

Preface

It is now a decade since *BC Studies* published its first special issue devoted to native Indians. It is also a decade since the Supreme Court of Canada delivered its decision on the Nishga land claim. In recognizing the principle of aboriginal land ownership in British Columbia, the judges prompted the government of Canada to become more responsive to aboriginal land claims in the province. The government of British Columbia, however, continues to deny the principle of aboriginal title, and among the non-Indian majority in the province there is little informed opinion about aboriginal claims or about actions of Indian peoples in pursuit of those claims.

A decade ago it was not fully evident that Indian activism would continue in the various spheres of concern to Indian peoples in British Columbia. Indian leadership was in short supply. There were only a handful of prominent spokesmen. They were self-made men, past middle age, who found co-operation with one another difficult. Today there is an entirely new generation of Indian leaders. Almost all of this new generation finished high school in the 1960s. Indeed, theirs is the first generation to have noticeable numbers of such graduates. Some of the new leaders were the first Indian graduates of the integrated schooling designed to assimilate them into the larger society; the others were among the last graduates of the Indian residential schools, which were by that time much less isolated from the larger society than previously. Having come to maturity in the same period and having a common familiarity with the larger society, the new leaders have been able to devise more suitable and effective means of defining and pursuing aboriginal interests.

Contrary to the premise underlying a century of Indian education policy in Canada, greater familiarity with the larger society on the part of growing numbers of British Columbia Indians has resulted not in assimilation into that society, but rather in a redoubling of efforts to revive aboriginal culture and to pursue aboriginal claims. For, in what

must be seen as one of the most important developments in the post-contact history of Indian peoples in British Columbia, the first generation of leaders truly able to choose assimilation has chosen to follow past leaders in rejecting simplistic notions of assimilation for themselves and their peoples. Today Indian leadership is in substantial and increasing supply in all spheres of aboriginal concern, and Indian activism in pursuit of aboriginal claims shows no sign of diminishing.

In the past in British Columbia, silence or casual rejection have been the main responses of both the dominant society and its government to aboriginal claims. While these responses have served their purpose in thwarting Indian progress in the claims, the responses have by their very nature precluded public debate on the question within the dominant society itself. The consequence has been paradoxical. Those who ostensibly form public opinion within the dominant society — for example, those who lead or manage government, the media, schools, universities and the professions (and including, presumably, most of those who read *BC Studies*) — continue, in the main, to ignore the nature and significance of aboriginal claims. Scattered through the province, however, in places where substantial numbers of Indians and non-Indians share the same locality — as in Port Alberni, Bella Coola, the Charlottes, Terrace, Hazelton, Fort St. John, Williams Lake, Lillooet, Kamloops, Merritt — are pockets of well-developed opinion within the dominant society.

In these pockets discussion is lively, although the debate is one-sided. Underlying the prevailing belief that the aboriginal population should be assimilated are several notions serving to belittle the validity of aboriginal claims. The notion is prevalent that Indian people before contact made little use of the land and resources, and had no developed notion of property. Recently, for example, a land developer on the Charlottes informed me that before contact the Haida never ventured inland more than fifty feet from the high-tide mark. Equally common is the notion that the Indian peoples faced contact in helpless ignorance, meekly acquiescing in the policies of missionaries and government officials. Something of both notions is embodied in a statement to me by an interior mayor that Indians established villages only after contact as they sought comfort and security around missions and trading posts. Such notions are intriguing not only because of their common, although generally unpublished, occurrence, but also because they serve so transparently to buttress the dominant society's local self-interest in undermining the validity of aboriginal claims. Still, the notions do recognize implicitly that the nature of Indian societies before contact and the way in which

Indian peoples responded to contact are relevant today in assessing aboriginal claims. Nevertheless, the common and rather uniform occurrence of the notions indicates that the practice of silence by those who should be informing public opinion has had as its legacy the prevalence of ignorance about aboriginal claims and the place of aboriginal peoples in British Columbia.

This special issue of *BC Studies* is intended to provide insight into some of the concerns, rights and activities of Indian peoples in the province and to provide material useful in informing non-Indian public opinion about aboriginal claims and the place of aboriginal peoples in British Columbia. The nine articles were prepared separately, and in each case present aspects of work in progress by the author.

Thomas Berger's essay sets the theme of the issue by establishing the historical context of aboriginal claims in British Columbia and discussing some contemporary provincial policy innovations bearing upon land claims. As Berger shows, the sorts of notions evident in British Columbia today about aboriginal property and society have been characteristic of European colonizers since the time of first contact. James McDonald's case study of aboriginal property relations develops one of the points raised by Berger and serves to refute the present-day popular notion that aboriginal concepts of property were absent or unsophisticated. The material which McDonald provides on behalf of the Kitsumkalum people is representative of a number of similar compilations that have been completed by, or on behalf of, particular groups in various parts of the province. The evidence about pre-contact use of land and resources which these compilations provide is an integral part of the current land claims preparations of these groups. That territories and geographical features were named by such groups is especially important evidence of pre-contact use and ownership. These circumstances explain the particular format of the Kitsumkalum study.

Clarence Bolt's study of the Tsimshian approach and response to Christianity and to Thomas Crosby counters the notion that Indian peoples could have little awareness of or influence over contact and post-contact circumstances, and in doing so the study provides an important contribution to the historiography of the immediate post-contact period.

Alan Haig-Brown and Evelyn Pinkerton examine aspects of contemporary cultural survival. In both cases the relevant public policies are provincial responsibilities. The Ministry of Education has provided appropriate and favourable guidelines relating to native language teach-

ing in the public schools, but linguistic research sufficient to support and guide the teaching of the languages is not a high priority within universities in the province. While the provincial authorities responsible for natural resource management have taken small steps in recent years to accommodate the needs of particular Indian communities, it is still the case that destruction of the natural environment by logging, mining, pipeline construction and electricity production remains a constant threat to many Indian communities. Takeover of aboriginal land and resources is not something which occurred only at some indeterminate point in the past. It continues today with equally little recognition of aboriginal rights to land and resources.

The traditional natural resource of greatest importance to Indian peoples in British Columbia is the salmon. Management of this resource, which is legally a federal responsibility, remains highly controversial in the province. In no other policy sphere of concern to Indian peoples is racial hostility so evident and in no other does the prospect of solution seem so slight. In this context Charles Broches' examination of Indian salmon fishing rights in Washington State is highly relevant, for in Washington a policy impasse identical to that which still prevails in British Columbia has been broken — and in a manner highly favourable to Indian interests. While the American legal and political system differs from ours, and while treaties have been the key element in Washington, the essential policy questions are the same on both sides of the border: Who is to be entrusted with ensuring the survival of salmon? Will Indians be allowed to take some portion of the harvest, regardless of intended use, simply because it belongs to them? The Boldt decision has answered these questions in Washington State; they remain unresolved in British Columbia. The Washington experience merits examination as well for the practical reason that the Boldt decision is well known to British Columbia Indians and continues to influence Indian opinion in the controversy over fishing rights.

Art is the aspect of Indian culture best known to non-Indians. It is also an aspect of growing economic importance, bringing fortunes to a few and livelihoods to many. The relation of contemporary native art to Indian culture, however, is not necessarily what it is often assumed to be. Karen Duffek's examination of "authenticity" in Indian art opens a topic not usually broached publicly by artists or art dealers.

In terms of numbers of persons involved, amounts of money spent, and degree of focus upon issues of exclusive aboriginal concern, politics has been the pre-eminent activity among Indian people during the

decade. It is in the political sphere that the presence and influence of the new generation of leaders have been most apparent. None of the prominent political spokesmen of a decade ago remain active today. Each of them — Frank Calder, Guy Williams, George Manuel and the late H. A. “Butch” Smitheram — retired from active politics during the decade. Those who have replaced them are too numerous to name even in a long paragraph. What is significant is that the new leaders have reaffirmed the claims to aboriginal rights that Indian spokesmen have been making since the time of contact. The means that the new leaders have established to pursue these rights, however, are quite different from those evident a decade ago. Tribalism, based on the traditional linguistic groups, and including unity of status and non-status Indians, has become the dominating element in Indian political activity in the province. In my essay I summarize the events and circumstances that have contributed to the present political situation.

Contemporary Indian politics, like contemporary Indian art, is the product of an ambivalent symbiosis with the dominant society. The political organizations depend upon government funding for their existence while the satisfaction of their immediate demands and long-term goals, including recognition of aboriginal rights, depends also upon government. Some of the major attributes and effects of the symbiosis are discussed in Stephen Fudge’s examination of the general public policy process affecting Indian peoples. These attributes and effects are most evident at the national level, where Indian leaders are one step removed from day-to-day Indian politics within the various regions of the country, but they are evident as well within the regions, including British Columbia. The Indian side of the public policy process, however, is not divided clearly into national and regional spheres, for the regional political organizations serve as the component units of the national organizations, and because the regional organizations deal mainly with the federal government, rather than those of the provinces, and depend upon the federal government for funding.

It is my hope, and that of the other contributors, that this special issue will provide insights into the contemporary place of aboriginal peoples in British Columbia, and point to more accurate and appropriate ways of viewing the history of this part of the world.

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