

From *Stonechild* to Social Cohesion: Anti-Racist Challenges for Saskatchewan  
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In October 2004, the Honourable Mr. Justice David Wright submitted the report of the Commission of Inquiry Into Matters Relating to the Death of Neil Stonechild (the *Stonechild Report*), a provincial investigation into the 1990 freezing death of Stonechild. The report criticized the police investigation into Stonechild's death. "The deficiencies in the investigation go beyond incompetence or neglect. They were inexcusable." (Harding 2004:A6; Wright 2004). Wright concluded that the Saskatoon Police Force had conducted the investigation in a fashion that obfuscated the matter, and in particular, the role of officers on the force in the event. Wright found that Stonechild, an Aboriginal seventeen-year-old, had been in the custody of the police on the night he was last seen alive, and that his frozen body bore injuries and marks likely caused by handcuffs. He found that the principal Investigator on the case, Keith Jarvis, carried out a "superficial and totally inadequate investigation" of the death, and "dismissed important information" provided to him by members of the police. Wright found that in subsequent years, "the chiefs and deputy chiefs of police who successively headed the Saskatoon Police Service, rejected or ignored reports ... that cast serious doubts on the conduct of the Stonechild investigation." Finally, he found that "The self-protective and defensive attitudes exhibited by the senior levels of the police service continued ... (and) were manifested by certain members of the Saskatoon Police Service during the Inquiry." (*Summary of Findings, the Stonechild Report, 2004:212*)

On November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Saskatoon Police Chief Russell Sabo fired Constables Larry Hartwig and Bradley Senger, announcing that they were "unsuitable for police service by reason on their conduct". (Harding 2004:A6) And what was the impugned conduct that cost the men their jobs with the Saskatoon Police Service? Not racism. Not criminal negligence. Chief Sabo

said they had failed to properly report information and evidence about Neil Stonechild being in their custody on November 24, 1990. At the time of writing, the Sabo decision is under appeal.

Neil Stonechild was not the first, nor the last, Aboriginal man to freeze to death in apparently similar circumstances. Indeed, the police practice of taking Aboriginals out of town and leaving them was known colloquially as “Starlight Tours”, both in the police service and in the Aboriginal community. At approximately the same time that Stonechild’s body was found, Darrel Knight was taken out of town and left to whatever fate may hold in store for him. Knight survived, and later filed a complaint. Two police officers were subsequently charged and convicted of unlawful confinement for their actions in his case. Two other bodies of Aboriginal men, Rodney Naistus and Lawrence Wegner, were found in 2002, frozen, in the same area. Deaths in similar circumstances include those of Lloyd Dustyhorn and Darcy Dean Ironchild in 2002.

Aboriginal activists and organizations called the police force racist. Spokespersons for the police rejected this, and defended the force’s reputation and the claims of the individuals involved in the Stonechild matter. And yet, the pattern of denial and obfuscation around the Stonechild case – which ultimately led to the Wright Inquiry – and the high degree of public awareness of the “Starlight Tours” – combined with the anger toward and fear of cops in the Aboriginal community, suggests there is something going on here. In the white Saskatoon community opinion was polarized between those supporting the police position and especially that of the officers involved, and those criticizing what appeared to be racism, apparent criminal behaviour on the part of some officers, and institutional practices violating human rights.

In this paper, I look at the report and the incident as exemplars of the racism in Saskatchewan's political culture, and consider what possibilities exist to erode this damaging and sometimes deadly phenomenon. I argue that, given Saskatchewan's demographic trajectory<sup>1</sup>, failure to deal with white racism will guarantee social stresses between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, damaging the province's economic and social viability into the future; and therefore, a proactive self-reflective anti-racist policy and a strategy for building public support should be a priority for any Saskatchewan government. Social cohesion, a notion of considerable interest to provincial and federal politicians and to academics in Saskatchewan<sup>2</sup>, cannot be constructed without tackling racism.

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<sup>1</sup>Census projections suggest the very young Aboriginal population will continue to increase rapidly, and by 2010 Aboriginal people, predominantly youth, will be the majority ethnic group in Saskatchewan.

<sup>2</sup>A Google search of "government of Saskatchewan social cohesion" raised about 11,400 invocations of the phrase. Recently and notably, this includes a speech by Regina-Wascana MP (and federal finance minister) Ralph Goodale. "we're building homes as a way to invest in Saskatchewan's centennial year and thereby leave a lasting social and human legacy ... It's all about building better futures in a community that truly cares about all its members - meaning greater inclusion and social cohesion." (Goodale 2004)

Acts of specific racism are often identified as such, and condemned by members of the dominant community. However, there is much less consensus on the existence and nature of a systemic racism which implicates all of us. And, as Irlbacher Fox (2005) shows, legacies of historic acts of racism are often discounted as though they were simply historic artefacts replaced by newer understandings and “renewed relationships”. This formulation avoids the questions of agency, in/justice, and responsibility.

Allegations of systemic racism are generally rejected by those who suggest that the way things are done, the *status quo*, is simply the product of social and intellectual consensus and is not laden with relations of dominance and subordination, nor the result of intentionality. But racism never happens in the absence of relations of privilege, and confronting and eradicating racism requires unmasking the white-preferential, male-preferential processes that facilitate access to power, privilege, education, influence, employment, political positions, and so on. Because the effects of racism are unintended by individuals, and because most people in the dominant community are well intentioned and truly believe that their privilege is solely the result of their merit and diligence, the existence of intentional systemic patterns of discrimination and privilege is denied. This results in what Razack calls “the dominant group’s refusal to examine its own complicity in oppressing others”. (1998:40)

I am alleging that systemic racism in the service, first, of colonialism; and subsequently, of maintenance of settler and white privilege, is embedded in Canadian political culture. “Race” is colloquially used to refer to categories of people who share broadly similar physical characteristics. However, critical race theorists and post-colonial scholars (such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Carol Schick, and Joel Olson) have shown that race is a constructed

category, that has shifted over time and across cultures, but that it is typified by the legitimation of relations of dominance and oppression, linked to categories of people. Reviewing that important corpus of literature is beyond the purview of this paper, and unnecessary for the argument I make. Still, it is useful to note that there are still some contemporary scholars who write and teach about race using discredited definitions and analysis.<sup>3</sup> Insofar as this contributes to elite knowledge that in turn, shapes the largely dominant categories of students in universities, this misconception of race is particularly egregious: it perpetuates the mindless racism that sustains relations of dominance and subordination in which we are all implicated. While “race” is a constructed and hence, a contestable and arguably fallacious category, racism is not. Racism occurs when people behave as though race were real – and when they act on the privileges or liabilities conferred by racist processes.

The systemic racism embedded in our political culture is inherited from the colonial relationships that have now been transmuted into the Canadian social context, where descendants

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<sup>3</sup>Without suggesting the following is either the most important or the worst of this phenomenon, I offer the example of Mark Dickerson and Tom Flanagan, in their widely-used *An Introduction to Government and Politics: A Conceptual Approach* (5<sup>th</sup>). 2000 (?) Toronto: ITP Nelson, at 51. “A race is a biologically defined group whose members share a gene pool, giving them common physical characteristics, such as skin, eye, and hair colour. A race is the same as a subspecies; members of a race are physically identifiable and distinctive, but they can interbreed with members of other races and produce fertile offspring (as well as new races). A race differs from a nation in that it is only a biological group. ...”

of settler populations carry with them a preferential entry into social, political, and economic institutions; and who see themselves reflected in those institutions and in the dominant culture, in ways that Aboriginal populations do not. Further, the very fact of normativeness is a social asset to those who enjoy it. Finally, this asset is correlated with especially white skin privilege, rather than with those Canadians labelled “visible minorities”. Ultimately, this phenomenon both perpetuates racist assumptions and processes, even as it is so normalized as to be invisible and non-controversial. (Green 2005) Yet, it is inescapably visible to those whose “race” constructs them as subordinate; and this realization is accompanied by anger at and resentment of those who benefit from race privilege while denying the existence and consequences of racism. (For a good personal account of this see Fourhorns 2005.)

And systemic racism has material consequences, both for those who enjoy privilege, and for those who are subordinate. Statistics Canada data show that the likelihood of Aboriginal people completing school or acquiring post-secondary education is improving – but is still significantly less than the national average (48% of Aboriginal youth did not complete secondary school as of 2001; 37% of non-reserve Aboriginal people had completed post-secondary studies, compared with 58% for the total Canadian population). Health problems are distinctive and prevalent for Aboriginal populations. “For every 10-year age group between the ages of 25 and 64, the proportion of Aboriginal people who reported their health as fair or poor was about double that of the total Canadian population.” Economic marginalization shows up in the lack of adequate housing and childcare facilities. (Statistics Canada 2003; Saskatchewan Labour 2003)

Colonialism and its racism are practiced through what Lawrence calls “extreme discursive warfare”. (Lawrence, 2004:39) The trenches of this warfare lie in the media, in



government bureaucracy and legislation, and in universities. The media write, speak, and produce for the “average reader”, the normative working class or middle class white model with its set of social assumptions about the world. The advertisers that underwrite the media pitch to this category. For the most part, Aboriginal peoples do not exist for the media, except as practitioners of violence or political opposition; as marketing stereotypes; or as bearers of social pathologies. Virtually no real Aboriginal people write for or are portrayed in the media, especially the private media, neither for Aboriginal or settler consideration (Doug Cuthand’s occasional columns in the Regina and Saskatchewan newspapers are so exceptional as to prove the rule.) The creators and enforcers of the laws and policies of the state are overwhelmingly non-Aboriginal, implementing regimes that are seldom directed at Aboriginal peoples and almost never with Aboriginal stakeholder or citizen participation. The knowledge producers, universities, construct and replicate forms of knowledge that they also have the power to determine; and in so doing, they mostly legitimate forms of knowledge that are alien to and hostile to Aboriginal forms and to critical contestation. Universities are overwhelmingly populated by those who know little or nothing about Aboriginal peoples and issues, and teach to student bodies that have only a few Aboriginal members. Thus, in both the knowledge presented and recruited, the ivory towers remain white, and the graduating elites carry with them this white-preferential way of seeing and organizing the world.

The Wright report indicates to me that the incident concerning the death of Stonechild is a manifestation of structural and individual racism in institutional culture, and the report documents the obdurate denial of this by especially the Saskatoon Police Force. The denial that such incidents could possibly be a consequences of individual or structural racism is shared by

many non-Aboriginal members of Saskatchewan society, who prefer to see such events as isolated acts by individuals.

Institutional racism is diffused throughout the professional cultures and practices of state and private institutions. Structural racism is similarly encoded in the apparatus and practices of the agents of state, corporate, and cultural power, such as politics, economics, and universities. Racism, thus, is, like other forms of political culture, transmitted intergenerationally and is non-controversial. Destabilizing it is enormously difficult, as it first requires the critique to make the practices visible, to de-normalize them; and then to provide strategies for change.

But *Stonechild* provides us with a moment of opportunity, for all who were appalled by, and who are committed to transformation of, this damaging and sometimes deadly phenomenon. It is a moment when even those who have no race analysis, and no understanding of colonialism<sup>4</sup>, are united with Aboriginal people in condemning the particular police actions that arguably led to the death of Neil Stonechild, and undeniably led to a set of institutionally-sanctioned practices of police behaviour frustrating the justice system. If we can trace the parameters of racism in political culture, it may be that the repugnance of those who reject police calumny and violence may also move them to reflect on our racist political culture, and how we are variously constructed within it. Then, we can move to strategies for building social solidarity, and for undermining race privilege as well as race discrimination.

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<sup>4</sup>Colonialism is an always exploitative relationship, in which the political, cultural, and economic autonomy of one society is appropriated by another via coercion. It is legitimated by myths of superiority, inevitability, and racism; and it is enforced by the socio-political institutions of the colonizer. These myths and the practices of colonialism are transmitted intergenerationally through political culture.

*Stonechild* shows us, as did the Pamela George case, in which the young Saulteaux woman was assaulted and killed by two middle-class white men in Regina, (Razack, 2002) and by the murders of Eva Taysup, Calinda Waterhen, Shelley Napope, and Mary Jane Serloin by a white man, John Crawford, (Goulding, 2001) that racism kills. It maims, as the case of the 12 year old Cree rape victim from the Melfort-Tisdale area, assaulted by three white adult males, demonstrates. (Buydens 2005) It's pervasiveness limits opportunities and experience, depriving us all of human capital even as individuals' lives are constrained.

Razack argues that racism in Canada has a spatialized component. She suggests that the colonial society disciplines the colonized into particular and the least valuable portions of communities. It is not only the bodies of people that are raced, but geographical space in communities, where whiteness constitutes a pass to all areas, but an exclusive pass to exclusively white areas; and where areas of predominately Aboriginal occupation are coded as dangerous, degenerate spaces still available for white (and especially white male) tourism. It is in this white adventure into degenerate native space, Razack argues, that the identities of white male and native female are enacted and confirmed – by the white agents, against the native ones. Thus, the Stroll in Regina is worked predominantly by Aboriginal women, and white men can venture there for risky adventure, confirming the power relations between all as they act out their raced sexuality on Aboriginal bodies. However, the likelihood that the women would similarly enter the primarily white residential space of the murderers is slim. This spatialized relationship maintains the focus on the indigenous themselves as needing to be controlled, for racism suggests they are ultimately not able to fit with civilized society. In ejecting Aboriginal men from the urban society of Saskatoon, the Starlight Tours also fit with Razack's analysis.

Razack uses this analysis to illuminate the processes that played out in the murder of Pamela George; her analytical framework can be applied to other situations to show similar or identical processes. The murdered women in Vancouver's notorious pig farm; the murdered sex workers in Edmonton and Saskatoon – the scores of missing Aboriginal women across the country – these cases show us the racial definition of space, into white space and Other space; and the racial conflation of Aboriginal with available and ultimately, disposable women. In this way, the white public knows there is no need to be concerned about these issues, for it believes (it is taught) that these women brought themselves into danger by “choosing their lifestyles”. Consider the numbers of missing Aboriginal women whose cases are being documented by Audrey Huntley, and publicized by the Native Women's Association of Canada. These women have been disregarded as objects for state concern and action because of the many factors in their lives that are directly consequent to being Aboriginal – and ultimately, precisely because they are Aboriginal.

In his book *Just Another Indian*, Warren Goulding explores the context for the murders of four Aboriginal women by John Martin Crawford; the lack of media and state attention paid to the murders; Martin's eventual trial and conviction in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and the “lurid details of a triple sex murder”. Goulding points out that, in contradistinction to the Paul Bernardo trial, the media didn't seem interested. It had the ingredients of sex and violence, but it was about Aboriginal victims, not middle class white girls. Racism played and plays a role – it was the in/significance of the Aboriginality of the victims to authorities, media, and the white public, that resulted in the lack of urgency around the case. Contrasting the response to the Crawford murders with those of Paul Bernardo and Karla Homolka, Goulding implies the

middle-class whiteness of the latter rendered them subjects of empathy and interest. “The mainstream media, conservative and decidedly non-aboriginal in terms of working journalists, were unable to empathize with the perpetrator or the victims and their families.” (2001:210-11) Crown prosecutor Terry Hinz told Goulding: “The media responds to victims they can empathize with”. Colour the media white. The indifference of white media and the white public to the violence and misery that attend to many Aboriginal people’s lives, is a deeply racist position.

Goulding also faults the organization of media, who particularly in the wake of private media mergers, have eliminated or scaled back or in other ways reduced focused positions such as the “Indian beat”. (2001:216) These apparently neutral decisions are implicated in the practices of racism and sexism, for they have the effect of eliminating good journalism of particular issues and on particular kinds of people. And when Aboriginal issues are of interest to the media, they are often unidimensionally presented. Goulding, a white journalist, writes:

Racism in the media begins subtly. ... When a violent incident occurs in [a predominantly Aboriginal] one of these areas. Editors and news directors ... make a basic evaluation: is it news? ... In Saskatoon, if someone is beaten in an alley in Riversdale or Pleasant Hill, it isn’t news; if a similar incident happens in upper-middle-class Silverwood Heights or Lakeview, it is.” The implication is that “bad things only happen to people who deserve them”. (2001:212-13)

While racism is most violently experienced by Aboriginal people, it also maims the humanity and civility of those who perpetuate it, and deny and ignore it. If you want to think of this instrumentally, racism injures the capacity of the body politic to work collaboratively toward common visions. In other words, the social cohesion that could sustain all of us is dependent on confronting and eliminating racism from Canada’s social fabric.

And this will be no easy task. Racism is the legitimating ideology of colonialism. Over decades, the racist assumptions that legitimate our politico-social order have been dignified by intellectuals, by policy, and by politics, until they have become part of what many white people understand as common sense. In families, in schools, and in popular culture, racism is reproduced intergenerationally by apparently good people. This culture of white racism operates in ways that appear to be benign, unintentional, passive, or unknowing. It can only operate thusly because of its' very normativeness, and because of the conventional consensus on the suspect nature of Aboriginal people.

Racism is supported by myths embedded in our political culture, such as variations on the theme that “we” trace our origins to brave tenacious ancestors who came from elsewhere to create this good society. These myths ignore the reality of colonial occupation of Aboriginal lands, and the displacement and subordination of Aboriginal peoples, all through official policies. Racism exists in the faith so many have in the myths of liberalism – that ultimately, we are all autonomous agents who choose the conditions of our lives. This myth is tied to a lack of appreciation of how, if we act as agents, it is in contexts, and in conditions, that are not of our choosing. Racism exists because of the conflation of the circumstances of peoples' lives with their aspirations about their lives – as though Aboriginal people “choose” statistically probable lives of immiseration. Above all, the myths of the dominant society ignore the reality that the social context and economic wealth for the settler community is based on “white privilege”, the toolkit of positive assumptions and advantages that Aboriginal citizens do not share.

The effects of racism may be found in the negative Aboriginal socioeconomic measures, such as dramatic differences in life expectancies, education levels, workforce participation rates,

infant mortality rates, rates of access to healthy sufficient water and sewage infrastructure and housing, and in high rates of social pathologies. These social pathologies disturb many whites, but too few appreciate these phenomena in political context. The miserable statistics are seldom accompanied by political and theoretical analysis that might explain how certain communities come to be systematically liable to particular kinds of misery.

In their study of urban Aboriginal women in Montreal, Jaccoud and Brassard make the point that Aboriginal marginalization “begins in early childhood and is rooted in a much broader social context associated with the consequences of (the) colonization”. (2003:143) This context becomes what they call a “defining path” that makes marginalization probable: “poverty, non-integration into the conventional job market, involvement in gainful activities that are socially frowned upon, unacceptable or even criminal, violence, alcohol, drugs, homelessness, reliance on food banks and shelters ...”. (2003:143) The notion of exclusion or marginalization describes “the relative absence of certain social groups from the labour market and, more generally, from participation in society’s core institutions ... [and are] one aspect of social isolation, poverty, and economic insecurity.” (Jaccoud and Brassard, 2003:143) These kinds of circumstances are incompatible with social cohesion.

When individual cases reach the justice system, like that of the 12-year old rape complainant, powerful actors participate in the adversarial justice system to show that the victim is in fact responsible personally, while no party explores the broader collective context for individual actions. Thus, the medical doctor providing evidence to the court in that case could state that the girl had reached “full physical maturity” and was “very attractive”, and the court could comfortably move to the question of the victim’s participation – and instigation – of her

rape by three older white defendants, who were, according to their lawyers, “aroused” by her. (Buydens 2005)

And in the case of convicted murderer John Martin Crawford, Mr. Justice Wright (the same judge who would later be the Commissioner in the Stonechild Inquiry) noted: “Mr. Crawford was attracted to his victims for four reasons: one, they were young; second they were women; third, they were Native; and fourth, they were prostitutes. ... He seemed determined to destroy every vestige of their humanity.” (Goulding, 2001:188) In other words, the Aboriginal identity of the murdered women was part of what marked them as targets for murder, in addition to their other common attributes.

In his “Final Comments” in the Stonechild Inquiry, Mr. Justice Wright wrote: “As I reviewed the evidence in this Inquiry, I was reminded, again and again, of the chasm that separates Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in this city and province. *Our two communities do not know each other and do not seem to want to.*” (2004:208) (Italics mine) And he was troubled by the fact that “the Saskatoon Police Service’s submissions regarding the improvements to the Service did not contain any reference at all to attempts to improve the Service’s interaction with Aboriginals and other racial groups.” (2004:210) Apparently, then, the police force did not think it had a race/ism problem to be fixed. Yet, Wright, whose report was in so many ways illuminative of the depth and pervasiveness of racism in the Saskatoon Police Force, was unable to grapple with it’s systemic and structural nature, and he concluded with the erroneous implication that racism is created by both communities, and is a matter of misunderstanding and cultural differences, rather than systemic power relations with historical origins and contemporary practices. Wright departed from the context for the institutional



racism that led to the deaths of the frozen men, by calling for greater “understanding” between the two communities. This suggests that the problem of racism is caused by cultural misunderstandings, rather than by the disproportionate power and malice held by those in the dominant community, who also benefit from the subordinated status of Aboriginal people. Neil Stonechild et al. did not die due to a misunderstanding.

Racism in Canada is the malaise of colonialism. The continued structural racism sustains the “toxic gulf” between Aboriginal and settler communities that Mr. Justice David Wright identified but misunderstood in the Stonechild Report, and its remedy will be found in positive strategies for decolonization. Wright misunderstands the “toxic gulf” because he sees it as personal and relational, and as being equally the responsibility of the dominant and Aboriginal communities. He does not conceptualize it as a logical consequence of the processes and consequences of colonialism. His even-handed condemnation of it, then, places an unfair portion of the blame on Aboriginal communities for the racism initiated by the dominant community’s elites. This is not to suggest that there is no racism in Aboriginal communities: there is. But it is to argue that institutional racism on the order demonstrated by *Stonechild* is emblematic of relations of dominance and subordination, and the reactionary racism in Aboriginal communities is just that, not the legitimating ideology of dominance. Destabilizing institutional and structural racism requires grappling with the relations of dominance – and consequently, with the race-coded privileges that accrue to especially white Canadians. White privilege is sustained by what Lawrence calls “The intensely white supremacist nature of Canadian society, where power and privilege are organized along lines of skin colour”. (Lawrence, 2004:175) This is about unequal power relations, not moral equivalence.

Racism's roots are embedded in the history of colonialism. Making this deep background of racism problematic, and then eliminating it, requires more than simply the good will of well intentioned white people, and superficial recognition of Aboriginal cultural practices. It requires the systematic dismantling of colonialism. This, in turn, depends on government leadership that confronts the past, takes responsibility for it in politically meaningful ways, and leads us all into new relationships that will not be like the old, and will not always be uncontroversial. It means requiring institutions, like justice and education systems and police forces, to learn and to change. It means land claims settlements, resource sharing, and a shift in political culture and power sharing in social, political, and economic institutions. It means hearing harsh truths from those who have had to swallow racism to date. It means a diminishment of power on the part of those who have always assumed their merit and goodness gave them the lion's share of social goods, rather than their race (and gender) privilege.

There is some modest movement in these areas, as the following examples suggest. Universities are beginning to make some meaningful space for critical, anti-racist, anti-sexist scholarship of the kind that can challenge relations, theories, and practices of oppression. On December 1, 2004, the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan announced a \$750,000 donation to establish the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan Chair in Police Studies. One of its objectives is to "address the concerns of the aboriginal community and recruit more aboriginal people into policing", according to John Stamatinos, chair of the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan. (University of Regina 2004) We hope this is transformative of police education, not merely co-optive or integrative of Aboriginal recruits. Also at the University of Regina, a Canada Research Chair position for Anti-Opressive Education is vested in the Faculty of Education. At the

University of Manitoba, a Canada Research Chair on Canadian Aboriginal issues is being appointed in the Faculty of Arts. Other examples exist. Gestures like this will lead to shifts in knowledge production, and in the preparation of cohorts of students obtaining elite education. They, in turn, will help shift the consciousness of civil society.

And there are some models for courageous political leadership in the service of positive social transformation. One example may be found in the Yukon government of Tony Penikett in the 1980s and early 1990s. Penikett's government built enough support in white society, through popular education, to design and implement the Yukon Umbrella Final Agreement that serves as the basis for the self-government and resource sharing agreements of the 14 Yukon First Nations. And, Penikett simultaneously built more cordial and equitable relations with Indian politicians. The result is the better model in Yukon. But it wasn't easy, it wasn't fast, and it took vision, commitment, and leadership. It took the courage to take a principled political position that could be a political liability. Another model is in the history of the Woodrow Lloyd government in Saskatchewan, which stared down a doctors' strike in bringing in medicare in 1962. Again, this required political leadership and courage, in the face of opposition and consequences.

Will the dominant society, the settler community, support the expensive and difficult transformation of a racist colonial order to one that is genuinely post-colonial? It should, for principled ethical reasons. But it must, because of enlightened self-interest.

Marginalisation and racism breed social pathologies, one example of which is the growing incidence of Aboriginal gangs now attracting media attention, with CBC Radio in Saskatchewan running a week-long (March 21-25) series on the phenomenon. The CBC<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup><http://sask.cbc.ca/regional/servlet/View?filename=fave1030522>; Last Updated Mar 22

reported: “According to a recent report by Criminal Intelligence Service Saskatchewan, a coalition of police agencies, Saskatchewan now has the largest number of aboriginal street gang members per capita in Canada. ... The province needs to put more resources into dealing with gangs. If nothing is done, some communities will eventually be completely controlled by gangs ...” (CBC 2005) The CBC also broadcast a story on Aboriginal teenage girls in custody at the Paul Dojack Youth Facility.<sup>6</sup>

Some say they see gang activity as part of a struggle against white society, and they're willing to do what it takes to be part of that struggle. ... One of the aboriginal teens said gang members see themselves fighting a war against a white power structure. "It's kind of like Indians against white people," she said. ... Last week, a coalition of Saskatchewan police agencies released a report indicating the province now has more than 1,300 gang members — the most young people per capita involved in street gangs of all the provinces. ... Police chiefs from across Saskatchewan are hoping the province will create a strategy to reduce gang activity. (CBC 2005)

Gangs are, without exception, involved in criminal activity, including prostitution and drugs. Yet, the Aboriginal gangs have fused identity and resistance with the sordid side of gang life, to create a form of loyalty against the oppressor and in favour of the gang. The wilder speculations suggest this is a race war, and it is troubling that the interest of the CBC, and the focus of many of its commentators, focuses on the racialized nature of the gangs in opposition to white society. “Should white people be afraid?” morning show host Sheila Coles asked, and thus, directed her primarily white listeners to the question of fear of the Other. Yet little

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2005 03:39 PM CST and accessed March 22, 4:58; “They're young and often aboriginal - and they say they're waging a war” CBC Morning Edition, <http://sask.cbc.ca> March 21, 2005)

<sup>6</sup>“Girls in gangs: disturbing reports from the inside”, Last Updated Mar 21 2005 08:58 AM CST <http://sask.cbc.ca/regional/servlet/View?filename=gangs-girls050321> accessed March 22, 5:23 PM.

attention was paid to the context that sustains the violent and oppositional cultures of gangs. One gets the sense that if white Saskatchewan could but guarantee it's own security, the gangs could run amok. That is, there is much concern for "our" security, but no great political push to eliminate the complex and intransigent conditions, including economic and political commitment to ending race privilege and oppression, the conditions that breed gangs.

Saskatchewan, with it's burgeoning population of young Aboriginals, should be concerned: there will either be a culture of redress, sharing, and commitment to a common future; or there will be alternatives, forms of resistance and alienation, like gangs. But the apparent ethos that "we" must control "them" lest they hurt "us" is precisely the ethos in which the gangs have emerged, and which must be transformed.

2005 is Saskatchewan's (and Alberta's) Centennial.<sup>7</sup> The province is celebrating, complete with a visit from the Queen. A significant amount of public money and energy is going into this birthday party. But the myths continue, even as Aboriginal people are encouraged to participate, providing the illusion of inclusion and diversity to a society that largely excludes Aboriginal peoples and voices. The myths of social harmony and a tradition of co-operation are true for some, less true for others. Colonialism is not named, much less confronted and dismantled. Solutions to Aboriginal problems will all be "neutral"; that is, they will amount to suggestions for inclusion into the dominant paradigms, while the dominant population will not have to change at all. Thus, the patterns of the past and present are likely to extend into the future, while white Saskatchewan insists it is not racist, and that it wishes the best

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<sup>7</sup><http://www.sask2005.ca/>; [http://www.cyr.gov.sk.ca/saskatchewan\\_centennial.html](http://www.cyr.gov.sk.ca/saskatchewan_centennial.html);  
[http://www.gov.sk.ca/govinfo/news/premier\\_speech.html?0085](http://www.gov.sk.ca/govinfo/news/premier_speech.html?0085)

in it's relationship with Aboriginal peoples. And the future of Saskatchewan depends on Aboriginal children, most still unborn.

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