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## **Abstract**

In past decades historians have become increasingly focussed on Native political activism in Canada. This has brought greater understanding to Native political issues and a degree of legitimization to Native political activism. Despite historians' interest in Native politics, however, some general weaknesses remain within the historiography. In particular, there has been a general tendency to document the political actions only of eras known to be politically prominent. This practice has led to an abundance of studies focussed on the Riel Uprisings and the surge of Native activism in the 1960s but has left other periods such as the interwar era significantly underrepresented. When the interwar era is mentioned, it is generally done in order to frame such political activities as context for other issues. These tendencies have created the impression that Native political activism was sporadic and reactionary, and therefore, not an established and legitimate response to longstanding grievances. This thesis attempts to rectify this gap within the historiography of Native political activism in Saskatchewan by illustrating the extent to which Native peoples during the interwar era were politically active. In establishing that Saskatchewan Native political activism was a force throughout the interwar era, this thesis elucidates the reasons for the rise in political activism within Saskatchewan Native communities, tracing the development of First Nations and Métis political organizations which began in the early 1920s and 1930s. This work then draws attention to the political strategies developed by Natives to achieve their political goals. Highlighting the period between 1922 and 1946 as a politically significant era for Natives in Saskatchewan, this work fundamentally demonstrates that the challenges facing Native political actions did not result in a failure of Native political identities as one might expect, but rather forced adaptation and growth.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ASI-Association of Saskatchewan Indians  
CCF-Co-operative Commonwealth Federation  
Department-Department of Indian Affairs  
HBC- Hudson's Bay Company  
IAA- Indian Association of Alberta  
LAC- Library and Archives Canada  
LIWC- League of Indians of Western Canada  
MAA-Métis Association of Alberta  
MSS-Métis Society of Saskatchewan  
NAIB-North American Indian Brotherhood  
NRTA-Natural Resources Transfer Agreement  
PAIT-Protective Association for Indians and Their Treaties  
QVTPA- Queen Victoria Treaty Protective Association  
RCMP-Royal Canadian Mounted Police  
SMS-Saskatchewan Métis Society  
USI-Union of Saskatchewan Indians

## Preface

To begin I would like to outline the major historical questions and circumstances that shaped this final work. In beginning the research stage of this project in 2007 I questioned whether there was a political movement amongst Native people in Saskatchewan during the interwar era, and wondered what this movement, if it existed, meant for the political identity of Natives. I also questioned what such a movement would have meant for the political relationship between Natives and non-Natives. I asked these questions because I had found through preliminary research that the political activities of the interwar era in Saskatchewan were generally overlooked, and yet upon seeing early on in my research that there was significant action during this period, I began to wonder how the politics of this era affected the larger history of Native activism.

Generally speaking, the lack of attention paid to Saskatchewan activism was puzzling, because, in other regions, such as Alberta, during the same era, Native political activism attracted a lot of attention. Yet Saskatchewan, which developed First Nations and Métis organizations at the same time, did not see the same degree of historical engagement. Instead Native politics remained in the background of scholarly works and were used to merely contextualize other issues. In this thesis, therefore, I tried to focus on the interaction between Natives and non-Natives at the political level, emphasizing that there was and is an important political relationship between the groups. My purpose, was to dig a bit deeper and see what how Native political activities were manifested in this era, and further, look at how these activities, affected Native political identities.

Originally, this project was meant to be something quite different, as I had first intended to look at government policy towards Native people in the same era. But in the end, my final work was profoundly shaped by my one month stay in Stó:lō territory during the summer of 2007. As a part of the University of Saskatchewan and University of Victoria's joint ethnohistory fieldschool I

was asked by the British Columbia First Nations community to look at the history of Stó:lō political activism. It was during this project, that I began to get a sense of how Native people themselves viewed political activism, and I discovered that the different ways in which the Stó:lō expressed their political thoughts were integrally attached to their political identities. The complexities at work within the political expressions of the Stó:lō surprised me and I began to wonder what similarities might exist within Saskatchewan Native activism. Upon returning to Saskatoon to take up my own research, I had found that my view of my own thesis topic had shifted considerably and I became interested in pursuing a topic of Native activism.

In attempting to understand Native politics in this era I tried first to understand the direct causes of activism. While Native political organizations such as the League of Indians of Western Canada, existed in the west as early as 1922, I also looked a little later to political organization in Saskatchewan specifically. This took me to the early 1930s, when Saskatchewan had largely abandoned attempts at pan-Indian organization, and attempted to stand on its own. In establishing the argument that Saskatchewan Native political activism was a force throughout the interwar era therefore, my first chapter sought to expose the reasons for the rise in political activism within Saskatchewan Native communities, and placed emphasis on the administrative changes to Native ways of life, economic and social conditions throughout the Depression and the emergence of capable Native leaders as pivotal conditions for activism. My second chapter then traced the development of First Nations and Métis political organizations which began in the early 1920s and 1930s, and further highlighted the challenges faced by such organizations. The general opposition encountered by these political associations helped to illustrate how these challenges did not eradicate the movement, but rather forced adaptation in political action.

My final chapter revealed aspects of political theory which affected the development and adaptation of political organizations in this era. Highlighting the political strategies that developed, the chapter detailed the accomplishments of Native activism, focussing especially on changes to government attitudes as a result of persistent political efforts. It was in this final chapter that I tried to look at the different types of political ideologies and strategies implemented by both the Native and Non-Native groups.

I chose to begin my research in 1922 because this was the year that the pan-Indian political organization, the League of Indians of Canada spread to the west. And though this movement was not strictly a Saskatchewan movement, it had profound implications for Saskatchewan political activism into the Depression and Second World War years. Initially I had chosen to end my research with 1945—to coincide with the end of World War II—but after completing my research I realized that in 1946 some pivotal events occurred within Saskatchewan Native activism which essentially ushered in a new era of activism, and therefore 1946 seemed like a natural place to end.

Through the process of researching and writing this piece of work I came to realize the relevance of this topic to other regions, time periods and disciplines. And while this made me painfully aware of the limitations of my own work, it also made me hopeful of other directions I could take using this thesis as a starting point. For instance, while time and space limitations forced me to abandon exploring areas such as gender in Native activism, I recognize that such a direction could and should still be explored in another project. Likewise, this topic could be expanded in depth or breadth by either limiting research and analysis to the community level or, expanding analysis to complete a comparison of Native activism across provinces or even countries. It seems likely that these approaches to research could uncover important conclusions and different

understandings of Native political activism and allow for the expansion of this project into something more complete.