

Imagining the Great White Mother and the Great King: Aboriginal Tradition and Royal Representation at the “Great Pow-wow” of 1901

Wade A. Henry

Volume 11, numéro 1, 2000

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/031132ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/031132ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Henry, W. A. (2000). Imagining the Great White Mother and the Great King: Aboriginal Tradition and Royal Representation at the “Great Pow-wow” of 1901. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 11(1), 87–108. <https://doi.org/10.7202/031132ar>

Résumé de l'article

La visite royale du duc et de la duchesse de Cornwall et de York (George V et la reine Mary) en 1901 au Canada a été marquée par une série de cérémonies en hommage à la Couronne et à ses représentants. « Le Grand Pow-wow » fut sans aucun doute l'un des rassemblements les plus importants : quelque deux mille Autochtones s'étaient réunis à cette occasion dans la région de Calgary pour honorer le fils du « Grand Roi » et plus spécifiquement, le petit-fils de la reine Victoria, leur défunte « Grande Mère blanche ». Plus qu'un simple spectacle de divertissement offert aux visiteurs royaux, le Grand Pow-wow de 1901 fournit l'occasion aux Blancs canadiens de définir leur propre identité et de se situer par rapport aux Autochtones au sein de la nation. L'élément indispensable à cette réflexion reposait sur l'image de la « Grande Mère blanche », une représentation de la reine Victoria qui, d'une part, donnait un fondement physique identitaire aux Blancs et qui, d'autre part, leur offrait un véhicule culturel par lequel ils cherchèrent à organiser, hiérarchiser et soumettre les peuples autochtones. Ces derniers toutefois résistèrent à ce contrôle symbolique et se servirent de l'événement pour affirmer leur présence et leur influence au sein de la nation canadienne. Comme d'autres cérémonies royales, le Grand Pow-wow de 1901 servit de terrain d'affrontement entre les Blancs et les Autochtones qui structurèrent, manipulèrent et fabriquèrent des représentations d'eux-mêmes, de l'autre et - surtout - de la monarchie, dans le double but de maintenir et de remettre en question l'ordre hégémonique.

Imagining the Great White Mother and the Great King: Aboriginal Tradition and Royal Representation at the “Great Pow-wow” of 1901

WADE A. HENRY

In the evening of 28 September 1901, Joseph Pope sat down at his desk and reflected on the day's events, recording the most pertinent in his diary as was his daily habit. This Saturday, however, had been unlike any other he had witnessed. On a wide plateau nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and overlooking the town of Calgary, more than two thousand people from the Blackfoot, Blood, Cree, Peigan, Sarcee, and Stony First Nations had gathered to honour the Duke of Cornwall and York (the future George V), son of the “Great King” and, more significantly, the grandson of Queen Victoria, their recently deceased “Great White Mother.” For weeks organisers, participants, and the general public had been eagerly awaiting the day, all anxious to see, hear, read about, and imagine the “historic” spectacle of the “Great Pow-wow” between the Native tribes of Canada and their future father-king.¹ While the press proclaimed the ceremony a fantastic spectacle that was far and above the highlight of the royal visit to Canada, Pope regarded the Pow-wow as rather “tame.” Certainly, the gathering had been interesting for its sheer magnitude and novelty, but the Undersecretary of State found it a memorable bore. “Of course,” he scribbled in his journal, “all depends on the point of view. The Indian agents were bent upon showing how the Indian had responded to civilizing influences, and had most of the chiefs resplendent in HBC reefers with brass buttons. What we wanted was to see how *uncivilized* they were, and expected to be met with screeching braves riding about firing guns, etc. There was none of this, however, and only a very limited supply of paint and feathers.”

I would like to thank Allan Smith, Robert Kubicek, and Joy Dixon for their comments on the chapter of my dissertation from which this paper springs. I am also indebted to the *Journal's* anonymous referees for their suggestions and to the John S. Ewart Memorial Fund for its financial support.

- 1 The “Great Pow-wow” differed significantly from the more familiar powwow practised across North America today. Therefore, when referring to the specific ceremony that took place in 1901 the hyphenated spelling will be utilised in order to differentiate it from a “powwow.” Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies* (Winnipeg, 1994), 188-9.

Unlike the press, Pope had regarded the grand spectacle of the Great Pow-wow as, essentially, unspectacular.²

While the circumstances of the ceremony may have disappointed Joseph Pope, they provide the historian with a valuable glimpse into Canadian attitudes towards Natives during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In recent years, historians have paid significant attention to this subject or, more specifically, to the state's attempts to control and assimilate the peoples of the First Nations through a series of measures that included the passage of the Indian Act, the implementation of a residential and industrial school system, the introduction of the pass system, and the promotion of farming on reserves.³ Scholars have emphasised the state suppression of Native ceremonies such as the Potlatch and the Sun Dance, and noted state attempts to discourage Native participation in rodeos and fairs as another important component in official Indian policy.⁴ The Department of Indian Affairs believed that in order to assimilate Native peoples, all aspects of Aboriginal culture had to be controlled, purged, and then replaced with European traditions.

Curiously, though, whenever a royal or vice regal visit occurred, the state would suddenly reverse policy and sanction the performance of Native ceremonies for the distinguished visitors. Some scholars have proposed that state officials sometimes approved such displays in order to advertise the success of their Indian policy by providing a before-and-after contrast between the "primitive" ceremony and the behaviour of "civilised" Native children from residential schools.⁵ Other historians have pointed out that, in contrast to the attitudes of church and state officials, the general public enjoyed a display of Native "paint and feathers" and *real* "screeching braves," probably reflecting what they had read in books and seen in the popular rodeos or Wild West shows that traversed the country. The possibility of entertaining visitors with similar spectacles may have provided another impetus for state sanction of these performances for

2 National Archives of Canada [hereafter NAC], Joseph Pope Papers, MG30 E86, vol. 48, Diary of the Royal Tour, 28 September 1901.

3 Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal, 1990); Noel Dyck, *What is the Indian "Problem"? Tutelage and Resistance in Canadian Indian Administration* (St. John's, 1991); D.J. Hall, "Clifford Sifton and Canadian Indian Administration, 1896-1905," *Prairie Forum* 2/2 (1977): 127-51; J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto, 1996); E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver, 1986).

4 Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver, 1990); Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind*.

5 Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*, 194-9; H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto, 1999), 172-7.

visiting dignitaries.⁶ While there is measure of truth in both interpretations, the underlying reasons were more complicated.

It must be understood that the "Great Pow-wow of 1901" was more than just a Native ceremony; it was a royal ceremony as well. As such, it must be understood not only in the context of the government's Indian policy, but also understood as part of the broader context of royal ceremonies, national identity, and power. The Great Pow-wow comprised a small, though significant, part of the royal tour of Canada in 1901. This visit represented the monarchy as a symbol of national identity in a number of different royal ceremonies held across the country. The Great Pow-wow was intended to contribute to this project by articulating a sense of Canadian national identity linked to the image of the "Indian." As in a lumberjack demonstration held in Ottawa a few days earlier, or in the introduction of maple leaf badges during the royal visit of 1860, Natives were used in this royal tour because they were considered distinctively Canadian. A variety of Native symbols and activities, such as lacrosse, canoeing, and snowshoeing,⁷ had been appropriated as national symbols and activities during the late nineteenth century; so too did Native peoples themselves become symbols of the Canadian nation and were accordingly treated like any other symbol, to be manipulated and controlled. In spite of their social and economic marginalisation, Aboriginal peoples had come to be regarded as living examples of the tradition of British justice in Canada which, it was argued, had treated Natives fairly and had cared for and protected them. Native participation at the Pow-wow, then, permitted white Canadians to define their own identity and imagine both their own place and that of Natives within the nation.⁸

Having an imagined place within the Canadian nation did not necessarily translate into political power within that national community. While seemingly investing Natives with symbolic power, royal ceremonies such as the Great Pow-wow were also used to maintain the hegemony of white Canadians, in part by consolidating and defining their culture in opposition to subordinate Native cultures. At another level, by including Natives in royal events, Canadians could maintain national unity through a conciliatory gesture without restructuring

6 Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York, 1979); Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver, 1992); Keith Regular, "On Public Display," *Alberta History* 34/1 (1986): 1-10; Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 172-173.

7 Nancy B. Bouchier, "Idealized Middle-Class Sport for a Young Nation: Lacrosse in Nineteenth Century Ontario Towns, 1871-1891," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29/2 (1994): 89-110; Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807-1914* (Toronto, 1987).

8 Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian*, 26-27; Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies* 31/4 (1992): 309-329; Francis, *The Imaginary Indian*, 7-8; Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 168, 173-174.

the power relations that lay beneath the surface.⁹ Aboriginal participation in the ceremony would be framed in such a way as to placate their concerns; not only would they be present, but their voices would be heard. At the same time, however, the very form of the ceremony would implicitly instruct both Natives and whites on the “innate” hierarchies of race through representation. As Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson argue, “Imperial relations may have been established initially by guns, guile and disease, but they were maintained in their interpellative phase largely by textuality,” that is, by framing events to indicate who mattered and who was subordinate and thereby compelling colonial subjects to internalise their own subjection.¹⁰ Central to this process – and to all representations at the Great Pow-wow – was the image of Queen Victoria as the “Great White Mother,” an image that represented, on the one hand, the racial “superiority” of whites and, on the other, served as the cultural vehicle with which whites sought to fix, rank, and subdue Native peoples. By the same token, however, the ceremony provided a context in which Natives resisted symbolic control and, indeed, sought to ensure their presence and influence within the Canadian nation. Royal ceremonies, then, served as contested sites in Indian-white relations as both groups structured, manipulated, and imagined representations of themselves, each other, and, above all, the monarchy, to simultaneously maintain and challenge the hegemonic order.¹¹

9 Allan Smith, “National Images and National Maintenance: The Ascendancy of the Ethnic Idea in North America,” in *Canada – An American Nation? Essays on Continentalism, Identity and the Canadian Frame of Mind* (Montreal, 1994), 182.

10 Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, *De-Scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality* (London, 1994): 3-4.

11 My dissertation examines the relationship between royal representation, national identity, and hegemony more fully, Wade A. Henry, “Royal Representation, Ceremony, and Cultural Identity in the Building of the Canadian Nation, 1860-1911” (PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, forthcoming). Studies which have informed my theories include: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, 1991); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992); Stuart Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London, 1996), 411-440; Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983); Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal, 1994); Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno, 1991); Mary Kay Vaughan, “The Construction of the Patriotic Festival in Tecamachalco, Puebla, 1900-1946,” in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, edited by William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French (Wilmington, Del., 1994), 213-245; Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980* (Sydney, 1981). Recent studies on the construction of Canadian traditions and symbols include: Robert Cupido, “Appropriating the Past: Pageants, Politics, and the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* N.S. 8 (1998): 155-186; Alan Gordon, “Contested Terrain: The Politics of Public Memory in Montreal, 1891-1930” (unpublished PhD thesis, Queen’s University,

IMAGINING THE GREAT WHITE MOTHER AND THE GREAT KING

The representations that were articulated at the Great Pow-wow of 1901 were developed through three stages: the initial planning and organisation of the event, the performance, and, lastly, the public's reception of the messages disseminated at the gathering.

Organisation

Initially it seemed that the Native gathering would not take place at all. When a fellow member of the Indian Affairs department suggested that the government should sponsor a Native demonstration during the Duke and Duchess' transcontinental tour, J.D. McLean, the Secretary of Indian Affairs, drew up a memorandum on the subject in May. He acknowledged that several Indian bands would "take such steps as they consider necessary" to greet His Royal Highness as they had when his father, Edward VII, visited the country in 1860 as the Prince of Wales, so such demonstrations by Natives would be inevitable. But should the state sponsor them? McLean concluded, "I do not think...that any concerted action...is either necessary or advisable."¹² Although McLean did not provide a reason for discouraging government assistance, his position is not surprising considering his record on Native policies. During his long tenure as Secretary to the Department, from 1901 to 1919, McLean had typified the Department's hard-line and unsympathetic approach towards Natives, which emphasised assimilation, control, and the suppression of any and all expressions of traditional Native culture.¹³

After perusing McLean's memorandum, James Smart, the Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs, concluded that the subject was of sufficient importance to inform Clifford Sifton, the Superintendent General. Smart enquired whether the Department should consider assisting Natives in participating in the Duke's welcome. Like McLean, Smart recommended that "no general participation by the Indians in any welcome should be undertaken..." Much to Smart's dismay, however, Sifton thought that some sort of demonstration would be appropriate and directed his Deputy to see to that effect. The directions Smart had been given, though, were modest. He requested from the Minister of Finance only a "small amount" of the general appropriation to assist some of the Natives in their endeavours and emphasised that "the Department

1997); Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Usable Pasts* (Toronto, 1997); Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*; Victoria R. Smith, "Constructing Victoria: The Representation of Queen Victoria in England, India, and Canada, 1897-1914" (unpublished PhD thesis, Rutgers University, 1998); Keith Walden, *Visions of Order: The Canadian Mounties in Symbol and Myth* (Toronto, 1982).

12 NAC, Records of the Department of Indian Affairs [RG10], Black Series, vol. 8582, file 1/1-2-15-6, Memorandum by J.D. McLean, 14 May 1901.

13 Hall, "Clifford Sifton and Canadian Indian Administration," 127-151; RG10, Black Series, reel C-10144, vol. 3825, file 60511-1.

will not undertake any elaborate preparations....” Though a reluctant helper, Smart consoled himself with the belief that “in a few cases it might be well to allow them to express their loyalty and affection to the Crown of Great Britain through Their Royal Highnesses.”¹⁴

Lord Minto also had the same idea but, as was his nature, he was much more expansive about it. Since his installation as Canadian Governor General in 1898, Minto had enjoyed visiting reserves and meeting the Natives whom he romantically considered noble savages unsullied by the extravagances of modern civilisation.¹⁵ Reflecting on the tour’s programme and impressed by previous vice-regal tours to North-West reserves, Minto decided to lobby for “a large gathering” of the Indians from the Blackfoot, Blood, and Sarcee reserves. Certain that the Duke “would much like to see something of the Indians in the North West,” Minto asked Sifton whether it would be possible to have a “large gathering” of Natives to meet the Duke at or near Calgary.¹⁶ Regarding the suggestion “a good one,” Sifton placed upon David Laird the “responsibility of seeing that arrangements are made to carry out His Excellency’s suggestion.” In giving these instructions to his Indian Commissioner, Sifton added one suggestion – that a contingent of police also attend the Indian gathering.¹⁷

Commissioner A. Bowen Perry of the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) was happy to contribute not only men to the celebration, but ideas for the form the exhibition should take as well. He told Minto that between 1,000 and 1,500 Indians could be assembled at Calgary for the royal visitors and “gymkhana, polo match, cattle roping, broncho riding etc.” could be arranged for their entertainment. Afterwards, the Duke could go to the nearby Sarcee reserve where possibly 6,000 Natives could be assembled. Minto regarded Perry’s suggestion “to hold a gymkhana etc. etc. an excellent one and in this the Indians would take part.”¹⁸ The Prime Minister, however, was less enthusiastic with the proposal. Reviewing the programme supplied by Lord Minto in late July, Sir Wilfrid Laurier noticed that there had been little provision for Native participation, which amounted essentially to a “Cowboy & Indians” display at Calgary. The Prime Minister felt that such a display was inappropriate because it limited Native involvement to a mere sideshow act. Laurier told His

14 RG10, Black Series, vol. 8582, file 1/2-2-15-6, J. Smart to C. Sifton, 20 May 1901 (copy), J. Smart to W.S. Fielding, 3 June 1901 (copy).

15 Carman Miller, *The Canadian Career of the Fourth Earl of Minto: The Education of a Viceroy* (Waterloo, 1980), 175-176.

16 NAC, Records of the Governor General Office [RG7], Miscellaneous Records Relating to Royal Visits [G23], vol. 8, file 23, Lord Minto to Sifton, 5 July 1901 (copy).

17 NAC, Clifford Sifton Papers, MG27 II D15, reel C-523, vol. 107, Lord Minto file, p. 84461, C. Sifton to D. Laird, 26 July 1901 (copy).

18 RG7, G23, vol. 11, file 34, A.B. Perry to Lord Minto, 9 July 1901, F.S. Maude to A.B. Perry, 20 July 1901.

IMAGINING THE GREAT WHITE MOTHER AND THE GREAT KING

Excellency that he would prefer a more formal and solemn meeting between the Duke and the Native chiefs in which the King-in-waiting could provide the chiefs with “some small but much valued presents.” He pointed out that “It has been the constant policy of the British government on this continent to have the sovereign bestow upon the Indian chiefs, marks of individual favour. There are many braves who to this day will wear with pride, silver medals sent to their great great grandfather by George III.” Although Minto had initially thought Perry’s proposal “an excellent one,” after reading Laurier’s letter Minto reversed his position to side with the Prime Minister, admitting that he, too, was “rather inclined to think there is too much Cowboy & too little Indian!” in the proposal and that the Indian gathering was in danger of becoming “a ‘circus’ show.”¹⁹

Now convinced that “any gathering of the tribes should in no way be connected with other arrangements at Calgary, such as Cowboy riding, exhibitions &c.,” Minto began to suggest to Perry, Sifton, and others that the Indian gathering should be held some miles south of the city. By placing the meeting away from Calgary as a completely separate occasion, he thought that its solemnity would be increased to create a “great ceremony in deference to [Native people’s] long connection with the history of the Empire.”²⁰ Clifford Sifton had already considered the necessity of holding the gathering away from Calgary but for a different reason. In keeping with his policy of police control, he had explained, “It would be impossible to have it in the town as we could not control the Indians there.” The influx of nearly 3,000 Natives into a town of about 4,000 people would make it “difficult to handle a number of Indians in the town itself.”²¹ Fred White, the Comptroller of the NWMP appointed by Laurier to assist in the arrangements, concurred and felt “relieved that you [Minto] do not wish to have it *at* Calgary – There are lovely spots within a few miles and it will be so much easier to get the Indians back to their Reserves.”²² By the first week of September, Laird and Lieutenant Governor A.E. Forget had scouted out locations and agreed that Shaganappi Point, about three kilometres from Calgary, would be the best place for the Pow-wow.

19 NAC, 4th Earl of Minto Papers, MG27 II B1, reel C-3113, Wilfrid Laurier to Lord Minto, 27 July 1901 (copy); reel A-131, vol.2, Letterbook, Lord Minto to Wilfrid Laurier, 31 July 1901; RG7, G23, vol. 11, file 34, Lord Minto to Fred White, 7 August 1901.

20 RG7, G23, vol. 11, file 34, Lord Minto to A.B. Perry, 7 August 1901 (copy), Lord Minto to Clifford Sifton, 10 August 1901 (copy).

21 Minto Papers, reel C-3114, vol. 10, Clifford Sifton to Lord Minto, [1901] (copy); Sifton Papers, reel C-424, Letterbook, Clifford Sifton to Arthur Sifton, 26 August 1901; NAC, Wilfrid Laurier Papers, MG26 G, reel C-787, vol. 203, p. 57882, Clifford Sifton to Laurier, 3 August 1901.

22 RG7, G23, vol. 11, file 34, F. White to Minto, 9 August 1901.

Organisers then considered the issue of supplying gifts and medals for the occasion. Following Laurier's suggestion that the Native chiefs should be supplied with some "much valued presents," Minto, Perry, and White agreed that every effort should be made to make a "generous expenditure for 'grub' and presents." Considering Native expectations and tradition, Laird and White agreed that the Duke should "be asked to promise a medal commemorative of the occasion to the Head Chiefs." As well, in order to exploit the medals to their full potential, the Duke was to emphasise that they were not to be considered "a personal gift, but to belong to the office, and to be handed to successors." In this way they hoped to further strengthen the political status of chief within each band as well as to reinforce band ties to the Crown.²³ Indeed, when Fred White ordered the medals, he requested a total of 115 silver medals for chiefs and 295 bronze medals for "minor chiefs," headmen, and councillors, so that the medals could be distributed to not only those who attended the Pow-wow, but, under directions from Sifton, to every chief and minor chief in Manitoba and the North-West Territories.²⁴

In addition to the promise of medals, the provision of food and tobacco for Natives at the Pow-wow was considered a necessity, again according to tradition and Native expectations, but also as an instrument of state control. Indian administrators knew that Natives would expect to be provided with other gifts from the son of the Great Father that the chiefs would distribute to all present. David Laird, however, felt that "presents are not easily arranged without creating jealousy" and, consequently suggested a "liberal supply of tea, tobacco, flour and beef in which all can share – not only those at the gathering but those who remain on the Reserves...." By distributing these kinds of gifts, he hoped to keep many Indians on the reserves during the Pow-wow. Furthermore, the rations were to be distributed by the Indian agents, giving the Indian Department some control over any potentially damaging outcomes of the Indian gathering. While Laird recognised that he could not prevent the Pow-wow from happening, he at least hoped to restrain its excesses by placing it under the tight control of his Department.²⁵ Since a cornerstone of Indian policy was

23 RG7, G23, vol. 11, file 34, Fred White to Lord Minto, 9 August 1901, Lord Minto to Clifford Sifton, 10 August 1901 (copy), A.B. Perry to Lord Minto, 13 August 1901, Memorandum by Fred White, 7 September 1901; NAC, Records of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police [RG18], Comptroller's Office, NWMP, vol. 216, file 631-1901, part 1, David Laird to Fred White, 3 September 1901.

24 RG10, Black Series, vol. 8582, file 1/1-2-15-6, Department of Indian Affairs Memorandum, 17 December 1902, J.D. McLean to David Laird, 3 May 1902, Eric Acland to G. Flaskerd, 19 August 1902, Fred White to J.E. Ellis Co., 6 November 1901 (copy); RG18, Comptroller's Office, NWMP, vol. 218, file 853-1901, Fred White to James Smart, 20 November 1901 (copy).

25 RG18, Comptroller's Office, NWMP, vol. 216, file 631-1901, part 1, David Laird to Fred White, 3 September 1901 (copy), Memorandum by Fred White, 7 September 1901.

IMAGINING THE GREAT WHITE MOTHER AND THE GREAT KING

to keep Natives segregated from the white community on reserves and to instil self-sufficiency and thrift in their communities, Indian administrators were not enamoured with the prospect of having hundreds of Indians venturing off their reserves to receive free food at the Pow-wow. By holding the ceremony away from Calgary with a contingent of police on hand and directing the issue of rations, they hoped to limit the potential threat to their program of Indian assimilation.

A greater threat to their Indian policy loomed, however, as they learned that Indian dancing was to take place at the ceremony. Since the 1890s, the Indian Department had consistently sought to suppress all Native dancing and ceremonies, particularly the potlatch on the West Coast and the sun dance among Plains Indians. Officials and the missionaries who operated the residential schools believed that the dances were pagan rituals that kept children from school, interfered with Native farming, and hindered the spread of civilisation and Christianity among Native peoples. Any performance at a public exhibition was doubly damaging. Not only would the dances perpetuate indigenous Native culture, but they would convey to the international community the image that Canada was "a place where wild Indians with painted faces still roamed the Plains." Such an image, officials believed, did not conform to the picture of a modern, progressive society open to immigration and investment capital that they had hoped to portray.²⁶ Not surprisingly, when confronted with the possibility of Indian dancing in the program, missionaries and the Indian Department resisted.

When the Reverend H.W. Gibbon Stocken, a missionary to the Blackfoot, first heard that dancing might take place at the Pow-wow, he asked Clifford Sifton if "it can be so ordered that the Indians be not asked to give any of their heathen dances?" James Smart, evidently stunned by Gibbon Stocken's information, dashed off a letter to Fred White explaining that he thought "it was understood that there were to be no pow-wows or other dances but merely a presentation of the Indians to Their Royal Highnesses." Smart urged the NWMP's Comptroller "to impress this upon those who have this matter in charge in the West." Smart then told Gibbon Stocken that "it is not intended that the Indians should be asked to give any of their heathen dances" at the Indian gathering. "I may add," he continued, "that the Department would rather discourage than sympathise with any such movement either during this reception or at any other time."²⁷ Indeed, Fred White's memorandum on the organisation of the Pow-wow reflected the influence of Laird, Forget, and Smart as he

26 Titley, *A Narrow Vision*, 162, 172; Cole and Chaikin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People*; Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind*; Francis, *Imaginary Indian*, 98-100; Keith Regular, "On Display," 1-10; RG10, Black Series, reel C-10144, vol. 3825, file 60511-1.

27 RG10, Black Series, vol. 8582, file 1/1-2-15-6, H.W. Gibbon Stocken to Clifford Sifton, 23 August 1901, James Smart to Fred White, 12 September 1901 (copy); RG10, Deputy Superintendent General's Letterbooks, vol. 1125, James Smart to H.W. Gibbon Stocken, 13 September 1901.

reported that it was their intention that the ceremony “should be as impressive as possible, with a moderate amount of demonstration on the part of the Indians.”²⁸

Lord Minto, on the other hand, could not understand what all the fuss was about. Why, he mused, should the “poor Indian...not enjoy himself as the white man does” at such gatherings?²⁹ He regarded Indian dances and ceremonies as interesting spectacles and considered it not “without benefit to our future history to care for the traditions, customs & costumes of the original possessors of the country.”³⁰ Responding to the intimation that “the noisy demonstration which has usually been considered an essential part of an Indian gathering” might be dispensed with on this occasion, White was informed that His Excellency “would much regret the elimination of this part of the Programme, which is so picturesque in his opinion.”³¹ The Governor General thought that some members of the Indian Department were too reactionary and had unnecessarily stigmatised all of the traditions and customs of Native peoples “as heathen & barbaric & therefore to be stamped out without mercy.” Lord Minto attributed “a want...of human sympathy” on the part of the “white administration” in their attempt to prevent Natives from enjoying one of the few amusements they had left.³²

In planning the Pow-wow, then, members of the state articulated different attitudes and positions that ultimately influenced the organisation and staging of the event. While officials from the Department of Indian Affairs resisted any action that could possibly interfere with their programme of Native assimilation, from dancing to the Pow-wow itself, other officials, influenced by popular romantic images of savage Indians, advocated spectacular ceremonies that conformed to their racial stereotypes. Still others, most notably Sir Wilfrid Laurier, pressed for a solemn ceremony that would pay tribute to the loyalty of Native peoples to the Crown, and as we shall see later, would remind Canadians of the heritage of British justice in the Dominion. Far from being a cohesive, monolithic entity, the state included and attempted to balance differing attitudes towards Native peoples in Canadian society.

28 RG18, Comptroller’s Office, NWMP, vol. 216, file 631-1901, part 1, Memorandum by Fred White, 7 September 1901.

29 Lord Minto’s Journal, 22 September 1900, *Lord Minto’s Canadian Papers: A Selection of the Public and Private Papers of the Fourth Earl of Minto*, vol. 1, eds. Paul Stevens and John T. Saywell (Toronto, 1981-83), 409.

30 *Ibid.*, Lord Minto to Wilfrid Laurier, 17 February 1903, vol. 2, 253-254.

31 RG7, G23, vol. 11, file 34, Fred White to F.S. Maude, 24 August 1901; RG18, Comptroller’s Office, NWMP, vol. 216, file 631-1901, part 1, F.S. Maude to Fred White, 26 August 1901 (copy).

32 Lord Minto to Wilfrid Laurier, 17 February 1903, Lord Minto’s Journal, 30 September 1902, Lord Minto to Wilfrid Laurier, 16 January 1903, *Lord Minto’s Canadian Papers*, vol. 2, 253, 244-246.

Performance

When staged, the Pow-wow would reflect these conflicting state attitudes and motives. In reaching a negotiated settlement, elements of each position would be incorporated into the staging of the Pow-wow. The meanings articulated at the ceremony, however, were not exclusively state products. Complicating the matter were Native agency and media reception and dissemination. State agents may have done their utmost to frame the meaning of the Indian gathering, but when it was played out, Natives and the media had their own contributions to make.

The Duke and Duchess' day started with their reception at the Calgary train station by Lieutenant Governor Forget, the Mayor, and several other local dignitaries. After a few kind words, the party, which included Lady Minto, Joseph Pope, and Sir Wilfrid Laurier, travelled to see a review of 250 Mounted Police under the command of Commissioner Perry at nearby Victoria Park. Following the review and the presentation of South African war medals by the Duke, the royal party then drove across the prairie to Shaganappi Point where the Natives and in excess of 2,000 white spectators were waiting.

As the official party approached the dais erected for the occasion, between 400 and 1000 mounted Indians galloped towards a designated spot behind the other assembled Natives. The chiefs were in the front row, directly facing the front of the dais, and behind them were placed minor chiefs, pupils from the residential schools, and, finally, the elderly, women, and infants. Once the warriors had ridden into place and the Duke stepped onto the dais, David Laird opened the Great Pow-wow of 1901 by officially receiving Their Royal Highnesses and conducting them to chairs placed at the front of the stage. As Fred White and Lord Minto had hoped, the Duke appeared in the uniform of Colonel-in-Chief of the Royal Fusiliers which, with its bright red colour, glittering ensemble of medals, and towering Busby, made him clearly identifiable to the Natives as a person of great importance.³³ Once the rest of the party had settled into place on the dais, the Indian Commissioner presented the head chiefs of the tribes to Their Royal Highnesses and instructed their collective address to be read by David Wolf Carrier, a young Sarcee. In fact, though, the address and the Duke's reply had been penned by Laird and Forget (a former Indian Commissioner).³⁴ As might be expected, then, the address from the Indian tribes of Southern Alberta reflected more the attitude of the Indian Department than that of the Natives it professed to be from. There was little chance of it being otherwise because, in carrying out its duty to review all addresses submitted for presentation to the Duke, the Governor General's

33 RG7, G23, vol. 4, file 6, Lord Minto to F.S. Maude, 27 September 1901 (copy).

34 Pope Papers, vol. 48, Diary of the Royal Tour, 1901, 28 September 1901.

Office had consistently declined all submissions from Natives (and other groups for that matter) that seemed political in nature.³⁵

Laird and Forget's address on behalf of the Indians more than adequately fit into the accepted structure of royal addresses. Beginning with an outline of how "they," that is, the Indian tribes of Southern Alberta, came into treaty with Queen Victoria, "whose death we deeply lament," the address reminded all present that when "we entered into treaty with our great mother we pledged her our allegiance and loyalty." It continued, "On the auspicious occasion of this visit, we beg you to convey to your highly exalted father King Edward VII, the same expression of devotion to his person, and loyalty to his Government which we promised to his Royal mother." Before ending the address, Laird and Forget could not resist adding a line that celebrated what they regarded as the prudent and sympathetic policy of the Indian Department. "Under the fostering care of his Majesty's Department of Indian Affairs," the interpreter read, "we are gradually adopting the civilised mode of living, and are acquiring cattle and other means of obtaining ample subsistence and comfortable homes."³⁶

So far, the Indian Department had been able to turn the Pow-wow from a potential disaster to their advantage. First, by positioning all of the Natives symmetrically in straight lines, balanced groups, and according to hierarchical status, the Department had arranged the Indians so as to give the impression of order and control. The seeming spatial control of the Indians was reinforced by a contingent of NWMP which, though small, conveyed the impression that they contained the indigenous peoples and would safeguard the heir apparent by patrolling an imaginary boundary between the Natives and the public, especially around the dais. The emphasis on Indian orderliness would also suggest to observers that the state controlled the situation in general and Native peoples in particular. In addition, their proportional placement and dramatic yet well-timed and conducted entrance on horseback, and the lack of "noise" intimated that these "wild savages" of the plains were well on their way to being tamed and civilized. The clothing that the state and missionaries had outfitted for the chiefs and school children was also intended to suggest that the Natives were adopting a settled and modern lifestyle and that the residential schools were a success. Dressed in dark Hudson's Bay Company reefing jackets with matching trousers, and topped with a felt hat with a red ribbon, the chiefs exuded the dignity they supposedly lacked in traditional garb. Meanwhile the school children on display were resplendent in uniform clothing and exhibited tidy and trimmed grooming. According to William Maxwell, a journalist for the

35 RG7, G23, vol. 10, file 29, Address to the Duke of Cornwall and York from the Oka Grand Chief, 9 October 1901; vol. 5, file 11, F.S. Maude to J.S. Hendrie, 14 November 1901 (copy).

36 Joseph Pope, *The Tour of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York Through the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa, 1903), 234-235.

IMAGINING THE GREAT WHITE MOTHER AND THE GREAT KING

Standard, "They were a clean, healthy, bright, and happy-looking company, a credit to the industrial schools from which they came, and an instructive contrast to the native children who pass their young days in camps."³⁷ Finally, the address provided a descriptive caption for the audience in order to assist their interpretation of the visual images of Native progress and contentment.

Immediately after the reading of the address, however, the head chiefs were each given an opportunity to speak to the Duke on almost their own terms. Unable to control what the chiefs would say and fearing the worst, the Indian Department hoped to make this part of the programme as brief as possible and, therefore, explained to the chiefs beforehand that the Duke's visit was necessarily very short and that their speeches must be restricted to "very moderate limits."³⁸ The chiefs respected the Duke's pressing schedule and kept their comments brief. White Pup from the Blackfoot nation first addressed the Duke by presenting the treaty his people had made with the Great Mother twenty-seven years ago and proclaiming that they would always observe it faithfully. The Blood chief Crop Ear Wolf made a similar statement by thanking the late Great Mother for looking after them so well and praying that the Duke would continue the tradition of royal kindness. Running Wolf of the Peigans concurred and added, "We want the Duke to see that we shall be as well treated in the future as we are now. I love cattle, but I want more of them, and I want my body to have more weight, and I want bigger horses." On behalf of the Sarcees, Bull's Head continued the requests for food by both reaffirming their allegiance to the Crown and then explaining their lack of food and hunger.³⁹ The effect of the address, according to Maxwell, was disappointing: "It amounted to a demand for 'lots of grub,' and something that sounded like a complaint that he never got enough to eat."⁴⁰ Nearly all of the speeches were characterised by the white audience in similar terms, as childlike orations on the importance of land, cattle, and "grub" as the elements of happiness. An official explained to the royal party that "there is nothing that an Indian enjoys so much as speaking by the hour about his grievances, real or imaginary; and it is not surprising that he should be a *laudator temporis acti* and a grumbler with regard to the present." Those present were unmoved by the pleas for assistance and changed little their opinions that the Indians were fairly treated.⁴¹

37 William Maxwell, *With the 'Ophir' Round the Empire: An Account of the Tour of the Prince and Princess of Wales, 1901* (Toronto, 1902), 279-280.

38 Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace, *The Web of Empire: A Diary of the Imperial Tour of Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York in 1901* (London, 1902), 391.

39 E.F. Knight, *With the Royal Tour: A Narrative of the Recent Tour of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York Through Greater Britain* (Toronto, 1902), 334-335; *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 September 1901.

40 Maxwell, *With the 'Ophir' Round the Empire*, 281.

41 Wallace, *The Web of Empire*, 392; Knight, *With the Royal Tour*, 333-4.

The lack of eloquence on the part of the chiefs can be attributed to the fact that their words were in fact screened, the filter being the English language. Every speech had to be translated by an interpreter, a process which devalued the orations. According to Wilton Goodstriker, a Blood elder, "Most of the First Nations languages are very descriptive and thorough in composition; consequently, much is lost in attempts to translate them accurately – in this case into English. The First Nations languages are verb-centred, while the English language is noun-centred. This alone would make literal translation extremely difficult."⁴² Joseph Pope appreciated that "the red man often suffers through the inability of the interpreter adequately to translate his symbolical expressions," but, nonetheless, he asserted that demands for fatter cattle, larger horses, and more food were the refrain of all. "If this feature was rather less conspicuous on the present occasion," he concluded, "it was perhaps due to the circumstance that the visible presence of the future King suggested ideas of a loftier nature."⁴³

After the conclusion of each speech, the chiefs advanced and shook hands with the Duke and the Duchess. The Duke then delivered the reply couched in what was regarded as "the figurative style of Indian oratory." After thanking the Natives for their renewed pledges of loyalty and devotion to the King, he assured his Native listeners that he knew of their attachment to the Crown and, more specifically, to Queen Victoria, "the great mother who loved you so much and whose loss makes your hearts bleed and the tears to fill your eyes." Commenting on the "steadfast loyalty" of Natives during the 1885 rebellion, he told them that the "Great King" found it a "source of satisfaction" that he could "regard you as faithful children of the grand empire of which you form part." Stating his satisfaction at finding so much "prosperity that now surrounds the Indian's teepee," he reminded them that when they were hungry and wretched "the great mother listened to you and stretched forth her hands to help you, and now those sad days have passed away never to return." After noting how their requests to have their children educated had been "generously" met, the Duke concluded the speech by promising that a "suitable silver medal shall be struck" to commemorate the event and indicated that he had arranged to have them supplied with provisions during their stay and until they were home again. The Indians later reciprocated with gifts of stone and bone carvings, a coat, and the headdresses of a medicine man and a brave.⁴⁴

42 L.F.S. Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists: Indian-White Relations in the Maritimes, 1713-1867*, (Vancouver, 1979), 131; Walter Hildebrandt et al., *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty Seven* (Montreal, 1996), 23.

43 Pope, *The Tour of Their Royal Highnesses*, 80.

44 *Ibid.*, 81, 235-237; Imperial Institute, *Catalogue of the Gifts and Addresses Received by Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, During their Visit to the King's Dominions Beyond the Seas, 1901* (London, 1902).

IMAGINING THE GREAT WHITE MOTHER AND THE GREAT KING

Although Prince George had not penned the reply, the speech's message seemed to conform to his personal beliefs on the treatment of Natives in the Empire. Believing that Natives should be treated with respect and not pushed aside, the speech he delivered seemed to endorse these sentiments since it spoke directly to Natives and addressed them not as a neglected minority, but as a loyal people within the Empire who were loved by their "great father" as much as he was loved by "his children of the rising sun." Steeped in paternalism, the address sought to reinforce the allegiance of Natives by reminding them of their past loyalty to the Crown and, more significantly, of the rewards they had received for supporting their Great Mother. So long as they continued their allegiance, and respect for the Great King's officers – "those whom he sends to carry out his messages" – he would continue to love and care for his children. The state provided substance to this incentive by handing out provisions to those who had journeyed to pay homage to the King's son.

Yet, the speech was directed as much at the public as at the Natives. Natives knew how they were "prospering" under state tutelage and needed little invocation from the Duke to tell them how they really felt. The public, though, was another matter. The address assured everyone that the Indians were treated not only fairly by the state, but generously. Under the state's tutelage Natives were thriving with "beautiful and abundant crops, the herds of cattle and the bands of horses." The residential schools were singled out for particular commendation – and promotion – as they were cited for their important contributions to Indian advancement and happiness. When he left Canada, the Duke addressed all Canadians and again underscored these messages as he noted that "I was glad to hear of the progress they [Indians] have made, and the contentment in which they live under the arrangements made for their benefit by the Dominion Government."⁴⁵ The remainder of the Pow-wow, however, would suggest otherwise.

After the Duke's speech, the Native children from the local residential schools sang "God Save the King." Neatly dressed and groomed in western modes and singing the perennial song of British loyalty in "credible" English, the young pupils became the exemplars of the state's program of Indian advancement. Their progress was further illustrated by the performance of Indian dancing and riding which followed. Featuring between seventy and eighty braves dressed in the "traditional outfit of the warpath" with their faces "hideously daubed" with "war paint," the demonstration of dancing provided an effective before-and-after contrast, though one Indian official would have preferred to omit. The mounted warriors were dressed in traditional clothes and

45 Harold Nicolson, *King George the Fifth: His Life and Reign* (London, 1952), 88; Pope, *The Tour of Their Royal Highnesses*, 236-237, 145.

some feathers and paint (although not enough for Joseph Pope's tastes). Onlookers were particularly struck with one Native rider who had smeared his bare body with yellow ochre and looked exceedingly fierce as he and his comrades galloped around the grounds holding their rifles high. NWMP Inspector James Wilson reported that the display of dancing "was not what it could have been" due to the opposition of the Indian officials. "A small dance was given," he wrote, "but was not entered into by the Indians with much spirit as they were evidently in fear of their Agents."⁴⁶ Joseph Pope, however, blamed the lengthy process of interpreting the several speeches for wearying the Duke so much "that when the dancing did come on, he would only stay about five minutes to watch it." Whatever the case, the display of dancing, no matter how restricted, and number of Natives who dispensed with modern attire contradicted the messages of Native assimilation that the state was attempting to diffuse. Despite the Indian Department's ability to influence the movement, words, and actions of Natives at the Pow-wow, the moderate demonstration by the Natives still permitted counter-representations within the press.

Reception

As soon as the *Calgary Herald* learned of the proposed Royal Visit to their town, the paper became a strong advocate of Native participation. It expressed its satisfaction with the decision to bring in as many Indians as possible for the Pow-wow, a gathering that, it trumpeted, "will probably be one of the most unique in the history of the Dominion." The *Herald* was also enthusiastic about the upcoming display of Mounties and broncho riding, but the Indian assemblage received more attention because of its character as "a great historical event" featuring the Native chiefs "swearing of allegiance to the new king through the heir apparent." The event did not disappoint the paper's correspondent as he described the scene as "a most remarkable one" as Indians danced and pranced about in costumes and war paint of "the most fantastic manner." Rather than remarking on the civilized demure of the chiefs or evidence of progress the Indian Department had attempted to communicate, the *Herald* indulged not in the neat attire of the pupils from the industrial schools, but in the "barbaric splendour" of their relatives.⁴⁷

The Canadian press across the country described the Pow-wow in similar terms. The following day's newspaper headlines did not refer to the NWMP review or the Wild West extravaganza that took place later in the day, but,

46 Pope, *The Tour of Their Royal Highnesses*, 81; Watson, *The Queen's Wish*, 374; RG18, Commissioner's Office, vol. 1484, file 197-1901, James Wilson to A.B. Perry, 29 October 1901 (copy).

47 *Calgary Herald*, 28 June, 31 August, 5 September, 12 September, 30 September 1901.

instead, proclaimed "Indians Greet the Duke," "A Great Gathering of Red Men to Meet Royalty," "Loyalty of the Natives Warmly Praised," and "Peaceful Indians in War Paint Entertain Royalty at Calgary." Referring to the Pow-wow as the main event during the Royal Visit to Calgary, "if not the event of the tour through Canada," the *Manitoba Free Press* concluded the proceedings were of a "most unique and interesting character." Similarly, the *Globe* considered that "The lumberman's exhibition at Ottawa and the grand pow-wow of Indians at Calgary will be remembered as the two most distinctive sights which have so far been seen during the Canadian tour." The speeches received considerable credit for the interest in the proceedings, not because they were primitive, as argued by Maxwell and Pope, but because of their symbolic and earnest expressions. The *Free Press's* correspondent was impressed with the way in which the Native chiefs "gave expression to their feelings by short speeches, some of which were delivered with considerable eloquence and feeling." Despite the truncated nature of the display, the mounted Indians and the "war dance" became the feature stories in the newspapers of the country. The hundreds of mounted braves dressed "in all the picturesque beauty of varied colored costumes, paint, feathers and beads" presented what one reporter thought was "the most extraordinary spectacle that your correspondent has ever seen." The *Globe* reporter reckoned that only a painting by Whistler could capture "the rainbow glories of the costumes."⁴⁸ Rather than describing the equestrian performance as an "aimless" dash about the prairie, as Joseph Pope had done, the *Toronto World* described the scene as "an exhibition of wild and reckless riding."⁴⁹ In addition, the "war dance" was regarded as "a wild and fantastic dance" in which most of the braves were "but scantily clothed, paint being considered sufficient covering for their naked bodies." Their gesticulations were equally grotesque as they "danced in savage fashion in a circle waving their arms and shouting weird calls" to the beat of a drum. In toto, then, the *Free Press* reporter concluded, "The scene was one that can never be effaced from the mind while memory lasts."⁵⁰

The media's description of the Pow-wow differed significantly from the observations of Pope and the impressions that the Indian Department had endeavoured to instil in the audience. The press focussed on the sensational elements of the Pow-wow, describing in detail examples of traditional Native culture that the Indian Department had attempted to cover up and repress. Influenced by commercial pressures to sell newspapers, the romantic narratives

48 *Globe*, 30 September 1901; *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 September 1901; *Ottawa Citizen*, 30 September 1901; *Toronto World*, 30 September 1901.

49 Pope, *The Tour of Their Royal Highnesses*, 81; *Toronto World*, 30 September 1901.

50 *Globe*, 30 September 1901; *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 September 1901; *Ottawa Citizen*, 30 September 1901; *Toronto World*, 30 September 1901.

catered to an audience interested in reading about the spectacular over the humdrum. Yet the reports were not simply expressions of sensationalism, since they also acknowledged the “historic” significance and distinctiveness of the event – and Natives – in Canadian culture. The press and many organisers recognised that nearly all of the activities they had in store for Their Royal Highnesses during their Canadian tour were repetitive and mimicked royal functions throughout the Empire. While the continuity in forms of celebration expressed a shared British heritage, the public and some elements of the state wanted something to set Canada apart from the rest of the Empire, as a unique colony, if not a nation. In Ottawa, an extravagant lumberman’s display was set up and in Toronto, the future national anthem of “O Canada” was performed in French for English ears in order to give expression to a Canadian sense of identity. Likewise, Natives were regarded as distinctive features of the Canadian nation not to be hidden from view. Accordingly, the Pow-wow garnered great attention during the Royal Visit and the Natives found themselves placed on centre stage in the ceremony and in the articulation of the idea of the Canadian nation.

While the Pow-wow formally recognised Natives as a part of the Canadian nation, the representations articulated at the event did not intend to empower them. Instead, the emphasis on the “historic” aspects of the meeting between Native chiefs and the heir apparent served to reaffirm the British heritage in Canada. As Laurier had wished, the Pow-wow underscored the traditional British relationship between Natives and the monarchy and, in so doing, promoted the heritage of British justice in Canada. The descriptions of Native prosperity under government wardship and articulation of benevolence and generosity from the Crown, in the form of kind words and gifts, confirmed the popular belief amongst Canadians, imperialists and anti-imperialist alike, that the Native races had always been treated fairly and with humanity by the Canadian government. In contrast to the confrontational and sometimes violent imperialist expansion that took place in the United States, Canadians had regarded their country’s expansion westward as an orderly and peaceful process which they attributed to the tradition of British justice purportedly embedded in Canadian politics and society. For example, Richard Lancefield, head librarian at the Hamilton Public Library, argued that under Queen Victoria’s benevolent guidance the Native populations were “generously treated, and in the course of time transformed into her warmest allies.” He continued, “Rarely can it be said that in the march of Empire she deprived even the most savage tribe of any right or privilege for which in some form or another she did not afford adequate compensation.” With the exchange of gifts, loyal addresses, and decorous Indian performances in honour of the Duke, the ceremonious meeting between Native chiefs and the King’s son bolstered such attitudes. Indeed, even Joseph Pope agreed that in this respect the Pow-wow had been “successful,” by “demonstrating the beneficent nature of government wardship, and providing the future

IMAGINING THE GREAT WHITE MOTHER AND THE GREAT KING

king with one more practical illustration of the wisdom of that humane and generous policy which ever characterises England's treatment of native races."⁵¹

The Pow-wow gave Natives a place within the nation, but not as equals. Symbolically incorporated into the Canadian nation, Natives became objects to be controlled and manipulated by cultural producers in ways that supported the hegemony of the dominant culture. Natives were regarded as the Other against whom the white community imagined its place within the nation. The depiction of Natives as barbaric savages against the discipline and civilized demeanour of the NWMP and Duke of Cornwall and York provided the most obvious example of difference and the assumed "cultural superiority" of the white community at the Pow-wow. Perhaps more crucial to the formation of a Canadian identity among the white community, however, and more widespread than any other representation to emanate from the Aboriginal-royal relationship, was the shared "whiteness" of royalty and the European-Canadian community and the "redness" of the Natives.

Throughout the eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries, the British monarch had been termed the Great Mother, or the Great Father, in order underscore the paternalistic relationship between Natives and whites. Then, in the late-nineteenth century, beliefs in racial difference and superiority began to creep into the imagery of the monarchy as the King and Queen became "White." Throughout the Empire, whites added the appellation of "White" to Queen Victoria's monikers, transforming her from the "Great Mother" to the "Great White Mother" and in Africa, the Great White Queen. At the Great Pow-wow, the press reconfirmed the images of the "red" Indian as they recounted how the "Great White Mother" had helped her "red children" in past times and how Natives now came to pay their respects to "the son of their great white chief."⁵² By emphasising the racial differences, the royal titles served to rank and subdue groups through representation of the place, power, and identity of the white community and of the inferior position accorded to Native peoples within the nation.

Recent studies in linguistics have raised questions about whether these pidgin titles actually succeeded in impressing the indigenous peoples of the Empire with a sense of racial hierarchy. In Botswana, the closest the Setswana language could come to translating "Great White Queen" was the far from impressive "Mrs. Little (Old) Lady" (*Mma-Mosadinyana*). First Nations inter-

51 Goldwin Smith, *Canada and the Canadian Question* (1891; reprint, Toronto, 1971), 52; Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto, 1970), 115-117, 155-176; Walden, *Visions of Order*; Richard T. Lancefield, *Victoria, Sixty Years a Queen: A Sketch of Her Life and Times* (Toronto, 1897), viii; Pope, *Tour of Their Royal Highnesses*, 83.

52 *Manitoba Free Press*, 30 September 1901; *Toronto World*, 30 September 1901; Maxwell, *With the 'Ophir' Round the Empire*, 285.

preters on the Canadian Plains were limited to the epithets “the woman leader” (*nina’waakii*) and “our great big white mother” (*kitoomhk skapiwksistsinon*), neither of which quite captured the English nuances in the term “Great White Mother.”⁵³ It seems, then, that the designation of the King and Queen as “white” had more impact and meaning for the white community itself. Laura Doyle explains that in modern fiction and culture a race mother often has been created as a device to access and represent a group history and bodily-grounded identity.⁵⁴ In contemporary literature and royal ceremonies, such as the Diamond Jubilee of 1897, Queen Victoria fit into this mould as she was selected to play the part of a race mother to the Anglo-Saxon people. Similarly, her casting as the Great White Mother assisted the white community in shaping its identities, and power, through the underscoring of racial difference with Natives. The Queen’s characterisation as not merely a Great Mother, but a Great *White* Mother, signified that while she acted as a parental figure to Native peoples they were not, and could not be, equal participants in the nation since they did not share their Mother’s skin colour. As the Great White Mother, Queen Victoria represented racial hierarchy in the Empire, if not for the colonised, then, at least, for the colonisers.

While white Canadians manipulated the representations of royalty and the Native-royal relationship to reinforce their hegemony and their vision of the nation, Natives participated in royal ceremonies and invoked the imagery of the Great Mother in order to demand justice and special recognition. For Indian participants, the display of traditional outfits, crafts, dancing, and horsemanship communicated a pride in their culture. They intended that their meetings with royal personages would remind the white community of their special relationship with the monarchy which, they argued, entitled them to certain rights and privileges.⁵⁵ Despite facing a number of restrictions at the Great Pow-wow, Native peoples managed to give expression to their views and their interpretation of the nation by resisting state attempts to control their behaviour. They used the ceremony to exercise their traditional rights as the Aboriginal children of the Great Mother and Father to reaffirm the paternal bond they held with the monarchy. Moreover, the organisation and style of the Pow-wow had been influenced by Native expectations. Consequently, provisions and the promises of medals were provided and chiefs permitted privileged access to the Duke.⁵⁶

53 Neil Parsons, *King Khama, Emperor Joe, and the Great White Queen: Victoria Britain through African Eyes* (Chicago, 1998), vii; Hildebrandt et al., *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty Seven*, 24.

54 Laura Doyle, *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture* (Oxford, 1994), 4-6.

55 Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind*, 100; Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists*, 86-87, 123.

56 Chapter 7 of my dissertation, “Aboriginal Tradition and Royal Representation, 1860-1911,” examines the issue of Native agency and traces the origins, history, and nature of the special relationship between Natives and the monarchy much more extensively.

IMAGINING THE GREAT WHITE MOTHER AND THE GREAT KING

Fidelity to the monarchy and faith in the paternal relationship between themselves and their King and Queen became a proud part of the Native heritage from British Columbia to the Maritimes. Believing they had a special relationship with the monarch based upon mutual respect, trust, and sympathy, Natives encouraged the continuation of their royal connections, ever reminding new generations of their "historic connection with the British Crown."⁵⁷ While the white community manipulated royal imagery in order to consolidate its hegemony and reaffirm the inferior place accorded Natives within its imagined community, Native peoples resisted these impositions with representations of their own designed to empower themselves and claim their rightful place in the nation.

Conclusion

Taken as forms of symbolic communication, royal ceremonies can be understood as sites of hegemonic processes involving multiple social groups and interweaving a variety of representations. Society and social relations are neither static nor fixed, but multiple and contradictory. The concept of cultural hegemony combined with elements from the "new" cultural history, such as imagined communities, offers a way to consider and analyse the complex role of power, identity, and royal representation in the nation-building process. From the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries, the Canadian state and civil society's elite wrestled with these issues as they sought to uphold order, promote unity, and build a national identity in an increasingly industrial, urbanised, democratic, and, as far as the dominant culture was concerned, unstable society. In addition to political and economic programs such as the National Policy, royal ceremonies and representations were invoked by members of the state, religious denominations, civic organisations, voluntary associations, the press, and the public to consolidate the expanding state and unify the Canadian nation around the central image of the monarchy. Images of the "Great White Mother" and the "Great King" constituted one facet of this process as they came to signify to white Canadians the heritage of British justice in the Dominion. Native peoples were regarded as living examples of this heritage as their continued existence, "fair" and "compassionate" treatment by the Crown, and avowed loyalty to the monarchy confirmed in the minds of Canadians the spirit of justice that marked the nation. Events such as the Great Pow-wow of 1901 allowed for the popular expression of these sentiments and, in addition, permitted whites to articulate visually the "innate" hierarchies of race. Identities are partly made in juxtaposition to another, especially a visible Other, and whites used Natives as a counterfoil against whom they could define

57 RG10, Red Series, reel C-11310, vol. 3007, file 218 222-113, Minutes of the Six Nations Council, 6 May 1909.

their own identity and imagine their place, and that of Natives, within the nation. Such public events, however, also caused divisions within the state, as some officials believed that the use of Indians in “traditional” ceremonies would be detrimental to their assimilation into Canadian society. Indeed, living representations always produce the potential for counter-representations through the agency of the participants and, as the example of the Pow-wow demonstrates, Native peoples were no different as they resisted symbolic control and attempted to frame the ceremony according to their own traditions. Royal ceremonies and representations, then, were not “trivial” events in Canadian history. As the example of the Great Pow-wow of 1901 attests, they comprised a fundamental – and contested – feature in national imagery and played a vital part in the building of the Canadian nation.