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# Aboriginal Justice, the Media, and the Symbolic Management of Aboriginal/Euro-Canadian Relations

**ELIZABETH FURNISS**

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In 1992 the government of British Columbia launched a public inquiry to investigate persistent allegations that Aboriginal people in the central interior of the province were being subjected to racial prejudice and unfair treatment by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the provincial justice system. Over a six-month period the Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry held hearings in ten of the fifteen Tsilhqot'in, Carrier, and Secwepemc reserve communities of the region. Aboriginal people brought forth almost two hundred incidents of complaint, including allegations of police assaults in jail cells, inadequate responses to calls for help, abuses of police authority, and poor representation by lawyers. The commission's final report concluded that problems of racial prejudice, discrimination, and cultural incompatibility were widespread between Aboriginal people and the justice system.<sup>1</sup>

The Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry is one of the more recent of a series of public inquiries, hearings, task forces, and royal commissions in the last decade examining the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Canadian justice system.<sup>2</sup> The highly publicized cases of the wrongful incarceration of Mi'kmaq Donald Marshall,<sup>3</sup> the shooting death of Manitoba Native leader J. J. Harper, and the murder of Helen Betty Osborne in La Pas, Manitoba,<sup>4</sup> along with the more recent shooting by an RCMP officer of Connie Jacobs and her young son in their home on an Alberta reserve,<sup>5</sup> have drawn much public attention to the complex ways in which factors of racism, poverty, gender, culture, and history are implicated in the difficulties that Aboriginal people across Canada continue to experience in their dealings with Canadian justice.

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The problems raised through these inquiries might be analytically separated into two categories. The first concerns problems of what could be called a structural nature: the cultural incompatibility of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal concepts of justice, the arbitrary imposition of state authority in Aboriginal communities, and the failure of Western concepts of justice to meet the needs of Aboriginal social systems. The second category involves attitudinal factors. Paradoxically, this involves not the failure of the justice system to respect and incorporate Aboriginal cultural difference in the application of justice, but the exaggeration of Aboriginal difference through attitudes of racial prejudice, in which Aboriginal people are denied the right to equal respect and dignity and are subjected to a range of discriminatory treatments, including over-policing (based on the presumption of the criminality of Aboriginal people), disrespectful treatment, abuses of authority, longer jail sentences, and so on.

Recent royal commissions and public inquiries investigating Aboriginal justice have recognized both structural and attitudinal barriers to Aboriginal justice. Policy changes geared toward resolving some of the long-standing structural barriers to Aboriginal justice are already underway. For example, the cultural incompatibility of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal concepts of justice is being approached through such initiatives as diversion programs and circle sentencing, where restorative rather than punitive justice is emphasized and Aboriginal communities are consulted in the determination of penalties both for individuals who may bypass the formal justice system and those who proceed through it to sentencing.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the attitudinal barriers to Aboriginal justice are much more difficult to address. These problems have to do with widespread attitudes of racism on the part of non-Aboriginal society, attitudes that have led to the miscarriages of justice, the over-policing of the Aboriginal population, and the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system. Cultural awareness training workshops are now regularly held with RCMP, judges, legal-aid lawyers, and Crown counselors as part of an ongoing initiative among Aboriginal leaders to bridge these barriers in understanding.

These attitudinal barriers, nevertheless, continue to present significant obstacles in Aboriginal peoples' quest to resolve problems with the justice system. This system is more than a set of laws, policies, and procedures created by government agencies and empowered by Canadian laws. It consists of individuals, largely non-Aboriginal, who have their own cultural attitudes and proclivities and who are responsible for the practical application of justice. To bring about positive changes to the justice system, Aboriginal leaders not only must seek to bring about policy changes, but also must confront and transform the way non-Aboriginal people in both urban and rural settings respond to such political initiatives and comprehend the nature of the problems Aboriginal people are seeking to bring to public attention.

This paper presents a case study of how one small city in rural British Columbia responded to a public inquiry into Aboriginal peoples' treatment within the regional justice system. The city of Williams Lake was at the center of the Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry controversy. While the inquiry

sparked a variety of responses among regional residents, the city's "official" response will here be assessed through coverage provided to the public by the city's twice-weekly community newspaper, the *Williams Lake Tribune*. Newspaper coverage will be assessed through the methodology of interpretive discourse analysis,<sup>7</sup> which highlights the manner in which newspaper content conveys explicit and implicit meanings through a variety of strategies, paying attention not only to textual features, or what is written—such as choice of words in the headlines and article body—but also to how the message is conveyed, such as the choice of content in the lead sentence; the selection and relative positioning of official sources quoted; the relative prominence of the article's placement in the overall newspaper; and the framing devices employed to contextualize and define the significance of the story. The discourse analysis methodology thus assumes that one may interpret the meaning of media messages from an analysis of the text itself, while suspending the analytical questions of both the factors shaping the production of media content and the way in which audiences or readers interpret that content. Here I explore how the reality of the inquiry was constructed and represented to the local public over a nine-month period and contrast this news coverage with that provided by a major Vancouver daily newspaper, the *Sun*. In drawing these contrasts, I seek to elucidate some of the aspects of culture, and barriers to Aboriginal justice, that are distinct to life in small, rural towns and cities in Canada.

In short, my conclusions are that the testimony presented at the Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry raised fundamental and deeply troubling questions about the state of local Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations in the Cariboo Chilcotin generally and in the city of Williams Lake specifically. It challenged conventional assumptions about the harmonious state of Aboriginal/Euro-Canadian relations; further, it threatened the Euro-Canadian community's own self-image of adhering to the values of ethnic tolerance, compassion, and racial equality. As a result, the ebb and flow of newspaper coverage can be understood as attempts at the symbolic management of local Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. Through newspaper reporting, certain events were selected, framed, and represented in a manner consistent with the dominant conceptual framework through which many Euro-Canadians understand themselves, Aboriginal people, and their relationship with Aboriginal people. By failing to cover certain issues and thus rendering them invisible, by interpreting other events according to prevalent, negative themes by which Euro-Canadians perceive Aboriginal people, and by manipulating the boundaries by which the local community conventionally defines itself, newspaper coverage of the justice inquiry presented a morally defensible self image of the community to its readers despite the cloud of racism that the inquiry raised. By examining newspaper coverage as it is generated in these contexts, I seek to demonstrate some of the daunting obstacles that Aboriginal leaders face in mobilizing support for their concerns in rural Canada.

### BACKGROUND: ABORIGINAL POLITICS AND THE MEDIA

The media play a central role in the social construction of reality and have a profound influence on shaping public perceptions and understandings. In recent years Aboriginal leaders have attempted to capitalize on the power of the media to generate public support for their claims to land, resources, and sovereignty. One of the key weapons Aboriginal people possess in advancing their claims is the “politics of embarrassment.”<sup>8</sup> In bringing long-standing problems to public attention, Aboriginal leaders are essentially engaging in a form of moral politics: they attempt to demonstrate how the actions of government and its representatives violate central values and principles on which Canadian society is based, and in so doing seek to generate sufficient public outrage and support to embarrass governments into addressing Aboriginal demands for policy change. Drawing attention to the contradiction between the practice of racial discrimination by representatives of the state and the ideal Canadian values of democracy, equality, and multiculturalism is one of the most powerful moral critiques wielded.

In directing these issues to the media, and in staging protests in the public domain—roadblocks, protest marches, and public hearings—Aboriginal leaders implicitly recognize one of the media’s central functions: to serve as a “moral watchdog” of society,<sup>9</sup> scrutinizing the activities of politicians and governments to ensure a conformity to the presumed moral values of society. The media claim to be defenders of the public interest, reporting on incidents of crime and lawlessness, and even creating imagined public problems against which public morality and values become defined.<sup>10</sup> The reproduction of dominant social values and identities is one of the primary motivating features of news production. It should be noted that Aboriginal people are only one of many subordinate groups in Canadian society that seek to gain advantage by focussing their political rhetoric on appeals to fairness, equality, and multiculturalism, and by exposing how social practices have deviated from these principles.

Such was the strategy used by Tsilhqot’in leaders in seeking a provincial justice inquiry. The facts of racial prejudice and discrimination stand in sharp contrast to the ideological underpinnings of the Canadian justice system, which presumes to treat all individuals fairly under the law. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms prohibits discrimination in the law on the basis of such factors as race, ethnic origin, and color. More generally, the equality of all individuals is one of the key principles of Canadian ideology, and since the 1970s federal policy has promoted multiculturalism and ethnic diversity. These contradictions between ideology and practice reveal dark aspects of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations that not only pose an acute embarrassment to agents of the justice system, but also contradict the very self-image that Canadians hold of themselves and their society. By bringing forth their testimony in a public forum, one in which the media were present, Aboriginal leaders in the Cariboo Chilcotin sought to draw sufficient public sympathy in order to pressure the provincial government into making positive changes to the justice system.

## METHODOLOGY

The media play a critical role in reproducing the dominant ideology and reinforcing relations of social inequality in society.<sup>11</sup> This is not to say that the media necessarily act in a conspiratorial manner. Rather, it may be more in the conventional structures of news production,<sup>12</sup> the implicit cultural assumptions of reporters, and the textual and linguistic forms of news discourse<sup>13</sup> that dominant ideologies legitimating structures of power in society are reproduced. The media, however, are not monolithic entities. Considerable variation may exist in the selection of events deemed newsworthy, the relative prominence given to news articles, the length of time a story is run, and the manner in which the news as discourse is constructed and communicated to the readership.

News reporting may vary according to several factors. One is the target audience. In writing for the public, editors and journalists presume their audience to be of one mind, to share common sets of interests, concerns, and moral values. They therefore select events deemed newsworthy and interpret the significance of these events in accordance with the imagined set of common-sense knowledge, values, and perspectives of its readers. The process of news production therefore manufactures an image of social consensus and a shared public morality, thereby masking any structural divisions, inequalities, or differences in perspective among groups in society.<sup>14</sup>

This consensus view of society shapes the language through which the news is communicated to the readership. Newspapers adopt, consciously or unconsciously, a particular language that Stuart Hall has called a "public idiom." This public idiom is the newspaper's own version of the "rhetoric, imagery and underlying common stock of knowledge which it assumes its audience shares and which thus forms the basis of the reciprocity of producer/reader."<sup>15</sup> Consequently, a close analysis of the semantic content of media discourse reveals some of the key mechanisms by which dominant beliefs and values are implicitly communicated.

A second factor shaping news production is the position of the media institution in broader networks of social and political power. Large urban dailies, small-town community newspapers, and alternate indigenous presses are positioned differently in these networks, have different economic constraints, rely on different funding sources, and may follow starkly different editorial policies. These factors might be considered under the general category of the political economy of news production.

As it is critical to analyze media discourse in terms of the cultural meanings prevalent amongst the target audience or "interpretive community,"<sup>16</sup> and following the assumption that the Williams Lake interpretive community differs markedly from the more diverse, urban audience of the Vancouver *Sun*, I first present an ethnographic overview of the city of Williams Lake, its socioeconomic structure, and the dominant cultural beliefs about regional identity, Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. I suggest the importance of political and economic factors in shaping news production through a discussion of the position of the community newspaper in

local structures of power; however, due to the difficulties of actually gaining access to and tracing the behind-the-scenes decision-making processes and internal politics within the newsroom, these factors will be only inferred rather than demonstrated.

I then survey newspaper coverage of the Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry provided in the *Tribune* between September 1992 and May 1993. I draw contrasts with the coverage provided by the Vancouver *Sun* between December 1992 and May 1993. I examine news stories and editorials, and leave aside opinion columns and letters to the editor. In all, thirty-one *Tribune* articles and twenty-five *Sun* articles were run in these respective periods. I examine some of the global features of news discourse,<sup>17</sup> such as the overall thematic frame into which information is assimilated, as well as the semantic implications of the article's prominence, headline, leading sentence, topic, official sources, and choice of words. Certain news stories are selected for analysis in order to exemplify the subtle manner in which information on the justice inquiry was assimilated through news reporting into the dominant public idiom of Williams Lake, and reflected the dominant attitudes and beliefs of the Euro-Canadian community regarding Aboriginal people and Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations.<sup>18</sup>

#### CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND ABORIGINAL/NON-ABORIGINAL RELATIONS IN WILLIAMS LAKE<sup>19</sup>

Williams Lake, like many other interior British Columbia cities and towns, has an economy based primarily on the forest industry, with four major sawmills and a plywood mill located in the city. Williams Lake is also a regional government center for the Cariboo Chilcotin. There are a variety of federal and provincial government offices, and the public service is the second largest employer. Euro-Canadians—people of European ancestry—comprise the majority of city residents, while Sikh Indo-Canadians comprise 12 percent, and Aboriginal people at least 8 percent.<sup>20</sup>

The city serves as the main commercial, service, and administrative center for a much wider geographic area that stretches some 300 kilometers westward through the Chilcotin plateau. The total regional population is over 40,000. There are fifteen Tsilhqot'in, Carrier, and Secwepemc First Nations in the Cariboo Chilcotin region with a total registered population of just over 6,000. Ten of these First Nations use Williams Lake as their primary center for purchasing goods, supplies, and services. Tsilhqot'in, Carrier, and Secwepemc people are a visible presence in the city, where they come from outlying reserve communities regularly to shop, socialize, and obtain government, medical, and educational services.

Williams Lake has enjoyed unprecedented economic growth and prosperity since the forest industry began to boom in the 1950s. In the last four decades the population has increased from less than 1,000 to over 10,000. Despite this growth, most residents feel that Williams Lake has a small-town atmosphere and they continue to refer to the city as a town in everyday conversation. When asked what they value most about life in the area, residents

highlight the friendliness of the community and the relaxed, informal lifestyle of the region.<sup>21</sup> The tourism industry capitalizes on the friendliness of the local people, and advertisements extend a “hearty Cariboo welcome” to summer visitors. The characteristics of informality, friendliness, and widespread social harmony are central both to the residents’ self-image and to the image the community presents to outsiders.<sup>22</sup>

The community newspaper plays an important role in promoting the image of the Cariboo Chilcotin as a stable, harmonious, and friendly place to live. The *Tribune* is the only media source devoted exclusively to in-depth coverage of local news, issues, and events.<sup>23</sup> It publishes twice weekly, and in the early 1990s its publisher, editor, and five staff reporters were all non-Aboriginal. The newspaper’s stated mandate is to serve as both a reflection of the community and as a watchdog over the actions of politicians, governments, and criminals who threaten the security of the public.

The Williams Lake newspaper is centrally situated within the social and political networks of the community’s elite.<sup>24</sup> As is typical of small cities and towns, this elite is composed primarily of local merchants and middle-class professionals: doctors, lawyers, accountants, administrators, and teachers. Individuals from these sectors dominate local governments, elected boards, and community service groups. Although the *Tribune* is owned by a small non-local corporation, its publisher is a member of a highly respected “old-time” family, many members themselves being successful business entrepreneurs. The newspaper itself, first and foremost, is a business enterprise geared toward making a profit and thus economically dependent on the continued support of its readership and especially on the favor of local advertisers, primarily retail stores and service providers. It is common knowledge that the newspaper’s economic reliance on local advertisers reinforces the close relationship between the newspaper and the city’s merchants.<sup>25</sup>

Of all sectors, city merchants are particularly active in local politics. They broker close relationships with forest-industry representatives and work tirelessly to promote Williams Lake as a safe, secure place for new outside investment. The interests of the merchants, local government, and industry have a natural resonance. Businesses rely on consumers having a continued and abundant supply of spending money. Any downturn in the forest industry translates into a threat to the economic viability of local businesses. Further, industry contributes a significant amount of the tax base that provides operating funds for the municipal government.

For its part, the forest companies depend on ongoing access to timber lands, access that has been enabled by the state’s previous historical policy of nonrecognition of Aboriginal title in British Columbia. This access is now subject to vocal challenge by First Nations people in the Cariboo Chilcotin, who on occasion have sought public and government support for their Aboriginal title claims by erecting road blockades that have significantly, if temporarily, interfered with logging activity, and who since 1992, following a shift in government policy, have been in the process of negotiating Aboriginal treaties with the provincial and federal governments. These historical and present circumstances have led to open eruptions of the racial tensions and hostilities



that have been latent in Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations in the Cariboo Chilcotin for many decades. Many merchants, civic officials, and corporate industry representatives are aligned in their collective opposition to the Aboriginal treaty process, fearing the loss of industry access to forestry lands and the perceived devastating consequence to resource-based communities across the province should Aboriginal groups gain control over significant tracts of land and resources.

From this brief summary I wish to highlight two focus points upon which the collective, public identity of the Williams Lake community is frequently constructed. First, the city's well-known public image as a small, harmonious, and friendly community is often drawn in contrast to a stridently negative view of urban life: the rural-urban opposition is one of the central foci of collective identity in Williams Lake.<sup>26</sup> This is not only a matter of value contrasts. Community leaders hold a strong sense of regional identity based on a conviction of their geographical and political marginalization from the mainstream of Canadian society. Urban governments and politicians are typically seen as intruders on local affairs; at the same time, local politicians believe that provincial funds, resources, and services are disproportionately distributed to the neglect of rural communities. One local politician expressed this common view in the adage "There's no hope beyond Hope," expressing the futility of expecting fair, equitable treatment to extend beyond the lower Mainland town of Hope that marks the transition between urban, settled British Columbia and the more northerly rural regions.<sup>27</sup> These feelings of powerlessness and resentment of urban governments are not unique to Williams Lake, but are a defining feature of life in small cities and towns in nonurban regions throughout Canada.<sup>28</sup>

The latency of this regional identity and strong anti-urban, anti-government attitude was recently brought to the forefront in one of the most bitter political debates in the Cariboo Chilcotin's history: a crisis arising from the provincial government's initiative to implement a sustainable forestry and land-use plan across the province. Sparked by dwindling forest resources, the specter of the collapse of the forest industry, and competing claims for access to natural lands by environmentalists and First Nations groups in the province, in 1992 the provincial New Democratic government implemented its Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE) project to develop regionally based land-use plans to mediate competing interests and create sustainable, long-term harvesting programs in all regions of the province. Forestry dependent communities across the province immediately began to voice protest, and in all communities intense divisions arose between pro-industry and pro-environmentalist sectors. Coalitions of industry interests and forestry communities (including Williams Lake civic representatives) engaged in political demonstrations at the Victoria legislature, where public speakers denounced the provincial government for destroying the rural resource communities that were the backbone of the province's economy. "Loggers, farmers, miners . . . carry this country on their backs"; CORE was the creation of "academics and backroom boys who have never had rain in their lunch buckets and who don't have to live with the consequences of their theory"; the

CORE process was denounced as the efforts of “cappuchino-sucking, concrete condo-dwelling, granola-eating city slickers” to impose urban environmental values and ethics on and interfering in the lives and livelihoods of rural resource communities.<sup>29</sup>

In the Cariboo Chilcotin, local governments, labor groups, industry interests, and local businesses coalesced into a powerful anti-CORE lobby that made strategic use of a powerful regional rhetoric that highlighted the efforts of honest, hard-working, small-town people struggling to fend off the intrusive and oppressive actions of urban governments. This rhetoric emphasized family values and pioneer traditions as central to the Cariboo Chilcotin’s identity; by extension, CORE was accused of destroying this very social, cultural, and historical basis of regional life. Publicity ads put out by the anti-CORE coalition engaged in a politics of victimization in which hardworking families and their values were pitted against the might of urban governments: “CORE has put our families, our workers, our communities at risk”; “We need to protect families”; “Please—listen to the people!”; and “We deserve a say in our destiny!” were typical slogans.<sup>30</sup> These demands were backed by assertions of the superiority of the practical knowledge of local residents over the theoretical knowledge of outside academics and bureaucrats, as well as the moral right of local residents committed to future generations and stewardship of the regional lands.

A second focus of regional identity lies in the predominant and even more pervasive conceptual opposition between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, or in colloquial terms, between Indian and white. Indeed, the categories of “Indian” and “white” are arguably the most fundamentally important social categories ordering social relations in both Williams Lake and the Cariboo Chilcotin generally.<sup>31</sup> In brief, although many Euro-Canadian residents characterize their community as being defined by the principles of friendliness, hospitality, and neighborliness, these values are not always extended in Euro-Canadians’ relations with Aboriginal people. Instead, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations in Williams Lake are characteristic of those in many rural towns across Canada, where Aboriginal people are generally viewed as a morally and culturally inferior people and where racist views of Aboriginal people are often voiced in discourse and made manifest in social interaction.<sup>32</sup> In Williams Lake, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal differences serve as primary symbolic markers through which Euro-Canadians construct an exclusive, oppositional collective social identity.

In casual conversations, many Euro-Canadians often criticize and ridicule Indians for a variety of perceived shortcomings. Indians are collectively stereotyped as drunks and criminals, are criticized for being lazy, unreliable, and lacking in initiative, and are condemned for “living off taxpayers’ money” and for being ungrateful recipients of government “handouts.” Such comments are casually and easily exchanged in informal, everyday conversations among many Euro-Canadians; the ease in which these remarks are exchanged is testimony to their common-sense, taken-for-granted status.<sup>33</sup>

Some quotations from interviews and field notes may serve as examples of the ubiquity of such attitudes.<sup>34</sup> One retired Euro-Canadian man vigorously stated to me in conversation:

I've been in every Indian house in the Cariboo. I have yet to see one Indian house with one vegetable garden. If you look at our vegetable garden up here, it's a quarter of an acre; we produce enough to keep us going right through . . . the winter. I have yet to see an Indian get out with a pick and shovel and dig the ground and sweat. They're just not made that way. . . . I have yet to see an Indian working who's an apprentice for a plumber or an electrician or a carpenter. The Indians want new houses at Sugar Cane, they get a white man to build them, and then they start to wreck them.

The image of Aboriginal people as sexually immoral drunks was epitomized in the comments of one middle-class woman who, during an interview not initially on the subject of Aboriginal people, reflected back on growing up in Williams Lake and drew on her memories to portray the contemporary reality of Aboriginal people:

There was the Famous Café that all of us kids went to when we were teenagers . . . and probably five nights out of every week . . . there'd be an Indian man and woman sittin' outside, and half the time they'd be making love, or he'd have his hands up her pants, or her pants would be off or whatever. I mean, it was just . . . when they were sober they were great people. But that wild juice did things to them! . . . Some of the nicest people I know are Indian people. But when they're into the bottle, they're not nice. They're different than we are. And they are different.

The belief that sexual immorality and violence are inherent features of Aboriginal life—while completely unsupported by historical evidence—is often heard in Euro-Canadian discussions. Despite the fact that the sexual abuse of students by priests and lay workers at the local Roman Catholic residential school has now been well-documented,<sup>35</sup> many Euro-Canadians discount the colonial roots of sexual abuse, saying, as one individual did, “They can't blame the Catholic schools for that.” One local community leader expressed the view more harshly: “I think that there are real problems in the reserves. . . . I don't think it's any secret . . . that the abuse of women is . . . much more common. . . . maybe 90 percent of Aboriginal females are sexually abused . . . by the time they are ten years old.” He was “absolutely convinced” that these social problems were not a recent historical phenomenon, but have been an inherent part of Aboriginal culture since before European arrival.

So too can the stereotype of the Aboriginal criminal be frequently heard. Williams Lake has long held the dubious honor of having the highest crime rate per capita in the province. It is widely believed, although unsubstantiated by statistics, that Aboriginal people are responsible for this high crime rate. As one

community leader stated to me: "If you took the Court Report [in the *Tribune*] and went through it, I mean, I can show you ten [newspapers], and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that 80 percent of those people going through the court system are the Natives!" In 1991 the mayor of Williams Lake was incautious enough to state such an unsubstantiated belief to a reporter from the *Vancouver Sun*, causing a furor when a prominent article was later published in which the mayor blamed the city's crime rate on "street people—I shouldn't say native people—breaking into premises to get liquor."<sup>36</sup>

Most significant to my argument is the stereotype of the lazy, undeserving Indian, which centers on the belief that Aboriginal people receive immense amounts of government funding of which they are undeserving and unappreciative, and which undermines the basic values of thrift, independence, initiative, and self-reliance upon which many Cariboo Chilcotin residents define their own identity and community values. Such criticisms have regularly appeared in letters to the *Tribune*, in which Aboriginal people are condemned as undeserving recipients of government largesse: "Everyone agrees that land claims should be settled, but how? How many years have we been pouring funds into this abyss [reserve communities]? . . . [W]here has this money gone? The native people of Canada should be the best dressed, the best housed, the best educated people in the world! The people on the reserves seem to be desperate and hopeless."<sup>37</sup> Another wrote: "There's a lot of concern over the land claims issues . . . who and what is really behind this, as we get along well with the native Indians? They now have warm houses to live in, warm clothing to wear, education privileges, and much more [than] before the white people came. . . . We are nice to everyone. . . . Canadians are nice people and try to give everyone a fair chance. Some are taking advantage of this goodness."<sup>38</sup> Still another wrote: "A note to negotiators [of land claims] for their lack of foresight on First Nations credibility. Does no one understand that giving [to] people who have proved themselves incapable of management will create a catastrophe? . . . We give them millions of dollars for programs and enterprises; most [of] which have been mismanaged and failed."<sup>39</sup> Yet another wrote, charging the federal and provincial governments of "reverse discrimination": "Natives can now leave their free homes (compliments of the Canadian taxpayer), jump into their tax-free vehicles and boogie over to their native-only gas bar. After filling up with cheap, taxpayer subsidized gasoline, and stocking up on tax-free cigarettes, they can head off down the highway (constructed and maintained by the taxpaying public) as they go merrily on their way to an all-Indian rodeo or native-only hockey tournament."<sup>40</sup>

Such stereotypes display a fundamental misconception about the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian state, and particularly the federal government's fiduciary responsibility toward status Indians and Indian reserve lands. Many of these assertions are incorrect—many status Indians are ineligible for "free homes" or tax exemption; there are many Aboriginal homes with large gardens; there are many Aboriginal apprentices working and indeed building homes on reserves; there are a number of responsible, flourishing First Nations governments and businesses in the region. More critically, these assertions serve the function of entrenching particular attitudes that contribute

to the disempowerment, marginalization, and silencing of Aboriginal efforts to challenge the structure of their relationships with non-Aboriginal people in the regional society, the very issues that leaders sought to raise and draw public attention to through the Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry.

Certainly not all Euro-Canadians in Williams Lake hold disrespectful or patronizing attitudes toward Aboriginal people. There are prominent Euro-Canadian community leaders who openly support Aboriginal people and publicly criticize the negative attitudes shared by others. However, these negative attitudes are encountered so often in conversations between friends, relatives, casual acquaintances, and even strangers from all socioeconomic sectors of the city, and are communicated so unselfconsciously, that they comprise a central part of the dominant culture of Williams Lake. Conversational forms defined by negative Indian stereotypes can be said to constitute a dominant local discourse—in Hall's term, a "dominant public idiom"—through which information about Aboriginal people is shared and circulated.

These attitudes translate into highly circumscribed social relations. During social interaction Euro-Canadians may at times treat Aboriginal people with subtle disrespect or condescension and occasionally open contempt and hostility. While Aboriginal people are accepted as consumers in local stores and businesses, they are largely excluded from the social life of the town. An invisible line divides the two communities, a line that manifests itself in the relative absence of conversation between Aboriginal people and Euro-Canadians in public places, and in the subtle, spatial distinctions between the Indian and non-Indian bars and restaurants in town.

In raising their concerns to the justice inquiry, Aboriginal leaders were in part launching a direct public critique of the state of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in Williams Lake. Concerns were expressed over the conduct of many representatives of the justice system, including RCMP officers, Crown counselors, lawyers, conservation officers, and the security guards at the local shopping mall. The majority of these individuals are non-Aboriginal, and, with the exception of two RCMP detachments in the Chilcotin, most work out of Williams Lake. As members of the middle class, they occupy positions of respect and status in the Williams Lake society, and can be assumed to be more or less enveloped in the dominant culture of the region.

While Tsilhqot'in, Carrier, and Secwepemc leaders certainly had a number of goals in calling for a public inquiry—some saw it as a tool of empowerment for local Aboriginal people, some hoped that the inquiry would generate public and government support for the creation of a separate Aboriginal justice system in Aboriginal communities—many hoped to demonstrate that racial prejudice and discrimination were problems that characterized Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations throughout the Cariboo Chilcotin. Many Euro-Canadian residents, however, have a different perspective on the current state of local Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations. Most Euro-Canadian community leaders I spoke with through the course of my research argued that Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations are generally positive, stating either that racism does not exist, or that it does not constitute a significant local issue and is only raised by "white agitators" with their own

personal political agendas. They explain their negative views of Aboriginal people not as instances of racial prejudice—the prejudging of an individual based on mistaken beliefs that certain characteristics are shared by an entire ethnic group—but as valid sociological generalizations.

In short, the dominant culture in Williams Lake is one in which there exists little sympathy for Aboriginal people or for their concerns. Aboriginal people are rendered invisible and irrelevant and are seen through the lens of racial stereotypes of the drunk Indian, the lazy Indian living off government handouts, or the Indian as criminal. The racial prejudice inherent in these stereotypes remains invisible to most Euro-Canadians who promote these views. At the same time, Williams Lake Euro-Canadians are also members of Canadian society, and many claim to uphold the values of multiculturalism and the equality of all citizens. Indeed, the *Tribune* periodically publishes articles and editorials condemning racism and special features on the cultural festivals and celebrations of the town's Indo-Canadian and Aboriginal peoples. The charges of racial prejudice and discrimination raised during the Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry challenged not only the integrity of individual representatives of the justice system, but also the very manner in which the dominant forces of Williams Lake represent the community's own identity and relationships with Aboriginal people.

How, then, was the newspaper, as the watchdog of the community, to respond to the allegations that RCMP officers and other central members of the community were committing serious breaches of moral conduct by racially discriminating against Aboriginal people? At the same time, how was the newspaper, as the arms-length representative of the Chamber of Commerce, to maintain a morally defensible self-image of the community, one that would not dampen the interests of potential investors to the city?

### NEWSPAPER COVERAGE BEFORE THE INQUIRY

In the three months prior to the opening of the justice inquiry, the *Tribune* ran ten articles and two editorial columns on the inquiry (see Table 1). All articles except one were on the front page. The justice inquiry was presented as a hot news item, one of interest and concern to the general public of Williams Lake.

News reporting during this pre-inquiry period had two main characteristics. First, two editorials voiced effusive support for the justice inquiry and what were perceived to be the concerns of area First Nations. A September 1, 1992 editorial announced:

We cannot blame Cariboo Chilcotin native people for feeling frustrated as they prepare for tomorrow's meeting with representatives of the attorney-general's office. For decades, our Indian neighbours have been pushed aside, knocked over and walked on by a dominant non-native society. Slowly our non-native society has learned to stop treating Indians as "worthless dirty savages." . . . [T]oday, many of us respect our native brothers and sisters for the way they have quietly fought for their rights.<sup>41</sup>

**Table 1**  
**Williams Lake *Tribune* Articles on the Cariboo Chilcotin Justice Inquiry**  
**Published Three Months before the Opening of the Inquiry**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Page</b>
September 1	Justice showdown looms	A1
September 1	It's time to negotiate with natives (editorial)	A4
September 8	Toosey meet raises issues	A1
September 10	Negotiations moving along	A1
October 6	Chilcotin Justice Inquiry terms of reference inked	A1
October 8	Justice Council slams funding from Victoria	A1
October 13	\$100,000 enough for inquiry—Zirnhelt	A1
October 13	Who's pulling Gablemann's purse strings? (editorial)	A4
October 20	Gentles wants lawyers limited	A1
October 22	Sarich okays counsel	A1
November 10	Native Council cans lawyers	A1
December 1	Chilcotin justice inquiry gets underway next week	A3

The editor proceeded to criticize the attorney general's office for delaying the justice inquiry. The editor suggested that the lessons that local whites had learned about respecting "our native brothers and sisters" had yet to be learned by the provincial government.

Here the editor is "taking the public voice":<sup>42</sup> he is not speaking for himself, but is claiming to speak for the public of Williams Lake. Through the use of the pronouns "us," "we," "they," and the phrase "our Indian neighbours," it becomes clear that the editor excludes Aboriginal people from the public—the community—on whose behalf the editor is presuming to speak. At the same time, the editor projects an image of Williams Lake as existing in a harmonious and respectful relationship with area Aboriginal people. The strategic political consequence is that the editor deflects the criticisms being raised through the justice inquiry away from local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations and projects them into the relationship between area First Nations and the provincial government. This externalization of the problem, and its assimilation into the frame "relations with urban government," dominated most editorials and news stories on the justice inquiry through the next eight months.

This news frame of “relations with urban government” is one of the standard frames employed by the *Tribune* in its regular reporting of events. As mentioned previously, the rural-urban contrast and a skeptical antagonism toward the provincial government are central elements of the way in which local politicians, community leaders, and residents construct a sense of a distinct, regional Cariboo Chilcotin identity. These concerns carry over to permeate the *Tribune’s* news reporting. For example, in a survey of fifty editions of the *Tribune* from January to December 1991 I found thirty-one editions highlighting local-provincial relations on the front page. The vast majority of these headlines dealt with perceptions of provincial government under-funding, unfair provincial tax increases, and provincial neglect of local autonomy and concerns. For example, provincial ministries were condemned for under-funding local school boards, leading to a loss of local school board autonomy and desperately inadequate facilities; for persistently failing to provide funding for sewer and water expansion to a growing suburban region of the city; for neglecting the needs of the local hospital in which facilities upgrades were “desperately needed”; for ignoring the condition of Cariboo Chilcotin roads and directly contributing to the high accident rates in some areas; for closing a local job-training office in a time of rising unemployment; for ignoring the critical need for local AIDS education; for failing to provide the region with an adequate number of RCMP officers to ensure effective policing (and reducing the city’s notorious reputation as a crime capital); for choosing another interior city to locate a regional cancer clinic; for implementing an 8 percent rise in homeowners’ school-based taxes; and for imposing unilateral decisions concerning the establishment of regional parks. The rhetoric of reporting emphasized the need for, and the efforts of, local governments and community leaders to fight and battle Victoria.

Thus while the assimilation of the justice inquiry into this news frame was not itself unusual, it had particular political consequences. The substantive issues to be raised at the inquiry—that Aboriginal people had been the subject of brutality, unfair treatment, and racial discrimination by RCMP and other agents of the justice system—received little prominent coverage. Instead, as in the September editorial, attention was focussed on the relationship between First Nations and the provincial government. News stories reported on discussions taking place between the Aboriginal leaders and the provincial government over the terms, scope, and budget being established for the justice inquiry. Headlines reflected these interests: “Negotiations moving along,” “[Inquiry Commissioner] Sarich OKs counsel,” “Native Council cans lawyers.” None of the ten headlines in this period specified the substantive concerns that Aboriginal people were to raise at the inquiry.

The greatest attention to these substantive concerns appeared in two October articles. On October 6 an article announced that the inquiry “will review the treatment of native people by police, Crown counsel, courts, probation officers and family court counsellors,” as well as “the level of knowledge police officers have of native culture, the perceptions the police have of natives and natives have of police officers, deficiencies in the legal aid system and the thoroughness of search and rescue operations of missing native



people.”<sup>43</sup> In an October 8 article, a Tsilhqot’in leader was quoted, saying that “The inquiry will really open the public’s eyes about what’s happened in the past . . . and what is continuing. Even though the RCMP know these discussions are happening we still hear reports of problems.”<sup>44</sup>

Just as the issues of racial prejudice and discrimination were becoming more visible, they were soon overtaken through the heightened attention to a second constructed issue: the perceived lack of sufficient funding being provided to the First-Nations-run Chilcotin Justice Council to coordinate Aboriginal participation in the inquiry. Through its front-page treatment and editorial attention, the “money” issue now surpassed and overshadowed the Tsilhqot’in leader’s suggestions that serious allegations of racism among members of the Williams Lake community would be raised at the inquiry.

The attorney general’s department in Victoria was to provide funding to the Chilcotin Justice Council to cover legal fees and travel expenses incurred by Aboriginal witnesses going to the inquiry hearings. On October 8 the leading front-page headline read: “Justice Council Slams Funding From Victoria.” The lead sentence cited the Justice Council’s non-Aboriginal lawyer accusing Victoria of impeding the progress of the justice inquiry by providing insufficient funding. “The funding for natives involved in the inquiry is less than adequate and is a perfect example of the discriminations in the justice system,” the lawyer apparently said. The following week the *Tribune’s* editor blasted Victoria for attempting to thwart the justice inquiry through underfunding. The editor wrote: “It is simply another slap in the face to the native community. . . . Can we be anything but skeptical about how committed the attorney-general’s office is to [the inquiry]? Can the native community be anything but skeptical about anything it hears from Victoria?” In a revealing conclusion, the editor stated, “The inquiry, when it does convene, should start with the attorney general’s office and work its way down.”<sup>45</sup>

Again, while such a news frame is by no means unique to reporting on the Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry, its mobilization was occurring within a specific political context of growing scrutiny and criticism of the state of local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. By representing itself as united with the Aboriginal community in opposition to Victoria, non-Aboriginal readers of the *Tribune* were encouraged to envision themselves on the moral high ground, as being both sympathetic of local Aboriginal people and as being common victims of oppression by metropolitan governments. Public attention to the problem of racial prejudice and discrimination was deflected from the local context and externalized in the structure of the bureaucratic relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Victoria. Whether by deliberate intent or by unconscious cultural habit, the employment of this familiar news frame and rhetoric by the *Tribune* counteracted and drew attention away from the looming tensions surrounding the accusations of racial prejudice and discrimination that would be raised once the justice inquiry commenced hearings.

### NEWS COVERAGE: THE ANAHIM LAKE HEARINGS

Between December 1992 and May 1993 the justice inquiry traveled throughout the Cariboo Chilcotin region holding hearings at ten of the fifteen reserve communities. In all, over fifty days of testimony were heard, during which almost two hundred incidents were reported.<sup>46</sup> The vast majority of complaints focussed on the conduct of the RCMP, although complaints were also voiced against lawyers, Crown counselors, conservation officers, ministry of social services workers, and private security guards. The inquiry wrapped up in June 1993, and the final report was made public in October 1993.

The justice inquiry opened its hearings in early December at the Ulkatcho Carrier reserve community at Anahim Lake, some 300 kilometers west of Williams Lake. The results of the three days of hearings were announced on December 10 in one small front page article neutrally headlined "Justice Inquiry Underway." The story's lead-in sentence provided the contextual frame. The first three paragraphs read:

A welcome opportunity to work with natives to make changes to the legal system continued Wednesday in Anahim Lake. That's what RCMP lawyer Gordon Bourgard called the third and last day of the Cariboo Chilcotin Justice Inquiry session at the Ulkatcho reserve. Bourgard is hoping recommendations will come out of the inquiry to establish 'progressive initiatives' for solving the problems Chilcotin natives face in the justice system.

The leading paragraphs, the first official source who was quoted at length, and the majority of the front-page coverage presented the RCMP's perspective. The problems were not defined as those existing between Aboriginal people and the RCMP, but as those faced by Aboriginal people in general. By removing the RCMP from the equation, and by claiming the inquiry was a "welcome opportunity to work with natives," newspaper coverage suggested that the RCMP was, and had always been, open to discussing any grievances the Aboriginal communities had. It implied that if Aboriginal people were experiencing problems, it was their own fault for not raising their concerns sooner.

The central issue raised at the Anahim Lake hearings was the tragic 1990 death of Ulkatcho Band chief Jimmie Stillas.<sup>47</sup> Stillas, a prominent and well-respected community figure, had gone out to his trapline and had been missing for several days. Upon being notified by the band manager of Stillas's disappearance, both the Anahim Lake RCMP and the area's non-Aboriginal search-and-rescue coordinator refused to launch a search, as the location in which Stillas had gone missing was three kilometers outside their jurisdiction. Instead, the Anahim Lake RCMP passed the matter over to the Bella Coola detachment. A search plane was eventually brought in from the distant city of Prince Rupert after a delay of over five hours. Believing that the RCMP were not taking the matter seriously and were dismissing the community's concerns, the Ulkatcho band staff chartered a local helicopter on their own and had already located Stillas, who tragically had drowned after falling through the ice

on his snowmobile. Whether the RCMP would have adhered so rigorously to jurisdictional boundaries if it had been a prominent Euro-Canadian citizen who was missing was a question that hovered over the inquiry.

Quite in contrast to the *Tribune's* reporting of the Anahim Lake hearings was the Vancouver *Sun's* coverage. The *Sun* gave the issue prominent coverage that clearly sympathized with the Ulkatcho people (see Table 2). It drew on standard symbolic themes portraying the callous mistreatment of a small and vulnerable Aboriginal community by a cold-hearted RCMP bureaucracy. Three stories were headlined: "Natives vs. justice system: Hearings open with probe of Indian leader's death," "Death in the wilderness didn't 'go through channels,'" and "Mounties dined when chief was missing." A photo was run of Chief Stillas's elderly mother, holding up "the last picture taken of her son Chief Jimmy Stillas." At times, the justice inquiry was portrayed more as a cultural odyssey than an investigation into the failings of public policy. Some images of Aboriginal people in the *Sun's* coverage approached noble savage terms, as in such sub-headlines: "Vibrant cultural differences emerge as the Sarich inquiry continues jolting across the rugged Chilcotin plateau."<sup>48</sup> Emphasis was placed on the remoteness of the reserve communities and on the cultural ceremonies which preceded the commencement of the inquiry at Anahim Lake.

In contrast, the *Tribune* provided only two sentences describing the key issue of Stillas's death, sentences which were buried in the body of the article. They read: "The first witness to testify at the inquiry brought up the subject of

**Table 2**  
**Comparison of Williams Lake *Tribune* and Vancouver *Sun* Coverage of the Anahim Lake Hearings, December 1992**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Williams Lake Tribune</b>		
Dec. 10	Justice inquiry underway	A1
<b>Vancouver Sun</b>		
Dec. 5	Natives vs. justice system: Hearings open with probe of Indian leader's death	B2
Dec. 8	Judge rebukes white legal system at native inquiry ceremonial opening	A4
Dec. 9	Death in the wilderness didn't 'go through channels'	A8
Dec. 10	Mounties dined when chief was missing	A8
Dec. 10.	Officer said job involved arresting drunk Indians	A8
Dec. 12	Justice on Trial	A8

the 1990 death of former Ulkatcho band chief Jimmie Stillas. The Ulkatcho band was disappointed with the outcome of the search for Stillas and conducted their own at a cost of \$8,700.<sup>49</sup>

The *Tribune's* curious emphasis on the \$8,700 spent by the band, to the exclusion of all other issues raised at the hearings, generated consternation and anger among a number of area Aboriginal leaders who, sensitive to the subtlety of local conventions of derogatory discourse, felt not only that the central issue of the hearing had been ignored but also that once again they (and the Ulkatcho Band leaders) were being unfairly accused of irresponsibly managing administrative finances. In short, these leaders read this report, and the brief reference to money, as promoting the "lazy, irresponsible Indians mismanaging government money" stereotype. Just how the reading public interpreted this sketchy report is open to conjecture. What I suggest, however, is that this news frame, once again, emerged from a prevalent local public idiom in which excessive concern is placed on the issue of the control and management of taxpayer's money and particular scrutiny is leveled at Aboriginal people as a whole.

While Aboriginal people are frequently collectively condemned for being the undeserving and wasteful recipients of masses of government money, criticisms of taxpayers' monetary waste are not limited to them. For example, a quick survey of letters to the editor of the *Tribune* between 1992 and 1995 revealed a variety of targets for criticism. Condemned for wasting taxpayers' money were the Cariboo Regional District for callously bulldozing a home that did not conform to building code standards; highly paid teachers for being granted "handout" money to purchase new computers for their own use; the Ministry of Highways for undertaking elaborate studies of eroding lands surrounding highways rather than simply building an alternate route; the city council for wasting money on an all-expenses-paid annual retreat to a local resort; mayors of British Columbia municipalities for attending their expensive annual conventions; Ottawa for instigating gun-control laws that are impossible and "too costly" to enforce; and perhaps the most bizarre, the Ministry of Health for funding welfare recipients to receive sex-change operations. The rhetoric of governments wasting taxpayers money was the common thread in all these angry letters. Underlying these criticisms was a fundamental sense—common to rural populist politics in an era of economic decline—that elected government officials had lost their accountability to the public and were essentially operating in a dictatorial rather than democratic fashion.

The *Tribune's* interest in the money spent by the Ulkatcho band to locate their missing chief is, I suggest, a product of this broader system of relevance that seeks to defend the interests of "ordinary taxpaying citizens" against the perceived wasteful spending and exploitation by government. But as a result, the paper's reference to the Ulkatcho band's expenditure of \$8,700, after being "disappointed" with the previous search, both misconstrued the reasons for the band's decision to hire its own searchers and implicitly evoked not only the "wasting taxpayer's money" issue but also the stereotype of "lazy Aboriginal people living off government handouts." Aboriginal people testifying at

Anahim Lake had raised the issue of Stillas's death in an effort to bring about critical scrutiny to central problems in their relationship with the RCMP. Yet their testimony was translated—in the most fragmented way—through *Tribune* news reporting into the public idiom through which many local Euro-Canadians understand and speak about their relationships both with Aboriginal people and with all levels of government. It is here that the ideological power of the public idiom of news discourse becomes particularly evident, and the manner in which it closes off opportunities for a greater public understanding of the difficulties Aboriginal people were attempting to convey regarding their relationships within the Canadian justice system.

References to the money issue and the “relations with government” news frame remained predominant in news reporting in the following months (see Tables 2 and 3). For example, a February 9 *Tribune* news report headlined “Justice Council out of Money” announced that the \$100,000 given the Chilcotin Justice Council by the provincial government in the fall was now almost depleted, and more money was required in order to coordinate Aboriginal participation in the justice inquiry. The paper described the efforts that Aboriginal leaders had gone through to obtain additional funds, and told how a Secwepemc leader had “traveled to Ottawa” to talk to federal Indian affairs officials, but to no avail. The article stated:

One of the reasons the costs to the justice council have been so high stems from the fact the terms of reference for the inquiry call for sessions on at least five reserves through the Cariboo-Chilcotin. The first session was held at Anahim Lake, pushing up travel, accommodation and meal costs.

Once again, a number of Aboriginal leaders reacted angrily to this report, which was inaccurate: the Secwepemc leader in question had not “traveled to Ottawa” but had consulted federal Indian affairs officials by the more economical measure of a phone meeting. Further, the very reason the inquiry was held at Anahim Lake was to facilitate Aboriginal participation. Indeed, over sixty Aboriginal people had attended the hearings there. Clearly, expenses would have been much higher if the inquiry had been held in an urban setting. Aboriginal leaders once again read such reporting as a subtle suggestion that they were guilty of extravagant spending and financial mismanagement of government funds.

The money issue persisted in news reporting, and shortly after the February 9 article appeared the *Tribune* took the subject to its weekly street interview. Individuals were asked: “Should natives get more money for the justice inquiry?” It is significant that the generic category of “Native” was used in this question, evoking implicitly the generalized Native-white opposition, rather than the more precise “Chilcotin Justice Council” or even “First Nations leaders.” Without knowing details of the budget and expenses, there was little factual basis on which respondents could decide; instead, it essentially was a moral question. Respondents were able to determine for themselves whether they perceived Aboriginal people to be deserving of more

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of Williams Lake *Tribune* and Vancouver *Sun* Coverage of the Soda Creek Hearings and Issues Arising from Testimony, January–February 1993**

Date	Headline	Page
<b>Williams Lake Tribune</b>		
January 12	Inquiry underway at Soda Creek	A2
January 14	Charter of Rights will protect police officers	A1
January 26	Court confusing for many natives	A6
February 9	Justice council out of money	A1
	Inquiry inundated with lawyers	A3
February 11	Greyeyes ducking charges	A1
February 18	Justice system failing Natives	A1
February 18	Ruling affects inquiry	A3
February 23	Greyeyes required to testify	A1
<b>Vancouver Sun</b>		
January 8	Judge hears of difficulties with mall guard	B5
January 12	Judge says he has authority to investigate the RCMP	A7
January 12	Claims of crimes by Mounties to be heard	A1
January 13	RCMP used threat of dogs in auto theft case, judge told	A7
January 13	Top civil servant order to answer abuse charge	A1
January 19	Indians face bewildering choices when they go to court	A4
January 20	Beating of prisoners described in court petition to kill hearing	A1
January 20	Judge says gag petition won't derail his efforts	A5
January 21	Indians to demand police reply to charges	A6
January 23	Isolated natives travel far to attend hearings (Subheading: Vibrant cultural differences emerge as the Sarich inquiry continues jolting across the rugged Chilcotin plateau)	B2
January 23	Once silenced native voice now free to tell tale of RCMP misconduct	B2
February 11	Judge's probe of justice system called criminal proceedings	A7
February 12	Bid to deny natives chance to fault system alleged	A7
February 23	Judge refuses to halt inquiry	A1

funding due to their status as hinterland residents oppressed by metropolitan interests, or whether Aboriginal people were undeserving in their enjoyment of extravagant and wasteful government money.

That the *Sun* gave no coverage to the money issue clearly shows that this frame was a product of a particularly local set of relevances. Through this period of reporting, the *Tribune* at times portrayed Aboriginal people as sharing the common rural experience as being victims of underfunding, such as in yet another *Tribune* editorial run on March 18. At other times, it was hinted that Aboriginal people were in collusion with corrupt, wasteful

governments and enjoying the largesse of extravagant government overfunding. Yet the very posing of the money issue to the exclusion of other more pressing issues such as Aboriginal peoples' experiences of being racially discriminated against by local Euro-Canadians representing various aspects of the justice system served to restrict public discourse and awareness about the nature of the issues being raised at the justice inquiry. The money issue became a flexible symbol through which the *Tribune* constructed an image of the Williams Lake community along pre-existing, familiar, and unchallenging news frames and themes, a construction of community that alternately included and excluded Aboriginal peoples while containing the threat to the status quo of local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations being raised by Aboriginal testimony.

### NEWS COVERAGE: THE DEEP CREEK HEARINGS

After the close of the Anahim Lake hearings and an adjournment over Christmas, the justice inquiry reconvened in January at the Deep Creek Reserve of the Soda Creek First Nation. Six days of testimony were heard there over a two-week period. In all, over twenty people gave testimony on a range of issues implicating RCMP officers, mall security guards, and legal-aid lawyers.<sup>50</sup> These included testimony of RCMP officers using excessive force during arrests and of RCMP forcibly entering an Aboriginal home without showing a search warrant. Three Aboriginal teenagers testified that they had been falsely accused of shoplifting at a convenience store. Despite the lack of evidence, the young men were detained in a back room by the clerk and subsequently questioned for some time by the attending RCMP officer. Finding no evidence of their guilt, the officer nevertheless threatened to throw them in the city's "drunk tank" if he caught them on the streets after ten o'clock in the evening. Two Aboriginal men testified to being physically assaulted by the shopping mall's security guard (deemed a member of a private police force and thus within the inquiry's scope). In what was to become the most serious of charges, an ex-RCMP officer, now a high-ranking official in the attorney-general's office, was implicated in two separate assaults on Aboriginal men held in the city's jail.

The Vancouver *Sun* gave extensive coverage both to the incidents being raised in Aboriginal testimony and to the efforts during January of the ex-RCMP officer implicated in assaults to bring a legal end to the inquiry. While the Deep Creek hearings were in session the *Sun* continued its sympathetic coverage, running eleven articles, three of which were front page stories (see Table 3). A number of headlines dealt directly with the allegations of RCMP harassment and assaults: "Beating of prisoners described in court petition to kill hearings," "Claims of crimes by Mounties to be heard," and "Once-silenced native voice now free to tell tale of RCMP misconduct."

In contrast, the shifting of the inquiry hearings from Anahim Lake in the Chilcotin and across the Fraser River to the Secwepemc Reserve at Deep Creek, just twenty-five kilometers north of Williams Lake, coincided with an almost total cessation of the *Tribune's* inquiry reporting. After the commencement of the

inquiry at Deep Creek through the end of January, only three articles were provided, and only one reached the front page (see Table 3).

That the *Tribune's* coverage reflected the interests of the Euro-Canadian elite rather than area Aboriginal people is clearly evident in the headline of the one article that did reach the front page: "Charter of Rights will protect police officers." The first three paragraphs read:

The Charter of Rights protects RCMP officers from incriminating themselves at the Cariboo Chilcotin Justice Inquiry, says Commissioner Mr. Justice Anthony Sarich. As a result, the inquiry will not make recommendations regarding individual instances, but will look at the larger issues surrounding interaction between natives and the justice system. The decision was made Monday as the inquiry resumed its hearings at the Deep Creek Hall of the Soda Creek reserve.<sup>51</sup>

While mention was given in the front-page article to the allegations against the mall security guard and the incident of RCMP harassment against the Aboriginal youths, the impact of this coverage was tempered by the expression of sympathy for the RCMP in the headline and lead section. The selection of this specific issue for front-page treatment plainly suggested that what was construed to be most relevant to the reading public was the protection of the reputations of RCMP officers rather than the publicization of discrimination being experienced by Aboriginal people. It is highly significant that the moral closure enacted through citing the Charter of Rights involved protecting the legal rights of RCMP officers rather than the legal rights of Aboriginal people to be treated without discrimination in the justice system.

### THE THIRD PHASE OF NEWS REPORTING

Between February and May the *Tribune* continued to selectively report the issues surrounding the justice inquiry. Fourteen articles were run, ten on the front page. In this period Aboriginal people presented over one hundred incidents of complaint to the justice inquiry.<sup>52</sup> Witnesses spoke of incidents of RCMP officers using excessive force during arrests; of unlawfully invading homes at gunpoint seeking suspects; of confiscating Aboriginal people's property during a search; of driving intoxicated individuals to the outskirts of town, taking their shoes, and leaving them stranded on the side of the road to make their own way home; and of failing to respond in a timely manner to emergency calls for assistance and to prosecute apparently serious crimes.<sup>53</sup> These and other incidents went largely unreported in the *Tribune*. Instead, the majority of *Tribune* reporting (eight of the fourteen articles) emphasized financial and procedural matters that were assimilated into the standard news frame of "relations with government."

Paradoxically, despite the lack of attention to the substantive issues, Aboriginal voices were prominent in the news reports. Aboriginal leaders, Aboriginal people testifying at the inquiry, or their legal counsel were cited as the first official sources in seven of the fourteen news reports. A variety of



sources were quoted in the bodies of news articles. These sources included a Tsilhqot'in community leader, a Secwepemc chief, two Tsilhqot'in chiefs, three lawyers representing the Tsilhqot'in, Secwepemc, and Carrier nations at the inquiry, an RCMP officer, an RCMP lawyer, and a spokesperson for the attorney general's department. The Tsilhqot'in community leader, upon whom the *Tribune* relied heavily as their Aboriginal contact, was cited in the body of seven of the fourteen articles. She received the most citations of any official source during this period.

What is interesting about these facts is that even when Aboriginal sources were cited, the significance of Aboriginal testimony was not fully appreciated by the *Tribune* reporters. As Regna Darnell found in her study of southern Ontario newspapers, there was a "muffing" of Native voices.<sup>54</sup> Individual witnesses at the hearings typically conveyed their experiences in a style of personal narrative: they described the events they experienced, and any assignment of blame was limited to the realm of the individuals they had directly dealt with—such as RCMP officers, lawyers, or conservation officers. Generally speaking, then, witnesses provided rich descriptive evidence attesting to the role of racial prejudice in the unfair treatment they had received from various representatives in the justice system. In contrast, the most-often-cited Tsilhqot'in leader is well known for providing more articulate political interpretations that situate individual incidents within a broader framework of both the attitudinal and structural barriers to justice that Aboriginal people experience. Despite these opportunities for *Tribune* reporters to investigate and grasp the significance of Aboriginal testimony, neither the incidents of racial discrimination at the individual level nor the fact that these incidents pointed to structural and attitudinal problems at the collective, systemic level made their way into the *Tribune's* newspaper reporting. In short, whether intentional or whether due to a habitual, general failure to listen and comprehend, the *Tribune* simply did not report on the issues at stake.

One example of this failure to grasp the issues at stake can be illustrated. An article inaccurately headlined "Setah seeks murder re-trial" ran on page three of the *Tribune* on February 23.<sup>55</sup> This article is somewhat unique in that it was one of the few news stories in which extensive coverage was given to one specific incident raised at the inquiry. The article discussed the conviction of a Tsilhqot'in man not for murder, as the *Tribune* headline erroneously implied, but for criminal negligence causing death in a fire that killed three young children. The first four paragraphs read:

A man who said he only pled guilty to murder because the legal aid lawyer said so, told Judge Anthony Sarich he wants his case re-investigated. Ronald Setah told the Chilcotin Justice Inquiry commissioner on Thursday his legal aid lawyer advised him he should plead guilty as it would be better not to waste his nor the court's time. Setah was sentenced to eight years in jail for the murder of three young children in a house fire on May 28, 1983. "I was expecting some time but eight years came as a surprise," said Setah.

Further on, the article stated “Setah told Sarich he knew some of the witnesses who testified against him were drinking that night, but never told the lawyers because they didn’t ask.” The article concluded: “Setah has made a declaration of innocence and now has someone who can corroborate his alibi.”

To a person knowledgeable and confident about their rights as a citizen, Setah’s actions may seem incomprehensible. The lead sentence—that Setah pled guilty because “his legal-aid lawyer said so”—subtly conveyed an image of passive, child-like obedience in the face of what most would consider to be serious charges. His reported failure to tell the lawyers that witnesses against him had been drunk at the time suggested that Setah, through his passivity, was partially responsible for his ultimate conviction. In concluding that “Setah . . . now has someone who can corroborate his alibi,” the article inaccurately represented Setah’s testimony at the justice inquiry. Overall, the *Tribune* article presented a sketchy, confusing, and inaccurate representation of what this young man’s experience had actually been.

This article can be contrasted with Setah’s actual testimony at the hearings, key aspects of which went unreported. At the justice inquiry, it came out that Setah had been drinking and partying with several other young men the night of the fire. The following day he was arrested by the RCMP. Setah testified that he had professed his innocence but ultimately the RCMP had coerced a confession from him, threatening that if he did not confess they would show him the burned remains of the three young children. He testified that he had an alibi for the night—he was with a friend at the time the fire was lit—but the RCMP rejected this alibi. Over the next ten months Setah remained in pre-trial detention, recanting the confession and maintaining his innocence. He had four court appearances; at each one he was represented by a different legal-aid lawyer. Each spent no more than ten to twenty minutes consulting with Setah before the court appearance. Setah testified that he had told his story to the second lawyer, including the existence of an alibi for his actions that night, and that he had been assured that the lawyers that later took over his case were familiar with the details of his account. In what appeared to be a major flaw in his legal representation, the young man who could have provided Setah with an alibi for that night was never called to testify at any of the court appearances, and his lawyer did not cross-examine the witnesses who claimed to have seen Setah set the fire. Finally, at his fourth court appearance Setah was advised by his new lawyer to change his plea to guilty. According to Setah, his lawyer had told him there was too much evidence stacked against him, that the Crown had a strong case, and that there was no hope of beating the case. His lawyer advised Setah not to waste the judges’ time, the jury’s time, or his lawyer’s time by contesting the charge. At the time Setah was then eighteen years old and had no prior criminal record. In the end, he relied on his lawyer’s knowledge and expertise, and while still professing innocence, finally agreed to change his plea to guilty. He recounted that by this time he had already spent eight to nine months in jail and “was getting tired of it.” Ultimately he simply gave up on the process. His lawyer had told him he would likely get three to five years in jail; he was sentenced to eight. In the end, Setah spent another three-and-a-half years in prison before finally being released.

To Aboriginal people who have had a long, collective experience of being accused of crimes they did not commit, who have little understanding of the justice system or confidence in its ability to represent their rights fairly, and who often plead guilty to crimes they did not commit simply to get the court process over with, Setah's dilemma was familiar and easily recognizable. Indeed, the Manitoba justice inquiry concluded that experiences such as Setah's were typical for Aboriginal people:

The justice system has failed Manitoba's Aboriginal people on a massive scale. It has been insensitive and inaccessible, and has arrested and imprisoned Aboriginal people in grossly disproportionate numbers. Aboriginal people who are arrested are more likely than non-Aboriginal people to be denied bail, spend more time in pre-trial detention and spend less time with their lawyers, and, if convicted, are more likely to be incarcerated.<sup>56</sup>

Yet these subtle and pervasive ways in which Aboriginal people are discriminated against within the justice system remained invisible both to the *Tribune* reporters and to its readers. Instead, Setah's case was presented in a disjointed, simple, and somewhat perplexing descriptive tale of one man's experience with the justice system. While the *Tribune* reporter may have attempted to grapple with and make sense of this man's testimony, the reporter and the *Tribune* as a whole ultimately failed to convey not only the manner in which these stories spoke to the experiences of racial discrimination—the attitudinal issues Judge Sarich criticized in his concluding report when he condemned local RCMP officers for their “readiness to unquestionably accept allegations made against natives while keeping a closed mind to anything they raise in answer” and for their “apparent disrespect for any rights of native people and the aggression and arrogance to which they are often subjected”<sup>57</sup>—but also for the manner in which these experiences point to systemic flaws in the justice system that characterize Aboriginal experiences across Canada.

## DISCUSSION

The *Tribune's* news coverage both before and during the Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry encouraged the reading public to remain unaware of and uncritical about the current state of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations and the way in which issues of racism, local prejudice, and chronic problems within the Canadian justice system were central and ongoing realities in the lives of Aboriginal people. Through its neutral and ambiguous headlines and its lack of emphasis on the substantive issues being raised at the inquiry, the *Tribune* ultimately failed to construct the allegations of racism in local Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations as a significant public issue, despite the publicity being given to these concerns in the provincial media.

There are several factors that influenced the particular characteristics of *Tribune* news reporting. In instigating a public inquiry into their treatment in the justice system, Cariboo Chilcotin leaders were in effect relying on the

politics of embarrassment. To effectively deploy this strategy, they needed to make a clear distinction between the agents of the state who were the targets of criticism and the public from which they hoped to elicit support and sympathy.<sup>58</sup> In urban settings with large populations and diverse, diffuse communities, this is relatively easy to accomplish. When transposed to the level of the rural community, these politics encounter distinct obstacles. Here the agents of the state being criticized—lawyers, RCMP officers, Crown counselors—are typically well-known and well-respected members of small, closely-knit communities that frequently define their collective identity in opposition to Aboriginal people. For these structural reasons it typically becomes difficult for Aboriginal leaders to mobilize public sympathy in the small, regional towns and cities that are the nexus of their connections to the Canadian state.

Coupled with this is the position of the small town newspaper in local networks of social, economic, and political power. The *Tribune*, like many regional community newspapers, functions to promote a positive image of the community so as to maintain a healthy climate for investment. This mandate is reinforced by the close associations between the community newspaper and city merchants. This by no means suggests that community newspapers only print positive news. In keeping with the *Tribune's* mandate to serve as a community watchdog, the actions of local politicians are always fodder for critical newsprint. Yet, as demonstrated in this case study, when criticisms are leveled by outside forces there is a tendency to “rally around the fort” and to silence issues that may bring critical outside scrutiny to the community itself.

A third factor influential in the *Tribune's* style of news reporting concerns the dominance of a particular local style of discourse about Aboriginal people. Anti-Aboriginal racism and prejudice are by no means unique to rural settings in Canada; rather they are prevalent streams of North American cultural attitudes more generally. In particular, one often sees the eruption of anti-Aboriginal racist discourse—in urban and rural locations—when Aboriginal people confront state authority, such as in the 1990 Mohawk crisis at Oka, and when competition arises over economic resources, as is the case currently in British Columbia with the signing of the Nisga'a treaty and the imminent conclusion of other treaties that will see the transfer of lands and resources to Aboriginal nations. Yet cultural factors unique to rural settings are also relevant to this account of news reporting on the justice inquiry.

In rural settings the premises of the racial and cultural inferiority of Aboriginal peoples typically have a more widespread, taken-for-granted status as shared truths. As a result, the assumption of Aboriginal people's inherently degraded status is reflected in the existence of a powerful, dominant public idiom of small-town Euro-Canadian discourse about Aboriginal peoples. Strong forces of socialization and habit reinforce this dominant public idiom. Those who disagree with such attitudes find this public idiom, this conversational style, extremely difficult to publicly challenge, and it continues to be a source of frustration and humiliation that Aboriginal people must confront daily.<sup>59</sup> The *Tribune's* news reporting was reflective of this public idiom, through which locally uncontroversial, negative assumptions about Aboriginal people at times subtly appeared: the images of Aboriginal people's

irresponsible spending of undeserved government funding, as found in earlier news reporting, and the images of the child-like, passive, naïve victim of the system as in Setah's tragic experiences with the justice system. Furthermore, in such settings where there is widespread lack of sympathy for Aboriginal people and lack of interest in Aboriginal concerns, the difficulty of mobilizing public support for Aboriginal issues is obvious, a difficulty that translates into a reluctance to fully listen to and engage in the issues being brought forward in such events as the justice inquiry. On all counts, reflective of the status of Aboriginal people in the regional society, the *Tribune* ultimately failed to apprehend and take seriously the nature of the issues being raised at the justice inquiry.

Most significant was the discrepancy between the news reporting of the *Tribune* and the Vancouver *Sun*. Indeed, the *Sun's* coverage was no less influenced by cultural factors and discursive traditions than that of the *Tribune*. In evoking sympathy for Aboriginal concerns through imagery that occasionally bordered on noble savage stereotypes, the *Sun's* coverage was equally enmeshed in an urban, liberal public idiom through which romantic perceptions of Aboriginal people were communicated. Such news coverage is often resented by rural residents, who respond defensively to "urban liberals" for their sympathetic support for Aboriginal people, and for accusing rural residents for being racists for their own treatment of Aboriginal people.<sup>60</sup>

The tendency of urban presses to cover Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal conflicts through noble-savage imagery, portraying Aboriginal people as romantic underdogs in regional conflicts, has been noted also by Gail Landsman, who observed how Mohawk claims to land and sovereignty in upper New York state were reduced by urban presses to conflicts between Mohawks and local townspeople, rather than claims against the state. She notes the resentment local residents had towards the urban presses:

A major component of the interpretive framework held by [local] Whites is the view of Aboriginal people as a minority group, and thus as another cause of bleeding-heart downstate liberals. It was believed by Whites . . . that the Aboriginal people were able to get what they wanted from the state in large part because they were able to dupe the downstate urban press.<sup>61</sup>

Noble-savage imagery in the urban presses had a certain political expediency:

In phrasing the conflict in terms of ethnicity rather than of sovereignty, the [urban] press turned public attention toward what in New York State at the time was a popular liberal cause, and away from the very issue which might pose a real challenge to the sovereignty of New York State or the federal government.<sup>62</sup>

Thus urban and rural presses alike are adept at manipulating news frames as a strategy of political containment: rural presses deflect criticisms of local Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal conflicts into rural-urban dichotomies, while

urban presses deflect challenges to state authority by evoking noble savage imagery and reducing Aboriginal claims to localized conflicts.

When contrasted with other studies of Aboriginal images in the press, the findings reported here suggest that news coverage of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal conflicts varies also according to the nature of the resources at the center of the conflict. When those resources are economic—such as in claims to land or natural resources—there is a tendency for news reporting to protect established economic/political interests by rejecting Aboriginal claims. Recent studies have shown how newspaper reporting of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal conflicts over economic resources has tended to generate negative images of Aboriginal people. For example, both Warren Skea and Marc Grenier have examined major Canadian newspaper coverage of the 1990 Oka crisis.<sup>63</sup> During this period, Quebec Mohawks protested the planned expansion of a golf course by the Oka town council and asserted Aboriginal title to the contested land through the erection of barricades. Grenier traced newspaper coverage in the English-language Montreal *Gazette*. He found that the blockade was not reported as a significant issue until four months after its erection, when the Quebec provincial police, equipped with riot gear, arrived at the scene to confront the Mohawks. Skea found that the assimilation of the Oka crisis into the “law and order” news frame rather than one of “Aboriginal rights” characterized coverage of the Oka crisis not only in the Montreal *Gazette* but also in major newspapers across the country. Similarly, during the period of intense competition over the fishery resources in the Skagit Valley of Washington State, small-town newspapers portrayed Aboriginal people in themes that emphasized negative and contentious behavior.<sup>64</sup> These findings are consistent with more general studies of media coverage of Aboriginal people and other ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority images were found most often to be negative, centered on themes of conflict or crime, suggesting that ethnic minorities are problems or threats to the dominant society.<sup>65</sup>

In the case of the Cariboo Chilcotin justice inquiry, the resources at the heart of the conflict were not economic. Rather, they were symbolic, involving the moral integrity, reputation, and respectability of the Williams Lake community in general. In response, *Tribune* news reporting, whether deliberately or through a more unreflective, habitual cultural convention, nevertheless contributed to a silencing of Aboriginal concerns through neutral and ambiguous headlines, through nonreporting, through “muffling” Aboriginal testimony, and through assimilating the mounting evidence of local injustices toward Aboriginal people into the newspaper’s well-used, conventional interpretive framework of “relations of rural communities with urban governments.”

Small-town antagonism and resentment toward urban society is not unique to rural British Columbia or Canada, and in this respect the response of the Williams Lake *Tribune* to this crisis of identity management reflects common challenges faced periodically by many other rural communities throughout the Western world in their response to conflicts not only with Aboriginal peoples but also with the broader regional and national society. For example, coastal townships from the northeastern United States to

eastern and northwestern Scotland have opposed large-scale offshore oil developments with virtually identical David-and-Goliath metaphors and imagery, portraying the moral superiority of the rural against the political and economic power of the corporate giants.<sup>66</sup> As Jane Nadel-Klein points out, such expressions of localism are frequently articulated against the nation-state or industrial elites as “part of a struggle for land, language, religion, or ‘way of life’” while being historically contingent and contested among the different sectors of the local community itself.<sup>67</sup> In a broader perspective, Raymond Williams identifies this dichotomy between rural and urban, or country and city, as a key concept in Western European thought that can be traced well back in history to the classical age.<sup>68</sup>

Despite the prevalence and antiquity of the rural-urban conceptual contrast in English literature, as Williams examines, and the vigor in which this opposition appears today in public discourse and debate, a phenomenon undoubtedly related to the contemporary context of global capitalism, corporate transnationalism, and the transformations these forces are introducing to rural towns and communities, this does not mean that the rural-urban opposition is the most meaningful and natural form of local identity. Rather, this is a pragmatic and expedient construct that residents of rural towns and cities use strategically in certain situations. Landsman tends to take the former view, suggesting that during the Mohawk dispute with local townspeople in upstate New York the upstate-downstate political conflict served as a main interpretive framework for public discourse because it was a more durable, significant, and meaningful issue to local whites as compared with their protracted conflict with the Mohawks. A similar argument has been made by Thomas Dunk in his discussion of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations in northern Ontario. Dunk argues that Aboriginal people are perceived to be the favored subjects of urban liberals and governments, and are perceived to receive an undue amount of government services and payments. Aboriginal people thus become a symbol of the rural community’s sense of powerlessness and resentment with respect to urban governments and power blocs. Conflicts with Aboriginal people are a product of the more general regional inequalities and class divisions inherent to the capitalist system.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast, and with the provision that here I am dealing not so much with public discourse broadly conceived as with a more limited set of news reporting and editorials, I argue that in the case studied here, rural-urban oppositions were not necessarily a more meaningful issue, but under the circumstances were a politically expedient way of framing news coverage. The conceptualization of local Euro-Canadian relations both with urban society and local Aboriginal people, as demonstrated in this case study, is in fact fluid and situationally variable. At times the Indian and white opposition overrode the rural-urban dichotomy in the framing devices of *Tribune* newspaper discourse. At other times the rural-urban opposition was introduced as the primary conceptual frame. Within this frame, placement of Aboriginal people on one or the other side of this rural-urban opposition alternately evoked the image of Aboriginal people and Euro-Canadians as common allies against the exploitation and oppression by urban governments, and inverted the moral

relationship between local Aboriginal people and Euro-Canadians by envisioning a collaborative conspiracy between Aboriginal people and urban governments over the distribution of vast amounts of government money. These observations of the fluidity of ways of conceptualizing local identity echo the studies of other social scientists, such as Jane Nadel-Klein in Scotland, Evelyn Plaice in Labrador, and Robert Paine in Labrador and the Canadian Arctic, all of whom emphasize the complexity, variability, and context-dependent nature of rural, local identities, the latter two specifically in the context of relations with Aboriginal peoples.<sup>70</sup>

The critical point to emphasize here is that this flexibility reflected more than the instrumental expression of identity: it had a clear hegemonic potential. This fluidity of boundary-marking enabled the maintenance of two contradictory themes of the dominant culture, that celebrating social harmony in Williams Lake and the principles of the equality of all citizens, and that condemning Aboriginal people to a position of social, moral, and cultural inferiority *vis a vis* Euro-Canadians. The irony is that this was the very cultural contradiction that Aboriginal leaders and witnesses challenged in their testimony to the justice inquiry. Although *Tribune* news reporting in effect reproduced key features of the dominant culture of the Euro-Canadian community, it also restated its contradictory elements, leaving room for further Aboriginal challenges. Undoubtedly, such challenges will continue with increasing vigor as regional Aboriginal leaders continue to press for not only a resolution of outstanding problems in their relationship with the Canadian justice system but also a renewed relationship with the regional society through the establishment of Aboriginal treaties, new economic partnerships, and new forms of self-government.

## NOTES

1. Anthony Sarich, *Report on the Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry* (Victoria: Province of British Columbia, 1993). The terms *Aboriginal*, *First Nations*, and *Native* may be used interchangeably to refer to indigenous peoples of Canada. In informal contexts most Aboriginal people in the Cariboo Chilcotin refer to themselves as Native. The terms *Aboriginal* and *First Nations* are the more acceptable terms in formal discourse (both in the Cariboo Chilcotin and in urban, academic settings), and I choose to use the former here. Most non-Aboriginal residents of small rural communities refer to Aboriginal people as *Indians*, and I use this term in contexts in which I wish to evoke the perspectives and attitudes of non-Aboriginal people in these settings. I define *racial prejudice* as the pre-judging of an individual based on mistaken beliefs that certain attributes, values, or forms of behavior are characteristic of an entire ethnic group. Stereotypes constitute "bundles of beliefs" through which racial prejudice is packaged and circulated during communication. I define *racial discrimination* as occurring when an individual behaves in a certain way, or fails to act, because of racial prejudice.

2. T. Alexander Hickman, Lawrence A. Poitras, and Gregory T. Evans, *Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall, Jr. Prosecution* (Nova Scotia: Province of Nova Scotia, 1989); Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Indian Policing Policy Review: Task Force Report* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1990); Alberta Task Force



on the Criminal Justice System, *Justice on Trial: Report of the Task Force on the Criminal Justice System and its Impact on the Indian and Métis People of Alberta* (Edmonton: Province of Alberta, 1991); A. C. Hamilton and C. M. Sinclair, *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Province of Manitoba, 1991); Law Reform Commission of Canada, *Aboriginal Peoples and Criminal Justice: Equality, Respect and the Search for Justice* (Ottawa: Law Reform Commission of Canada, 1991); Saskatchewan Indian Justice Review Committee, *Report of the Saskatchewan Indian Justice Review Committee* (Regina, Sask.: Province of Saskatchewan, 1992); Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Bridging the Cultural Divide* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

3. Hickman, Poitras, and Evans, *Royal Commission on the Donald Marshall, Jr. Prosecution*.

4. Hamilton and Sinclair, *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba*.

5. Thomas R. Goodson, *Report to the Attorney General Public Inquiry: The Fatal Inquiries Act* (Edmonton: Province of Alberta, 2000).

6. Royal Commission, *Bridging the Cultural Divide*, 104–116.

7. Teun A. van Dijk, "Structures of News in the Press" in *Discourse and Communication: New Approaches to the Analysis of Mass Media Discourse and Communication*, ed. Teun A. van Dijk (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1985), 69–93; Teun A. van Dijk, *News as Discourse* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1988).

8. Noel Dyck, "Aboriginal Peoples and Nation-States: An Introduction to the Analytical Issues," in *Indigenous Peoples and the Nation-State: Fourth World Politics in Canada, Australia and Norway*, ed. Noel Dyck (St. John's, Nfld: Memorial University, 1985), 15; Robert Paine, "Ethnodrama and the 'Fourth World': The Saami Action Group in Norway," in *Indigenous Peoples*, ed. Dyck, 214.

9. Arthur Vidich, "American Democracy in the Late Twentieth Century: Political Rhetorics and Mass Media," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 4 (Fall 1990).

10. Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

11. Stuart Hall, "Culture, the Media, and the 'Ideological Effect,'" in *Mass Communication and Society*, eds. James Curran, Michael Gurevitch, and Janet Woolcott (London: Edward Arnold, 1977); Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*; Michael Gurevitch et al., *Culture, Society and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1982); Donald Lazere, ed., *American Media and Mass Culture: Left Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

12. Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News* (New York: Pantheon, 1979); Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

13. Roger Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press* (New York: Routledge, 1991); van Dijk, "Structures of News"; van Dijk, *News as Discourse*; Sandra J. Harris, "Sociolinguistic Approaches to Media Language," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 5 (March 1988).

14. Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*.

15. *Ibid.*, 61.

16. Kevin M. Carragee, "Interpretive Media Study and Interpretive Social Science," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 7 (June 1990).

17. van Dijk, "Structures of News."

18. The discourse analysis approach, best articulated in the work of van Dijk ("Structures of News"; *News as Discourse*) is a powerful methodology for analyzing bias in news reporting. Most of the existing studies of Aboriginal images in the press (Warren H. Skea, "The Canadian Newspaper Industry's Portrayal of the Oka Crisis," *Native Studies Review* 9 [Spring 1993–94]; Marc Grenier, "Native Indians in the English-Canadian Press," *Media, Culture and Society* 16 [April 1994]; Benjamin D. Singer, "Minorities and the Media: A Content Analysis of Native Canadians in the Daily Press," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 19 [Fall 1982]; Bruce G. Miller, "The Press, the Boldt Decision, and Indian-White Relations," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 17 [Summer 1993]) have utilized content analysis (Bernard Berelson, "Content Analysis in Communication Research," in *Reader in Public Opinion and Communication*, second ed., eds. B. Berelson and M. Janowitz [New York: The Free Press, 1966]) to quantitatively assess the relative frequency of various categories of news reporting about Aboriginal people. Although categories of news reporting can be derived through an interpretive process sensitive to the ethnographic context (David L. Altheide, "Ethnographic Content Analysis," *Qualitative Sociology* 10 [Spring 1987]), content analysis generates an essentially static model. Once the categories are set, the analyst, for methodological reasons, must presume that the content has an objective meaning that remains consistent through time independent of subtle contextual changes, not to mention changes in the broader social, political, and cultural contexts in which their readers are situated. In contrast, the discourse analysis approach enables a much finer-grained analysis of the subtle manipulation of images and the variations in meaning that result. The discourse analysis approach becomes particularly powerful when coupled with a case-study analysis of the development of one news story, as will be shown here.

19. Since 1985 I have been carrying out ethnographic research among both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the Cariboo region and the city of Williams Lake; my analysis of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations in Williams Lake is in addition based on several years of personal experience as a resident of the city and working for an area tribal council. I present a more in-depth analysis of culture, identity, and social relations in Williams Lake in *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999).

20. These figures are based on 1991 Canada Census data from those individuals reporting a single ethnic origin. Aboriginal people are underrepresented in the Census data.

21. Commission on Resources and the Environment, *Cariboo Chilcotin Land Use Plan* (Victoria: Province of British Columbia, 1994), Appendixes, Social Profile, 10.

22. Furniss, *Burden of History*, 81–87.

23. In 1993 a second weekly newspaper began publishing in Williams Lake. It focuses on more lengthy news features, as well as community events, the arts, and entertainment.

24. Very little social scientific analysis as been made of the role of the newspaper in contemporary small towns. However, studies of the first part of the twentieth century show many similarities to the findings presented in this case study. Small-town newspapers in the earlier twentieth century played a similar role in protecting the interests of the town's elite, the middle class (Gerald K. Wells, "The Small Town Editor:

Guardian of Respectability,” in *Order and Image in the American Small Towns*, eds. Michael W. Fazio and Peggy Whitman Prenshaw (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1981). Papers followed a “good news only” policy, printing negative copy only when assured of the unanimity of opinion in the community (Albert Blumenthal, *Small Town Stuff* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932]). In his study of a north Cariboo community between 1908 and 1933, Malzahn found that the local newspaper was linked through close political ties to the city’s merchants. He wrote: “Efforts were made to create an image of the region as a whole, and particularly of the village of Quesnel, as a stable, harmonious community which was rapidly developing into a major settlement. The Cariboo Observer’s editorial policy was clearly formulated to inspire confidence in the North Cariboo’s future and to encourage optimism and perseverance” (Manfred R. Malzahn, “Merchants and the Evolution of the North Cariboo, British Columbia, 1908–1933,” (master’s thesis, Department of Geography, McGill University, Montreal, 1979, 54).

25. Precise information on the economic base of the *Tribune* is not available. However, in a study of the financial structure of newspapers in Canada, Hallman, Oliphant, and White reported that in 1979–1980, newspapers with less than 250,000 aggregate weekly circulation (the *Tribune*’s circulation is 6,900) received 75 percent of their revenue from advertising. Of this amount, ads bought by retail stores and national advertisers (such as car manufacturers and airlines) comprised three-quarters of the advertising revenue, and income from classified ads about one-quarter. Circulation revenues made up one-quarter of total newspaper revenue (Eugene Hallman, P. F. Oliphant, and R. C. White, “The Newspaper as a Business,” *Royal Commission on Newspapers*, vol. 4 [Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1981], 43).

26. Furniss, *Burden of History*, 81–87.

27. *Ibid.*, 85.

28. Thomas Dunk, *It’s a Working Man’s Town: Male Working-Class Culture in Northwestern Ontario* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 115–121; David Stymeist, *Ethnics and Indians: Social Relations in a Northwestern Ontario Town* (Toronto: Peter Martin, 1975), 26; Stanley R. Barrett, *Paradise: Class, Commuters, and Ethnicity in Rural Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 167–169.

29. Furniss, *Burden of History*, 97.

30. *Ibid.*, 97–98.

31. For an in-depth discussion see Furniss, *Burden of History*, 104–137.

32. Niels Braroe, *Indian and White: Self-Image and Interaction in a Canadian Plains Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975); Yngve Georg Lithman, *The Community Apart: A Case Study of a Canadian Indian Reserve Community* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1984); Dunk, *Working Man’s Town*.

33. Furniss, *Burden of History*, 104–137.

34. The following quotations are based on ethnographic research conducted in the Cariboo-Chilcotin between 1992 and 1995.

35. See Elizabeth Furniss, *Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995).

36. “Williams Lake Crime Rate Dismays Mayor,” *Vancouver Sun*, 26 October 1991, A19. This widespread belief regarding Aboriginal criminality was reinforced after City Hall set up a special task force to investigate crime in Williams Lake. The provincial attorney general’s office provided statistics on those individuals charged

with offenses, and who were processed through the court system, over a one-year period. These statistics were broken down into Native and non-Native offenders, as well as youth and adult. The statistics indicated that 53.4 percent of criminal charges being laid in one year were against Natives. Whether this figure constitutes a statistically significant "majority" is open to question. To be sure, the 53 percent figure indicates that Aboriginal people, on a percentage of the total population basis, are grossly over-represented in the justice system. Yet the diverse and complex reasons for this overrepresentation are not contemplated by most local Euro-Canadians, but are accepted as inherent, essential features of Aboriginality (see Hamilton and Sinclair, *Manitoba Justice Inquiry*, for a thorough analysis of these factors). As a result, Aboriginal people continue to be over-policed and subsequently overrepresented in the justice system in part because of the stereotypes of Indian criminality. That the city's task force concluded that the most relevant factor accounting for criminality was ethnicity, rather than socioeconomic status or gender (95 percent of the offenders were male), speaks once more to the prevalence of negative Indian stereotypes and the ease and frequency through which they are reproduced in the regional culture.

37. "Enough is enough," *Williams Lake Tribune*, 24 November 1994, A5.

38. "What are land claims—peace or revolution?" *Williams Lake Tribune*, 31 March 1994, A5.

39. "How much cash has been given to First Nations?" *Williams Lake Tribune*, 19 December 1995, A5.

40. "Feeling reverse discrimination," *Williams Lake Tribune*, 3 November 1994, A5.

41. "Its time to negotiate with natives," *Williams Lake Tribune*, 1 September 1992, A4.

42. Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, 63.

43. "Chilcotin Justice Inquiry Terms of reference inked," *Williams Lake Tribune*, 6 October 1992, A1.

44. "Justice Council slams funding from Victoria," in *Williams Lake Tribune*, 8 October 1992, A1.

45. "Who's pulling Gablemann's purse strings?" *Tribune*, 13 October 1992, A4.

46. Notes on the Cariboo Chilcotin Justice Inquiry, Nenqai Deni Yajelhtig Law Center, Anahim Indian Reserve, British Columbia.

47. Notes, Anahim Lake hearings, Cariboo Chilcotin Justice Inquiry, 7–9 December 1992. Nenqai Deni Yajelhtig Law Center, Anahim Indian Reserve, British Columbia.

48. "Isolated natives travel far to attend hearings: vibrant cultural differences emerge as the Sarich inquiry continues jolting across the rugged Chilcotin plateau," *Sun*, 23 January 1993, B2.

49. "Justice Inquiry Underway," *Williams Lake Tribune*, 10 December 1992, A1.

50. Notes, Deep Creek hearings, Cariboo Chilcotin Justice Inquiry, 7, 11, 12, 18, 19 and 20 January 1993. Nenqai Deni Yajelhtig Law Center, Anahim Indian Reserve, British Columbia.

51. "Charter of Rights will protect police officers," *Tribune*, 14 January 1993, A1.

52. Notes, Cariboo Chilcotin Justice Inquiry hearings, February through May 1993. Nenqai Deni Yajelhtig Law Center, Anahim Indian Reserve, British Columbia.

53. Sarich, *Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry*, 52–60.

54. Regna Darnell, "Inadvertent Muffling of Native Voices in the Southwestern Ontario Media," in Algonquian Conference, *Papers of the Algonquian Conference Twenty-Third Annual Meeting* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1992).

55. Here I contrast newspaper coverage with the tape-recorded evidence presented by Ronald Setah to the Cariboo Chilcotin Justice Inquiry, Incident #119, Redstone Reserve, February 1993. Nenqai Deni Yajelhtig Law Center, Anahim Indian Reserve, British Columbia.

56. Hamilton and Sinclair, *Manitoba Justice Inquiry*, 1.

57. Sarich, *Cariboo-Chilcotin Justice Inquiry*, 11.

58. See Paine, "Ethnodrama," 202.

59. See Furniss, *Burden of History*, 123–137 for a longer discussion of these points.

60. See also Gail Landsman, "Ganienkeh: Symbol and Politics in an Indian/White Conflict," *American Anthropologist* 87 (December 1985); Dunk, *Working Man's Town*.

61. Landsman, "Ganienkeh: Symbol and Politics," 829.

62. Gail Landsman, "Indian Activism and the Press: Coverage of the Conflict at Ganienkeh," *Anthropological Quarterly* 60 (January 1987): 111.

63. Skea, "Portrayal of the Oka Crisis"; Grenier, "Native Indians in the English-Canadian Press."

64. Miller, "The Press, the Boldt Decision, and Indian-White Relations."

65. Singer, "Minorities and the Media"; Paul Hartmann and Charles Husband, *Racism and the Mass Media* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1974); Teun van Dijk, *Racism and the Press* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

66. Jane Hurwitz Nadel, "Houston's Little Sisters: A Cross-Cultural Perspective on Offshore Oil," *Human Organization* (Summer 1983); Maurice Broady, "The Drumbie Inquiry: David and Goliath in Scottish Rural Development," *Community Development Journal* 10 (April 1975); Jane Nadel-Klein, "Reweaving the Fringe: Localism, Tradition, and Representation in British Ethnography," *American Ethnologist* 18 (August 1991).

67. Nadel-Klein, "Reweaving the Fringe."

68. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), 1.

69. Dunk, *Working Man's Town*, 115–116.

70. Nadel-Klein, "Reweaving the Fringe"; Evelyn Plaice, *The Native Game* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University, 1990); Robert Paine, *The White Arctic: Anthropological Essays in Tutelage and Ethnicity* (St. John's: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University, 1977).