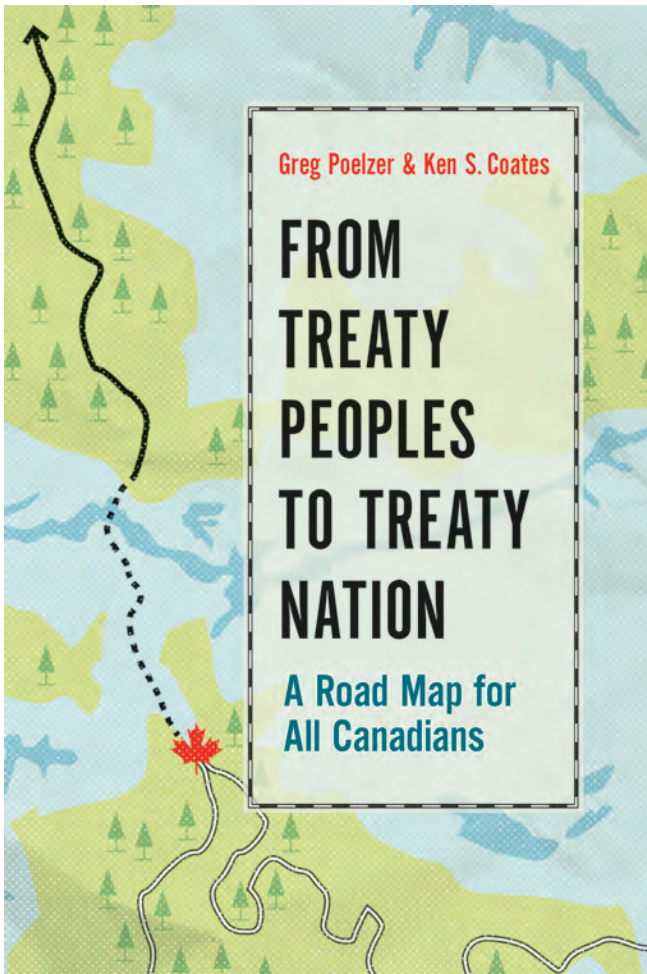


NEW BOOK RELEASE FROM UBC PRESS

FROM TREATY PEOPLES TO TREATY NATION

A Road Map for All Canadians

Greg Poelzer and Ken S. Coates



“There are plenty of good, thoughtful, and creative solutions to the political challenges facing Aboriginal people in Canada. Most of these ideas operate at the level of ideals and political philosophy and are not yet grounded or tested in practice. At present, they represent idealized and diverse notions of what Canada could be. All agree that the issue is of great national importance. All agree that the status quo is not viable. All agree that major changes are in order, even as they disagree profoundly about what those changes should be. A merging of political ideals with practical realities could accomplish much.”

— *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation*, p. 125

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AFTER DECADES OF CONFLICT, RECONCILIATION BETWEEN ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND CANADA IS ESSENTIAL. BOLD STEPS ARE REQUIRED. POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IS ESSENTIAL. POELZER AND COATES LAY OUT A PLAN.

Vancouver BC – In *From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation: A Road Map for All Canadians*, Greg Poelzer and Ken Coates lift themselves above the fray of “Aboriginal issues” to clearly lay out the history, the complex policies, the cultural assumptions, the mix of overlapping and divergent opinions, and the approaches that have failed and succeeded in the past. Then they breathe new life into the debates to offer all Canadians – from policy makers to concerned citizens – realistic steps forward.

“The most balanced and fair-minded treatment of Aboriginal issues in Canada that I have ever read.”

— Jonathan Kay, **Walrus** magazine

Poelzer and Coates masterfully summarize the perspectives of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous intellectuals and activists: John Burrows, Charles Taylor, Alan Cairns, Emma LaRocque, Calvin Helin, Taiaiake Alfred, Bonita Beatty, and Tom Flanagan, to name a few. “Canada has gone far enough down the road of Indigenous–non-Indigenous debate to know what the two sides need and expect from each other. The political challenge of reconciliation now involves moving beyond philosophical or rhetorical positions into the realm of administrative practicalities and financial realities.” Given the dire circumstances some of Canada’s Aboriginal people face today, “reconciliation ... is no longer an option. It has become a necessity.”

The book doesn’t get bogged down in the heart-wrenching stories about poor living conditions, high teen suicide levels, or lower-than-average life-expectancy rates that attract mainstream media. Instead, the authors aim to shift our attention and focus to the ability of First Nations, Métis, and the Inuit to successfully self-govern, negotiate business ventures, win important court battles, and make positive community changes through grassroots programs.

Pragmatic and realistic thinking are the backbone to the way forward. There are hundreds of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, each with distinct needs, and currently caught up in a broken system. “Aboriginal Affairs programs are not producing the desired outcomes and are time-consuming and, ultimately, very controlling.” The stakes are high and the models for change are plentiful. The authors offer solutions that both sides can bear, setting goals, which are quite simple: “Aboriginal people in Canada deserve nothing less than full equality of opportunity with other Canadians in the social, political, and economic realms as well as recognition of their cultures, traditions, and Aboriginal and treaty rights.”

They summarize ten general conditions that would put Canada on the path to becoming a “treaty nation;” five are priorities:

1. Establish national service standards to ensure there are adequate housing, proper education, and health care.
2. Implement properly-funded education with a focus on the health and well-being of the most vulnerable: children from birth to age five.
3. Respond quickly and respectfully to important landmark and culturally significant events.
4. Transform the Department of Aboriginal Affairs: make a shift towards longer-term funding arrangements and encourage self-government, public accountability, and governance systems that are based on traditional political structures and Indigenous principles.
5. Clearly define Aboriginal legal rights regarding resource and infrastructure development

“Poelzer and Coates have written a ... source document of leading-edge thinkers from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal circles [who] offer options for all of us who yearn for improved relationships and long-term reconciliation with Aboriginal people.”

— Chuck Strahl, former minister of Indian and Northern Affairs

From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation offers a page-turning read for all Canadians. Getting to a place of common ground, though, will, “more than anything else, ... require openness and creativity.”

AUTHOR BIOS



Greg Poelzer is a Fulbright Arctic Initiative Scholar, executive chair of the International Centre for Northern Governance and Development, and a professor of political studies at the University of Saskatchewan. For more than 25 years, Greg has worked on Aboriginal and northern policy research in Canada, Russia, and Scandinavia. His first book, **Arctic Front: Defending Canada in the Far North** (2008), was awarded (with his co-authors) the Donner Prize for excellence and innovation in Canadian public policy writing. He is a recipient of the prestigious and inaugural Fulbright Arctic Initiative scholarship and part of an international team of scholars looking at pressing social, economic, and environmental issues confronting Indigenous and Northern communities in the Circumpolar North. He was a co-investigator on a major research project on Aboriginal political participation, including voting in federal elections.



Ken S. Coates is the author and editor of over a dozen books on Aboriginal issues, including **Best Left as Indians: Native-White Relations in the Yukon**; **The Marshall Decision and Native Rights**; and **A Global History of Indigenous Peoples**. Raised in Whitehorse, he is the Canada Research Chair in Regional Innovation at the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan. He is a frequent contributor to magazines and newspapers throughout Canada and appears regularly on radio and television programs.



PRAISE FOR *FROM TREATY PEOPLES TO TREATY NATION*

"*From Treaty Peoples to Treaty Nation* tackles issues of vital importance to all Canadians. It is impressive in the breadth of the topics covered and the clarity of the discussion. It is a must-read for politicians, business leaders, Aboriginal citizens, academics, students, and average Canadians."

TOM MOLLOY, OC, SOM, QC, Canada's pre-eminent land claims negotiator

"Provocative, vigorous, and on every page interesting."

FRANCES ABELE, expert on federal northern policy and professor of public policy at Carleton University

"This timely and thought-provoking book is a welcome addition to ongoing conversations about how best to achieve reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples and complete the unfinished work of federalism. Poelzer and Coates juxtapose (and often challenge) divergent and conflicting academic perspectives on Aboriginal and treaty rights, make a compelling case for pragmatism, and chart a course of action by citing numerous examples of Indigenous success stories and the need to understand and build on them."

JODY WILSON RAYBOULD, regional chief, BC Assembly of First Nations

"This book is a major contribution to one of the most difficult issues facing the country. The magnitude of the task undertaken by the authors is remarkable. Their goal is to redefine Canada. They view contemporary Canada as an incomplete country because a rapprochement with Aboriginal Canadians has eluded us. The vehicle for its achievement, they argue, is the diffusion of the understanding that we are all treaty peoples. This book provides us with a coherent sense of direction."

ALAN CAIRNS, expert on constitutional and political issues and author of *Citizens Plus: Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian State*



from Chapter 5: Political and Institutional Approaches

Ideas matter, because they reflect national and regional mindsets and because, in many subtle ways, they influence how Canadians think about Aboriginal issues. People who have never read Taiaiake Alfred or Sákéj Henderson, or who have never heard of Tom Pocklington or Frances Widdowson, may nonetheless have been exposed to their ideas, albeit in a limited and incomplete form. The intellectual swirl around Aboriginal affairs in Canada is filled with strongly held positions. Amidst all of the writing and pondering are gems of insight and vision that will, collectively and individually, affect how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians relate to each other in the coming decades. At this point, however, there is consensus on only a handful of items: that Aboriginal peoples are suffering, that the status quo is not working effectively, that government funds are not being applied properly, and that Canadians need to consider bold steps if they want things to get better for Aboriginal people and if Canadians ever hope to become treaty peoples and transform themselves into a treaty nation. We share all of these assumptions – but we also believe that high-level theorizing avoids the most basic elements of this issue: that Aboriginal peoples are hurting, that Canada continues to embarrass itself through its ineffectiveness on this file, and that practical, reasonable steps are needed to provide a greater measure of justice and opportunity for Indigenous peoples and communities in this country.

...That there is public engagement – and disagreement – with Aboriginal people about models for future relations is a sign of strength and political maturity among all participants. Aboriginal people are not naive enough to believe that, in the complex Canadian political environment, they will achieve all of their objectives and see the implementation of their ideal strategy. To bring ideas forward and have them ignored – as happened with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples – is insulting and patronizing. Ideas warrant a response, and response generates a debate. In this way, limits will be defined, negotiations will commence, and compromises will eventually be found. That opponents, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, of Aboriginal governments, policies, and proposals now routinely speak their minds is of vital importance to the development of a healthy and meaningful dialogue. Canada will not resolve the conundrum around Aboriginal rights unless and until there is a full, free, and highly engaged airing of different opinions. As is now being discovered, this debate can often be acrimonious, and those courageous enough to venture forward with radical or creative ideas may well find themselves the subject of intense criticism and personal attacks. Aboriginal people have felt the effects of these attempts at silencing for quite some time, and political leaders and thinkers feel them still.

...All agree that the issue is of great national importance. All agree that the status quo is not viable. All agree that major changes are in order, even as they disagree profoundly about what those changes should be. A merging of political ideals with practical realities could accomplish much.

...While debate will undoubtedly rage on about the usefulness of compromise and discussion as a foundation for Canadian political life, it is increasingly clear that further delays present an unfair and unjust burden on Aboriginal people. Bold steps are required. Acts of political leadership and diplomacy are required. Major declarations of positive intent and openness to meaningful partnerships are essential if Aboriginal people are to escape the difficult conditions that history, racism, injustice, and political lethargy have imposed on them. Reconciliation, to put it more simply, is no longer an option. It has become a necessity.



from Chapter 9: Global Lessons

As we argue throughout this book, the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples requires substantial rethinking. Historical arrangements clearly failed, and although contemporary arrangements include substantial improvements over those of the past, continued and thoughtful change is still required. We argue that there are several pillars that must underlie the path forward. The goal, it seems to us, is quite simple: Aboriginal people in Canada deserve nothing less than full equality of opportunity with other Canadians in the social, political, and economic realms as well as recognition of their cultures, traditions, and Aboriginal and treaty rights.

Much Canadian Aboriginal policy is structured around the goal of making Indigenous peoples look, live, and act like other Canadians. The inherent paternalism of such approaches belongs in the historical dustbin of government policy making. The goal, instead, should be to create situations where Aboriginal people can achieve equality of status, equality of political liberality, and equality of economic opportunity, situations where they can create and determine their futures within the laws, structures, and political processes of the country as a whole. To achieve this, we must set the stage for real and sustainable equality of opportunity. The prospect of achieving these goals is much more realistic than it was thirty years ago but will still require unprecedented commitment to rejecting the colonial and racial assumptions of the past, stepping aside from long-standing government policies and structures, and accepting Indigenous peoples and their governments as full participants within the Canadian political, economic, and social system.

There are many reasons to be optimistic, but we also acknowledge that Canada faces tough choices about the future of Aboriginal–non-Aboriginal relations, and the past century does not provide a clear model for positive coexistence. Current proposals for rebuilding First Nations and improving relations are unlikely to provide acceptable solutions, although the situation is not as gloomy as most Canadian think. It is true that ideas with historical, practical, or moral merit tend to be rejected by one side or the other, deepening the divide and enhancing the intensity of debate. At the same time, almost all Canadians agree that the status quo is not workable and that the social and economic problems facing Aboriginal people must be addressed.

Given that the past provides few workable models and that many of the current approaches are unacceptable to one side or the other, the country is in a difficult spot. Positions harden, conflicts intensify, anger flares, political will dissipates, and social, cultural, and economic gaps remain. This does not serve the country. Many analysts put great faith in continued negotiations and the refinement of legal and constitutional positions and, indeed, growing political and legal power has brought some gains to Canada's Aboriginal communities, with more to come as new generations grow up in more optimistic conditions. But this progress has also heightened non-Indigenous people's anger and frustration. One lesson from the past, in Canada and elsewhere, is that laws and the courts offer declarations of intent, not assurances of conduct. Canada's long history of neglecting its political commitments and legal responsibilities suggests that constitutional and legislative agreements may well be a weak foundation for reconciling Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. Transforming ourselves into a treaty nation will require more than treaties.

More than anything else, the path towards common ground will require openness and creativity...



TALKING POINTS FROM TREATY PEOPLES TO TREATY NATION

1. What is unique about the 2015 federal election in terms of Aboriginal policy and politics?
2. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and your book make the case that change is urgently needed in Canadian policy for Aboriginal peoples. What needs to be done to break the logjam in terms of Aboriginal policies in Canada?
3. Twenty years ago provincial governments were not very engaged with the Aboriginal file. What has changed and how is that working out?
4. Your book is, in the end, quite optimistic. Given the often dire evidence of socio-economic distress in Aboriginal communities, why do you come to such positive conclusions?
5. You speak very positively about the commitment and energy of Aboriginal leadership. What accounts for this commitment and how important is leadership to the future success of Indigenous communities?

