



WOMEN'S 2
HISTORY 0
MONTH 0
OCTOBER 6



Aboriginal Women

The Journey Forward



Status of Women
Canada

Condition féminine
Canada

Canada



FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT WOMEN

*are dynamic members of this country's fastest-growing demographic, comprising just over half of the 1.3 million Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Many of their stories, past and present, are inspiring. To commemorate Aboriginal women's place in Canada's history, the theme for Women's History Month 2006 is **Aboriginal Women: The Journey Forward.***

October is Women's History Month (WHM) in Canada, a time to recognize the achievements of women from all walks of life as a vital part of our Canadian heritage.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis women have made and continue to make outstanding contributions to the fabric of this country. But most of their achievements have gone unnoticed, omitted from many history books. In fact, their efforts are all the more impressive given the obstacles they face due to discrimination, poverty and violence—harsh realities that began with colonization.

The arrival of Europeans to North America forever changed the lives of Aboriginal peoples. In all pre-contact Aboriginal societies, women had different social roles from men but were equally respected and even revered. With the Europeans came entrenched gender-based biases that deeply and negatively affected Aboriginal women and their roles in their communities.

Gender-based discrimination toward First Nations women was formalized in 1868, when legislation was enacted decreeing that Indian status could only be passed through the male line. As a result, when a First Nations woman married a non-Indian man, she and her children lost their Indian status and their entitlement to many benefits.



This gender-based discrimination was used as a technique of assimilation until 1985, when changes to the *Indian Act*, known as the Bill C-31 amendment, were finally implemented—the result of a challenge launched in 1971 by Jeannette Corbiere Lavell, an Ojibway activist. The success of that challenge permitted reinstatement of the First Nations women and children who had lost their status.

Like Ms. Lavell, many dedicated First Nations, Inuit and Métis women have worked hard—and continue to do so—to bring about positive social change across Canada and around the world. The process is slow and many challenges remain, but their efforts are creating better lives and greater opportunities for women, their families and their communities.

Through the oral tradition, First Nations, Inuit and Métis knowledge, culture and history are shared and passed on to succeeding generations. Let's take a brief look at the inspiring stories of a handful of women of achievement:

- **Victoria Belcourt Callihoo** (1861–1966) chronicled her life on the Prairies, from her early years as a young Métis woman, witness to the first treaties in western Canada, the decimation of the buffalo herds and the establishment of Alberta as a province.
- **Olive Dickason** (born 1920) is a Métis writer and oral historian of Aboriginal life. She is a Member of the Order of Canada and a recipient of the First Nations Lifetime Achievement Award.
- **Freda Diesing** (1925–2002) was a Haida artist and master carver, one of the first Aboriginal women to take up the tradition of carving on the Northwest Coast.
- **Matinen (Rich) Katshinak** (born 1927) is an Innu hunter and granddaughter of one of the last northern shamans. She shares her knowledge with young people to ensure the traditions are not lost. “My mother was one of the great hunters. Me too, I can hunt as well as a man.”
- **Jean Cuthand Goodwill** (1928–1997), a member of the Cree First Nation, championed public health services for Aboriginal people and helped to establish the Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada.



- **Rita Joe** (born 1932) is a Mi'kmaq poet and songwriter, a Member of the Queen's Privy Council and the Order of Canada and a recipient of an Aboriginal Achievement Award.
- **Bertha Allen** (born 1932) is a member of the Gwich'in First Nation, a lifelong advocate for Aboriginal and Inuit women's political rights, and a recipient of the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Persons Case.
- **Marion Ironquill Meadmore** (born 1936), from the Peepeekisis Reserve in Saskatchewan, was called to the Manitoba Bar in 1977, becoming Canada's first Aboriginal woman lawyer.
- **Maria Campbell** (born 1940) is a groundbreaking Métis author, playwright and filmmaker. The heartwrenching 1973 classic, *Halfbreed*, illuminated the Métis experience for readers of all ages and established her reputation worldwide.
- **Nellie J. Cournoyea** (born 1940), an Inupiak woman, was elected to the Northwest Territories Legislature in 1979, becoming the first Aboriginal woman government leader.
- **Ethel Blondin-Andrew** (born 1951) is a treaty Dene and the first Aboriginal woman to serve as a Member of Parliament and member of the federal Cabinet.
- **Sheila Watt-Cloutier** (born 1953) is an Inuk, the first female President of the Inuit Circumpolar Conference and an international activist on climate change.
- **Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond** (born 1963) is a member of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation and a Harvard graduate. In 1998, she became the first treaty Indian and the first Aboriginal woman to be appointed to the Saskatchewan Provincial Court.
- **Susan Aglukark** (born 1967) is an Inuk singer-songwriter who blends English and Inuktitut. A winner of three Juno Awards and the first-ever Aboriginal Achievement Award, she is a mentor to Inuit youth and an Officer of the Order of Canada.

These are but a few of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis women of foresight, courage and compassion whose stories are igniting our collective imagination.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION,
CHECK OUT THE LINKS BELOW OR VISIT

www.whm.gc.ca

And don't forget to check our cross-country
Calendar of Events for a WHM 2006 event near you



Aboriginal Canada Portal
www.aboriginalcanada.gc.ca

Celebrating Women's Achievements
www.collectionscanada.ca/women

Department of Foreign Affairs and International
Trade—Aboriginal Planet—Indigenous Women
[www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/aboriginalplanet/756/
resource/global/indigenous_women-en.asp#UN_](http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/aboriginalplanet/756/0010589-503-XIE.pdf)

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
www.ainc-inac.gc.ca

Statistics Canada—Women in Canada
a Gender-based Statistical Report
[www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-503-
0010589-503-XIE.pdf](http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/89-503-0010589-503-XIE.pdf)

Status of Women Canada
www.swc-cfc.gc.ca

United Nations—Division for
the Advancement of Women
www.un.org/womenwatch/daw