

Cultural values held by our aboriginal peoples continue to emphasize the importance of living in harmony with nature, the benefits of close community life, and the fundamental meanings of inter-dependence, understanding and trust. The Committee feels that Canadians of every origin have much to learn from these cultural values, particularly as they relate to sustaining relationships between people, their traditions and natural environment.

As the concept of native self-government is developed, the fostering of cultural expression must be a priority in the process. Aboriginal peoples have the right to shape their own identity, to convey it into the larger vision of Canada as a whole, to use and develop their creative talents, to know themselves, to share their values with all Canadians and to take pride in their contribution to this great country.

*When young native people receive awards, they have tremendous pride. The parents have pride. The community has pride. ...It [the arts] does a tremendous amount of good for self-esteem, for pride, for promoting identity in a peaceful, positive manner, for creating economic viability for its peoples. Artistic development is one of the few things you can do, and still live in your community. — John Kim Bell, National Director, Canadian Native Arts Foundation (Issue 15:37).*

Although the precise meaning and application of inherent self-government in Canada remains to be defined at this point in our history, it is essential that governments and leaders who are developing these directions be aware of the cultural component of aboriginal life in Canada. Otherwise, constitutional clauses will be nothing more than empty words, and there will be no special life or reality to the concept of a separate aboriginal society and culture within a unified Canada.

Over the years, Canada has become an increasingly pluralistic society, with its citizens coming from various parts of the world. To accommodate this new reality within Canadian society, the government passed the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* and implemented a multicultural policy which encourages the retention and, indeed, the celebration of our ethnocultural heritage. This plurality of distinctive cultural backgrounds complements and parallels the other three main communities of Canadian culture — English-language, French-language and aboriginal.

*Canadian culture is a unique culture which is the product of our history. It has the proud and rich cultures of the Aboriginal peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Metis), the strong influence of Anglo-Saxon and French languages and cultures, and the significant presence and contribution of many other cultural groups who have migrated here ever since the first Europeans (began) to arrive.*

*By its very nature, Canadian culture has been, and is constantly evolving... "the evolving mainstream". — Canadian Ethnocultural Council, Brief, p. 3.*

Upon examination, Canada's multicultural approach can be seen as an enlightened extension of the freedom of cultural expression — a freedom that has long been characteristic of this nation. Understanding and respect for differing and diverse cultures, cultural groups and cultural origins are part of the dynamic vision which Canadians share.