



## Sandra Lovelace Nicholas

Citation

May 8, 2006

Most Reverend Chancellor, I have the privilege to present to this Convocation, Sandra Lovelace Nicholas, an aboriginal woman, a mother, a grandmother and a Senator. Sandra was born on the Tobique Reserve [NEGOOT-GOOK] as a member of the Maliseet Nation [WOLASTOKWIYIK] in 1948.

She grew up on the Reserve and got married to a non Indian man in 1970. She moved away with her husband to the United States and had one child. She had two more children later. When her marriage ended, she returned to the Reserve and found out that her identity as an Indian and band member was taken away from her at the time of her marriage and without her consent. The federal Indian Act had enacted section 12(1)(b) that automatically deprived Indian women of their legal status and identity when they married non Indian men. There was no similar provision for Indian men who married non Indian women. This discriminatory legislation was first enacted by Parliament in 1869. The aboriginal women challenged the discriminatory section 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act right up to the Supreme Court which did not rule in their favour in 1974.

Sandra was born into a very politically involved family. She joined the struggles of other aboriginal women who were faced with the same challenge across Canada. She was determined to fight to regain her Indian identity and rights as a band member. Sandra got involved in 1977 with a national outcry of this injustice. In July 1977, Sandra and other women from the Tobique Reserve organized a 100 mile walk from the Oka Reserve, near Montreal, to Ottawa to bring national attention to their struggle for equality. She was not done with her social activism.

Sandra took her case to the Human Rights Committee at the United Nations in 1979. Canada was asked to respond to her complaint. In 1981, the UN Committee found that Canada was in breach of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* because of this discriminatory section of the Indian Act. Her struggle was still uphill. The leadership of the Indian governments would not agree that this section should change. The Parliament of Canada repealed this discriminatory section in 1985. The legal status of Indian women who lost their status and rights were reinstated. The reinstatement of rights was also extended to their children and other Indians who had lost their legal identity in other situations.

Sandra has achieved various training in her career. She has attended Community Colleges in NB, Ontario and the State of Maine. She completed three years at this University. Her mother and sister graduated from this University. In 1990, she was given the Robert S. Litvack Memorial Award for Human Rights at McGill University and was a recipient of the Order of Canada. In 1992, she was given the Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Person's Case. Twenty years after the repeal of the discriminatory section 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act, the Government of Canada appointed her to the Senate of Canada.

Senator Sandra Lovelace Nicholas is an example of a person who would not accept injustice for herself, her sisters and their children. Her successful struggle to change law in Canada must be heralded. She has changed history forever. She has overcome local, regional, national and international obstacles in her quest for justice.

Most Reverend Chancellor, it is with great pride and pleasure that I humbly present Senator Sandra Lovelace Nicholas for the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.

