

## **Preface**

This book began more than 40 years ago now when a friend of the lead author ended his life over matters that even now seem far too trivial to have brought about that particular response. In such situations the feeling that you've failed a friend is impossible to shake; the need to find something to do about it, even though it is now far too late, never really diminishes.

It has taken this long for several reasons, the most important of which were (1) the thought that the position we've taken had been sufficiently clarified in 1996, (2) the further thought that someone else, someone that people would listen to this time, had gotten it right in 1999, and (3) the incredible capacity of academic and applied fields dedicated to the phenomenon of Native suicide to impose near-impenetrable layers of misunderstanding everywhere. This latter point was driven home to the lead author most forcefully when he realized near the end of his working time at a Native suicide crisis office that the "official" approach demanded he respond with obvious irrelevance to the suicidal Native bleeding in front of him.

Another start was made in 2002 by our third author, in her undergraduate thesis (which we've included here). Although it won international awards at the time, it has never received the circulation and exposure it deserved. And because the lead author's current posting didn't (and does not) have an attached graduate program, it wasn't possible to continue the collaboration as she has moved on to her doctoral studies.

Bits and pieces continued to be assembled by the lead author, and regularly teaching a course in Native Suicidology allowed him to keep up with the literature and even write large portions of this book as parts of lectures given. But it wasn't until the

arrival of the second author that the book began to assemble itself. The second author hates disorder and does not tolerate it even in a thesis supervisor; so, as if she was completing a gigantic jig-saw puzzle, the various pieces went into the framework the lead author had developed 20 years before but hadn't put to proper use. Our second author is also a voracious reader; it was in her going through the collection of books and papers the lead author had assembled, and in being pushed along by her own thesis requirements, that the mess began to look like something.

Undergraduate students have the disadvantage of not knowing a lot about specific topics, but they have the advantage of the naiveté that goes with that lack; in short, they ask questions and demand answers where someone too close to the work has already moved past those concerns. Students in two courses in this last academic year (2014) put aside other concerns to concentrate on specific topics that have become parts of our Chapter 4; their efforts are acknowledged in this work, on the title page for that chapter.

Readers may discern that this book is, in reality, part of a much larger project. When serious work began, portions of this larger project kept intruding so frequently that for a time we considered writing a "super-book," to get it all down at once. But finally we decided to cut our work on indigenous suicide away from its sister works on (1) Canadian racism, (2) an alternative approach to psychological issues (autochthonology), and (3) methodology. Not only would the whole thing, taken together, have been unwieldy in the extreme, it would have put back the release of our work on Native suicide.

That would have been irresponsible on our part. The suicide plague is not going away, and, if there's anything to what we're saying, there are good reasons it's here to stay. We believe -- and in here we argue -- that the reactions to that plague now must change in fundamental ways. Even if we're wrong, it's time the conversation concerning "what's wrong with Indians" takes a different direction.

We take our audience to be *indigenous individuals with some concern (personal, professional, or otherwise) with the issue of Native suicide*. If our suspicion is right, this target audience can be reduced to *indigenous individuals*. We don't care if other, non-indigenous people read our work; we're concerned with Native people facing the challenge of unnecessary deaths, of themselves or of others around them. Our goal is to prevent such deaths, for at least long enough for the people involved to reach an understanding of what is really happening; for "reflection is a famous foe of violence," even self-violence.

Sooner or later we know we're going to hear the complaint that our work is "too difficult," "hard to understand," and that it "uses words that are too big." Well, tough. We're writing about life and death here, not an Archie comic book. Does anyone pretend that "the solution" to the "Native suicide crisis," even if our book isn't it, is going to be the intellectual equivalent of half an hour with Dr. Phil? Yes, it's hard; yes, it's going to take time to go through it; and yes, at least some of you are going to have to consult your dictionary. But the three of us are on the internet and we promise to answer our emails, as best we can.

Besides that, the people who complain our work is too difficult "for Indians" are making some extraordinary claims about Indians. If they really mean to say it's too

difficult for *them*, then they should just say that rather than insult the whole lot of us. In any event, we *don't* think it's *too* difficult to understand. Yes, it's difficult. So will resolving any of the issues facing us indigenous peoples. But we either do the work or give up now.

Since we're focused on indigenous peoples -- service providers, band officials, individuals with friends they worry about, individuals who worry about themselves -- we don't much care about what others will have to say about this work. We have no intention to "defend" our beliefs, or argue about our analyses and conclusions. It's all there in black and white. And if you think we're wrong, then write your own book. If anyone claims they don't understand us and would like us to elaborate or explain, that's fine. That goes for Native and non-Native people alike. But we have no intention whatsoever to acknowledge mindless drivel, or to become mired in it; we have better things to do (for example, our books on racism and autochthonology).

This work has been accomplished without the support of any "official" institution.

We would like to thank our families, friends, and students for having put up with us during the trying period during which this work was completed.

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