

# **TEACHINGS FROM CREE ELDERS: A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP**

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## **ABSTRACT**

For the past two hundred and fifty years, the relationship between First Nations and Euro-Canadians has shifted from an equal partnership to one of colonized and colonizer. Despite this history, First Nations people have shown resiliency, continuing to honor beliefs, values, and traditions. Constrained by Euro-Canadian government Indian Affairs policies, First Nations have not progressed economically or politically, but have been caught in the trap of administering their own poverty. The First Nations people are dying a slow death; thus, it is critical to examine their current reality, acknowledging that history does not begin with the arrival of Europeans, but that the beliefs, values, and philosophies of the First Nations are embedded in their culture.

Using a grounded theory approach, this study attempted to answer two questions: What are the core values and beliefs of the Cree people? And, how can these beliefs be used to reshape the Cree self-governance systems? To address these questions multiple, in depth, and focus group interviews were held with the seven First Nations members, all of whom speak Cree and are leaders from the Saddle Lake First Nations reserve.

This study captured the stories of the Cree elders which included the gift of spirit and responsibility to the land that is embedded in the Cree language and the traditional knowledge that guides daily lives which dwells in the ceremonies. The voices of the

participants explained that the imposition of the European systems of individualism, accumulation, and capitalism have contributed to the methodical and deliberate destruction of the core values and beliefs of the First Nations culture. Participants provided personal experiences of the colonial policies which have left them and their communities in the oppressed and dependent state they find themselves. However, the reawakening of First Nations ceremonies is one example of a resurgent force that is playing a central role in reclaiming the Cree gift and responsibility as First Nations people.