

What I know about First Nations

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I have done a few projects over the course of my years at TVO where I have covered our First Nations communities. And the one thing I've learned is this...

I know virtually nothing about First Nations communities.

I think many non-Natives like me tend to look at First Nations Indigenous as one big group. We have a vague sense that, as the term "First Nations" implies, that big group is made up of a number of different communities and nations. But often when we think about them and talk about them, we use the blanket concept "Aboriginals" or "Natives", in both our words and thoughts.

Several years ago, I helped produce a one-hour documentary on the histories of Ontario's Native peoples. We should have realized this going in, but we quickly found out that trying to condense, in one hour, the various traditions and stories of Ontario's many different First Nations communities proved to be a virtually impossible task. I have to give credit to the other producer working on the program for managing to pull it together. But despite his best efforts, what we ended up with was a patchwork, an imperfect series of snapshots of Ontario's Native heritage.

Not only was the amount of different Native communities overwhelming. So too was trying to capture the incredible diversity of opinions within each First Nation. It seemed that everything, from what really happened in the past, to questions about traditional Native religions, to politics, to traditional languages, to what form of government a community should adopt, was hotly debated and contested. And these were debates *within* individual communities. I didn't even get a good sense of the debates *between* communities.

So if I have learned nothing else in my interactions with First Nations Indigenous, I have at least learned to appreciate just how complex and diverse those communities are.

Our guests tonight are all either First Nations citizens or Métis. When you watch these four "Natives" on our show, be mindful that they each come from a very different Native community in very different parts of the country. And they are only a small sampling of the many different nations, personalities, and politics that are a part of the many First Nations across this country.

It may seem like an obvious point. But it's one that, too often, non-Natives tend to forget.