**Chapter Outline**

to accompany

*Indigenous Peoples within Canada: A Concise History*, Fifth Edition

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**Chapter 8: Westward and Northward**

The purpose of this chapter is to trace the expansion of the fur trade into what would become western Canada and to further demonstrate the impact that European contact would have on the Indigenous nations of the West. The chapter begins by highlighting the impact that the horse, firearms, and disease had on the nations of the Plains. In short, each of these resulted in a shifting of territories as various groups gained or lost power due to access to horses and firearms and as they struggled under the devastation of European diseases. The impact of the early smooth-bore guns is not fully known; the bow and arrow was still the preferred buffalo hunting method for groups who were plains hunters before the arrival of the Nehiyaw (Cree), Nakoda and Plains Ojibwa. At first, the introduction of guns was primarily a psychological advantage.

One of the most obvious results of the shifting of territories is demonstrated by the movement of the Nehiyaw and Nakoda onto the Plains and their adoption of a buffalo culture, especially in the southern portions of the territory. The Nehiyaw also continued to be major players in the fur trade, providing European goods to the western Indigenous nations such as those of the Niitsitapiikwan (Niitsitapi, Blackfoot) Confederacy and taking on the “middlemen” role. As time progressed, however, the Nehiyaw and Niitsitapiikwan became enemies, resulting in the Niitsitapiikwan dealing directly with traders. The Niitsitapiikwan at first believed they were not being treated as fairly as the Nehiyaw, especially with regards to firearms. However, with the expansion of the fur trade into the Athabasca region and a growing market for buffalo robes and pemmican, relations between traders and the Niitsitapiikwan improved. The late 1700s saw the Nehiyaw and Niitsitapiikwan competing for dominance on the Canadian Plains.

The late 1700s also saw the development of the fur trade in the Far Northwest, a term used by settlers to indicate the present-day Northwest Territories, Yukon, and northern British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. The trade developed on two fronts, one from the interior toward the coast and another along the coast after Captain Cook’s visit to Nootka Sound in 1778. The Northwest Coast saw three companies vying for control of the trade—the Northwest Company (NWC), the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC), and the Russian American Company—with the HBC eventually prevailing. It was due to the financial backing of the British Crown and the vast trading network it had established that the HBC was able to control trade. As was the experience on the Plains and on eastern portions of the continent, contact with traders had social consequences. Like other groups, West coast societies were affected by diseases, increased aggression between Indigenous nations, and a change in lifestyle.