

STRENGTH

PEACE

UNITY

Mohawk Council of Kahnawake

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Sent via email to the National Post

Dear Editor,

Alas, Jonathan Kay gets it all wrong in his depiction of Kahnawà:ke (The one place where racism is still tolerated: native reserves).

Ours is a community of approximately 6,500 people who have been relegated to a postage stamp of land, thanks to the lax immigration policies of our ancestors. Despite our Two-Row Wampum Treaty in which, basically, our ancestors agreed to share this vast land with the proviso that neither side interfered with each other's governance, Canadian and colonial governments have for centuries broken their word at every turn. And so, as we try desperately to hang on to our language, culture and 'Mohawk-ness' on our remaining 35,000 acres, a 33-year-old community directive makes it clear that anyone who marries or co-habits with a non-Native would be expected to live off the Territory. The community has never said that such unions were not allowed. The community did not say that the non-Native partners were not welcome to visit. They just asked that, at the end of the day, those deemed ineligible to live here return to their own off-reserve homes at night.

Isn't it ironic that the federal Indian Act made it illegal for non-Natives to be on the Territory "after sundown"? The same Indian Act also removed Native women from "Reserves set aside for the use and enjoyment of the Indians" when they married non-Native men before 1985. And the same Indian Act forced Native doctors and lawyers renounce their status as Native people before they could practice.

There are racists in every society, unfortunately. But the overwhelming sentiment in Kahnawà:ke is that our residency requirements were put in place to protect what little we have left from getting lost in the crush of North American culture that surrounds us. It has nothing to do with racism or hatred. It is about survival of a way of life – pure and simple.

It is unfortunate that Mr. Kay hasn't taken the opportunity to visit our community. It is actually a very loving and welcoming place. We have hundreds of non-Native people working in the community and hundreds more who visit. And, most important, we have a significant number of Kahnawà:ke people who have fallen in love with non-Natives from the surrounding region and followed both their hearts and the law by living off-reserve. Those who respect the will of the community have the respect of the community.

Mr. Kay's column angered many our people. Using terms such as 'racist' and 'militant' indicate a commentator who would rather take the easy shots rather than deal with a long and dismal history that has seen the systematic destruction of a way of life that was flourishing long before the arrival of the first Europeans. Our ancestors were victims of their trust that the visitors would be people of their word, and Mr. Kay's words are quite explicit in their venom.

Grand Chief Michael Ahrihron Delisle, Jr.
Mohawk Council of Kahnawà:ke