Ray, Chapter 1: THE LAND AS HISTORY BOOK

A long time ago all the world was water. Crow saw that Sea Lion owned the only island in the world. The rest was water. Sea Lion is the only one with land. The whole place was ocean. Crow is resting on a piece of log. He's tired. He sees Sea Lion with that little island just for himself. He wants land too. So he stole that Sea Lion's kid. "Give me back that kid," said Sea Lion. "Give me some beach, some sand," says Crow. So Sea Lion gave him sand. You know how sand in water floats? Crow threw that sand around the ocean. "Be world!" he tells it. And it became the world. —Origin myth told by Angela Sidney, of Tagish and Tlingit ancestry.

Many of Canada's Indigenous people define themselves in terms of the homelands that sustained their ancestors. These are the places where their spiritual roots lie. Drawing from their natural surroundings, Native groups have developed powerful metaphors, symbols, and narrative traditions to express their religious and philosophical views. As the Tlingit-Tagish say, these narratives are true stories about how the land came to be. Some groups named the features of the landscape to recall important events in their individual and collective lives. In effect, the land was their history book.

CANADA'S FIRST EXPLORERS AND SETTLERS

According to many of the creation narratives, the ancestors of Canada's Native people appeared in the country at a time when the land was covered in water, and animals were the only living creatures. Painstakingly collected archaeological evidence in fact suggests that the first inhabitants emigrated from Eurasia by crossing the Bering Land Bridge connecting Siberia and Alaska sometime between forty thousand and twelve thousand years ago, a time when much of the land was blanketed in massive continental glaciers and vast meltwater lakes. The Ice Age migrants moved steadily southward, passing through an ice-free corridor lying between the massive northeastern Laurentide Ice Sheet, which buried two-thirds of the country, and the cordilleran glaciers that covered most of the coast ranges and large sections of the Rocky Mountains.

Today, the fluted stone points of their lances provide the most striking evidence for the presence of the hardy Ice Age hunters. Archaeologists have unearthed such artifacts in the prairies, in southern Ontario, and in the Maritimes. Unfortunately, we do not know much about these so-called fluted-point people who lived ten to twelve thousand years ago because few traces of them survive. The organic remains that have been scientifically recovered from their ancient camping and hunting sites tell us that these folk, the country's original explorers and pioneers, were large-game hunters of mammoth, mastodon, bison, and caribou. Probably they lived in small hunting groups. Their lance points were made from carefully selected quartz, quartzite, and chert, a dark mineral resembling flint. The way they highlighted any banding or other natural patterns in the rock is a testament both to their skills as lithic toolmakers and to their aesthetic sense.

Between ten thousand and five thousand years ago, the climate moderated, causing the continental and cordilleran glaciers to melt away. It was not until 1500 B.C. that the environment became very similar to that of present-day Canada. While these changes were taking place, the forebears of Canada's First Nations adjusted to their altered surroundings and, according to oral

tradition and archaeological evidence, moved into lands formerly blanketed by ice or covered by glacial lakes.
Early inhabitants also responded to external cultural influences. Among the more revolutionary of the imported technologies were pottery making, the use of the bow and arrow, and horticulture. Shortly after 1000 B.C., for instance, groups living in the forested country between the middle Churchill River, in what is now Manitoba, and the St Maurice River, of present-day Quebec, learned to make pottery from groups living farther south. At approximately the same time, the local hunters began using bows and arrows, although it is unclear where this technological advance originated. The proto-Iroquoian-speaking people living in the lower Great Lakes area made one of the most revolutionary changes fifteen hundred years later when they took up corn cultivation. Corn, one of the many Native North American gifts to human civilization, became domesticated in Mexico about five thousand years ago, and the practice of cultivating it and other crops slowly spread northward from this region. Well before the arrival of Europeans, the Iroquoians were skilled horticulturists.
Far to the north, meanwhile, two comparatively late waves of migration from Eurasia led to the first peopling of the central and eastern Arctic. Before 4000 B.C., lingering ice sheets had barred settlement in this area. The initial occupation was about 2000 B.C. when paleo-Eskimo people from Alaska began pushing eastward. Their descendants reached coastal Newfoundland some fifteen hundred years later, but for unknown reasons they abandoned the island before A.D. 900. By this time another group, whom archaeologists call the “Thule people,” were already migrating eastward from Alaska, displacing their predecessors along the way. On the eve of contact, their descendants, the Inuit, had reached eastern Labrador near the Strait of Belle Isle.

By then Canada’s Native people spoke numerous languages and countless dialects that derived from eleven major language families. Some of these languages, most notably Algonquian, Athapaskan, and Inuktituk, were spoken over immense areas. Others, particularly those of the Pacific slope, were spoken by large numbers of people who lived in densely populated smaller territories. Linguistic divisions did not create insurmountable communication barriers: European accounts of early contact relate that most of the groups living near these boundaries had members who were bilingual as a consequence of centuries-old trading, warring, and diplomatic traditions. This ten-to-twelve-thousand-year history of settlement and cultural development in Native Canada meant that Europeans encountered very diverse and well-rooted peoples when they arrived on the scene.

IROQUOIAN FARMERS
Although all Native groups engaged in food collecting and hunting, and most of them also fished, these activities varied in importance from region to region according to cultural traditions, local environmental circumstances, and seasonal cycles. The ancestors of the Iroquoian-speakers of the eastern Great Lakes– St Lawrence valley developed a diverse economy featuring hunting, fishing, horticulture, and the collection of berries and a variety of other wild-plant foods. By the end of the fifteenth century, their descendants—the Stadaconans, Hochelagans, Huron, Petun, and Neutral—obtained most of their food from their fields, which were managed by the women. Using fire-hardened dibble sticks, hoes made of wood and deer hipbones, and brush rakes, they planted corn, beans, squash, sunflowers, and tobacco. The

men assisted, mostly at the beginning of the fieldrotation cycle, by clearing the fields with their stone axes. Because it was too troublesome to fell large trees with these tools, the men killed them by stripping away the bark around their bases. They also chopped down the underbrush, piled it on the field, and burned it. The ashes provided much-needed potash fertilizer.

Once a field was cleared, the women could cultivate it for about a decade before declining nutrient levels in the soil forced them to prepare new plots. After sowing the seeds they had gleaned from the previous year's harvest, the women weeded during the growing season and, helped by their children, kept a watchful eye on the fields to ward off birds and other pests. At harvest time, everyone helped. This slash-and-burn agriculture may seem primitive by modern standards, or even by those of fifteenth-century Europe, but it was highly productive nonetheless. In most years the women produced substantial surpluses, which they dried and stored in their houses or in storage pits. The produce of their labour provided from 50 to 75 per cent of the caloric intake of their families.

If the cultivated fields were largely the domain of women, the forests, lakes, and rivers were to a great extent the domain of men. Among the Huron, for instance, the men ventured to Lake Couchiching at the northern end of Lake Simcoe for sturgeon in the spring. In the early autumn and late winter, they mounted hunting expeditions to the south of their homeland for white-tailed deer, which they drove into brush enclosures. Huron hunting parties were thus able to kill large numbers of herd animals with ease. Late autumn was another fishing season, when whole families travelled to spawning sites on Georgian Bay, where they caught and processed whitefish and lake trout.

Other Iroquoian groups developed similar seasonal cycles. The Stadaconans, for example, fished and hunted for part of the year in the Gulf of St Lawrence. After planting their fields in the spring, entire villages often set out on lengthy canoe voyages as far away as the Gaspé to hunt marine mammals and catch mackerel and eel. They returned home in time to harvest their fields.

SUBARCTIC NOMADS

Many Canadians who live along the southern border of the country think of the Subarctic boreal forest as a harsh and grudging land. Native residents have a different view. Job Bearskin of Chisasibi (Fort George), Quebec, recently said, "This whole place is like a garden, because many things grow here, and the Indians are one of the things that grow here." He added, "The animals were given to the Indians so they could feed their children and old people, and everyone has always shared the food from this garden."

Various groups of Algonquian-speakers occupied the central and eastern portions of the vast evergreen forest that stretches from interior Labrador into the Yukon. These people and their northwestern neighbours, the Athapaskan-speakers, were skilful nomadic hunters, fishers, and gatherers. Moose and woodland caribou were the most prized large-game animals living in the boreal forest. Small hunting parties stalked these creatures and killed them at close range with bows and arrows and lances. A moose provided up to 500 pounds of dressed meat, a caribou 100 to 150 pounds. Their hides were used to make clothing, footwear, and summer-lodge covers.

Herds of barren-ground caribou roamed along the forest-tundra boundary. During the winter, they browsed in the sheltering woods. In the summer, they moved out on the open tundra,

migrating eastward from the Lower Nelson River region as far as Akimiski Island in James Bay to calve. The nations who depended on these animals developed a number of ingenious hunting techniques that took advantage of the predictability of herd movements. The Dene worked in large parties to build brush enclosures, called surrounds or pounds, in places where herds normally wintered. The hunters set snares inside the pounds to catch the caribou they drove in. The Dene and the Swampy Cree also built intricate barricades across the trails regularly used by caribou, placing snares in the gaps left in these “deer hedges.” During the open-water season, Dene hunting parties herded caribou into rivers and lakes, where fellow hunters speared them with ease from canoes.

The Algonquian and Athapaskan groups employed various snares and deadfall traps to kill fur-bearing animals. Beavers, muskrats, and hares were their most common prey. The beaver coat, which Native people wore with the hair against their bodies for warmth, was an essential article of winter clothing, as were hare blankets and coats. The meat of small animals, especially beavers, was a crucial food source as well. An adult beaver could provide a hunter and his family with up to forty pounds of meat.

At the end of winter, several hunting groups from adjacent territories would camp together at a fresh-water fishery for several weeks or more. They used hooks and lines,spears, dip nets, and fences(weirs), depending on the site and species sought. For many groups, freshly caught fish was the mainstay of their diet between late spring and early autumn. Women usually preserved a small surplus to carry their families into the winter. Ojibwa women, for example, dried and pounded sturgeon and mixed it with fish oil. This concentrated, protein-rich food had a storage life of several months, provided that the weather remained reasonably cool. Subarctic women also made a glue from the swim bladders of sturgeon, which they used to fix the colours in the paint that decorated everything from their bodies to their dwellings.

During the spring and autumn, when the Subarctic teemed with millions of waterfowl, the hunters took prodigious numbers of ducks and geese. Geese were a particularly treasured food for the Swampy and Eastmain Cree who lived along the shores of Hudson Bay and James Bay. In the fall, hunters preserved large numbers of birds simply by letting them freeze in the cold air, but protracted winter thaws sometimes spoiled their larders.

The people worked in teams. Men did most of the large-game hunting, made the stone tools and hunting weapons, fashioned snowshoe frames, and built canoes and sleds. Men, women, and children trapped fur-bearing animals. Women did most of the fishing; they collected various plant foods and fibres; gathered firewood and supplies for canoe building and repairing; processed and cooked the food; scraped and tanned hides and pelts; made the clothing and household equipment; and strung the snowshoes.

During the winter, women freighted most of the gear when the hunting parties trudged from camp to camp by snowshoe and sled. Pack and sled dogs often helped, but most families could not afford to feed many of these voracious creatures. Although some Dene groups fed their animals caribou meat, fish—particularly whitefish—was the ideal dog food, and often the productivity of the winter fishery determined the number of animals a group could sustain. In most areas, each family could support only one two-dog team. Obviously, summer movement by canoe was much less taxing for women. A typical canoe could hold a family with one or two children and several hundred pounds of cargo.

ATLANTIC MARITIME HUNTERS AND GATHERERS

In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the stumpy boreal forest yields to mixed evergreen and deciduous forests. Just before the first Europeans arrived, the Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, and Maliseet occupied this region. Their economies were similar to those of the Subarctic people during the winter when they stalked large game and trapped fur-bearing animals inland, deep in the woods. At other times, the Atlantic groups lived very differently, turning to the sea for food. On the beaches, they collected a variety of shellfish, and from their canoes they caught fish, especially mackerel and cod. They also hunted seal and other marine mammals.

Archaeological remains suggest that for several thousand years the ancestors of this region's First Nations spent the entire year on the Atlantic Coast. Apparently moving inland during the winter was a very late pre-contact development; it is possible it may even have been a response to trade with European fishermen and whalers who sought furs.

ARCTIC MARINE HUNTERS

The coastline and offshore islands between the Strait of Belle Isle and the Alaskan border are the homeland of the Inuit—the greatest marine hunters of North America. Among their treacherous quarry were ringed and bearded seals, walrus, narwhals, beluga whales, and polar bears. For many, seal was the basic raw material of life. Some Inuit groups, particularly those of the Ungava district and the central Arctic, also relied heavily on barren-ground caribou. Like their woodland neighbours, the Inuit hunted various fur-bearing animals. They prized arctic hares and arctic foxes, but wolves and wolverines were significant, too. Groups living in the Mackenzie River delta took beavers and muskrats, which were absent in most other areas of the Arctic. All Inuit caught large quantities of fish; they particularly liked arctic char and lake trout.

To take this array of fish, large game, and marine mammals, the Inuit developed a remarkable sensitivity to even the subtlest variations in the land, sea, and ice landscape and used very effective hunting and transport technologies. Their seasonal migratory rounds took them from the offshore ice shelves in winter to the inland tundra in summer. For their pursuit of seals, walrus, and whales, Inuit men made toggling harpoons, driftwood-handled harpoons with detachable bone points attached to a line, and throwing boards (atlatals), which were used to propel spears. Like Native groups elsewhere, they fashioned spears, bows, and arrows. Because they lived beyond the tree line, the Inuit often made their bows from bone, and they invented a double-curved sinew-backed design to obtain more thrust. Their fishing gear included many of the same kinds of equipment found elsewhere, such as barbless bone fishing hooks, jigs, nets, and spears. They also built willow-brush and stone weirs in the rivers to trap the migratory arctic cha.

The wood-framed and skin-covered kayak is probably one of the best-known objects of traditional Inuit life. It was used by hunters to stalk and kill their prey along the edges of ice floes and to spear caribou swimming across lakes and rivers. Inuit also constructed the less familiar umiak. This flat-bottomed boat, with a puncture-resistant seal-, beluga-, or walrus-hide cover, could carry ten people and several tons of cargo. During July and August, hunters chased a variety of dangerous mammals, including whales and polar bears, from these boats. When bands headed upriver in the autumn to catch char and hunt caribou, they hauled their belongings in their umiaks.

Like their Subarctic neighbours, the Inuit used dog sleds made from driftwood, bone, or antler. They also used their dogs as pack animals; a fully loaded pack dog could carry thirty to forty pounds. Again, shortages of dog food often placed severe constraints on the number of animals a group could support.

PEOPLE OF THE BUFFALO

The buffalo people of the prairies lived in what a European fur trader described as a vast "sea of grass and scattered islands of woods," which teemed with bison. Bison, or buffalo as they are usually called, North America's largest terrestrial animal, had been the main focus of the Plains people's economies since the great Ice Age. The adult male buffalo weighs up to two thousand pounds and could provide the hunter with as much as a thousand pounds of dressed meat. A female yielded much less, about four hundred pounds, but her meat's greater tenderness was preferred. Buffalo tongues and bosses (the fatty humps located between the shoulders) were considered delicacies. The Plains people also depended on buffalo for an array of essential raw materials. Their heavy winter coats served as warm robes for bedding and outer wear. The hides were ideal for making lodge coverings, parflèches (leather containers), clothing, babiche (leather cording), and war shields. Men worked bison bone into a variety of tools, and the women used the stomach as a cooking and storage container. In short, this one majestic animal provided the foundation for their way of life.

Buffalo hunts were all-consuming enterprises akin to military campaigns. When the summer rutting season approached, the buffalo gathered into enormous herds numbering in the tens of thousands; as the autumn winds grew chilly, they scattered into smaller herds and headed for the shelter of the aspen parklands to face the winter. Herd movements were highly predictable, and hunters devised strategies to take advantage of this. During the winter, they pitched camp in sheltered locations near places the buffalo frequented. Under the direction of the "poundmaker," or winter village chief, they constructed a circular brush enclosure with a fenced chute leading to the nearby prairie. When a herd approached, skilled hunters went out to meet it, disguised as buffalo or wolves. They lured the unsuspecting buffalo into the chute where their kinfolk, hidden behind the fence, helped drive the animals into the pound by spooking them. Once the buffalo were inside, men, women, and even children slaughtered them with lances and bows and arrows. The pounds, if well maintained, lasted for many years.

Before Spaniards introduced horses to North America, the cliff drive was the most productive summer buffalo-hunting technique. When everything worked according to plan, a carefully set fire, or men and women drovers working in a Vshaped formation, terrorized thousands of buffalo and sent them thundering over precipices to their deaths. The Plains people frequently built an enclosure at the base of the cliff to make it easier to dispatch any animals that did not die in the fall. Pre-contact "buffalo-jump" sites still dot the prairie landscape and testify to the effectiveness of this technique. Archaeologists have learned that Native people used some of these kill sites repeatedly over thousands of years. Excavations have exposed bone layers up to fifteen feet deep. Today, examples of these impressive ancient hunting locations may be visited at Old Woman Buffalo Jump and the world heritage sites of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump in Alberta and Wanuskewin, Saskatchewan.

The "surround" was an impromptu hunting strategy. A group of hunters on foot approached and surrounded part of a herd. The brave hunters then drew themselves into an ever-smaller circle,

killing as many animals as possible until the herd broke through and ran away. Clearly this practice demanded nerves of steel and required considerable experience.

As in other regions, after the hunt was over the women did most of the butchering and processed the hides and robes. They also made one of the most famous Aboriginal foods—pemmican. This highly nutritious product was a mixture of dried and pulverized buffalo meat and melted fat flavoured with berries— usually saskatoon berries. The women poured the pemmican mixture into parflèches to congeal. Each container held about ninety pounds, and its contents had an extremely long shelf life. Pemmican was the ideal travelling food because a single parflèche held the equivalent of nine hundred pounds of fresh meat, or that of two adult female buffalo. Every summer and autumn, Plains groups accumulated a stock of pemmican for their winter use and for trade.

Although these people were probably more focused on a single species of animal than any other Aboriginal hunters, they did pursue other prey. Wapiti (elk), which weighed up to eleven hundred pounds and lived in the bordering woods, was an important back-up food when the buffalo herds failed to leave the open grasslands, as happened during exceptionally mild winters. The Plains groups also took moose in the woods. Some of the Plains Cree and Ojibwa, who were recent immigrants from the woodlands, still relished moose meat. In addition, Plains hunters preyed on the packs of wolves that stalked the buffalo herds, and pursued a variety of other fur-bearing animals—notably beavers and muskrats—in the aspen woods bordering the rivers and countless lakes that dot the prairie landscape. During the spring and autumn, migrating waterfowl provided another alternative food source.

For some Plains groups, fishing was a very important food source in the spring and fall. The Assiniboine and Cree built weirs on the Assiniboine and Red rivers in the spring to catch sturgeon. In marked contrast, the Siksika people refused to eat fish.

FISHERS OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE

The Pacific-slope people were the premier fishers of Native Canada. They enjoyed eating and trading fish, particularly salmon. Of the five species of this fish, one or more made spawning runs through the territory of every nation living west of the Continental Divide. Most salmon species are found in abundance along the lower sections of the rivers near the coast, but only the crimson-fleshed sockeye swim great distances inland up the mighty Fraser and Skeena rivers and their tributaries. Coastal people, then, could almost always harvest salmon—and other seafood—but groups living far inland were at the mercy of the sockeye runs. Salmon have marked cyclical population fluctuations; the Fraser River sockeye, for example, has a fouryear cycle. At the height of the cycle, the rivers teem with the fish, but at its low ebb the inland groups often could not catch enough for their needs. In narrow canyons, landslides added to the uncertainty of the upriver fishery by destroying fishing stations and spawning beds. For these reasons, inland groups relied more heavily on hunting.

The genius of the West Coast Native economies was the development of a sophisticated salmon-fishing technology; it included spear fishing, trolling with hook and line, and the use of an impressive array of stationary nets, fish weirs, and various traps, which were custom-made for each fishing site and often formed multi-purpose fishing facilities. Along and near the coast, and inland in narrow or shallow rivers and creeks, they relied heavily on hooks and lines, nets, stone and basket traps, and weirs; in the narrower canyons and at waterfalls, they used

longhandled gaff hooks, dip nets, spears, and large basket-trap complexes. Even coastal groups took most of their salmon in rivers and creeks. Although fishing in the raging waters of narrow canyons was very risky, it was generally much less hazardous than fishing on the sea. A few weeks of concerted effort usually enabled coastal groups to catch enough fish to satisfy most of their annual consumption and trade requirements. The processing and storage techniques they had developed to stockpile their harvests made this possible. Women, working in groups, filleted the salmon (mostly caught by the men), smoked or dried the fillets, then stored them in various containers and above-ground caches. They also processed the oil and made fish eggs into stew or dried cakes for local consumption and trade.
Eulachon, which runs in the spring, was another important fish to West Coast people. The Nass River became the unrivalled centre of this fishery. Native people prized the eulachon for its rich oil. Because the dried-salmon diet of the winter and spring was very low in fat, oil provided a much-needed dietary supplement. The Nisga'a developed what amounted to a processing industry for eulachon oil. They packaged the oil so that it could be carried long distances inland over an intricate network of trading routes, which came to be known as the "grease trails."

Halibut, shellfish, herring and salmon roe, sea-bird eggs, seaweed, and marine mammals—seals, sea otters, and whales—also figured prominently in the coastal economy. To harvest these and other resources of the ocean, groups like the Tsimshian, Haida, and Nuu chah nulth built impressive sea-going dugout canoes with decorated cedar-plank prows. Working with bone, stone, and hardwood axes, chisels, and wedges, the men built thirty-five- to seventy-five-foot-long canoes that could carry crews of up to fifty paddlers over great distances. They also custombuilt smaller shallow-draft canoes for river travel. The Haida were particularly famous for their canoe construction skills. Coastal groups did some hunting, but the dense rain forests of their lands offered poor prospects. Upriver people were better situated for this activity, and accordingly, they devoted more time to it. The Gitxsan hunted bears and mountain goats, which they prized for wool and horns. They also trapped a variety of fur-bearing animals, particularly groundhogs. Their neighbours, the Wet'suwet'en and Babine, placed a premium on beavers, which they treasured as ceremonial food.
As in all other regions of Native Canada, women collected and processed an assortment of berries and other plants for food and fibre. Huckleberry cakes were a favourite food and an important article of commerce. Women made them by crushing the berries in a cedar box and boiling them over red-hot rocks. They spread the cooked huckleberries on a bed of skunk-cabbage leaves arranged over a drying rack. Using a low-burning fire located under the rack, the women dried the berry "cakes," rolled them into tubes, and hung them in a warm place to finish drying. Afterwards, they flattened and chopped the tubes and packed them into cedar boxes for storage or trade.
Coastal women also collected a variety of bark (especially cedar bark), spruce root, nettle, and sea grasses for making fishnets, baskets, and numerous other items. They were the only weavers in Native Canada. The Chilkat blanket, a patterned blanket that combined plant fibres and mountain-goat wool, was the finest example of their work. They also made waterproof basket hats, outer wear, and basket traps for fishing. As in other regions, the women tailored warm winter clothing from hides and fur pelts. The luxurious sea-otter cloak was the most valuable of these garments, worn only by people of high social rank.

In addition to building impressive dugout canoes, West Coast men constructed the largest houses in Native Canada. These dwellings, which were some times highly decorated, featured massive cedar supports covered by cedar planks. The planks were often detachable because most families maintained several fishing, hunting, and berrying camps as well as a principal winter residence. When they moved from one settlement to another, they often transported the planks to place over the permanent ridge poles left in each camp. The carved bentwood cedar box was the most important piece of household furniture made by the men. The sides were fashioned from a single cedar board, which was steamed, bent into a rectangular shape, and joined at one corner. These boxes served as chairs and as storage for possessions. Other versions, often with dividers inside, were used as food-storage and shipping containers.

THE POPULATION QUESTION

Today there is no scholarly consensus on how many people the regional economies supported in Native Canada, or elsewhere in the Americas, for that matter, before diseases introduced by Europeans swept the land with devastating effect—often preceding the newcomers' arrival in a particular locale. Early in this century, most anthropologists, including Diamond Jenness, who wrote the 1932 classic, The Indians of Canada, concluded that pre-contact population-growth rates must have been very low in most areas because Aboriginal groups lived a precarious migratory existence, with accidents, frequent famines, and conflicts within and between nations causing high mortality and low fertility rates. Jenness speculated that pre-contact infant mortality rates had always been high "partly through ignorance of some of the most elementary principles in child welfare." These assumptions were plainly wrong, having been made at a time when the surviving Native cultures led a marginalized existence, which was itself largely responsible for the living conditions Jenness described. Also, it was a time when cultural-evolution models were popular among anthropologists. These schemes placed the hunters and gatherers of the world on the low end of the cultural-evolutionary scale and postulated that the people existed on the edge of starvation.

We now know that fishers, hunters, and gatherers in general, and many Native Canadian societies in particular, obtained stable supplies of food with far less effort and much more ingenuity than was previously supposed. In fact, some anthropologists suggest that these were the original affluent societies because people spent remarkably little time working to meet basic requirements. This new perspective does not deny that starvation occurred but suggests that famines were probably no more frequent among hunters, fishers, and gatherers than among farmers. There is no reason to infer that the economic orientation of Indigenous societies severely limited population growth or that warfare caused a chronic drain on population numbers.

More recently, it has become clear that the low population densities of many of the Aboriginal hunters and gatherers in Canada, and elsewhere around the world at the beginning of this century, were the result of repeated epidemics and protracted neglect at the hands of colonial societies. Earlier historical demographic projections based on these groups are now considered suspect by many scholars. Today, the tendency is to revise pre-contact population estimates for the whole of the Americas upwards from those made at the turn of the twentieth century. Scholars are deeply divided among themselves, however, about the extent of the revisions that ought to be made. The so-called high counters suggest an increase of twelve-fold or more is in

order, which would indicate a Canadian pre-contact population of well over one million people. Other scholars reject these new estimates. In spite of the debate, many scholars do agree that on the eve of contact Canada's Native people were concentrated, in order of density, in the Pacific slope (150,000–200,000), the eastern Great Lakes and St Lawrence valley (100,000–150,000), and the grassland-parkland areas of the Western Interior (50,000– 100,000). Perhaps fewer than 100,000 lived elsewhere. This suggests that, at most, slightly more than 500,000 people occupied the land when Europeans arrived at the end of the fifteenth century to transform their lives.