The James Bay Treaty

Articles of a Treaty made and entered into between the King of Great Britain and Ireland, in the Province of Canada, and the said Indians, the 9th day of July, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifteen.

Whereas the Indians inhabiting the said Province of Canada, having been in the habit of living in peace for a long time past, have now petitioned the said King to make a Treaty with them, for the better regulation of their affairs.

And whereas the said Indians have been encouraged by the said King to enter into a Treaty with him, and to agree to the conditions and articles contained in this Treaty.

And whereas the said Indians have agreed to the conditions and articles contained in this Treaty.

And whereas the said Indians have agreed to the conditions and articles contained in this Treaty.

A FILM BY ALANIS OBOMSAWIN

TRICK OR TREATY?
THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

PRESS KIT
The James Bay Treaty

At the time Treaty No. 9 was signed, Cree and Ojibway nations representatives had an oral tradition and they didn’t understand nor spoke English. The commissioners had to explain the agreement to them and enter into a verbal understanding. Several people who appear in the film demonstrate that some of the rights that were promised and negotiated are not included in the treaty’s written version. Based on the historical documents compiled, it seems that there were two versions and two interpretations: one oral; the other, written.

Dr. Stan Louttit, Grand Chief of the Mushkegowuk Council, organized conferences in recent years to help the First Nations understand the context in which the treaty was signed and what exactly it signifies. In doing so, he hoped everyone would have a better grasp of the issues threatening the territories and the future of Indigenous communities. This duty of remembrance led him to travel across their territory to share facts and knowledge with as many people as possible – so that tomorrow’s history would change and evolve.

Idle No More

In 2012, the federal government introduced two omnibus bills: C-38 and C-45. In October, four women in Saskatchewan voiced their concern over modifications to the Fisheries Act, Indian Act and Navigation Protection Act. The Idle No More movement was born. The movement’s initiators organized awareness-raising marches and gatherings to mobilize the public. They were quickly joined by many supporters and other movements emerged abroad. Their demands are political, economic, social and environmental.

In November, Attawapiskat Cree Chief Theresa Spence began a hunger strike to demand a meeting of all Indigenous chiefs with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Governor General of Canada, David Johnston. From a tipi on Victoria Island, she hoped to focus the attention of Canadians on the living conditions of First Nations, the inequalities affecting them, the rights they were demanding and their concerns about the bills that had been introduced. After a 44-day fast, she ultimately ended her strike. The leadership of the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women’s Association of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party of Canada committed to working toward ensuring that Indigenous rights were respected.

A meeting was scheduled with Mr. Harper, but without Mr. Johnston. Theresa Spence refused to attend. The negotiations failed to achieve the desired results.

1,600 kilometers on foot

In January 2013, sixteen-year-old David Kawapit decided to walk 1,600 kilometers to the Canadian Parliament in a show of solidarity with Theresa Spence. David and five of his friends, along with a guide, braved the bitter cold and set out on their journey from Whapmagoostui, a Cree village in Quebec on the coast of Hudson Bay. Over the next ten weeks, they were joined by dozens of other young people. When the group arrived in Ottawa in March, a huge gathering took place on Parliament Hill. Everyone was moved to see how committed the young people were. Messages of peace and calls for solidarity followed.

That is how the First Nations Grand Chiefs, women and young people are making their voices heard to denounce and end poverty in their communities. At a time when environmental resources are dwindling and the suicide rate among Indigenous is dramatically high, Alanis Obomsawin is giving those who refuse to surrender a chance to speak out. She portrays their struggles and hopes, but also their disillusionment. The issue of identity as well as handing down knowledge and traditions continue to be of vital importance to these threatened peoples.

The elders see new hope: Young people are mobilizing in growing numbers. Focused on the future and proudly proclaiming the values of their ancestors, they are at the forefront of a great awareness-raising movement to put an end to inertia and let true change begin.

THE FILM

In 1905, when mining was in full swing and the national railway was being built in northern Ontario, the British Crown and the Canadian government entered into an agreement with Crees and Ojibways from Ontario and Manitoba: the James Bay Treaty-Treaty No. 9. Signed over 100 years ago, the treaty is still called into question today by a number of Indigenous and Canadians who want to set the record straight.

The documentary Trick or Treaty? by Alanis Obomsawin follows the course of Indigenous leaders in their quest for justice and fairness as they seek to establish dialogue with the Canadian government. Their message is clear: Urgent action is needed. By tracing the history of their ancestors since the signing of the treaty, they want to raise people’s awareness about the issues that concern them now more than ever: respect for and protection of their lands, their natural resources and the right to hunt and fish so that their society can prosper.

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A member of the Abenaki First Nation, Alanis Obomsawin is one of Canada’s most eminent documentary filmmakers. She has directed over 40 films with the National Film Board of Canada, focusing on the lives and concerns of First Nations people. Her most recent documentary, *Trick or Treaty?*, follows the journey of Indigenous people in their quest for justice as they seek to establish a dialogue with the Canadian government.

Alanis Obomsawin launched her career as a professional singer in New York in 1960. In 1967, NFB producers Joe Koenig and Bob Verrall invited her to come to the Film Board as a consultant for a film about Indigenous people. She wound up behind the camera herself, but continued to sing for humanitarian causes and went on to become a multidisciplinary artist.

As an activist filmmaker, Obomsawin is driven by a desire to give a platform to First Nations people in Canada. Her entire body of work bears witness to their experiences. From *Christmas at Moose Factory* (1971), which depicts life in a Cree village in James Bay as seen through children’s drawings, to *Hi-Ho Mistahyey!* (2013), about the campaign to ensure that First Nations students have fair access to education in safe and comfortable schools, Obomsawin has tirelessly shown the importance of her roots, and the importance of intergenerational links in preserving North American Indigenous cultures.

Obomsawin is also an activist director who makes films about the pressing issues of the day, such as her quartet of films about the 1990 Oka crisis: *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), winner of 18 international awards; *My Name is Kahentiosta* (1995); *Spudwrench: Kahnawake Man* (1997); and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (2000).

Other notable films include *Incident at Restigouche* (1984), a gripping description of a raid by Quebec Provincial Police on a Mi’kmaq reserve; *Richard Cardinal: Cry from the Diary of a Métis Child* (1986), a disturbing documentary about a teen’s suicide; *No Address* (1988), a portrait of homelessness in Montreal; and more recently, the 2014 winner of the Canadian Screen Award for Best Social/Political Documentary, *The People of the Kattawapiskak River* (2012), which plunges us into the housing crisis faced by the Cree of James Bay, and *Hi-Ho Mistahyey!*, which had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) in 2013 and was nominated for the Canadian Screen Award for Best Feature Length Documentary (2014).

The people of Odanak, the community where Obomsawin grew up, and their stories figure largely in her work in films such as *Waban-Aki: People from Where the Sun Rises* (2006), which has won numerous awards, and the short film *Sigwan* (2005), a fable about a young girl comforted by forest animals.

*Our Nationhood* (2003) shows the determination of the Mi’kmaq of Listuguj to manage the natural resources on their traditional lands, while *Is the Crown at War with Us?* (2002) takes a hard look at the conflict over fishing rights between the Mi’kmaq of Burnt Church, New Brunswick, and their Acadian neighbours.

Alanis Obomsawin was named to the Canadian Film and Television Hall of Fame in 2010. In 2013, she was honoured at the first edition of the Birks Diamond Tribute to the Year’s Women in Film during the Toronto International Film Festival. She is also a recipient of the Humanitarian Award (FILM & TV) — For Exceptional Contributions to Community & Public Service.
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To all the Marchers, Drummers and Singers
“You have made a mark in history - change has arrived”

Norman Ottereyes

Producer
Alanis Obomsawin

Executive Producer
Annette Clarke

Trick or Treaty?

National Film Board of Canada
Quebec Centre
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