were seen as pivotal in a process of community, national, and individual degeneration. Sid Atkinson, an elder from Ross River, whose community was moved in the early 1960s, observed that "even right now they [community members] say it was better on the other side [of the river]." The major result of the move, he recalled, was a tremendous increase in alcohol abuse:

Q: When did the people first start to drink?

A: After the move, they set up a bar in a trailer, you had to order food to get a drink.

Q: Was the new village a good place?

A: No, I don't think so. Everyone was drinking . . . getting worse . . . What are the kids going to do but drink? Start early, too.

Q: Did people get along well in the new village?

A: It spoiled everything, the drinking.

Q: What about trapping? Did people continue to trap?

A: Only the ones that didn't drink--not many. In the old place there were lots of trappers . . . no bar there.

It is understandable that two generations after the beginning of the move from the land to permanent communities, some of the First Nations elders still resent the events which they see as leading to many of the modern troubles which plague their peoples. The elders interviewed for this study, however, did not identify the post-war welfare state as the chief cause of these events; rather, they cite the building of the Alaska Highway as the root cause.

1988, and recorded on videotape.

The people "lived good in the bush," said Lucy Wren of Carcross, "everything changed after the highway came."⁶⁷ Florence Smarch of Teslin, asked why people started moving into the communities, replied that it was "because of the highway."⁶⁸ Sam Williams, now a resident of Haines Junction, said that people moved into town "because they have vehicles and could go back and forth."⁶⁹ Julia Joe, aged 87, the granddaughter of a famous Marsh Lake chief, commented that "most of the white people were against the Indians."⁷⁰ It is quite understandable that the highly visible presence of the highway should have assumed this causal role, but in fact the highway an the instrument rather than the cause of the social changes which overtook the First Nations people of the Yukon in the post-war period. The family allowance plan, the necessity of attending school, and the rest of the government programs contributed greatly to the changes; the highway simply made it easier for the government agents to reach the people. Much the same process occurred in isolated corners of the Yukon and in the Mackenzie valley, though perhaps a few years later, and there was no highway there. The highway also, of course, made the First Nations people more mobile; as

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Interview with Lucy Wren, Carcross, January 1988.

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Interview with Forence Smarch, Teslin, January 1988.

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Interview with Sam Williams, Haines Junction, January 1988.

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Interview with Julia Joe, Whitehorse (interviewed at Marsh Lake), May 1993.

Kitty Grant observed, one of the reasons that people moved into town was that they thought they could have the best of both the old ways and the new: "I guess they figured they could just drive out and hunt and trap."

The government counted on the band council system, as managed by the Department of Indian Affairs, to provide stability and administration for the new and expanding villages. The system bore little resemblance to traditional models of leadership and corporate decision-making, which respected clan distinctions and which worked around a belief in the efficacy of consensus.⁷¹ Yukon villages were slow to adopt the electoral model of band council selection, and thus were delayed in being formally consisted as "official" bands. The elected system, in fact, tended to produce leaders whose authority rested on the political and legislative authority of the Department of Indian Affairs, rather than the traditional sources of authority within the aboriginal group.

The elected band council system was not adopted or implemented evenly across the territory. As Indian Agent R.J.Meek observed in 1955, "Some Bands today have no chief and council. At Carmacks the Band could never agree enough to have a nomination meeting for an election. At Whitehorse there were never enough members who showed any interest in a Band election. As examples of a better structure, Teslin, Dawson, Mayo and Old Crow have enthusiastic meetings, and strongly support their chief and council....At Carcross and

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Among the Inland Tlingit (Teslin), clan distinctions play an even greater role, where the role of individuals in making decisions depended upon social position, age and status within the clan.

Aishihik the chiefs claim to be hereditary. Champagne, Atlin and Casca Bands have a Chief and council, but are not very active."⁷² Those communities which embraced the new system--Teslin, Dawson, Mayo and Old Crow were among the first to do so--soon discovered that the establishment of a non-traditional political system contributed new difficulties and tensions, while being less than totally successful at addressing existing problems. In the 1960s and early 1970s, several communities rose up in protest against elected councils and successfully deposed chiefs and councillors.

Given the relative youthfulness of the reserve communities, the cultural mixing that occurred in many of the villages, and the continued difficulties with the non-aboriginal population, it is hardly surprising that the band councils faced considerable difficulties in responding to the many challenges they faced. The system, put simply, did not relate well to the realities of community life. In some instances, the councils were scarcely effective at all, thus requiring the Department of Indian Affairs to step in more directly. This, in turn, increased the influence of the department within the community. Superintendent Fry agreed that government-directed initiatives were required to capitalize on the opportunities and to deal with the problems of aboriginal villages: "Now, no one is more aware than I of the tremendous extent to which this program will be on Branch initiative alone in the beginning and how contrary it is to good development principles for civil servants to map out the program for a community and bring it down from above but if we are ever to reach that level

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R.J. Meek, Report on Yukon Indian Agency, 1 March 1955.

where community initiative can play a growing and finally dominant part, we must at our initiative, make the beginning."⁷³

The situation did not change rapidly. R.M. Connelly, Director, Community Affairs Branch, commented in 1974, "There is no doubt that the Indians communities need special forms of assistance to guarantee that they enjoy a measure of equality with their non-Indian neighbours, particularly in the highly sophisticated, competitive, industrialized society in which we live."⁷⁴ E.J. Underwood, Superintendent for the Yukon, summarized the situation:

Pressure is mounting on Indian Affairs--from all sectors of the Yukon community at large--to accept full and direct responsibility. Typical sources of conflict include: water services, sanitation, community freezers and community halls. The almost total lack of Band Funds or Band resources in the North, coupled with the Yukon Indians' resistance to organization, makes any independent solution to the problem so difficult as to be unrealistic or impracticable. Moreover, it should also be appreciated that nearly all non-Indian communities in the Yukon are, in effect, Government subsidized, and therefore Indian Affairs must be prepared for a similar expense or allow its physical development programs to collapse as a consequence. Regardless of Indian Affairs projected "policy" or theory, the cold hard fact is that Indian Affairs is deeply involved in community services in the Yukon because there exists no practical alternative at the present time.⁷⁵

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IAND, 801/7-2. vol. 1, Fry to Indian Commissioner, 1 March 1965.

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IAND, 801/8-19, Connelley to Regional Director (Yukon), 19 April 1974.

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IAND, 801/8-19, vol. 1, Underwood to Regional Director (Yukon), 1 July 1970.

Underwood's assessment, while somewhat harsh, captured the reality of the situation. Most Yukon Bands lacked the administrative experience and expertise to cope with the myriad demands and opportunities.

The process of establishing residential reserves and thereafter providing government-funded services created expectations among the Native people who moved to the sites. This was, in part, due to the dependency on government that was created by the extension of the welfare state to the northern Natives. The quick effect, however, was considerable aboriginal anger toward the government department that had assumed responsibility for the maintenance of the reserves. The report of the Carmacks Band for 1971 reflects some of this frustration: "Last year one house was built. Peter Silverfox got that house. It was not built right. Water leaks through the lighting fixtures and from the windows. The ceiling tiles came off. There is lots wrong with the house. We have 11 families that need houses right now and we have 18 houses badly needing repairs. We have not been able to get enough material to repair hardly any houses....One family had to live in a tent all winter and still does."⁷⁶

The situation in Whitehorse, the largest reserve community in the territory, was not uncommon. A consultant's report, prepared in 1972 as part of an investigation of the relocation of the reserve, provided an unflattering portrait of conditions. The review concluded that "The social climate among residents of the present village has deteriorated over the past several years. Local disputes, ill-feelings among residents and general

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IAND, 801/29-2, Carmacks Band Report, c. 1971.

frustrations have resulted in a demoralizing atmosphere." The writer identified four main factors influencing the development of the village: the poor physical setting, the virtual absence of employment opportunities and the resulting dependence on welfare, the rapid growth and prosperity of the non-Native residents, and the fact that "The Village is composed of families who come from many areas of the Yukon. There exists traditional animosity between some families and some groups. No attempt has been made to consider this essential fact of life in the arrangement or allocation of homes in the present village." As well, the report concluded that there were striking generational differences in the village, exacerbated by the proximity to Whitehorse and by the influence of the Canadian school system.⁷⁷

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IAND, 801/19-4, vol. 5, Whitehorse Village Relocation Study.

THE WHITEHORSE RESERVE: FINDING A HOME

The Kwanlin Dun reserve, currently with the largest population of any in the Yukon Territory, has a long and chequered history. As with the other residential reserves in the territory, the Whitehorse reserve was established to provide aboriginal people with a place to stay while near the community, without mixing unduly with the non-Native residents. The goal, therefore, was to create a site proximate to the non-Native community, while retaining some social division between the aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. The growth of Whitehorse, from a small, ramshackle riverboat and railway terminus during the Klondike Gold Rush, to a bustling seasonal centre in the early years of the century and to the territorial capital following the highway-induced boom of the 1960s, re-created the town and therefore created new circumstances for the First Nations.

The physical expansion of the town, coupled with the desire to keep the Native people at arm's length, resulted in the frequent relocation of the reserve. On several occasions during and after World War I, the government established new boundaries for the Whitehorse reserve, and expected Native inhabitants to shift to the new sites. This process gradually

moved the Native village further away from the town centre, and closer to the swamp land to the north of Whitehorse. The Whitehorse reserve was on an unattractive piece of land; during the Second World War, the Americans constructed the CANOL refinery (later converted to an industrial park) between the reserve and the townsite. This provided an added buffer between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. The uncertain legal status of the property--the same as for other Yukon reserves--created uncertainty, particularly as regarded the prospect of leasing the land for industrial use or dealing with the encroachment of non-Native squatters on the land.⁷⁸

By the 1960s, the Whitehorse reserve was all but fully occupied, albeit with a rough and ramshackle collection of houses and shacks that lacked the basic amenities--central heating, indoor plumbing--available for most non-Native homes (save those squatting on private lands along the river) in the capital city. E.L. Underwood, Superintendent of the Yukon Indian Agency observed in 1969 that additional construction nearby by the White Pass Railway had added to existing disadvantages with the site: "Immediately north of the reserve is located the sewage outlet for the Takhini, Valleyview, and Hillcrest sub-divisions. The odor from this during the few warm days is extremely obnoxious. Further problems that are encountered at the present village are swampiness, an extremely high water table, and the unavailability of water."⁷⁹ There were numerous non-aboriginal complaints about the nature

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 1, Sullivan to Superintendent of Reserves and Trusts, 25 February 1958.

of the reserve community, which was held up locally as a symbol for the difficulties and problems plaguing Yukon First Nations. The Department of Indian Affairs attempted to tidy up the reserve, although funds for new construction were chronically short of identified requirements. Yukon Indian Agent Fry rejected the strong advice that he should concentrate territorial funds in the high profile location: "I will not concentrate funds at Whitehorse to window dress for Ministers' inspections. When these shacks go, they must go as part of a program which is fair to all people in the Agency on a basis of straight need, not location in the window of public views."⁸⁰

The prospect of relocating the reserve attracted considerable attention as the years passed--including one suggestion, rejected by the Natives, that the band be relocated to the Canadian Forces cements in Camp Takhini. Federal politicians expressed concern about the "ghetto flavour" of the Whitehorse reserve and suggested the investigation of the relocation of the band members into the town.⁸¹ An investigation conducted in 1966 revealed approximately 330 Native people in Whitehorse, with 31 living in the town and an additional 65 in squatter settlements. The Whitehorse reserve had a total population of 234, 143 of whom were Band members.

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IAND, 801/19-4, Underwood to Regional Director, 7 February 1969.

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IAND, 801/29-2, Fry to Indian Commissioner, 3 May 1966.

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IAND, 801/1-1, vol. 2, Gibson to Battle, 19 October 1966.

Initial discussions with Whitehorse Natives revealed that the prospects for relocation were dim: "Because many (particularly the older adults) will resist all efforts to move them, it appears the Village will remain as a permanent settlement. As standards of accommodation and facilities in the Village are improved over a period of time, this will improve the situation of the younger people....Relocation, however, would have to be gradual and without overtones of a forced move."⁸² As J.V. Boys, Indian Commissioner for B.C. commented, "The Indians in the Whitehorse Indian Village feel very insecure, and would understandably resist any suggestion that they move elsewhere lock, stock and barrel."⁸³

By the late 1960s, and despite many years of failed attempts to relocate the Whitehorse reserve, there was a growing consensus that the existing site was seriously inadequate. The Whitehorse Indian Band Council formed a Relocation Committee in 1969 and petitioned the government for a commencement of discussions; their submission indicated that a sizeable majority of the families polled supported a relocation of the reserve. As well, the Band Council observed that the community "felt Indians should have a chance to pay for land and houses in order that they have ownership of one or both, and not be forced to continue (as at present) as squatters on the land and as tenants in houses owned by the

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IAND, 801/1-1, vol. 2, Battle to Gibson, 15 November 1966.

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IAND, 801/1-1, vol. 2, Boys to Sprott, 25 October 1966.

Department of Indian Affairs."⁸⁴ As well, a clear aboriginal imperative was "the feeling that the Indian culture can only be preserved in a separate setting."⁸⁵

In 1970, following numerous representations from the local Band, federal and territorial officials agreed to examine the request for a new reserve, the Band also requesting that the existing area be retained for "cultural and other development."⁸⁶ The Yukon Native Brotherhood completed a report in 1971 which formed the basis for subsequent discussions, and a meeting of the Whitehorse Village Relocation Committee early in 1971 resulted in a preliminary plan, drafted by a consultant, to consider two proposals: a site along the Alaska Highway southeast of town and a location across the river from the Whitehorse townsite. The proposal--to relocate south of Whitehorse and construct 25 houses in the first year, 15 houses per year thereafter until demand was met, commercial and public buildings, to be completed in the main within three years--represented a sweeping change of existing arrangements. Government concerns about the costs were met head on: "The Band feels that cost factors should be secondary to the entitlement the Bands believes to exist and the need for that entitlement to be met."⁸⁷

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IAND, 801/19-4, vol. 1, Band Council Resolution #42.

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IAND, 801/19-4, vol. 5, Hodginson to Chretien, 19 June 1972.

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IAND, 801/30-0-1, vol. 3, Vergette to Chief, Administration Division, 8 January 1970.

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IAND, 801/43-1, vol. 2, Gryba to Churchman, 2 March 1971.

Although the Band leadership favoured the plan, there were considerable indications that other members were less than enthusiastic.⁸⁸ As one official wrote to Chief Johnny Smith of the Whitehorse Band Council, "Field officers inform me that, although the Band Council resolution implied that all residents of the Indian Village wished to locate to a new site, some Band members now state that this was not a unanimous choice; some apparently wish to relocate closer to Whitehorse; some to stay where they are presently located and others to move to a location other than Whitehorse. Due to this uncertainty, it has been found necessary to determine the exact wishes of each individual family before planning a relocation program. I believe that personal interviewing of family heads is now being done."⁸⁹

Consideration was also given relocating the families throughout the Whitehorse area, "providing each family with an urban neighbourhood of its choice" or to moving to "a frontier type Indian Village," thus ensuring greater distance from the non-aboriginal population. Discussion of the disposition of the existing reserve focused on a variety of lease or sale options, although a government official cautioned his superiors that "We would also have to be satisfied that the Band were experienced and competent enough to manage the entire program on their own. I for one would be reluctant, at a time when the Band will have

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IAND, 801/23-1, vol. 1, Yukon Region March 1972 Report.

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IAND, 801/3-8, vol. 2, Fournier to Smith, 8 April 1970.

to overcome and solve so many problems, to saddle them with the burdens of administration and funding."⁹⁰ This position stood in some contrast to an earlier observation about the independence of the Band: "We feel it is essential that the Indian people be as free to choose where they live as are other Canadians."⁹¹

Federal officials expressed considerable caution about the proposed relocation. Their concerns rested primarily with the high cost of the proposed transfer and the possibility that the Band members would ultimately decide not to move. For at least one official, the Department of Indian Affairs was in a no-win situation:

We appear to be faced with an impasse in which the Yukon brotherhood is convinced that the department will provide them with 80 sq. miles of land and build a new community without being able to give any assurance that the Indians will move to it. Nevertheless failure of the project will be blamed upon the Department not the Yukon brotherhood. On the other hand if the request for 80 sq. miles of land required for the development of the community and commercial facilities there will again be serious criticism levelled against the department on the grounds that we have failed to keep faith with the Indian brotherhood. The time has come when we must look at the situation objectively and try to determine the needs and desires of the people involved.⁹²

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IAND, 801/19-4, vol. 5, Whitehorse Indian Community Relations, Land Program Outline, 21 January 1971.

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IAND, 801/3-8. Darling to Knorr, 4 June 1968.

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IAND, 801/19-4, vol. 5, Report on Whitehorse Indian Village, 1972.

Additional considerations entered into the discussions. As more aboriginal people found jobs in the growing city, many moved off the reserve and into town housing. For several decades, many officials with the Department of Indian Affairs favoured such an initiative, believing that it would help the people integrate into the non-Native society. I.F. Kirkby, Regional Director, Yukon Region, suggested that a more responsive housing program, one which encouraged the provision of off-reserve homes, would deal with the "more affluent Whitehorse Indians." The relocation would, he argued, "be confined to that group which had a special desire to preserve their culture in a separate setting."⁹³

The tabling in 1973 of the Whitehorse Village Relocation Study prepared by Environmental Planning and Engineering Consultants added new wrinkles. The report concluded that the long-investigated Site 7, located over fifteen miles south of town by the Lewes River dam, was inappropriate and would not attract a significant number of families. Rather, the consultants recommended--supported by 62 of 69 family heads interviewed--that a new reserve be built on the east side of the Yukon River, one mile north of the hospital. This site offered "a degree of separation from Whitehorse," a goal of many aboriginal peoples, plus access to "a variety of services found only in the City." The relocation to the new site was anticipated to cost approximately \$4.4 million.⁹⁴

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IAND, 801/19-4-1, Kirkby to Toogood, 24 July 1972.

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IAND, 801/19-4, vol. 5, Whitehorse Village Relocation Study.

For the better part of a decade, government officials and Yukon Native representatives debated and investigated the possibility of creating a new reserve on the east side of the Yukon River. There were a variety of studies, including additional polls of Band members, and investigations of the cost and feasibility of erecting a bridge over the Yukon River. The Whitehorse Band continued to push, albeit unevenly, for the relocation; as a Band-commissioned report indicated in 1979, "The Band Council's primary objective in seeking to relocate is to take the Band from an environment in which traditional values and social order are being eroded, to one in which these will be encouraged and preserved."⁹⁵ The prospect of major pipeline development along the Alaska Highway in the late 1970s spurred the Band to push harder for the relocation, for fear that "other developments, brought on by the pipeline, take the land we wish to use for our community site."⁹⁶

Difficulties continued to plague the effort. In 1979, as Band, territorial, municipal and federal officials planned to meet to discuss the proposed relocation, it was learned that the Northern Canada Power Corporation had cut a preliminary location line across a portion of the land set aside for the reserve, preparatory to the construction of a major hydro-electric line. When presented with the obvious contradiction of building a power line through a

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IAND, 801/19-4, vol. 8, *Feasibility and Cost of Development a New Indian Village Near Whitehorse, Yukon. A Study for Whitehorse Indian Band*, June 1979.

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IAND, 801/19-4, vol. 8, Sam to Faulkner, 13 January 1978.

proposed housing site, NCPC agreed to move the line to the eastern edge of the village site.⁹⁷ It was yet another road-block in a long and difficult process. The Yukon land claims process, the federal political changes in 1979 and a myriad of local and political difficulties, stalled discussions and pushed the time-table for implementation ever-back. As well, the cost of the proposed move had now escalated to around \$22 million, almost a five-fold increase from the initial expectations.⁹⁸

An unexpected opportunity to resolve the impasse over the location of the reserve arose following the collapse of plans for the construction of the Alaska Highway natural gas pipeline. In anticipation of a building boom, the City of Whitehorse had developed a new subdivision on the escarpment above the city. The collapse of the project deflated the housing market, and left the City with a real estate white elephant on its hands. The Kwanlin Dun band expressed an interest in the land, thus offering a solution to their need for more and better land and to the City's difficulty. After considerable procrastination--the new site was one of the preferred locations within the city--the decision was taken in the late 1980s to move the Native band from the established site to the new location. The Kwanlin Dun people found themselves shifted from the least attractive location in Whitehorse, where their reserve was bounded by a steep hill, and industrial area and a swamp, to one of the nicer subdivisions in the community, abutting an area designated for considerable expansion of

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IAND, 801/19-4, Fontaine to Brown, 11 April 1979.

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IAND, 801/19-4-1, vol. 8, Fontaine to Brown, 25 April 1979.

general housing lots. The irony was pronounced, for the establishment of the new reserve ended decades of shuffling aboriginal people in Whitehorse from one undesirable location to another. The construction of a new set of homes and the move up the hill from the old reserve established a new foundation of aboriginal life in Whitehorse and also intensified the process of urbanization

There was an additional irony. By the late 1960s, the aboriginal people of the Yukon were arguing for the preservation or extension of residential reserves, as a means of protecting their people and cultures from the continued impacts of the non-Native population. The process had evolved substantially, from the initial emergence of the residential reserve as an important feature of Yukon life to a situation where Yukon Native people were themselves arguing for the creation of residential reserves as a means of cultural protection and survival. What was initially an instrument of change, with the caveats noted above, had become a tool for societal preservation and continuity. This point reveals the difficulties inherent in determining the precise impact of the process of residential reserve creation in the Yukon.

In retrospect, the history of the Whitehorse residential reserves remained in the memory of the First Nations people as another of the many ways in which outsiders had imposed on them. It was not that the Kwanlin Dun reserve was undesirable--it was on some of the best real estate in Whitehorse--but the process by which the people had arrived there continued to give offence. Jessie Scarfe, a resident of the reserve, had lived in different locations in Whitehorse over many years, but remembers her various moves and the provisions made for her with no pleasure; her tenure was always impermanent, and she found

she could be moved as government policy and the wishes of non-Natives dictated.⁹⁹ She recalled that "a long time ago, the majority of our forefathers used to live right downtown . . . my aunt Jessie, all my mother's family. The white people moved in and moved us out to that swamp." The facilities were seldom satisfactory:

When I first bought that house on 7th and Wheeler, they wouldn't even hook up my electricity--it was out of city limits [a friend hooked her up illegally via a wire looped over a tree, an arrangement that lasted for seven years]. We bought a place in behind General Enterprise, a great big place, till it burned down in '71.

Nor did the move to the more commodious housing at Kwanlin Dun solve the problem: ". . . same thing up here [Kwanlin Dun] . . . they're trying to squeeze us out . . . seems like they don't want us to have anything.

There is a difference in perception among those who were interviewed for this study from what southern planners might have expected. For instance, the respondents did not seem particularly "grateful" for the attempts made to ameliorate the mistakes of the past. As Mrs. Scarfe said, "How could the government give us land if it was already ours? How would you like it if I took your shirt and gave it back to you? In another hundred years I'll give it back to you?" As for new housing, "I stayed in that low cost housing on Jeckell St. They called it low cost--it took the majority of my wages . . . they took half of what you made." For Mrs. Scarfe, who had six children of her own, adopted six, and cared for ten more for a social agency--22 at the same time--such considerations were stronger than any

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Interview with Jessie Scarfe, Whitehorse, May 1993.

feeling of gratitude. Even in the Kwanlin Dun reserve, where the housing, though not luxurious, is probably above the average for the entire community, Mrs. Scarfe feels a sense of unease. The reserve is surrounded by suburban real estate, where despite the band's requests, there is no room for the reserve to expand. "Twenty years from now," asks Mrs. Scarfe, "where are the grandchildren going to live?"

The debate over the Whitehorse reserve, which required some twenty years to resolve, is perhaps the best Yukon example of the nature, impact and use of residential reserves. As was the case across the territory, this situation combined non-aboriginal and aboriginal desires, changing government policy, the often lethargic or uneven application of federal policy, and tensions among all groups about the best "solution" to the Natives' "problems." In these debates, the residential reserve emerged as an important instrument for change, and village conditions as a vital element in the desire for a restructuring of aboriginal life. In the period after World War II, in Whitehorse as elsewhere in the territory, the imperatives of village life and the growing importance of residential reserves became a cause, a reflection and a symbol of the transformation of aboriginal society in the face of multiple pressures for change.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

The villages established and expanded in the Yukon Territory following the end of World War II have assumed a social, political and cultural legitimacy that they did not have in the first instance of their creation. Discussions and negotiations in the territory tend to take the residential reserves and the communities defined thereon as aboriginal "givens" and much planning and development has proceeded accordingly. Although this study has argued that the communities, as presently constituted, are at least in substantial measure creations of the post-war period, they are now an integral part of aboriginal life in the Yukon.

It is vital, nonetheless, to recognize the relative youthfulness of these communities--as physical, settled and occupied spaces--compared to the exceptional longevity of the peoples

and cultures that are now contained within them. In less than fifty years, and a much shorter period in some areas of the North, a variety of processes and developments resulted in the migration of aboriginal peoples from their traditional territories and into lengthy occupation of homes on officially designated residential reserves. Not surprisingly, these physical spaces did not, of necessity, coalesce quickly as harmonious cultural or social spaces; the difficulties encountered at some communities are readily understood.

A series of general implications arise from the analysis offered above:

1. All northern Native communities are not at comparable levels of social, political, cultural and administrative development, and this is due substantially to such variable factors as the timing of the migration to the village, mixing of cultural groups, linguistic and social differences on the reserve, and the relationship of the residential reserve to a non-Native settlement.
2. The current process of community empowerment, while representing a major thrust of aboriginal policy, should take the differential pattern of community evolution into direct account. It would be inappropriate not to recognize the differential patterns of development among the many northern villages. Self-government is generally recognized to be of positive benefit to the First Nations. The Native villages and, more accurately, the tribal councils and the Council of Yukon Indians, will appropriately determine the pace and nature of self-

government within each community. Because the villages have different histories, and different local issues, the receptiveness to self-government initiatives will likely vary.

3. It is important to keep the very short time frames in mind when seeking to understand the nature and evolution of northern aboriginal communities. In many instances, what were either seasonal or non-existing settlements became, within twenty to forty years, substantial, year-round villages. Northern cultures are very ancient; the primary contemporary manifestation of those cultures--the physical and social spaces typically defined as a village--is a recent phenomenon. Self-government will, appropriately, be negotiated with the social and political structures of the contemporary Native peoples of the Yukon Territory. That these communities are not "traditional" in the cultural or historical sense should not be a barrier to negotiations or settlements. The evolution of First Nations villages is, however, important to consider in seeking to understanding Native response to negotiations and the implementation of settlements.

4. Communities, considered now to be the core of aboriginal self-government and cultural rebuilding, reflect many non-aboriginal influences, including the construction and design of housing, government and administrative structures, and centralized and bureaucratic control. It is important, on a community by community basis, that attention be paid to the origins of the settlement, the cultural elements within the communities, and the economic, social, political and administrative forces that led to the establishment or expansion of the village in

the post-war period. If the federal and territorial governments are, as appears to be the case, determined to share power with the First Nations by empowering band councils and communities, it is vital that there be a clear understanding of the nature and historical evolution of the specific settlements. This historical knowledge is vital in seeking an understanding of the contemporary social, cultural and economic dynamics of First Nations communities. As stated above, it is appropriate that self-government be negotiated on the basis of the existing Native villages and social arrangements; the intention here is not to suggest that the current emphasis on community empowerment is somehow "invalid" because of the historical evolution of the settlements. Knowing more about the process and specific nature of village formation, however, is useful in seeking to understand the approaches and contemporary situation of individual aboriginal groups and communities.

5. The very process of creating permanent villages in the North left a legacy of considerable bitterness and anger. Some Native people believe that they were "forced" to move into a government-regulated settlement; others continue to express frustration with the location of the reserves, the lay-out of the community and the initial design of the homes. These sentiments are less noticeable among the younger generations, who grew up largely within the confines and structures of the residential reserves and who consider the villages to be an established reality. Elders who recall life before the relocation process routinely express a preference for the earlier times and trace many of the contemporary difficulties in Native communities to the establishment of the villages. It would be beneficial for communities,

perhaps as part of a general effort at documenting and chronicling their histories, to bring these tensions into the public and to provide a forum for an open discussion of the historical processes and tensions which influenced community development. To this point, First Nations concerns about village formation and evolution are rarely discussed in open. This limits the possibility that the concerns about village establishment and transformation will fully inform contemporary discussions and the search for lasting solutions.

6. A detailed, localized investigation of the circumstances of settlement should be an important component of community and public education. The history of land allocations, and the cultural and social implications thereof, explains a great deal about the evolution of aboriginal life in the north after World War II. Greater awareness of this process should help overcome some of the misunderstandings between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in the North. The production of individual village histories, prepared by local researchers (potentially with the cooperation of academic or professional historians/anthropologists) and based substantially on oral testimony, would be very beneficial in ensuring that each community had a stronger sense of its historical roots, particularly as this related to the current village site. (Such material and documents would, in turn, be extremely valuable classroom sources.)

7. The smaller, less dramatic processes of relocation and village development often carry very significant implications for community peace and evolution. The contemporary

emphasis on the more dramatic episodes, such as those in the Eastern Arctic, take attention away from the less noticeable, subtle, and more pervasive experiences of northern Native people. It is vital that the search for the epic circumstance, with all the attendant publicity, not over-ride the search for understanding that rests with a consideration of the more low-keyed development. This is not intended to suggest that the more dramatic examples be ignored; rather, an effort should be made to document, from various parts of the country, the nature and extent of post-World War II relocation of First Nations peoples. Local and regional attention, perhaps by way of the publication of village histories (and the circulation through other media, including Native radio and newspapers), would add to general understanding of the extent and implications of northern community formulation in the post-World War II era.

8. There is a tendency to point fingers and, in this instance, to search for the single policy decision or individual policy maker who established a process of general importance. While there are many such examples, there is an even larger number of circumstances, often with vital impacts on the peoples involved, that emerged out of a collection of influences. The very complexity of the origins of such processes often deters investigators; in such instances, it is important to consider the implications, however complex, and to then examine the forces which created and sustained the process. It is vital, as well, not to be preoccupied with the search for a scapegoat; understanding is more important than identifying a culprit

9. The pattern identified for the Yukon Territory likely had national and southern parallels.

The processes and implications documented herein had a particular northern and territorial twist, and the precise details are, of course, unique to the Native peoples of the Yukon.

Similar developments, however, can be identified across the country as, in the aftermath of World War II, the federal government and Native people sought to come to terms with the proliferation of government programs, a new agenda for aboriginal people, and the changing social, economic and cultural landscape of Canada. There is a tendency to see northern developments in isolation; there is substantial evidence that, at a minimum, the developments described herein closely parallel patterns in southern, remote regions (the West Coast of British Columbia, for example) and therefore are of extra-regional relevance. It is not enough to simply make this point; additional research is required to document the nature of the impact of post-World War II government programs, including but not restricted to relocation. Various scholars have recognized that the post-war period witnessed massive changes in First Nations life. It would be most helpful if this material, supplemented by the results of additional material, was brought together in some fashion so that First Nations' communities and the general, non-aboriginal public would gain a greater understanding of the impact of government efforts in this period.

10. There are some broader historical and cultural implications underlying this discussion.

From the early years of European expansion, newcomers have sought to remove or relocate aboriginal peoples to suit their needs. Initially, the concerns were primarily those of demands

for land due to newcomer expansion and desire for access to resources. Similar concerns, plus the additional interventionist agenda of the modern welfare state, motivated the relocation process in the Yukon Territory after World War II. There is a tendency to consider developments in temporal and cultural isolation, and to see such processes as manifestations of a particular national or regional character. Such assumptions carry fundamental risks, for they divert attention from the possibility that much deeper patterns underlay specific historical activities. In this instance, the Yukon relocation process is an example of a much broader pattern of inter-cultural relationships, one based on newcomer assumptions about superiority and the seemingly insatiable desire for land and resources. The recommendation contained herein is very simple: that the more general argument--that newcomers have systematically endeavoured to shift and/or transform aboriginal life in order to better accommodate non-First Nations needs and aspirations--be given serious consideration. The fragmentation of historical understanding, while useful in explaining the impact of specific measures and concepts, often diverts attention from broader, longer-term patterns and processes. The Royal Commission is, at one level, founded on the assumption that an accommodation is possible between the First Nations and the non-Aboriginal population of Canada. This same assumption surrounded the post-World War II government initiatives. Basic questions must be asked. Are reconciliation and accommodation possible. Or are the differences in need, aspiration and culture so profound as to mitigate against a viable, mutually-beneficial relationship between First Nations and non-Aboriginal peoples.

11. Aboriginal communities in the North, as they struggle to deal with problems and opportunities, carry the burden of their past. To the degree that the analysis advanced here captures the reality of the post-war experience in the Yukon, the creation of village life in the territory continues to inform intra-community difficulties, political and cultural tensions, individual and collective dysfunctions, and attitudes toward government officials and federal initiatives.

The aboriginal villages in the Yukon Territory are the creation of the post-World War II environment. While the hand of the federal government, and particularly the Department of Indian Affairs, is evident throughout, particularly in encouraging and facilitating the settlement process, it is overstates the case considerably to suggest that government officials set out with single-mindedly to force aboriginal people onto residential reserves. But the general thrust of government policy in this area was indicative of a long-standing and broader European consensus that permanent settlements were economically, socially and culturally preferred to continued movement across the land. At the same time that the Department of Indian Affairs was setting up village sites near new and existing settlements, they were also confirming or establishing sites required for traditional purposes. The transition to a more sedentary existence and to life on residential reserves originated in a complex web of economic, social, cultural and political factors.

Regardless of the origins, however, the shift to village life created a fundamentally different reality for Yukon Native people. Within a very short period of time--less than two decades--the seasonal movements of the pre-World War II era had been replaced by the

difficult and often unsuccessful adaptations to a village existence. In these new settlements, which rarely reflected the cultural nature of pre-war Native life, aboriginal people struggled to adapt to a myriad of initiatives and influences. They did so, as well, within the administrative structure of the Department of Indian Affairs, and the political framework of the recently implemented elected Band Council system.

Given the pace, complexity and severity of the changes experienced by Yukon Native people, it is hardly surprising that the transition to village life was fraught with tensions and difficulty. This is a vital point. The government's efforts to encourage village settlement may well, as described herein, have been based on gentle, well-meaning, motives. But the result of the various initiatives which encouraged greater village settlement were, indeed, substantial. The basic elements of government involvement--that the government knows what is best and makes major decisions (or minor decisions with major impacts)--remained in place, with significant consequences for Yukon Native people.

This investigation provides only a preliminary assessment of what may be one of the most important processes in the re-formation of aboriginal life in northern Canada in the post-World War II period. As stated at the outset, it would be irresponsible to suggest that a single cause--in this case the shift to village life--was responsible for the contemporary difficulties facing northern aboriginal people, particularly when, as in this case, it is extremely difficult to separate cause and effect. Stated differently, the shift to a village existence by the vast majority of Yukon Native people was likely as much a result of numerous social, economic and cultural changes as it was the cause of these transitions. The

very process, typically described in demographic terms, needs to be better understood if we are to truly comprehend the transformation of northern aboriginal life over the past four decades.

We must, as well, however, be clear about the nature of contemporary Aboriginal village life in the Yukon Territory and the relationship between current conditions and historical developments. It falls to others to fully document the state of modern Yukon Native communities and to describe the complex combination of assertiveness and social pain and suffering. Contemporary Native villages have more than their share of the latter, revealed through personal feelings of hopelessness and depression. There is, as well, a very real tension between the evident desire for greater control over community affairs and the lingering legacy of a system of dependency on government initiatives and regulations. Peoples are the creations of their histories, and must live with the consequences and legacy of their past. For the Native people of the Yukon Territory, the transition from life on the land to the village is a vital element in their historical evolution and should be understood as such.

A NOTE ON INTERVIEWS AND FIRST NATIONS INVOLVEMENT

The interview portion of this project was structured in the following way: Northern Native Broadcasting Yukon, an aboriginally-owned and operated radio and television company based in Whitehorse, agreed to carry out the interviews with the elders. Trained interviewers, many of them fluent in First Nations languages, conducted the interviews, and, where required, prepared typed transcriptions of the interviews. This material was then incorporated into the analysis for this report.

An additional point is worth considering. In the course of attempting to set up interviews with First Nations elders, the interviewers encountered what might be described as "interviewee fatigue." A significant number of the elders were reluctant to be interviewed, about any topic, and made it clear that they felt that of late they had been interviewed more than enough. Part of the problem rested with the timing of part of the project; summer is not a good time to try to arrange interviews, as many elders are then on the land. The small and diminishing group of elders in the Yukon, and I suspect elsewhere, who remember life as it was before the changes of the past fifty years has been interviewed repeatedly, and probably too often. It is a testament to their patience and their willingness to share their knowledge that so many did consent to talk to the interviewers. The lesson here is that the research agendas of outsiders--academics, government researchers, journalists, and the rest--is a considerable imposition on the lives of aboriginal people.

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