

Decolonization Learning Journey

A four-part Learning Journey with Mi'kmaw Elders and knowledge sharers.

Community Sector Council of Nova Scotia

Decolonization Learning Journey – Resource document

Series 3 - Webinar #1, November 10, 2020

Hosting team:

- Elder Jane Meader, Elder, BACS & Med
- Mary Beth Doucette, Assistant Professor and Purdy Crawford Chair in CBU's Shannon School of Business, Cape Breton University
- Nicole Cammaert, Associate Executive Director, CSCNS

Guest speaker:

Chief Andrea Paul and Stephen Augustine

Topic: Mi'kmaw Governance

Highlights

What is the Mi'kmaw Grand Council?

- The Mi'kmawey Mawio'mi or Mi'kmaq Grand Council is a spiritual, political, and traditional governance body of the Mi'kmaq of the Atlantic provinces. It is an Indigenous construct governing the Mi'kmaq people and remains salient to Mi'kmaq culture and society today. The Grand Council was traditionally the governing body of the nation and was led by several officers, including a kji'saqmaw (grand chief), a putus (treaty holder and counselor), and a kji'keptan (grand captain, advisor on political affairs). The Sante Mawiomi determined where families might hunt, fish, and set up their wumitki (places of residence). More importantly, the Grand Council managed relations with other Indigenous nations.^{1 2}

¹ Watch Hereditary Chief Stephen Augustine speak more about the Grand Council-
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zm0zpKQUVh0>

² Watch Kji Keptin Antle Denny speak about the Grand Council-
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKfOY_QhswA

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What does the *Indian Act* have to do with Mi'kmaw Governance?

- The *Indian Act* is a Canadian federal law that governs in matters pertaining to Indian status, bands, and Indian reserves. Throughout history it has been highly invasive and paternalistic, as it authorizes the Canadian federal government to regulate and administer in the affairs and day-to-day lives of registered Indians and reserve communities. This authority has ranged from overarching political control, such as imposing governing structures on Aboriginal communities in the form of band councils, to control over the rights of Indians to practice their culture and traditions. The *Indian Act* has also enabled the government to determine the land base of these groups in the form of reserves, and even to define who qualifies as Indian in the form of Indian status. While the *Indian Act* has undergone numerous amendments since it was first passed in 1876, today it largely retains its original form.³
- The roles and responsibilities of chief and council can look different across First Nation communities. Chief and council are typically responsible for various portfolios and can have several standing committees consisting of: health and social; education; finance; personnel and general administration; lands, estates and membership; economic development; and housing. The committees provide guidance and a process for planning and decision making for the First Nation.
- There are two departments in the federal government who handle business pertaining to Canada's First Nation communities: Indigenous Service Canada⁴ and Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada.⁵
- The First Nations Elections Act and First Nations Elections Regulations came into force on April 2, 2015. The act and regulations were developed in collaboration with First Nations organizations to make improvements to First Nations election processes. This was initiated by the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs and the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs with First Nations to develop recommendations on a bill to address concerns about the election process under the *Indian Act*. In October 2010, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development and the leaders of these organizations launched a national engagement exercise on electoral reform. With the support of the Government of Canada, these organizations met with other First Nation leaders across the country between October 2010 and March 2011 to present their recommendations, seek advice and reach consensus on improving the election process for First Nations.^{6 7}

³ Source: https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada.html>

⁵ <https://www.canada.ca/en/crown-indigenous-relations-northern-affairs.html>

⁶ https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/annualstatutes/2014_5/FullText.html

⁷ <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1323195944486/1565366893158>

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What is environmental racism?

- Environmental racism is a form of systemic racism, rather than individual racism, meaning it is the result of institutional policies and practices, rather than individual beliefs and actions.^{8 9}
- Boat Harbour is a body of water on the Northumberland Strait in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. Originally a tidal estuary, construction of a pulp and paper waste effluent treatment facility in the 1960s led to the pollution of the harbour and the source of ongoing environmental concern. Treated water takes about 30 days to reach the Northumberland Strait. Since the treatment system began operation in 1967, Boat Harbour has become polluted with dioxins, furans, chloride, mercury and other toxic heavy metals. It is considered to be one of Nova Scotia's worst cases of environmental racism.^{10 11 12}

⁸ Source: <https://ecojustice.ca/environmental-racism-in-canada/>

⁹ Further reading: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/what-is-environmental-racism-pollution-covid-systemic/>

¹⁰ Watch the documentary *There's Something in the Water* on Netflix: <https://www.netflix.com/ca/title/81206890>

¹¹ Read the book *There's Something in the Water*: <https://fernwoodpublishing.ca/book/there8217s-something-in-the-water>

¹² Read *The Mill* by Joan Baxter: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/36673848-the-mill>