

Presidential Address. Confronting Our Colonial Past: Reassessing Political Alliances over Canada's Twentieth Century

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Article abstract

This article examines examples of settler-initiated political alliances with Indigenous peoples in Canada over the twentieth century, placing them in their social and historical context, and assessing their insights as well as ideological and material limitations. I explore four very different examples, ranging from protests over the dispossession of land to attempts to preserve Indigenous cultures to the post-World War II organization of the Indian Eskimo Association and youth Indigenous projects associated with the Company of Young Canadians. Past settler efforts to create alliances or speak on behalf of Indigenous peoples incorporated multiple intentions and political ideas; they included both efforts at advocacy and partnership and paternal replications of colonial thinking. Assessing their complex histories is an important part of our efforts to grapple critically with Canada's history of colonialism.



Joan Sangster - CHA President | Présidente de la SHC, 2015-2017

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Abstract

This article examines examples of settler-initiated political alliances with Indigenous peoples in Canada over the twentieth century, placing them in their social and historical context, and assessing their insights as well as ideological and material limitations. I explore four very different examples, ranging from protests over the dispossession of land to attempts to preserve Indigenous cultures to the post-World War II organization of the Indian Eskimo Association and youth Indigenous projects associated with the Company of Young Canadians. Past settler efforts to create alliances or speak on behalf of Indigenous peoples incorporated multiple intentions and political ideas; they included both efforts at advocacy and partnership and paternal replications of colonial thinking. Assessing their complex histories is an important part of our efforts to grapple critically with Canada's history of colonialism.

Discussions of the colonizer's moral and political responsibilities in a settler country are very much on the political agenda, from critiques of the occupy movement's use of the language of "possession" to Paulette Regan's influential argument that we need to "unsettle the settler within," to academic writing on the incommensurability of decolonization.¹ Settler nations, some claim, "are not immigrant nations." No matter what their origins, experience, or connection to other forms of colonialism, all settlers became trespassers on Indigenous "land, law, epistemologies."² To embrace this view would unsettle some accepted precepts of Canadian history.

Given that we are immersed in discussions about 150 years of Confederation and colonialism, and given my own evolution as a scholar at Trent University, with its historic commitment to

Indigenous Studies, a discussion of attempted settler Indigenous alliances seems fitting for this address. Indeed, my interest was piqued by a ceremony I attended in 2016 at Trent to mark the 1971 establishment of the Inuit Tapirisat at a meeting organized by the Indian Eskimo Association of Canada (IEA). In the library room where the final plans were made, we honoured the spot with the most conventional settler commemorative forms: a plaque. To claim the space for the founding meeting has some irony, since claiming space has been so central to colonialism. Nonetheless, Inuit leaders Mary Simon and Peter Ittinurit attended, as did the former Trent president, Tom Symons, who had originally organized the meeting as an IEA Board member. That ceremony led me to the IEA Archives at Trent and to begin to think through how we might historicize past political alliances between settler and Indigenous groups.

Case studies of contemporary political alliances have been scrutinized more extensively than historical ones, and as the collection by Lynn Davis' shows, they are rooted in multiple meanings and intentions, reflecting "different concepts of relationships which embody varying power configurations," including paternalism, partnerships, and a combination of both.³ Even allies who support Indigenous-led efforts must often negotiate political realities of contending meanings and strategies of self-determination debated by Indigenous actors who may not agree on political priorities and strategies.⁴ Past alliances may well embody some of the same contradictory motivations but they still require more intensive historical scrutiny. Contemporary writing about past alliances has perhaps been too summarily dismissive, referring to them as "bumbling" efforts, attempted "moves to innocence," reconciling "guilt and complicity."⁵ Yet, the rich history of settler-Indigenous relations in national and transnational context written over the past few decades suggests we might create a more complex narrative.

By focusing on past political alliances, I do not intend to excuse or soften the history of settler colonialism by pointing to insightful, sympathetic non-Indigenous people who challenged colonialism. This is not intended as an apologia, an effort to

de-value the centrality of Indigenous-led protest, or a desire to be “made innocent.”⁶ The risk of focusing on such alliances might be the perpetuation of an uncritical narrative of liberal tolerance and peacemaking — what Pauline Wakeham calls “reinvented white civility” — that shores up national mythologies while foreclosing fundamental questions of asymmetrical power.⁷ On the other hand, it is easy to dismiss the inadequacies of past political efforts, but important to understand them in light of the material context and intellectual choices of the time: they too are part of grappling critically with our colonial pasts. We should beware of history conceived as an engine charging forward in a linear direction of ever-increasing political sophistication, with current scholars patting ourselves on the back for our very superior anti-colonial insights. Historians are inevitably judgmental about the past and I am no exception, but I do believe, methodologically, we try to walk a tightrope between presentism and relativism, interpreting the past with both skeptical distance and empathetic insight, however tall an order that is.

This essay is not an ethnography which fully explores both sides of the cultural equation, though in it I do suggest some tensions and unsolvable differences between settler and Indigenous groups. Rather, I ask what kind of settler-initiated alliances emerged over the early to mid-twentieth century that led to some small cracks in colonialist thinking? What encouraged settlers to think beyond the dominant ideas of the time and how were allies also constrained by “common sense”⁸ racial, class, and gender ideologies? Were settler-constructed efforts abetted or limited by their intersection with other political ideals, shaped by religious, liberal, feminist, socialist, or anti-colonial thought? I am going to scamper over the twentieth century, extracting four specific examples of alliances. In doing so, I am thus omitting far more — from people such as Ruth Gorman to Native Friendship Centres — however my intention is to pose initial questions rather than offer a definitive history of an unfinished, uncertain story.

The colonizer who refuses

Tunisian writer Albert Memmi famously argued that it was near impossible to be a “colonizer who refuses.” No matter how horrified by colonialism, the colonizer’s protests will “launch himself into conflict with his own people,” there can be no place for him in the future nation, and he will end up in a political no man’s land of “ineffectiveness.” He cannot offer criticisms of the anti-colonial movement and he “will slowly realize that the only thing for him to do is to remain silent.”⁹ Acknowledging a host of contradictory dilemmas, Memmi ends up in a rather pessimistic cul-de-sac of dualities.

Historians who likely see themselves as “colonizers who refuse” have played a role in dissecting Canada as a colonial project while political theorists have engaged in parallel efforts to theorize abstract explanations of, and solutions to colonialism that range from Alan Cairns’ compromise of “citizens plus” to Will Kymlycka’s endorsement of unique minority rights within a liberal state to Patrick Macklem’s argument that legal equality rests on principles of distributive justice and differentiated group rights.¹⁰ For Indigenous activists and theorists, these solutions often come up short. In the 1970s Harold Adams, influenced by Frantz Fanon, Marxism, and Red and Black Power, rejected liberal remedies that ignored the deep connections between western imperialism, capitalism, and the oppression of Native peoples, and he exposed the raw anguish of internalized racism that haunted Indigenous communities.¹¹ Over thirty years later, Dale Turner, Taiaiake Alfred, Leanne Simpson, among others, explored Indigenous ways of knowing as the basis for governance, though they advocated different ways forward. Turner calls for the leadership of Indigenous “word warriors” who understand western and Indigenous paradigms in order to engage with the state; Alfred and Simpson are more attuned to employing the rich resource of Indigenous cultures to guide a process of liberation and renewal, using Indigenous thought *not* to seek sanction from the state but to “transform the colonial outside into a flourishing of the Indigenous inside.”¹² To Mohawk scholar Audra

Simpson, refusal as political practice and mode of analysis, not recognition, is the solution.¹³

Alliances may be also imagined as theoretical coalitions. Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith recommend “theoretical promiscuity,”¹⁴ using the tools of both western and Indigenous thought systems to aid decolonization, a strategy Glen Coulthard’s innovative integration of Marx, Fanon, feminism, and Indigenous knowledge embraces. Not coincidentally, Coulthard is critical of the liberal pluralist politics of recognition in which Indigenous nationhood is reconciled with settler state sovereignty, a compromising accommodation of Indigenous identity to, and by, the state.¹⁵

Negotiating a colonial past inevitably impinges on our political present. As Victoria Freeman comments in *Distant Relations*, discussions about what we do now with our “inheritance of the past”¹⁶ may be the most productive question at hand for researchers. Moreover, a focus on individual guilt, good will, and personal responsibility, as Memmi recognized, does not adequately address collective and systemic relationships.¹⁷ As historians, we need to understand the interplay between individual agency and the social structures that produced colonialism, its critics (however few), and its current legacies. Those few people who spoke out against dispossession, Freeman notes, were “marginalized, ignored or ridiculed.”¹⁸ Sadly, the voices of non-Indigenous allies sometimes counted more than those of Indigenous peoples, a fact that undermined alliances but also spurred autonomous Indigenous organizing, which in the past, as now, remains the key motor of anti-colonial protest.

Land

However diverse the focus of political alliances in the past, they often circled back to one issue: land. “Territoriality,” as Patrick Wolfe argued, “is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element.”¹⁹ Because settler colonialism is fundamentally a process of “displacement and replacement,” land was the focus of both Indigenous struggles and attempted alliances.²⁰

In British Columbia, land dispossession and the lack of treaty rights mobilized Aboriginal communities and their non-Aboriginal sympathizers at the turn of the century, the latter associated with the Protestant Social and Moral Reform Council and an overlapping lobby group, the Friends of the Indian. Established in 1910 on the suggestion of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society [BASAPS], the Friends of the Indian petitioned Canadian governments and the Crown on behalf of Indigenous groups, as well as attempting to use the BASAPS as a backdoor path of influence to the colonial office.²¹ A few key white supporters, such as the socialist, amateur anthropologist James Teit and Anglican minister and lawyer Arthur O'Meara were in the forefront of this alliance work.²²

Nevertheless, Indigenous resistance led the way. A delegation took a petition to the King in 1906; in 1908 25 chiefs from the north and south coast travelled to Ottawa to address federal politicians. Spurred by the movement of settlers into Indigenous territory, the encroachment of railway construction, and years of frustration dealing with a recalcitrant provincial government, they argued that "the whole country [is being] taken away from us without treaty or agreement."²³ Indigenous leaders 1909 "Cowichan" petition, argues Hamar Foster, marked a shift in alliance tactics, from pleading letters written by individuals on behalf of Indigenous people in the nineteenth century to early twentieth century legal arguments calling for collective redress based on constitutional documents such as the Proclamation of 1763.²⁴ Disillusioned with their treatment by the provincial legislature, Ottawa, and the 1912 McBride-McKenna Commission, Indigenous people saw more hope in the courts, especially the British Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC), which was key to O'Meara's legal strategy.²⁵

When the federal government sent Dr. J. A. McKenna of the McKenna-McBride commission to British Columbia in 1912, he told assembled chiefs that they had been conquered by a "stronger race" and that they had to accept the inevitability of white progress and development. The Friends responded indignantly: "are you telling Native people that they must con-

sider themselves a conquered people [with no] rights in respect of the lands of their forefathers...in direct opposition to British principles embodied in the proclamation?"²⁶ The Friends spoke in a language of Christian conscience and British fair play, with the Proclamation of 1763 held up as a symbol of even-handed dealing with "the Native." Failure to address Aboriginal title and "inherent rights" of the "original inhabitants of the land" was "a stain on the honour" of the country, declared ally Rev. Tucker.²⁷

The Friends' advocacy undoubtedly unsettled colonial thinking still attached to the arrogant certainty of *terra nullius*: those who believed even inhabited land was up for legal grabs if they deemed the "people not Christian, agricultural, commercial, sufficiently evolved, or simply in the way."²⁸ Accused of "fomenting discord" among the Natives, the Friends retorted that they were Canada's best bulwark *against* violence. "Our greatest achievement has been our success in keeping the Indians quiet," they argued, and in encouraging constitutional solutions despite the unfair dealing by various governments.²⁹ The Friends were the true expression of British justice, asking that the "liberal policy" of treaties and reserves elsewhere in Canada be extended to British Columbia. Besides, they added, failure to deal with the land question might inhibit settlers from coming to British Columbia and hold back Christianization of the natives.³⁰

Even taking into account that this pamphlet was crafted to counter attacks on them, the Friends offered a limited analysis of what we would now refer to as dispossession. As a legal critique, the Friends did not question who "has the authority to have the authority" to make decisions about territoriality: jurisdiction, itself socially and historically produced, was assumed to reside with the Crown, a long-standing bedrock of British colonial ideology.³¹ Underlying title and legitimacy was not questioned, though Indigenous peoples should be allowed to negotiate for fair compensation on the extinguishment of their rights.³² Paternalism (for the Friends claimed they were "promoting the best interest of the Indian"), a commitment to justice, and colonialist views were all mixed together, along with imperialist sentiment

and the belief that the Empire was a positive force for civilized values across borders.³³

O'Meara's motivations have been examined in detail. Some scholars argue that he evolved from a paternalist Christian missionary who saw Indians as wards of the state to a lawyer ally who believed in their inherent land rights. Individual hearts and minds, in other words, can be won over.³⁴ His single-minded dedication to appeal to the JCPC was shaped by his belief in British justice and an unfailing conviction that Indians were the subject of political duplicity. Yet, as a "colonizer who refused," O'Meara represented some of the contradictions Memmi noted, namely rejection by his own people and conflicting relations with Indigenous peoples. He was increasingly alienated from the church, government officials, even his own family as the issue *became* his life. He was "persona non grata" with all federal officials, lamented the British Anti-Slavery Society trying to negotiate between these groups.³⁵

The Friends did inspire a like-minded Calgary group, with Rev. John MacDougall on the executive and a Friends organization also emerged later in Edmonton in 1944.³⁶ However, calls by the Moral and Social Reform Council for an active Canadian-wide network of Friends of the Indian immediately after World War I never materialized. In other land disputes of the time, such as the one at Six Nations in Ontario, allies were more likely to be found abroad, a reminder of the transnational character of many alliances which drew on people, ideas, and organizations in multiple nation-states and international organizations.

When land and governance issues came to a head in the early 1920s at Grand River, Indigenous organizing again led the way, but non-Indigenous allies — other than lawyers engaged — were few. For years, anger with the federal state had been brewing at Grand River over compulsory enfranchisement, the state's overbearing (mis)management of Six Nations funds, revisions of the Indian Act which allowed the removal of their land, and efforts to use the Soldiers Settlement Act to hive off reserve lands. Refusal of the government to recognize Six Nations as allies of the Crown and their right to manage their affairs using

traditional forms of governance also contributed to conflict. The RCMP's willingness to enter the territory as well as the frustration caused by continual roadblocks to a proposed inquiry, often reflecting Duncan Campbell Scott's stubborn view of Indigenous people as childlike, pre-modern and unable to govern themselves, hurried along a collision.³⁷

The Six Nations knew land, governance, and survival were inextricably linked: one could not protect the land when all decisions were made by a federal government intent on assimilation. Yet, no Ontario Friends rallied behind them. It was assumed Ontario Indians had been dealt with long ago — and fairly. Some press coverage recognized government ineptitude in handling the issue, but writing also rested on racist stereotypes. The conflict was described as “lawless Indians in revolt,”³⁸ instigated by the traditionalists or “pagans,” meaning the Confederacy. Six Nations clan mothers' role in choosing leaders was portrayed as a remnant of primitivism: just a bunch of “old women” running the show. Covering a powwow at Oshewan, Ontario newspapers described images of “savage warfare” and dancers’ “blood thirsty yells and hideously painted faces.”³⁹ According to the papers, it was also arrogant for Indians to expect an exalted status as British allies. Talk of “self determination” by the Six Nations was an “absurdity, a joke to the rest of Canada,” equated with Irish demands and other “comedies of self determination.”⁴⁰

Support was more forthcoming in Britain, where land development issues did not have the same material impact as they did in Ontario. American lawyer George Decker (much despised by Indian Affairs) eventually took the case and helped Cayuga Chief Levi General, or Deskaheh, negotiate a trip to Britain and then Geneva to address the League of Nations.⁴¹ Deskaheh was presented in the European press as a hybrid persona, an educated Indian in western business suits but also the fierce “red man warrior” in buckskin and feathers. Colonial tropes were used strategically *by* Deskaheh and Decker who hired a publicity agent in Britain in order to appeal to Europeans' colonial desire to imitate aspects of Native culture. In the British press, the conflict was framed as part of a “romantic history of the red Indian.”⁴²

Deskaheh had some support from the BASAPS (until he disregarded their advice)⁴³ but his most vocal allies were a small group of upper middle-class British women, notably Sarah Matheson Robertson, a Scottish writer who had encountered Indigenous peoples on an earlier North American trip and who took in wounded Indigenous men during World War I. An avid keeper of Scottish clan history, she wrote about an alliance between Scottish and Longhouse clans, both historically dispossessed of their inheritance.⁴⁴ Robertson became a one-woman advocacy group, advising the BASAPS, mediating between them and Deskaheh, raising funds, writing public pleas, and sending ardent appeals to every influential Canadian relative or friend she could possibly imagine who might press the Six Nations case, especially notables like cabinet ministers. Almost obsessively committed, displayed in her copious, incensed, hand-written appeals, she drew in another valuable public ally in Scotland: Mrs. Milne-Howe, a descendent of Sir William Johnson, whom Matheson induced to write directly to Prime Minister Mackenzie King and also co-sign a petition to the King.

Robertson's reasoning was similar to the Friends: the Six Nations deserved British justice and fair play, meaning the Crown should honour the Proclamation of 1763 and the Haldimand Treaty.⁴⁵ The Canadian government was doing the exact opposite: attempting to "decimate the Iroquois into the white race ... scattering them to the winds."⁴⁶ They are fighting for land, their existence against the "devils want it from them," as wrote Robertson⁴⁷ For these female advocates, Deskaheh was also a "noble native," a "splendid example of the finest Indian manhood who sought freedom for his race."⁴⁸ One of them, the less than tactful Rica Fleming-Gyll, wrote to the Six Nations Indian Agent, denouncing the "outrages he perpetuated," and adding, "I have no hesitation in saying you are a damnable scoundrel and deserve to be shot. Your detestable cruelty to the Indian deserves no less than god's punishment."⁴⁹ The very proper British Society agreed Fleming-Gyll had crossed a line. But if less violent in tone, Duncan Campbell Scott was contemptuous of all these women lobbyists, including Pauline Johnson's sister, who

wrote on behalf of Six Nations. They were just another example of the dangers of “petticoat government”, according to Campbell Scott, associated also with Six Nations clan mothers.⁵⁰

Matheson's motivations were multiple: an idealized view of the Indian, a belief in legal justice, imperialist sentiment, and a sense of personal connection to a courageous individual. Ontarians had a different view: the land was there for development not for protection of people who were trapped in a pre-modern, if romanticized, past. For the Six Nations, this was not just a question of history's due, land removed, or governance, but of survival in their homeland. Deskaheh understood how these three issues could not be separated. As he wrote just before his death in 1924, in the United States, unable to return home, he dreaded the thought of the Six Nations as “homeless, uprooted,” at risk of losing their familial and cultural roots. If we lose our land, he wrote, “we will be isolated, we will live in little rooms in which we would suffocate. We would then be scattered and lost to each other and lost among so many of you.”⁵¹

Culture

Changes to the Indian Act in 1927 severely limited the legal and political activities of First Nations, forcing Indigenous peoples and their allies to find other means of protest. Cultural preservation became one backdoor entrée to political engagement. For white women like Alice Ravenhill and Nan Shipley, the cultural project of documentation, preservation, and celebration drew on traditional forms of female civic involvement: good works, social services, the arts. Their intent was to counter the erasure of Aboriginal peoples by stressing their creativity, admirable qualities, and contributions to Canada. By challenging the dominant narrative of white civilization and progress, cultural allies both pushed against the boundaries of colonialism, but they also remained trapped within some of its suppositions.

Alice Ravenhill, founder of the Society for the Furtherance of British Columbia Indian Arts and Crafts, author of books on Indigenous art, and promoter of Indigenous artists, began her

career as an educator in public health and child care, but turned to the preservation of Native handicrafts and art in the 1920s. She lobbied in British Columbia for the improved teaching of Indigenous history in schools, better Indigenous education, and also for the encouragement of Aboriginal arts and crafts as an avenue to Indian cultural resurgence and economic self sufficiency.⁵² Although the federal government shared the latter goal, Ravenhill was critical of the state's education policy, pointing to the severe inadequacies of residential schools and the need to keep younger children with their families. In her view, educational institutions should value Indigenous culture, not denigrate it.

From the perspective of current-day historians, her work incorporated questionable forms of racial essentialism: preserving native art was particularly important, she wrote in the 1930s, as a means of understanding pre-modern societies, the *precursor* to western ones. By the 1940s and 1950s, she dismissed faulty, unscientific arguments about "race distinctions,"⁵³ and extolled the "intricate social and religious" organization of "tribes" in British Columbia but still fell back on idealized essentialism. Indian art was extolled for its "ingenuity, vivid imagination and keen observation": Indian artistic talent was an "inherited artistic gift," with "manual dexterities latent in [all] young Indians."⁵⁴ For Ravenhill, as Lilynn Wan argues, Indigenous art should be valued for its "primitive, spontaneous, and simplistic aesthetic."⁵⁵

Her cultural work, however, evolved into more public political statements on the social needs of Aboriginal communities. Ravenhill was seen as an ally by the Native Brotherhood of British Columbia, and based on consultations with teachers, Indigenous peoples and researchers, she wrote a brief for the 1947 Senate and House of Commons Joint Committee on Indian Affairs, which *The Native Voice* lauded as evidence of her role as a "great champion of Indian rights" motivated by a "love of justice."⁵⁶ While not radical by our standards, the brief highlights how long Indigenous Canadians and their allies have pointed to their sub-standard education and social conditions.

History was often seen by such cultural allies as a key to unlocking the truth and impelling progress. Ravenhill posited

colonial conquest and arrogant disregard for Indigenous cultures as the cause of Indian "exploitation"⁵⁷ and degradation, though her liberal optimism prevailed: the past could be overcome with a new understanding about the destructive impact of settlement and the contributions of Indigenous culture to Canadian life. If her writing veered too close to a romanticized and static image of the demoralized Indian, Ravenhill also believed in cultural resurgence. She was especially concerned that Indigenous girls appreciate women's history: their contributions to cultural resilience, their essential labour, and their political roles. "In former days," she insisted, "Indian women were eligible for and frequently held the position [of] chiefs in some tribes."⁵⁸

Allies like Ravenhill left a paradoxical legacy. They appropriated Aboriginal symbols for a Canadian identity, yet at the same time urged Aboriginal allies to use such symbols as forms of cultural revival. Their understanding of Indigenous peoples as anti-modernist, with their artistic creations shaped by racial attributes of a less complex society, was hardly progressive by our standards, but the Society she founded later promoted politically active artists who themselves utilized notions of authenticity to forward arguments about Indigenous nationhood, decolonization, and political redress.

The same contradictory premises are apparent in the efforts of Manitoba author Nan Shipley to rescue and nurture a beleaguered, endangered Aboriginal identity. Born in Scotland, Shipley grew up in Winnipeg, the daughter of a railway foreman and a suffragist mother. Married to a railway man, Nan spent her early wedded life in the provincial North, living in a cold boxcar, experiencing numerous miscarriages. (Only one of her children survived). Yet it was her difficult northern years, she claimed, that led to her fascination with "Indian" history.⁵⁹ Like Ravenhill, she found an appropriately feminine expression for her interest that did not challenge social convention and fit her limited educational opportunities: fiction and non-fiction historical writing on the Canadian West. While diverse in theme and different over time, her writing consistently attempted to feature Indigenous history as Canadian history, altering negative views

of Indians by celebrating their culture, heroism, and virtues. Her writing was an entrée to other alliances: she was a founder and supporter of the Winnipeg Indian Metis Friendship Centre, promoter of Indian art and crafts, co-editor of Indian legends and writing, and advocate for a writing contest for Indigenous youth, intended to nurture new artistic talent.⁶⁰

Like Ravenhill, her cultural work both defied conventions and reinforced them. Her efforts to speak on behalf of Indigenous peoples reflected a paternalistic impulse towards a group she saw as oppressed and demoralized. She promoted Indigenous writers, however, as the authentic voices of their own culture and she had to tolerate condescension from Indian Affairs (IA) for her specific efforts to promote a youth writing program. Although she spoke positively about “integration,” the IA catchword for progress, she defended treaties as the means by which Indians maintained their own distinct culture, and by the 1960s, she spoke out more forthrightly against racism, warning that violence might erupt in Canada since our racism approximated that of the southern United States against African Americans.⁶¹

Shipley’s sympathetic renditions of Christian missionaries in the North in her early books like *Frances of the Cree* and *Anna and the Indians* fit firmly into colonialist traditions, with their celebration of white women “pioneers” on the northern frontier, devoting their lives selflessly to the aid and education of Indigenous peoples.⁶² Although she extolled the benefits of western education, she did attempt to stress cultural exchange between settlers and Indigenous peoples, and the shameful lack of generosity on the part of many settlers.⁶³ Shipley is also cognizant of the prominent place of Aboriginal women in their societies, and in her later work, *Back to the River*, decries the racism that young women migrants encounter in the city.⁶⁴ Her novel depicting a woman disguised as a male fur trader suggested women’s non-conforming agency was of interest to her.⁶⁵

Shipley utilized accepted gender conventions to create cultural products *intended* to re-cast white-Indian relations. *Scarlett Lilly*, for instance, begins firmly positioned in the romance novel tradition: a young white teacher is swept off her feet by hand-

some Indian man (though educated in white society) and their devoted marriage instills in her a deep aversion to racial prejudice and new respect for native culture. After his tragic death at the hands of unscrupulous white whiskey traders, she honours his memory by pushing her new husband politician (a rather unlikeable character) to create honorable treaties with western Indians.

Scarlett Lily has overtones of American Helen Jackson's famous reform Indian novel, *Ramona*. Racist white denigrations of Indians are repudiated with moralistic horror, but civilization and a pluralist nation, preferable to Indian extermination, will emerge through education, domesticity, treaty-making, the latter seen uncritically by the heroine of *Scarlett Lily* whose ranch is situated on Indian land.⁶⁶ Like Jackson, Shipley attempted to draw a political lesson through the emotional power of fiction, rejecting suggestions from her publisher that the theme of interracial marriage was too controversial. Advocating tolerance and inclusion, however, has its liberal limits.⁶⁷

Like Ravenhill, Shipley also moved from cultural pursuits to more political statements. In 1968 she wrote a brief for the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW), scathing in its description of the treatment of Aboriginal women. Using feedback from Indigenous women near Winnipeg, she highlighted a litany of disgraceful problems: housing, employment, and, especially, the legal system, since Indian women were charged and jailed for minor infractions more often due to their poverty but were also subject to "bestial and vicious" violence not taken seriously. Better to restore sentencing power to the chief and councillors who understand the background of the law breaker, she concludes in an unusual endorsement of traditional justice. She too saw history as an avenue for cultural exchange, tolerance, and Indigenous pride. The beginnings of Canada, she stated, "did not commence with the arrival of the European," and Indian children need to "discover their impressive history" if dignity is to be restored."⁶⁸

Shipley's RCSW brief was that of a white woman speaking *on behalf of* Indigenous women, a stance we would now question, but she was extremely critical of the legal, welfare, and educational

systems, as well as the social apathy of non-Indigenous society. Aboriginal Manitobans, she argued, were demoralized as a result of the loss of their natural diet, enforced idleness, humiliation, and hunger, not to mention residential schools, where children were forcibly placed in a “strange, cage-like environment, many to never see families again, their language forbidden and culture stamped out,” producing the “bitterest memories, resulting from unbearable loneliness, rejection and needless restraints.”⁶⁹ Yet she too falls back on a language of cultural essentialism,⁷⁰ suggesting a pre-modern Aboriginal culture had been overwhelmed by modernity, and her understanding of gender in Indigenous communities was shaped by white, middle-class postwar gender ideals.⁷¹

It is important to contrast the muted cultural approach of such allies from some Indigenous-led political activism. While white allies questioned colonialist stereotypes and encouraged cultural survival, their writings lacked a materialist analysis of colonialism as an ongoing structure, and it was somewhat limited by its focus on cultural authenticity. It was not unlike later efforts to “teach settlers to be Indigenous”⁷² and therefore *value* Indigenous peoples. Even in the 1930s and 1940s, Indigenous resistance took other forms, sometimes projects of cultural survival, but also ones of self organization, protest, and lobbying, shaped by a sense of collective identity and grievance over social conditions and, especially, dispossession. Prairie Metis activists Malcolm Norris and Jim Brady, to use one example, drew both on Indigenous culture, as well as socialist, Marxist, anti-colonial thought in their efforts to rejuvenate the Metis quest for recognition and land through the Metis Association of Alberta in the 1930s. They had an acute sense of the racist misconstruction of Metis people as backward, apathetic, “hopeless indigents, unfit for agriculture,” a developed critique of the exploitation of impoverished Metis, and a distrust of elite manipulation through institutions like the Church. What they did share with allies like Ravenhill was a commitment to a revisionist history. Brady’s extensive research attempted to explain the economic reasons for Metis poverty, their contributions to the creation of a democratic

West, and the impact of the ethnocentric slighting of Metis identity. History was an essential element of his presentation to the Ewing Commission in Alberta: it was a means of rewriting the dominant story and therefore suggesting different political choices for the future that did not spell mere band-aid "relief" to Alberta Metis, but offered something far more transformative.⁷³

Organization

Nan Shipley's research for the RCSW was completed at a key "transition point" in Indigenous-settler relations,⁷⁴ also the point at which the IEA was born. Established in 1959, within a decade, the IEA's original *raison d'être* was deemed politically problematic by Indigenous leaders. Its white founders did not disagree and the organization altered its orientation and name, becoming the Canadian Association in Support of Native Peoples (CASNP).

The IEA emerged from a 1958 committee of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) on Indian issues, which became the National Commission on the Indian Canadian, then the IEA. It was a self-named "citizens' organization" with combined research, education, planning, and coordination roles. Its founding mission was to act as a broker between groups involved in Indian issues, to advocate for new policies to serve Aboriginal peoples, and to challenge public apathy and ignorance about Native issues.⁷⁵ It was an organization of social conscience, social justice, and human rights, describing its own work as "social action."⁷⁶ Drawing on individual and organizational members, it existed on membership dues, an initial endowment from a foundation, government grants, occasional corporate donations, and allocations from Miles for Millions. Funds were used to do research, prepare briefs, coordinate meetings, and to draw Indian organizations and communities into the work of self transformation. By the 1970s, about one third of the membership was Indigenous in origin.⁷⁷

The IEA's first president, Clare Clarke, a graduate of Victoria College who worked for the CAAE, was a key architect for and supporter of the organization. Her quiet determination and

personal commitment held the project together for many years.⁷⁸ The IEA work, she believed, did not address “an Indian problem, but a human problem,” or, as she put it more bluntly, not an “Indian problem[,] but a white problem.”⁷⁹ Goods and services by themselves are not enough to fill this human need, nor will mere “protestations of good intent.” Above all, sensitivity and understanding on the part of Canadians were needed, not given “condescendingly,” but rather given “freely to enable [Indians] to choose for themselves what kind of life they want.”⁸⁰

Dominated initially by church, social work, and educational leaders, the IEA was built with non-Indigenous elite and middle-class connections, some Indigenous leaders, and occasional corporate donations. When a vice president of RBC wrote a chapter on the history of Native peoples to celebrate Canada’s centennial, for instance, the IEA praised, edited, and printed multiple copies, not thinking to question his expertise or whether an Indigenous perspective might be better. The IEA was to be a pluralistic, non-partisan organization with a public presence precisely *because* it was respected for its wide-ranging membership and reasoned research. That both the Imperial Order of the Daughters of Empire (IODE) and many faith-based communities were represented was seen as a positive sign of its broad reach, and it collaborated with other international NGOs such as OXFAM. In 1963 both high-ranking Department of Indian and Northern Affairs bureaucrat R.A.J. Phillips and Metis activist Malcom Norris were on the very large board of directors. Generally, they did not agree on much. Indigenous membership was encouraged, but initially remained in the minority, with highly accomplished Indigenous people like Dr. Gilbert Monture and Senator James Gladstone made honorary members to highlight a native presence.

The IEA tread carefully when it came to the state, not just because it relied on grants, but because they thought they could make a difference by tactful lobbying from within the structures of power. Their first foray into lobbying was a brief for the 1960 Joint Senate House of Commons parliamentary committee on Indian Affairs (IA) and many similar, densely-researched presen-

tations to a wide variety of inquiries and committees followed. Inadequate IA policies, reprehensible conditions on reserves and in urban areas, and the inadequate resources put into education and job training were often exposed. Earlier briefs sometimes portrayed Indians in stereotypical ways, as demoralized, cowed, fearful of change, not the least because the reserve system, created by whites, induced their dependence; IEA documents also posited a dichotomous "traditional" land-based native as opposed to a "modern" western person.⁸¹

Native peoples, the IEA did argue, had a distinctive way of life and did not necessarily want integration as much as they desired to live in their communities without starving, with access to water and education. The IEA did continually stress the scandalous living conditions of the First Nations, comparable to a third world country. (And they were, and are). Yet, First Nations peoples were often portrayed as objects of knowledge. It was assumed Indians had to be trained in methods of self governance and democratic process, which were lacking in their own communities.⁸² There were both echoes of IA homilies about self help as well as Hawthorn-like thinking of "citizens plus," with a strong emphasis on economic improvement and equal access to social provisioning (with other Canadians) as the key to a new form of citizenship.⁸³

By the mid to late 1960s, a shift in emphasis led to more regional, grass-roots, local community development, and urban work. Seeing solutions to economic and social problems percolating upwards, rather than downwards, they tried to decentralize the organization into provincial units, hired field workers, offered workshops for community development and Native-Friendship centre workers, and gave advice on specific community economic projects. For a brief moment, their strong investment in community development overlapped with IA initiatives in the mid-1960s.⁸⁴ A committee on the "Indian in the City" was set up in 1966, headed by Walter Currie, an Indigenous teacher and Ontario educational administrator who later came to Trent University as the founding head of Indian-Eskimo studies. The IEA focus was on practical policy and programs to address the

housing, education, and work needs of urban migrants. It was especially alarmed by the over-incarceration of Indigenous people. An emphasis on adjustment and integration suggested some overlap with the state's agenda. Rather than endorse demonstrations, it often provided background information.⁸⁵

The IEA could not resist some charitable efforts, such as sending skates and skis to northern children, but its main preoccupations were advocacy and initiating social projects designed to spark communities' own efforts at change. It lobbied for an Indian claims commission, believing treaty violations lay at the heart of Indigenous peoples' understandable distrust and bitterness: without "honourable settlements" relations with non-Indigenous peoples could not be repaired.⁸⁶ In this respect, it echoed the Friends of the Indian which saw just land settlements within the Canadian legal order as a way forward. Much like Nan Shipley, the IEA wanted history be re-written with attention to Indigenous culture and accomplishments. They pressed for commemoration of events like Pauline Johnson's birth and repeatedly urged revision of school texts which denigrated Indigenous peoples by offering students an outdated "savage" stereotype.⁸⁷

One project, Northern Radio Forum, illuminates its goals well. From its inception, the IEA was focused on the North, setting up an early Northern Service Committee which evolved into the more community development-oriented Northern Community Action Program (NORCAP). A key concern was that "Inuit rights were simply ignored as resource development threatened their livelihood and culture."⁸⁸ Investigative teams that often included Clare Clark went north to hear from government and Indigenous groups; the IEA set up a volunteer student program in North nicknamed the "Northern Peace Corps." Claimed as a precursor to the Company of Young Canadians (CYC), the program hired university students to work on Northern Affairs projects ranging from child care to the construction of new government facilities. In order to connect with the "grass roots," the IEA hired Eskimo and Indian field workers to reach out to geographically dispersed communities. Acting on the suggestion of the Yukon Native Brotherhood, and with additional funds from

Oxfam, the IEA bought an airplane, "The Talking Bird," piloted by Metis activist and journalist Wally Firth to connect northern projects and people.⁸⁹

They also built Northern Radio Forum, originally developed as a centennial project with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, though they drew on funds and advice from other players in the north including the Arctic Institute, the government, and the Hudson's Bay Company.⁹⁰ Northern Radio Forum, modeled on Farm Radio Forum, was to be an adult education project, a tool for social change, a means of documenting Indigenous histories and issues, a method of bringing together northern communities, and, also, of passing on information about the North to the South.

A young white field worker from the South, Paul Lumsden, was hired to oversee the project along with two field workers, Inuit Charlie Smith and Dene John Pascal. Recognizing the cultural and linguistic diversity of the North, Northern Radio Forum was intended to draw diverse Indigenous groups into dialogue about contemporary concerns. Its political potential was its role in cultural preservation combined with a commitment to historical research: by interviewing elders in their own languages, for instance, a basis was laid for land claims. Northern Radio Forum was slated for creation in mere months, but the difficulties — finding, recording, and translating in multiple languages, producing programs, training field workers, traveling over immense distance — were overwhelming. So too was Lumsden's realization of the magnitude of the cultural differences he faced; he also identified the impoverished conditions in the Indigenous North and state incompetence as frustrating and "enraging." Lumsden returned to the South to give an interim report that, as the IEA minutes noted politely, was rather negative. Lumsden wrote a 57-page, hand-written critical self reflection about the experience, the barriers and failures of the radio project. The full extent of the project's longer legacy in stressing the preservation of elder testimony, however, might not have been recognized at that time.⁹¹

Land and treaty rights became more central to IEA advocacy over time, including in the North, not in the least because they

were key for their Indigenous partners. IEA advocacy became blunter, addressing the “supreme failure” of IA, its “one hundred years of paternalism,” and the state’s tendency to “sit on its hands” while cycles of poverty persisted.⁹² Revealing of this shift was one minor conflict over the IEA’s participation in a northern meeting over treaty and land issues. The IEA field worker met with local Indigenous leaders about the need to “document of treaties through oral histories and affidavits.” Government officials, he noted, “wanted us and the press thrown out of a NWT (sic) meeting, but after a vote, Indian people said we should stay.” Land was at the centre of debate about resources and development that the state saw *itself* overseeing, not Indigenous people and not their allies armed with advice and tape recorders.⁹³

By 1968, the IEA’s work was challenged directly by Indigenous leaders. The organization claimed it was aiding, not usurping, native leadership, but this is not how a new generation of Indigenous activists saw it. In 1967 Harold Adams addressed the Ontario IEA conference and shook things up by calling for more militant action. Indians are oppressed, he informed the conference, brainwashed in their schools, their identity distorted. The message: Indigenous peoples must seek our own liberation. At an IEA conference a year later, an Inuit university student, Mary Carpenter, gave a critical speech that reflected the new mood in movements like Black and Red Power: the federal government, she charged, was engaged in a “rape of the North,” particularly with regards to oil exploration; they regarded the “Eskimo as little more than ‘a kind of new nigger with a parka’.” It was an entirely new political context.⁹⁴

Paternalism, often an undercurrent in non-Indigenous led organizations, was confronted, criticized, and opposed. In 1968, that year of international revolt, the IEA invited native groups to offer a critique of its successes, failures, even its actual existence. The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) responded bluntly: your board elections are undemocratic; your name is misleading, as you are whites speaking on behalf of Natives; you use Native people on your board for window dressing. A joint meeting with the NIB and the Canadian Metis Society produced tumultuous debate,

despite the fact that Indigenous groups did not speak with one voice, since some advocated a "racial" division in the membership of advocacy groups while others did not. A three-person coordinating committee was set up to oversee joint work, though many Indigenous leaders were adamant that *they* must define issues and offer political leadership, with the IEA providing "skilled advice, funds and public and political influence."⁹⁵

The IEA's went through both immense soul-searching and practical efforts to revise their structure and constitution. A name change was debated regularly after 1968, which finally occurred in 1972 when the IEA became CASNP. The organization cultivated a new agenda that supported Indigenous organizations, noting they had always thought their role was to be intermediary and interim until Indigenous groups were at a "mature stage of development." (Again, a touch of paternalism.) Environmental and resource issues such as James Bay increasingly assumed their attention. When Tapirisat was founded the same year, the meeting was facilitated by the IEA Board, but it was an Inuit-only discussion.⁹⁶ Incoming president Tom Symons believed in the importance of Indigenous leadership and self organization, but he also argued that the IEA was not redundant as long as there was a need to educate Canadians about Aboriginal needs and problems: the IEA had to address the "non-Indian problem." More controversial, he realized, was his contention that a citizens' organization still had an intellectual responsibility to maintain some independent judgment on issues, rather than endorse the views of all native organizations.⁹⁷ Yet, the shift after 1968 did not muzzle the IEA's views on issues such as treaties. Although there was some internal confusion over how the IEA should respond to the white paper, an editorial in their *Bulletin* by Board member Tom Symons on "The Obligations of History," penned in 1970, pointed to the "injustice" of the new policy: it both ignored the obligations, such as the Proclamation, to Aboriginal peoples and failed to see that the denial of treaty rights was the denial of "the most important rights of Aboriginal peoples."⁹⁸

In just over a decade, the IEA emerged, expanded, was transformed, faced with obsolescence. It was, however, differ-

ent from the one-person campaigns of Arthur O'Meara or Sarah Robertson. It moved beyond the cultural validation projects of Shipley, though it never ventured into the deeper structural analysis of colonialism and capitalism that Norris and Brady developed. The IEA hoped to collectively change peoples' hearts and minds, based on evidence-based research, reasonable debate, and the creation of new historical writing. Shaped by postwar discourses about human rights and by an emerging emphasis on multiculturalism, it represented a non-Indigenous expression of social conscience with some Indigenous support. The IEA's commitment to dialogue and community development meant it did listen to dissident Indigenous views and, inevitably, it encountered criticism from a new generation of leaders who saw its humanitarian approach as still one encased in colonialist assumptions. The IEA was challenged both generationally and ideologically by new projects of youth mobilization and alliance, one of which was the Company of Young Canadians (CYC).

Youth Mobilization

The CYC was the second incarnation of youth work in Indigenous communities after initial efforts on the part of the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA) in the prairies floundered in the mid 1960s. A few SUPA activists passed through the IEA but saw it as a "buffer group": "too patronizing," too much the "do gooders," as SUPA activist Jim Handy recalls. Influenced by civil rights organizing in the US, and counseled in the West by Malcolm Norris, SUPA activists were seeking a "racial analysis of class," and of the "colonization of the Indian" from a radical left perspective, ideas they had "never encountered" in their university history classes.⁹⁹

Over a period of two years, SUPA activists in the Neestow project lived with northern Saskatchewan Indians and Metis, supposedly to understand their lives, but also, some admitted, with the underlying hope of "changing the world." On reflection, they realized that alliances built on an idealized view of an "Indian cultural mystique," not to mention short-term sojourn-

ing in Indian communities, were destined for difficulty. SUPA activists had no shortage of anger about local conditions, but their political commitment often came up against long-standing embedded colonial relationships. Though they took away a better understanding of the need for Indigenous self-organizing, they were intensely self critical of their own efforts as “good-hearted liberals”. Their honest, open admission of their own naiveté and ideological shortcomings indicated a profound uncertainty that can also be read as productive. They also passed on their self-criticism to the CYC.¹⁰⁰

The CYC was a different kind of organization, created by the state to harness youth oppositional energy into productive projects of social animation. The organization's character shifted in a short space of time, at first allowing some latitude for radical political activities, but after a 1969 parliamentary inquiry into the CYC, there was a tightening of fiscal and administrative control and more stress on service-oriented endeavours. Nevertheless, social action and social service always existed in tandem and in tension within the CYC throughout its history.¹⁰¹ Inspired by ideas of social animation associated with Montreal and Gaspé-centred anti-poverty work; Saul Alinsky's ideas about community action; and international writing about radical forms of community development; the CYC directed some of its energy to Indigenous communities, though almost exclusively in English Canada. In the National Film Board's (NFB) film about Saul Alinsky in conversation with Indigenous CYCers at the Rama reserve, they warn him that his ideas are not compatible with Indigenous cultural values.¹⁰² Their admonition did not necessarily mean that all the Indigenous projects which threw settler and Indigenous allies together were failures, if one counts lessons learned as successes. The CYC's on-the-ground volunteer work provided a more integrative experiential kind of political work than did many of the previous alliances that were based on one issue, one advocate, or one white-dominated organization of experts.

Tensions between non-Indigenous and Indigenous perspectives did exist. At the outset, the Canadian Indian Youth Council stated it did not think white CYCers had the cultural sensitivity

for Indigenous projects and urged better cultural training and the hiring of native CYCers. Both recommendations were adopted.¹⁰³ Odawa educator Wilfrid Pelletier, hired by the CYC as the Director of Indian programs, wrote extensively on the CYC as a means of crafting a “new relationship between white and Indian.” While he often used a language of “racial” difference, he saw his job as a go-between, listening to both groups to find some “realization of human values.” What attracted him to the project was the opportunity for young people to go into Indian communities and put their hand on the “pulse beat” of what was happening. “Because the CYC offer coincided with my own reasons for working with Indian people,” he acknowledged, “I felt this was a golden opportunity to create understanding where it did not exist.”¹⁰⁴

Nonetheless, he had criticisms. Skeptical about the motivations of non-Indigenous CYCers, whether they were of the “service, missionary, or anti-Establishment” mentality, he tried to explain the suspicions and cultural differences that shaped Indigenous worldviews. Most volunteers, he stressed, did not understand that we live in a “police state,” supervised by “a dictatorship.” Living on reserves with a “non-objective” approach, without any intent to foster social change, he suggested, might be preferable for CYC volunteers to a community development approach and certainly to either service or missionary objectives.¹⁰⁵ Another proposal he wrote with Jeannette Corbeil-Lavell in 1967 ventured a new “style of action” intended to overcome “ethnocentrism” in the CYC: an urban project in which Indigenous youth would talk, live, and interact with others, including successful Indigenous people. Through experiential discovery, they would see how “they can use their heritage to find themselves and to find happiness in a contemporary Canadian setting.”¹⁰⁶

The sharpest tensions were between CYC volunteers and critics who directly opposed their work: provincial governments, IA, or sometimes the CYC head office. While Alberta premier Ross Thatcher’s employed standard anti-communist diatribes about CYC “outside agitators,” IA took a more subtle approach, suggesting a “Company of Mature Canadians,” the IA’s ver-

sion of the elder “good Indian” who would nudge their fellows towards integration. Tensions between the CYC and some local communities were the outcome of long-standing racism. Physical harassment of Indigenous CYC workers in Canyon Creek, Alberta, were so serious that the incident led to solidarity student mobilizations and the founding of the Native Peoples Defence Fund. In Armstrong, northern Ontario, some disgruntled locals demanded that the CYC leave after the volunteers made it their mission to denounce institutionalized racism in education. CYCers had a point: Aboriginal children who were not allowed to attend the local school were sent far away to residential schools. In northwestern Ontario projects, the CYC collaborated with Ojibway leaders Buddy Sault and Hector King, the latter president of the Armstrong Indian Association, who then also became a CYC volunteer. Together five CYCers crashed the “nicey-nice” IEA banquet in Toronto, usurping cabinet minister Robert Andras’ place as the after-dinner speaker.¹⁰⁷ Denied a place on the program, King demanded to be heard, and he was: he provided a harsh criticism of the problems in Armstrong and insisted that Indians must direct their own process of liberation.

Sometimes the CYC central office succumbed to local pressures, as they did in one of the Lesser Slave Lake projects. Two CYC volunteers, mandated to develop recreational programs for Indigenous youth, decided these were little more than a “band-aids” and that they would be better to confront the entrenched institutional racism in the community. The CYC head office gave in to local pressures to pull them out, even though the volunteers were defended by some Indigenous residents. In northern projects, the CYC’s indirect role facilitating land claims or aiding the birth of new, autonomous Indigenous organizations, were often local irritants. In other words, dispossession and self-determination were the most unsettling of elite settler concerns that lead to criticisms of CYC work.

The ability of Indigenous and non-Indigenous CYCers to craft some kind of alliance was likely the result of shared historical and ideological proclivities. In the early years of the CYC, non-Indigenous volunteers imported remnants of New Left

thinking, including a critique of imperialist wars, racism, and capitalism. The Indigenous volunteers had cut their teeth on Indigenous youth activism, cultural mobilizations, legal struggles, or had been exposed to Red Power. These two sets of settler and Indigenous political values could find some common rapprochement. There was also an emphasis in CYC training on listening to communities, organizing upwards not downwards, letting Indigenous people define the problem, then working with them to deal with it. Even where there were synergies, the two groups sometimes laboured together, then ran parallel projects, as in Thunder Bay and northwestern Ontario.

Over time, more Indigenous volunteers were placed in Indigenous projects and non-Indigenous CYCers gained a rudimentary sense of the tenacity of Canadian racism, as well as a front-row view of IA's bureaucratic paternalism.¹⁰⁸ Some also began to realize that Indigenous people were not simply passive and demoralized as they were portrayed; rather, they drew on long traditions of resilience and resistance. Non-Indigenous volunteers had to learn to retreat when they were not wanted. In one B.C. project, the CYC volunteer's anti-authoritarian streak led to his alliance with local band dissenters against the Chief who demanded his exit so quickly the supervising field worker "could barely organize his physical retreat [fast enough]." "I felt as if I needed the UN," wrote the field worker.¹⁰⁹

In other circumstances, CYC activity supported the creation of new, autonomous Indigenous organizations, such as the North West Territories Indian Brotherhood (NWTIB). A steering committee which included IA, IEA, CYC, and chiefs facilitated a meeting which debated what kind of organization to form — treaty or all Indigenous peoples — and when the former was pursued, CYC volunteers were employed to publicize the Brotherhood's work.¹¹⁰ When the CYC was asked to leave northern communities, it might have had more to do with individual transgressions of volunteers rather than program issues. Conflict could also arise between Indigenous CYCers and Indigenous communities if the former was an outsider, not aware of local needs.

In a multitude of projects, ranging from after-prison release supports for Aboriginal prisoners in British Columbia, to housing issues in Calgary and Thunder Bay, to cultural mobilizations, non-Indigenous volunteers were exposed to Indigenous issues of the time. Some of the most successful CYC ventures — media projects like northern Ontario *Kenomadiwin News* and the NFB's All Indian Film Crew — drew together settlers and Indigenous peoples in different ways. Non-Indigenous field supervisors supported the Indigenous editors of *Kenomadiwin News*; editors of *Akwesasne News* were at one time CYC volunteers; and the Film Crew, a venture with the NFB Challenge for Change program, sometimes supplemented its crew with non-Indigenous staff. Later Studio D leader, Kathleen Shannon, for example, worked on the film about the Akwesasne bridge protest, *You Are On Indian Land*.¹¹¹

One of the most imaginative CYC efforts, The Indian Traveling College, founded and managed by Ernest Benedict, another advisor to the Trent Native Studies program, was funded by the CYC as well as other donations. The original idea of having an Indian train travel across the country and into the United States, with young Indigenous people living on board, learning everything from history to native languages and arts and crafts, with elders joining along the way to teach both Indigenous students and local non-Indigenous participants, was ambitious to say the least. Though it eventually it became a Volkswagen van and then a more sedentary venture, the idea of cross-generational, eclectic, activist cultural education became the thinking behind the incorporation of Elders into university education.¹¹²

After 1970, there was a shift towards CYC cultural projects, economic development, and social service provision. When volunteers are reduced to bingos and bake sales on a reserve to keep a pre-school centre going, it is clear that social *action* is not the end.¹¹³ But the commitment to hiring local Indigenous volunteers continued, and likely had a diffusive, long term impact, encouraging Indigenous experience in dealing with the state (salutary, if not positive), as well as new forms of leadership. In two Labrador projects in Hopedale and Happy Valley, for example, volunteers reported that the Inuit were “not interested in

whether the CYC wants to be in the vanguard of social issues” but rather in youth programming, a community council, a newspaper, as well as some pressing employment and water issues. Inuit volunteers were hired, and though one concluded her main triumph was setting up a sports teams for young people, her own exposure to new ideas was significant: “I have learned a lot and the Inuit are taking things into own hands now (sic) . . . if I could do it again, I would speak with stronger voice. To continue with this kind of work and carry our recommendations about housing forward is a dream for the Inuit, but in my case I have had a chance at least to do it.”¹¹⁴

Historicizing Alliances

CYC funds were used to support Indigenous women volunteers starting up the Ontario Women’s Native Association (OWNA) in 1972. OWNA’s founding agenda stressed preservation of language and culture, as well as problems that affect “the home, family and children.” They too asked that a “true” Indian history be taught on reserves.¹¹⁵ When OWNA turned its attention also to legal challenges to the Indian Act and Indigenous women’s absence from constitutional debates, they drew on essential economic and moral support from feminist groups. In the 1970s alliances between feminist groups and Indigenous women’s organizations were sporadic, issue-oriented, but a consistent theme in the women’s movement, and one needing further exploration.¹¹⁶ Attempts by non-Indigenous women to collaborate with Indigenous women were sometimes based on noblesse oblige or a social service model, but also on overlapping political concerns, ranging from violence against women to broader analyses of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy. No one would claim these alliances were ideal, or fit our current thinking, but they do underscore the importance of allies finding a common political critique, perhaps reflecting the “theoretical promiscuity” advised by Simpson and Smith.

The example of OWNA also underscores how important Indigenous political agency is to the history of alliances:

Indigenous participants in joint efforts always selectively used non-Indigenous support in ways they saw fit. To assume these organizations and efforts were automatically dominated by settlers belies Indigenous agency, resistance, and political decision-making. For non-Indigenous actors, breaking away from dominant ideas was a struggle, and by our measure, they may not have done it thoroughly, or critically, or very well. As Dara Culhane points out, from legal decisions to social attitudes, there are powerful colonialist “common sense” understandings of Indigenous peoples at the heart of Canada.¹¹⁷

However concerned the Friends of the Indian or advocates like Sarah Robertson were with ensuring legal fair play, they could not see the contradictions in extolling British justice while leaving unquestioned the violence inherent in Empire. Nor did their efforts extend throughout Canada. They were constrained by what legal scholars identify as a *persisting* ideological barrier to decolonization: the necessity to question the state's right to inaugurate law on lands acquired through colonial settlement, land originally overseen by Indigenous forms of law, government, and oversight. These allies did, at least, discount the arrogance of terra nullius and point to nation-to-nation commitments, such as the Proclamation of 1763, that responded to Indigenous actors' repeated efforts to make settlers understand that survival and land were inextricably linked, as Deskaheh so eloquently stated.

Those who pursued cultural alliances, as did women authors and art promoters, did not stress dispossession as much as they sought to validate Indigenous cultures, re-write a biased Canadian history, and preserve what they feared would be swept away by a dismissive modernity. Some also moved from the cultural to the political, linking cultural issues to the pressing social needs of Indigenous communities. An emphasis on culture which cannot escape an essentialist or romanticized view of Indigenous peoples, however, can be limited in its vision. It can celebrate Aboriginal culture but in ways that also create Indians as victims; it can integrate Indian culture into a narrative of Canadian identity; and it can downplay the material basis of colonial conquest and control.

Organizations like the IEA, grounded in human rights discourse, social conscience, and a firm belief in reform through productive coalitions, believed that evidence and education would expose colonialism, a word they did not begin with but later moved towards. Perhaps most importantly, they listened to criticism, altering their mode of political interaction. Youth mobilizations committed to living day-to-day alliances through social action were perhaps even more open to criticism, and non-Indigenous actors could sometimes find some a common language with Indigenous allies, despite differences in social experience. CYCers exposed to New Left and anti-colonial ideas, and imbued with ideas about organizing democratically from the bottom-up, could imagine politics differently. Volunteers were exposed to the appalling social conditions created by colonialism as well as the resilience and resistance of Indigenous communities. Alliances could be unsuccessful, occasionally disastrous, but were always a learning situation. Moreover, for Indigenous CYCers, the experience was a launching pad for further political work as a new generation of Indigenous actors challenged the paternalistic, bureaucratic yoke of IA. In one community in British Columbia, reserve inhabitants complained that their own Indigenous CYC volunteer was not paying attention to her reference group which was most interested in social service work. She was convinced “research on land claims a movement across the province” was the future, and left to do this work. She was not wrong.¹¹⁸

In every attempted alliance, there were efforts to challenge colonial assumptions, sometimes to listen to Indigenous priorities, but non-Indigenous allies also found themselves limited by prevailing ideologies, notions of philanthropy and helping: there was a tendency to embrace social conscience but not social transformation. There was also reliance on, and containment within state-oriented solutions, precisely the critique forwarded by Indigenous activists today who argue that reconciliation, as taken up by some very well-meaning organizations, including universities, is partial at best.

As Audra Simpson argues, reconciliation and healing may seem “unassailably virtuous goals,” but she reminds us that

reconciliation has only become a necessity after the success of Indigenous resistance and dissent over the past decades. She cautions that apologies for certain kinds of violence, such as residential schools, do not come with a fulsome analysis of all violence, which includes the violence of dispossession, and that a “theurapeutic model” of reconciliation that “demands forgiveness” is wholly unsatisfactory. “Emotional performances of singular contrition” can remain surface gestures: they are not automatically “healing” if they are not socially transformative. They can be “read in multiple ways by different publics,” shaped to fit different political ends.¹¹⁹

Those of us who aspire to be allies might take her conclusion to heart: listen to and engage with those Indigenous “people who stand in critical relationships to this project of ‘reconciliation’.” To do so will mean both constantly re-writing our history — the project which many non-Indigenous allies agreed was important — and questioning taken-for-granted assumptions of colonialism, deeply embedded in Canadian history and social thought. The writing of Shuswap leader George Manuel, advocate for an Indigenous fourth world, who stressed survival, self-determination and the fundamental redistribution of economic and political power, is instructive. Recognition of “Indigenous presence and humanity,” he wrote, will take “a genuine reconsideration of so many peoples’ role in North American society that it would amount to a genuine leap of the imagination.”¹²⁰ History may be one tool that can help us to take that leap.

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- 49 Oxford, BASAPS. S. 22, G 306, Rica Fleming-Gyll to Indian Agent, Grand River, nd.
- 50 Scott quoted in Catapano, “The Rising of the Ongwehònwe,” 114. Interestingly, after white Canadian women finally secured the federal vote, the *Brantford Expositor*, near Six Nations, was still referring to Six Nations women’s governance roles with disdain, as were other newspapers.
- 51 “The Last Speech of Deskaheh,” <https://tworowtimes.com/the-last-speech-of-deskaheh/>. < Viewed 11 July 2017 >.
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- 57 Alice Ravenhill, brief, 175–76; see also her *Memoires*, 212.
- 58 “Indian Women’s Opportunities $\frac{3}{4}$ Yesterday and Today,” *Native Voice*, April 1947, 2.
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- 61 UM, Shipley, Box 11 “Author Shipley Warns of Possible Violence,” 9 Oct 1965, clipping, no newspaper cited. See also the essay in her papers, “A Moral Wrong” criticizing white Winnipeggers opposed to a hostel in their neighbourhood.
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- 64 Nan Shipley, *Back to the River: a novel* (New York: Frederick Fell Inc, 1963).
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- 69 Ibid, 2, 6.
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