

EDITORIAL

The devil, they say, is in the details. And there are details a-plenty in the four full-length articles in this issue of *BC Studies*. Byron Plant, a recent doctoral graduate in history from the University of Saskatchewan, traces what he calls the “convoluted life and legacy” of the Indian Research Project, a large-scale social scientific survey of Aboriginal life, society, and economy in British Columbia that was commissioned in 1954. Ben Isitt, an energetic, visionary labour historian and activist now teaching at the University of Victoria, explores the short-lived, but not inconsequential, 1920s experiment to establish a united front of Communist and non-Communist workers in the BC section of the Canadian Labor Party. Matt Cavers, a former resident of Victoria who now lives on the Sunshine Coast, draws from his Queen’s University MA thesis in geography to muse, for several pages, on the cultural history of an obscure tree with a limited range – the Garry Oak of Vancouver Island. And freelance historian Karl Preuss draws attention to the convoluted events involved in the creation, demarcation, and adjustment of Chuchuwayha Indian Reserve No. 2 in the Similkameen Valley of British Columbia.

Cynics of the sort who, after reading their titles, regularly call into question the worth of research projects in the humanities and social sciences, might be inclined to ask, after a superficial review of these articles, why we need to know so much about so little: twenty-seven pages of commentary on the fifty-year-old research of a triumvirate of anthropologists; more on the long-ago failure of socialist and Communist workers to find lasting common ground; intricate tracings of where boundary lines lay in the dry grass of the southern interior mining country; and a suggestion that we should listen to trees. Harrumph! Of course, those with a particular interest in any of these topics would object, pointing out that each of these articles tells us a good deal about its particular subject matter and thus contributes to our understanding of particular places and times. However, both individually and collectively, they do more than this. The intricacies charted in these pages remind us of the complicated, contested, and contingent nature of the world in which we live, and of the ever-present, ever-shifting limitations of our efforts to understand it.

Plant and Preuss ask us, in different ways, to reconsider some of the simplifications that often guide our society’s thinking about the immensely complex issues surrounding the place of indigenous peoples in

British Columbia, past and present. As Plant shows, the contrasting interests and agendas that shaped the Indian Research Project dent simplistic colonialist critiques of the links between anthropological research and policy development. And events in the Upper Similkameen warn against facile generalizations about European contempt for and indifference towards indigenous peoples as here, at least, federal agents tried more than once to protect Native interests from the avaricious ambitions of settlers. On a different tack, in a different context, Isitt's article reveals that race and class were neither entirely exclusive nor entirely antagonistic categories during the early decades of the twentieth century and that, for all the vitriolic strength of economic arguments against Asian immigration, some Marxists sought to counter racist views by stressing the importance of class solidarity. In a very different vein, Cavers invites us to contemplate what Garry oaks meant to people in Victoria before they became the environmental icons they are today, and, in so doing, he reminds us that attitudes towards nature, as well as attitudes towards other humans, are shifting constructs that reflect a good deal about those who evince them.

These themes are nicely pointed up in the short feature in this issue, somewhat playfully entitled "The Play's the Thing." This commentary on *Nanay: A Testimonial Play*, by my colleague Geraldine Pratt and her graduate student Caleb Johnston, reflects on the challenges of translating social scientific research into theatre and highlights the irresolvable but fascinating tensions inherent in the challenging act of communication. Different genres depend on different modes of information transmission: the quest for a simple, clear message strains against complex, intricate evidence; interpretations are constructed by authors and audiences alike, and, shaded by expectation, experience, position, and circumstance, they may well be quite different. To borrow from and paraphrase Pratt and Johnston, the process of bringing academic research to a diverse audience should generate critical reflection and, at best, stimulate a wide-ranging public debate about issues of central importance to the development and maintenance of civil society. The articles in this issue are contributions to that end.

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