

Culture



Elizabeth FURNISS, *Victims of Benevolence: Discipline And Death At The Williams Lake Indian Residential School, 1891 - 1920*, Williams Lake, B.C.: Cariboo Tribal Council, 1992; 53 pages / Joy MANNETTE (ed), *Elusive Justice: Beyond the Marshall Inquiry*, Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1992; 108 pages

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The second book, edited by Riewe and Oakes, contains 11 contributions by writers representing a variety of disciplines and interests in northern affairs. The preface implies that each paper was first delivered as a lecture at the University of Alberta in 1991, but three are reprints of earlier publications. Unfortunately, these were the only three accompanied by abstracts which hints that the book was hastily assembled without any real attempt at integration. The skimpy one-third page preface to the volume does not notify the reader that *Human Ecology* especially refers to the field of home economics, so some readers might be surprised to see lengthy articles dealing with nutrition, northern housing, and bird skin clothing. Then, the concept of ecology also covers articles on child abuse, spirituality, education, and international affairs. Clearly, the editors intend a very broad definition of ecology, but that definition is rather obscure.

Nevertheless, the book contains some very interesting papers that can be judged on their own merits. Jane Ash Poitras gives us a particularly well-spoken cultural model of history and change in the north. Her model assumes that social problems experienced by aboriginal people are the consequence of spiritual conflict and destruction attending the penetration of aboriginal communities by Canadian culture. The key to development, according to Ash Poitras' model, lies in revitalized traditions, especially spiritual traditions. Her article is a counterpoise for Rosemarie Kuptana's more technical description of child abuse and prevention programs in Inuit communities, and Catherine Twinn and Dexter Dombro's piece on sexual abuse and the criminal justice system. Together, these three articles work well in describing aspects of a particularly pernicious form of human tragedy. They also represent how many aboriginal communities have approached ridding their communities of social pathologies — by strengthening cultural integrity, by more sympathetic program intervention, and by more effective use of the law.

Similarly, papers by Eleanor Wein, Jean Sabry and Frederick Evers, David Young and Elizabeth Olsen, and Milton Freeman can be viewed as complimentary discussions of the impact of economic change on dietary customs. The remaining articles are more difficult to place in an integrated context. Bryce Larke of the University of Alberta has contributed a case study of his efforts to conduct program-oriented research into hepatitis B in Baffin Island communities. Even seasoned researchers in other

fields of northern research will be awed by the mountains of constraint Larke had to overcome to get his work done. Carol Morgraine of the University of Alberta and Rick Riewe of the University of Manitoba provide academic papers summarizing recent events from their perspective as human ecologist and zoologist, respectively.

To fully appreciate all that is offered in these two volumes, readers will need wide-ranging interests and interdisciplinary skills. Since, in my experience, this will be no problem for northernists, both books should get a wide reading.

Elizabeth FURNISS, *Victims of Benevolence: Discipline And Death At The Williams Lake Indian Residential School, 1891 - 1920*, Williams Lake, B.C.: Cariboo Tribal Council, 1992; 53 pages.

Joy MANNETTE (ed), *Elusive Justice: Beyond the Marshall Inquiry*, Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1992; 108 pages.

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While Canada is not alone in its record of the adversity which confronts indigenous peoples before the law, that there should be cause to produce a text such as the one edited by Mannette is, in itself, an indictment of the criminal justice system in that country. And the discussion of physical and emotional abuse of Native pupils at the Williams Lake Mission School which has been undertaken by Furniss (an historical exposé made all the more relevant by recent successful legal action against staff at the same school) is a timely reminder of the ways in which, throughout history, the forces of colonialism have continued to reinforce the powerful/powerless dichotomy which underpins the relationship between invader and invaded.

In many ways the subject matter of the first text, *Victims of Benevolence: Discipline and Death At The Williams Lake Indian Residential School, 1891 - 1920*, informs the content of the second text under review — *Elusive Justice: Beyond the Marshall Inquiry* and even if it were solely for this reason, both are important

and welcome additions to the literature associated with Native studies.

Embodied within her relatively brief discussion of the lives and deaths of some of the Native children of the Roman Catholic administered Williams Lake Indian Residential School between 1891 and 1920, Furniss provides a framework similar to that from within which Mannette et.al. approach their discussion of the legal debacle commonly referred to as the Marshall Inquiry. That the substance of one details the situation which existed for Shuswap peoples in British Columbia in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Furniss), while the other emanates from Donald Marshall Junior's experience of Nova Scotia 'justice' in the late twentieth century (Mannette et.al.) is, of itself, instructive. Both are replete with images of the Native as 'other' — 'other than human'; 'other than settled'; 'other than worthy of consideration' — and yet a century of white settlement intervenes. Negative stereotypes were as 'real' and consistently applied throughout the Marshall Inquiry as when the provisions of the Indian Act made Natives wards of the Canadian government in the nineteenth century.

Through the use of primary source documents, Furniss recounts the beliefs which obtained at the time of the inception of residential school policy. Native people were considered "inherently 'wild' and resistant to discipline" (p.4); in possession of an "innate character" (p.33); judged to have "a holy horror of anything which smacks [of] system and order" and to have an "habitual and innate disposition to shirk what is so irksome to them" (p.19). Furthermore the belief that, in being taught to speak English, and through the deliberate inculcation of a negative self image (pp.35-36) the children would "lose all of their original simplicity" (p.11) clearly demonstrates that the residential program was intended to be the instrument which would act as "an inherent component of their civilisation" (p.4).

Almost a century later Donald Marshall Jr., a member of the Mi'kmaq peoples of Nova Scotia was charged, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. In October 1986, seventeen years after his conviction and four years after he was exonerated of the crime, the provincial government of Nova Scotia announced that it would conduct a Royal Commission into the Donald Marshall Jr. Prosecution. Throughout the Royal Commission, Marshall heard his people described as "Indians", "wagon burners" and "broken arrows" (Mannette

et.al., p.67). He heard himself variously described as a "typical Indian witness", a "terrible witness", a "bad witness" and a "poor witness" (p.69) and he was "blamed for his own conviction" (p.16). He listened as his membership of a "race" rather than his "nationality" or "culture" became the *raison d'être* which equated with his level of civilization (p.49). And Marshall's own lawyer was exhorted by the Attorney General not to "put [his] balls in a vice over an Indian" (p.41). In short, Marshall was both subjected to and is the product of the employment of law and order to maintain the *status quo*.

While Mannette et.al. have provided vigorous discussions of Marshall's initial conviction, his imprisonment, repeated appeals and eventual exoneration, together with analysis of the underlying reasons for, and conduct and outcomes of the Royal Commission, the book does exhibit some problem areas. Firstly, though, an examination of its strong points is fitting. The chapter by Wall (pp.13-33) provides clear evidence of the inadequacies of the Royal Commission: to its limited terms of reference; to the lack of reference to broader aspects of public policy; and to the fact that Federal/Provincial tensions created the perfect climate within which the all too important questions of social, political and legal responsibility could be avoided.

In reviewing the text of the Commission's testimony, James Youngblood "sakej" Henderson accurately defines the "four characteristics of alienation of Membertou Mi'kmaq: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness [and] alienation" (p.43) while quite correctly criticising the absence of any dialogue on racial attitudes (p.38) and the general denial of the importance of historical memory (p.44). Other contributors follow suit. Mannette (pp.63-77) introduces an interesting discussion of the concept of "ethnic hegemony" (pp.65-66) and highlights — albeit briefly — the need for a thorough investigation of systemic as well as individual racism (p.66). In her discussion of testimony which revealed clear association by police with "Indians as criminals", Mannette delivers powerful and stinging criticism when she writes: "This litany of apartness is the grammar and punctuation of marginal existence" (p.67).

Likewise, through M.E. Turpel/Aki-Kwe's informed discussion of Canada's stand on international human rights and the contrast of this with its domestic 'track record' (pp.79-101) is, deservedly, unrelenting. In critiquing the Royal Commission and its findings the author delivers a cogent and coherent account of

the fact that the Donald Marshall Jr. case “invites broader political and cultural analysis because not only was one individual grossly wronged by the criminal justice system but an entire political/historical relationship between two communities was compromised and ignored by government” (p.82).

This, then, is the stuff of Royal Commissions. Government is seen to be done; an avenue by which the powerless can take recourse in the law is more apparent than real; recommendations are made and are devoid of any political power which would enforce implementation; and, as the author describes, racism continues in a more subtle package (p.99). The book is a timely reminder that colonialism is alive and well.

This said, in its entirety the collection of essays would have benefitted from a more thorough editing process. There are numerous instances wherein exact sources are repeatedly cited and unnecessary duplication could have been avoided. Repeated reference to the exhortation “Felix, don’t put your balls in a vice over an Indian” (p.41, p.54) and to the extract from the Grand Council of the Mi’kmaq Nation (p.73, p.79) would be better eliminated. And in a work of this length, it is considered unnecessary to restate so often, and in so similar a way, the details of Marshall’s case.

Nonetheless, these are small criticisms. Together and separately both texts represent valuable contributions to the field.

Peter CARSTENS, with foreword by Chief Murray ALEXIS, *The Queen’s People: A Study of Hegemony, Coercion, and Accommodation among the Okanagan of Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991. 333 pages, \$22.95 (paper), \$55.00 (cloth).

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Carstens’ book describes the processes of incorporation into the Canadian state of an Okanagan Indian population in the upper part of the Okanagan Valley, southern British Columbia, and the resultant reserve community which emerged. The view is based on a long-term relationship Carstens describes

with this Okanagan community. Integral to the argument is that the Okanagan were subject to external economic and political institutions which extended the hegemonic power and control of the Canadian state. In describing these processes, Carstens introduces the reader to what he sees as the integration of social anthropology, ethnohistory, sociology, and political economy. Hence, there is a sprinkling of Max Weber along with what most Plateau researchers have learned — that one has to ‘de-Thompsonize’ the writings of the early Plateau ethnographer and associate of Boas, James Teit.

In pursuing the theme of control, Carstens’ book has two main parts. The first deals with the actual processes of incorporation, and key factors in the transformation of power: the impact of the fur trade and a gold rush, the severe depletion of game in the period 1820-1850, the power of missionaries, and the ability of Indian agents and government bureaucracies to exercise control using the Indian Act. The creation of reserves paved the way for land grabs by settlers and ranchers in the 1800s. In the second part of the book, Carstens presents his interpretation of the ways in which the contemporary reserve community operates. He points out, for example, that one outcome of the ways in which land was alienated was the individualization of Okanagan Indian land ownership. The central theme of the book seems to be captured in the statement that “all Indian reserve communities are encapsulated . . . by one common administrative style” (p. xvii); hence, the Okanagan can be seen as representative of others who have a “reserve culture”.

The story is told in seventeen chapters. Chapter 1 sets the stage by describing traditional chieftainship; Chapters 2-6 describe the changes in the 1800s and early 1900s which limited and transformed Okanagan culture (at one point, Carstens refers to Okanagan conflicts as parallel to those of ‘peasant-farmers’). Chapters 7 and 12 return to the issue of chieftainship, and its transformation under state policies and altered economic circumstances. Chapters 8-16 describe the reserve community, and how the band council attempts to deal with issues such as unemployment. Carstens presents the internal political process as one of competition between factions, as various patronymic networks vie for power.

Much of Carstens’ account is tied into key Okanagan individuals, whom he identifies as chiefs. Carstens merges individual biographies with cultural processes, describing chiefs from 1865 on, and