

June 14, 2018

Celebrating Indigenous Values and Mother Earth on National Indigenous Peoples Day, and Each and Every Day

The longest day of the year falls on June 21, when the life-giving sun shines longest in the northern hemisphere. Historically, it is revered for the renewal of the cycles of life and the seasons. The Canadian Government has also recognized this day “as National Indigenous Peoples Day “to celebrate the unique heritage, diverse cultures, and outstanding achievements of Canada’s Indigenous Peoples.”

On this land every day matters

It does not require a blessing from the Canadian government to validate millennia of Indigenous existence. Successive colonial and settler governments aimed to extinguish Indigenous culture and language in their thirst for mineral wealth and natural resources. This happened with little regard for the land, water, people, and creatures that lived here. This tragedy cannot be resolved merely through a “day of celebration”.

It can begin by how we reconcile our behaviour and live every day on this land. Let us recognize Indigenous heroes, whether it be the stories of Sitting Bull, the grandmothers at OKA, the water-keepers, the Idle No More movement and generations of struggle. There is a lot for us to absorb in order to make things right.

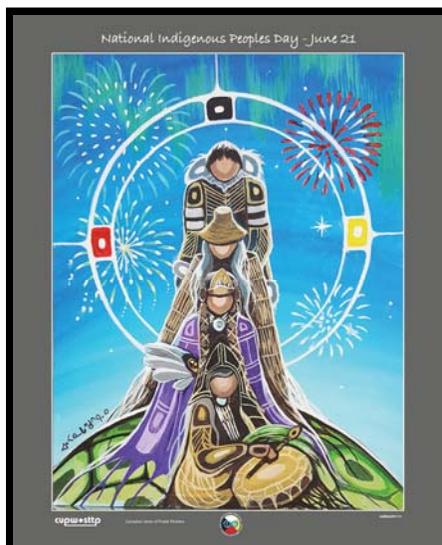
In 1995, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recommended the designation of a National First Peoples Day. Well-intentioned gestures, however, do not make for reconciliation. We have the opportunity to apply thousands of years knowledge and values to create a nurturing and caring society. The traditional system of Indigenous values did not permit profiteers to exploit the earth and did not treat workers as disposable objects. It did not treat life on the planet as a competition between winners and losers.

“We never lost our identities, we kept our tradition”

This year CUPW reproduced the moving work of Shelly Fletcher, Morningstar Woman, descended from the Missanabie Cree First Nation. She is a stone carver, painter and visual artist. Her people long ago settled and lived in a vast expanse between what are called “Hudson’s Bay” and the “Great Lakes” today.

This image reminds us that First Nations in Canada have overcome and continue to confront the challenges brought about by historical traumas such as the residential school system, and the Sixties Scoop, where

children were kidnapped and forced into foster care and residential schools. The focus is on rich and varied traditions. “The Eastern tribes with their peaked cap and sweet grass, the young Cree/Ojibway fancy shawl dancer, the West coast figure in traditional cedar strip robes, and the Inuit man in traditional parka, are all proclaiming and maintaining their traditions across Canada to this day. We are survivors on this land for centuries and our roots on Turtle Island are deep. Our legacies are ones of resilience. We are proud nations who rely upon our traditional ways as we move into the future. What has kept us from dissolution are our traditions...; our languages, our dances, our drums and our ceremonies. We never lost our identities, we kept our traditions,” said Morningstar Woman.



In these times of constant growth, overwork and a punishing workplace where our stresses often come home with us, we have the option to rise in solidarity with Indigenous struggles for Mother Earth and our survival on this planet. We cannot continue to pollute our water and destroy our land and be driven like pack mules. We have the option of joining the front line to fight for a better future for respect and dignity, and life for our children and grandchildren.

That-future can be one of hope and unity. The struggle for dignity and respect exists anywhere. It existed all

those years ago when a 12-year-old boy, Chanie Wenjack, determined get back to his family, escaped his abusive residential school prison. He died of exposure, alone, on his long walk home.

In some ways Chanie Wenjack is still walking. Could he have imagined that his quiet and lonely sacrifice would provide such strength and awareness to others today? His was also a journey of transcendence that remains before all of us to complete. Please participate in June 21 activities in your area and support Indigenous struggles everyday in your community.

All my relations, in solidarity,

Dave Bleakney
2nd National Vice-President

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