

EDITORIAL

The judgment of the Supreme Court of Canada in the case of *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* (11 December 1997) abruptly changes the nature of Native/non-Native relations in British Columbia. It begins to redress some of the deep inequities in the long colonial encounter that is the subject of this double issue of *BC Studies*, and it validates, in a delayed and roundabout way, some of the ideas of British colonial theorists in the 1830s and 1840s.

In those years, theorists of what they regarded as an enlightened, humanitarian colonialism, such as Herman Merivale and Earl Grey, argued that the Crown had to intervene in the government of colonies to protect Native peoples from White settlers. The interests of the two, they held, were inimical. If settlers and Natives were left alone with each other, conflict would ensue, the settlers would win, and the Natives, sooner or later, would be exterminated. In the short run, the only solution was to interpose the Crown and its representative between the two and, in the long run, to assimilate Natives into civilized society.

In British Columbia, policies of protection did not have much of a chance. Governor Douglas, a product of the fur trade and, to a degree, of the humanitarian values of the early nineteenth century, tried to create protected space for Native peoples. However, even before he left office in 1864 it was clear that few Whites in the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia held similar views. After his departure, Native land policy was controlled by settlers and became far more parsimonious. When British Columbia joined Confederation in 1871, the Government of Canada assumed the protective responsibility of the Crown, but the province remained a bellicose defender of settler rights. Over and over again when the federal

government faced the choice of defending Natives or of placating an irate provincial government, it did the latter. Natives, who had been told repeatedly that the Queen's law was impartial and would protect them, continued to believe that somewhere beyond a racist colonial society were those who would intercede on their behalf. Hence their many petitions and trips to Ottawa and London.

Although by the standards of so much that preceded it, Chief Justice McEachern's judgment in 1991 (*Delgamuukw et al v. The Queen, Reasons for Judgment*) was relatively generous, it remained within a tradition of colonial thought that emerged clearly in the mid-1860s and has dominated the province ever since. Merivale and Grey would probably have said that McEachern was too close to the situation. The Supreme Court of Canada is farther away and somewhat detached from the values of this settler society — as was the Colonial Office, as might have been the federal government. After 150 years an outside authority has done what Merivale and Grey insisted it must: provide some real protection for Native peoples against settlers. For those who understand something of the trajectory of colonialism in British Columbia, 11 December 1997 was a historic day. Finally, there is reason to hope, Native/non-Native relations have been placed on a more just footing.

At the same time, we should not forget that British Columbia has been, and largely remains, a highly successful colonial society, one that has generated such self-congratulatory stories about its past that colonialism has been invisible to most of the people who live here. For most of us, colonialism happened elsewhere, and the recognition of it here, and of ourselves as its agents, suddenly qualifies our fulsome accounts of the progress and development of an immigrant society while connecting us with a much less comfortable past.

The articles in this double issue of *BC Studies* explore these matters. The volume has not been long premeditated. It was conceived barely six months ago when, suddenly, these articles were in hand or in sight. The fact that they were, and that their authors come from several academic disciplines, is a measure of the widely perceived need, at least in academic circles, to take colonialism out of the closet, where it has been hidden for so long, and examine it for what it was and is in British Columbia. As this is done, it becomes apparent, as others have shown elsewhere, that colonialism is not only about gunboats and economic domination, but also about cultural assumptions and agendas that have long outlived the gunboats. It is also clear that colonialism involves intricate, varied, two-way

relationships between colonizers and colonized. It is not a mechanical process that stamps itself across people and land, and has not been quite the same in British Columbia as anywhere else. Colonizers as well as the colonized have been affected in an enormous variety of ways, but here as elsewhere, power has been greatly imbalanced and the burden of change has rested on the colonized.

This collection begins with an analysis by anthropologist Elizabeth Furniss of contemporary attitudes towards Native peoples in Williams Lake, a small town in the Central Interior of British Columbia. Furniss argues that a pervasive myth of the frontier erases Native Peoples, and she uses her analysis of this myth in Williams Lake to explore attitudes that, she suggests, are widespread and enormously debilitating for Native peoples. Essentially, she describes the contemporary persistence of colonial values.

From this vantage point we revert to the origins of colonialism in British Columbia. A paper by one of the co-editors of this journal describes the forms of external power that entered what is now British Columbia before 1850 and considers Native responses to them. This is followed by two remarkable vignettes of Native life in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. The first is a poem by the late Charles Lillard, based on a story told by Richard of the Middle-giti'ns to the American ethnologist John R. Swanton at Skidegate on the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1900-01. The story, therefore, has passed through several filters (we also reproduce Swanton's version) and is interesting as much for the questions it raises about textual authority as for its glimpse of a revenge raid that probably took place in the late 1860s. Across Hecate Strait at the same time lived Arthur Wellington Clah, a Tsimshian chief who had learned English at Fort Simpson and the habit of keeping a diary from William Duncan, the Anglican missionary. The historical geographer Robert Galois uses this extraordinary manuscript to construct an astonishing picture of Clah's travels and of his encounters with Christianity — a hybrid Native life at the interface of two worlds.

Colonial societies construct boundaries between colonizers and the colonized and reinforce them in a great variety of ways. The remaining articles in this collection all turn around such boundary constructions. The historian Sylvia van Kirk considers five prominent families near Victoria in the 1850s, all products of mixed marriages, and explores the gendered fate of the progeny of such alliances as the social boundary between Native and non-Native strengthened in a fledgling colonial society. The geographer Ken Brealey shows how one of the

most basic boundaries in the province was laid out on the ground as Peter O'Reilly, Indian Reserve Commissioner from 1880 to 1898, distributed small Indian reserves across the province and in so doing separated the land available to the colonizers (almost all the province) from that reserved for the colonized. The other co-editor of this journal considers White male constructions of Native female sexuality — a dangerous, wild other to be variously enjoyed and contained — and also shows how, in this instance, the interests of males overrode racialized colonial boundaries. The anthropologist Jo-Anne Fiske explores the changing place of Native law in Northern British Columbia. She shows that missionaries and early government officials relied heavily on such law; that it was eventually superseded by the legal apparatus of the state; and that now, after several court decisions, some Native legal practices are being codified within Western legal frameworks.

The collection concludes with an interview with Doreen Jensen, a distinguished Gitksan artist and historian, a storyteller about her people in several media. Her interview contains glimpses not only of the boundaries and interdictions imposed by colonialism but also of Native peoples' struggle to subvert these oppressions, waken their "sleeping" cultures, and live proudly within a transformed world. Implicit in her conversation is an important reminder about resistance and the persistence of Native ways and pride in the face of their long colonial battering.

We might add, parenthetically, that when we undertook this editorial job we rather assumed that neither of us would publish in *BC Studies*. We felt that however bad a submission from one of us might be, it would be virtually impossible, in the interest of working harmony, for the other to turn it down. But with this issue we do publish in the journal we edit, although, and in spite of our best efforts to edit the other's work objectively, our original reasoning on the matter still seems persuasive. A reasonable conclusion is that your editors are a self-indulgent pair, bereft of principle. We offer only the lame excuse that perhaps our contributions add something to a collection that, overall, seems to us to say important things about the rather unknown society formed in this rather unknown place that, not long ago, was abruptly brought within the colonial reach of the outside world.

The editors