

Government programs stifle Native initiative

does the Addiction Research Foundation.

While government agencies may not know if Natives face problems or ask for their services, Robert Holota, director of the counselling unit and a community worker at the Native Canadian Centre, knows obstacles Natives face in the city. He gained his street smarts living in Toronto for the past eight years after leaving his reservation.

Sitting back in his chair, smoking a cigarette, Holota talks about the Native's experiences in the city in a matter-of-fact tone. Young Natives come to Toronto unprepared to live and work in an urban environment. They don't get an adequate education on the reservation and possess few job skills. Coming from a rural environment with extended families, Natives are isolated by the city with its emphasis on individualism. They don't receive much guidance in living and working in the big city.

"Indians who have a sense of self-sufficiency do okay in Toronto, but there are a lot of Indians who have grown up dependent on the federal government and its welfare," said Holota. "These dependents find it very difficult to make it on their own because the federal government doesn't take care of them off reserve."

This lack of inbred self-sufficiency on the reserve is one of the main reasons there is so much alcoholism among Natives, according to Holota. It gives them a way of escaping from their problems.

"Some Indians coming to Toronto are already alcoholics. It isn't the city that turns them to

drink" said Holota. "This need to drink with other Indians makes the Silver Dollar an important Indian institution in Toronto."

The lack of self-sufficiency allowed by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs raises Wilson Ashkewe's anger. As one of

Many Indians grow up dependent on welfare.

four native employment counselor specialists in Canada manpower offices in Toronto, Ashkewe is an example of a new Native class of government bureaucrats that developed in the 70s after the federal government allowed Natives to take over their own affairs.

"Indians are big business," said Ashkewe, shaking his head. "The government may have originally wanted to help Indians with programs but then it grew and grew. The bureaucrats just wanted to protect their jobs and construct programs for their idea of an Indian. They didn't want us to become self-sufficient because they would lose their jobs. We had to fight this."

He echoed Holota when he said that if Natives are going to make it in Toronto, they must learn self-sufficiency. They must get away from the dependency taught on the reserve "where he expects the government to take care of him when he comes here."

Not only will it help the Native cope with the city but the quality of

life on the reserve will also improve.

Holota said in his matter of fact tone that Natives still face racism but he tries his best to not send them to job interviews where he knows the employers are racist. Mark Nakamura of the Ontario Human Rights Commission said the commission receives few complaints of racism but this does not mean Natives are not being discriminated against. He said there are several reasons why Natives may not complain.

"There may be a lack of trust of governmental institutions, they may not be aware of the Commission's existence or people who face discrimination may not feel it worthwhile to pursue. Natives don't need the aggravation," said Ashkewe.

While some Natives coming to the city are transients, moving from place to place, others have come to the city to stay. Ashkewe said Natives who decide to settle in Toronto have a chance at a good occupation, especially since the federal government has initiated

affirmative action programs in six of its departments.

Settling down in the city and giving up the idea of being a transient is considered losing one of

the traits that makes a person an Indian.

"I decided that I wanted to get a good job. I like the idea of owning my own home, my own cottage, my own car," said Ashkewe. "Because I settled down, some think they are more Indian than I am. They call you a white apple."

Toronto will have more "white apples" in the future. A recent survey conducted by the Native Canadian Centre showed that of the 181 families interviewed, representing a total of 701 natives, 90 per cent have lived in Toronto for at least two years, and 47 per cent have lived in the city for at least 10 years. When asked if they

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Carl Ray: "Man eater of the underworld" (1975)

Courtesy of the McMichael Canadian Collection

Students organize

Raising Native awareness at York

Lydia Pawlenko

Lenore Tobias, an Ojibwa from Cape Croker Reservation, on the Bruce Peninsula, enrolled into York's Fine Arts Programme four years ago. It wasn't until a couple of months ago that she met another Native Indian student, Kirby White Duck, after they had "passed each other by in the hallways of York, hundreds of times."

"I was afraid to approach him, even though he looked Indian," Tobias now laughs. "I thought he'd be offended if he turned out to be Oriental or Polynesian."

Recognizing the need to create some Native awareness at York, Tobias and White Duck decided to

organize the Native Students Association of York University, which, after two months, has a membership of twelve Native students.

Among the objectives at last Monday's meeting in an Environmental Studies classroom were:

- To present an opportunity for the expression of Native culture in various backgrounds and contemporary situations in a multi-cultural forum

- To create and maintain "support mechanisms" for the Native students at York and set up a network of communications between Native students

organizations in other universities across Ontario and possibly across Canada

- To permit a variety of cultural interest groups within the Canadian mosaic an opportunity to hear Native people discuss their situation

While the group will not officially be involved in politics, it will present an opportunity for Native students to discuss the issues affecting Native people. Lately, most talk has focused upon the exclusion of Native rights in the Canadian Constitution.

The Association has applied for a grant from the Secretary of State, and plans to hold various open forums, debates and performances in the next term. Its members are hoping to open communication channels to the York community, in order to clear misconceptions that have arisen because of a lack of information about their culture.

"The stereotypes are still very much alive and it bothers me to

no end," Tobias said. She feels Native people in Canada are still often thought of as "nature-loving, noble savages, living the way they did 4,000 to 5,000 years ago. It's like living under a shadow."

It is only within the last decade or so that native studies have

"The stereotypes are still very much alive."

become part of the university curriculum, and have moved beyond the confines of traditional anthropology. Professor John Price of York's Anthropology Department, writes in his book *Native Studies* (1978) that programmes at learning institutions like York and Trent Universities, Manitou Community College, or the Nishnawbe Institute, were shaped because of, "...an increasing awareness on the part of Native people that academic

methods can be used to foster an ethnic cultural renaissance."

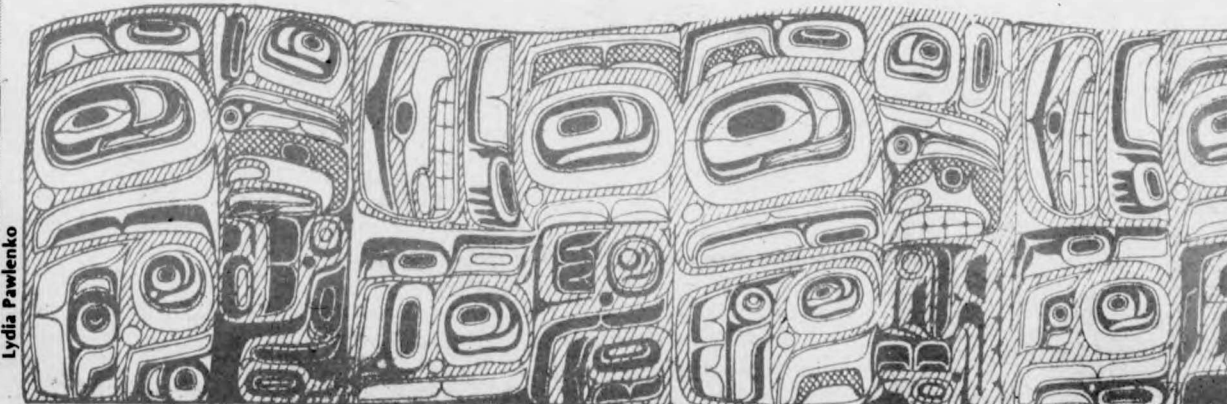
Price views Native studies as a positive means of adjustment to today's world.

Members of the Native Students Association at York felt the Native studies courses at York are scarce. While one may take courses dealing with certain Native topics in different academic areas, a formal specialized programme has not been initiated.

The students did, however, seem impressed by the Faculty of Environmental Studies recent attention to the area of Native Canadian relations. Following a suggestion last year by Andy Rickard, an environmental studies student and former grand chief of some fifty reserve communities in northern Ontario, the department coordinated a seminar on Native Canadian issues. It focuses on defining key problem areas, on examining responses by different levels of government and by committees of native peoples, and on proposing new policy planning and management initiatives.



Lenore Tobias



Lydia Pawlenko