

CURRENTS

19

Volume 4, No.2

READINGS IN RACE RELATIONS

Spring 1987

URB0010
1901.C00014

FOR DISPLAY ONLY

NATIVE PEOPLE AND RACISM

Also

Self-Government:

Crawling out from under the weight of paternalism and dependence

The Race Question:

Statistics Canada seeks advice

Refugee status

determination: fight or flight?

Native Economy:

Strategies for change

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double discrimination in attaining economic parity

Published by THE URBAN ALLIANCE ON RACE RELATIONS

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CURRENTS: Readings in Race Relations is the quarterly magazine of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations formed in July 1975 "to promote a stable and healthy multiracial environment in the community," is a non-profit organization made up of volunteers from all sectors of the community.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations is an educational agency and an advocate and intermediary for the visible minorities. It works toward encouraging better race relations, increased understanding and awareness among our multicultural, multi-racial population through programmes of education directed at both the private and public sectors of the community. It is also focusing its efforts on the institutions of our society including educational systems, employment, government, media, legislation, police, social service agencies and human services, in order to reduce patterns of discrimination and inequality of opportunity which may exist within these institutions.

The work of the organization is carried out through working committees such as: Educational Institutions; Legislation; Media; Law Enforcement.

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The subscription rate is \$20.00 per year, \$30.00 for institutions.

Membership fees to join the Urban Alliance on Race Relations are:

Students & Senior Citizens	\$ 5.00
General Membership	\$20.00
Sustaining Membership	\$50.00 & over

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Articles offered for publication are welcome. They should be typewritten, double spaced, with adequate margins for notation.

All enquiries about advertising should be directed to the Editor.

The Urban Alliance on Race Relations wishes to acknowledge the financial support of the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.

International Standard Serial Number
ISSN 0715-7045.

2nd Class Mail Registration Number 5972.

April 1987

Native People and Racism

"The more intelligent and educated Indians, of which there are great number, are extremely anxious that the experiment should now be tried of allowing them the control of their own private funds, and express themselves ready and willing to assume the consequent liabilities. This desire seems most natural, and I trust that if it be complied within the manner proposed, individual enterprise and industry will be developed to an extent which will justify so important an alteration in the administration of Indian Affairs."

The Earl of Elgin,
Governor-General of Upper
Canada
1854

Not long ago, a grade three class in Toronto wrote thank you letters to a Native Canadian who had entertained and spoken to their class. One pupil wrote: "I enjoyed your talk very much and learned a lot about Indians. It made me wish more Indians would come to Canada." This innocent comment betrays so much about Canada's almost purposeful pursuit of blissful ignorance about Native people, as does the quotation made by the Earl of Elgin in 1854 about Canada's elusive inability to put substance to the process of self-determination.

It has been suggested that the possible responses of a dominant group toward a minority group can be classified under the following patterns of interaction:

- Extermination
- Expulsion
- Segregation
- Integration
- Assimilation

Extermination solves the problem of minorities by annihilating the minority. Expulsion involves the removal of the minority from the society; segregation is the process of physically separating the minority from the dominant

members of the society and assimilation is defined as two previously distinct social categories which have been amalgamated or blended into a unified social category.

Since the white man first arrived over four centuries ago, Native people have suffered at varying times from all of these treatments. And today, Indian leaders are still fearful that the intent towards them of the larger white society and its governments is essentially assimilative in nature.

While the present priorities of Native people in Canada are the pursuit of self-government and the settlement of land claims, let us not befuddle the underlying cause of the unique and serious position in which Native people find themselves today. The underlying cause is racism, and as Richard C. Powless states in the opening article, "Canada's history and systems of governance and behaviour have institutionalized this racism into current reality."

Native Economic Development

Native peoples in Canada suffer from low incomes, high unemployment, high poverty rates and other adverse socio-economic circumstances.

The development of employment and economic opportunities within the Native communities to address these problems is not, however, simply a technical matter. Values, culture, political institutions, history and other 'soft' factors play a much greater role than the technical factors that traditionally most concern economists and policy makers. While the Native economies remain extremely fragile and vulnerable, care must be taken to ensure that the costs of supporting economic growth does not mean sacrificed values, traditions and social organizations.

Traditional Indian cultures, not so many years ago, were subject to the sudden shock of modern science, industry and military might. The problems of Indian adjustment to the modern world were partly economic, but have also involved in major part adjustments in the religious, cultural, political and other non-economic

dimensions of Indian life. Successful adaptation has not been a matter of making progress in one dimension - such as economic - alone. Rather, the economic is dependent on the political and cultural, and vice versa.

This issue of Currents therefore addresses some of the political aspects of self-determination and self-government, and touches upon the cultural element by looking at the impact upon Natives of the mass media.

However, the major focus of the issue is upon Native employment and economic conditions which perhaps is indicative of the fact that it is in this area that non-Native people in general and the public sector in particular have the greatest potential to play a decisive and constructive role.

Yet it is important to remember the history of treatment that Native people have suffered at the hands of the white man. To put it in its mildest context, it is a history of disillusionment, disappointment and broken promises. There is still not enough recognition today of the wide differences among Indian people across Canada. There is not enough recognition of the social and educational foundations that must be laid and other major changes in the Native economic environment that are needed if development is to succeed. There is not enough recognition of the nuances of Native values and traditions, and not enough recognition in public policies and programmes that what works in one culture doesn't necessarily work in another culture - Native or non-Native.

The deprivation suffered by Native peoples as manifested by high dropout rates from educational systems, high incidences of alcoholism, poor health, low self-esteem, can be correlated directly with high unemployment rates stemming from lack of employment and economic opportunity. And while we may not appreciate the South African Ambassador Glenn Babb pointing it out to us, it is indeed a national tragedy that requires urgent attention.

Tim Rees

