Human "Being"

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By Laura Spitz

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In this summary, Professor Spitz discusses how the Douglas Treaties acknowledged Aboriginal title when negotiations with Indigenous populations when purchasing land. She looks at how what the definition of “human being” is during the 18th century and how Douglas’ respect of Aboriginal land title also indicated he was these people as people. This diverges from categorizations surrounding the term *Indian*, and its implication that populations were subhuman and/or a different species.

Douglas is still embedded in a larger social and legal structure even as he understands indigenous populations as human when it comes to resources and allocations. Where the white, colonial legal field is assigning human-ness based on legal definitions, the Coast Salish nations understand human-ness as in yourself. Where those who are legally human believe they are owed something, the belief of innate human-ness corresponds to an obligation to all living things.