

Professional Resources

Rob Baxter

Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-up Call

by Arthur Manuel and Grand Chief Ronald M. Derrickson

Between the Lines, 2015

ISBN 978-1-17711-317-66

An essential acquisition for schools where students and staff seek greater understanding about the Native Canadian struggle for human rights and social justice (in spite of a lack of Provincial and Federal governmental leadership).

Both an autobiography of Native Canadian Arthur Manuel and a history of Native injustice, *Unsettling Canada* is a revealing and disturbing account of Manuel's struggle to establish and protect Native human rights across the country. This is a story about race, racism, property rights, poverty, and exploitation by our governments and corporations, leaving the reader to wonder just who benefits from the exploitation of our natural resources.

As Manuel points out, "according to Canadian government estimates, more than \$650 billion (yes, billion) in resource extraction investment is expected to pour into Canada over the next twenty years. The great majority of that investment will be targeted on our lands." Manuel views this type of development as an "assault" on Native lands which Aboriginal communities, as environmental custodians, have maintained for thousands of years.

Three Supreme Court decisions have granted Native Canadians more rights than in the past. The first was the *Calder* decision in 1973, when half the Supreme Court judges recognized

that Aboriginal title "was a property right of Indigenous peoples that could continue, despite the assertion of sovereignty by the Crown." The second, the *Delgamuukw* decision in 1997, made the Crown's constitutional "Interest" subordinate to Aboriginal "Interest" provided that the latter had not been purchased by the Crown in a treaty. This paved the way for the *Tsilhqot'in* decision in 2014 when Aboriginal title was recognized over almost 2,000 sq. km. of *Tsilhqot'in* territory. "This case is the first in Canada where Indigenous peoples have repossessed their lost — or more accurately, stolen — inheritance."

As a result of the Oka Crisis in 1990, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was established "to study the evolution of the relationship

between Aboriginal peoples, the government of Canada and Canadian society as a whole." First among its recommendations was that the doctrine of "discovery" be rejected as racist, since it gave one race the right to dominate and acquire the lands of another. "The discovery of North America" is still, unfortunately, a phrase often used in school history classes today. It also recommended that Aboriginal peoples have the inherent right of self-government. However, the Commission was dissolved when the government changed political parties.

Manuel has taken his struggle a few times beyond the borders of Canada to international bodies such as the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity conference in The Hague in 2002, the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the UN Human Rights Committee. When held up to international scrutiny of this kind, Canada is forced to respond to claims of injustice and discrimination.

Providing Native Canadians with more rights and greater autonomy would benefit all Canadians, since the Department of Indian Affairs could be dismantled, thus saving the country billions of dollars a year in operating costs. New Indigenous governments would be set up to encourage sustainable Indigenous economies to generate greater wealth and health benefits for Native communities everywhere.

