

Colonialism's Currency: Money, State, and First Nations in Canada 1820-1950 by Brian Gettler

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Colonialism's Currency
Money, State, and First Nations in Canada 1820-1950

by Brian Gettler

Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020. 301 pages. Paperback
 \$37.95. Cloth \$120.00. ISBN 978-0-22800-117-1. (www.mqup.ca)

Recent studies of Indigenous-state relations tend to focus on specific policies and, in some ways, micro-histories of how policies played out on the ground. Brian Gettler's excellent book is a continuation of this trend. Focusing on several communities (the Moose Factory Cree of James Bay, the Wendat of Wendake, and the Innu of Mashteuiatsh), Gettler uses currency as the lens through which to examine Indigenous-state relations, moving between policy debates and how these impacted Indigenous peoples at the community level.

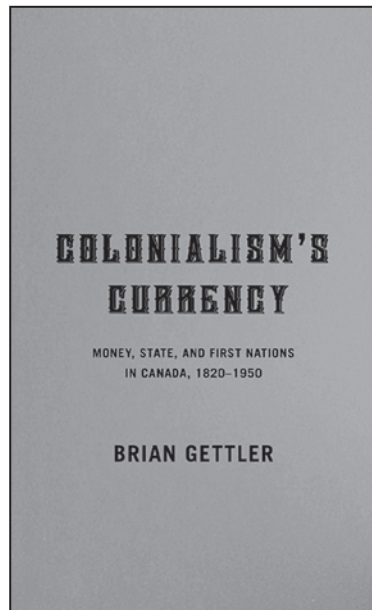
Irony, in the cruellest sense of the word, is often present in the history of state policy towards First Nations. Despite its stated goal of assimilating Indigenous peoples into the 'mainstream' of Canadian society, Indian Affairs' policies had the opposite effect. Gettler demonstrates how government policies regarding First Nations' access to currency were no different. Indian Affairs, Gettler argues, "worked to keep money from First Nations and First Nations from the market" (11). A department that wanted First Nations to abandon traditional pursuits and fit into the capitalist labour economy

actively worked to limit Indigenous people's access to currency, the thing that facilitates participation in the economy. Over six chapters, Gettler outlines how Indian Affairs' perception of First Nations as untrustworthy and careless justified the state's intrusion into their economic lives.

Chapter One outlines how currency reflected how Canada changed both symbolically and practically. Chapter Two examines early policy debates regarding money and its distribution by the state to First Nations.

Chapters Three and Four focus on two of the author's case studies and what happened when settlers brought money to Indigenous peoples and the state attempted to intervene. Chapter Five examines what seems to be a recurring theme in Indigenous history: a First Nation (the Wendat of Wendake) requesting a treaty even while various levels of government proceed with resource development in their territory. Chapter Six investigates how Indian agents manipulated relief payments to Indig-

enous peoples, how Indian Affairs treated Indigenous veterans and their pensions, and how Indian Affairs inserted itself into the fur trade following the Second World War.



As with any book, particular topics grab the reader's attention. Chapter Two stands out as Gettler examines what was in some ways the beginning of the currency issue: the early nineteenth-century debate over the distribution of annual presents and treaty annuities to First Nations. To save money (shipping items incurred an expense), British officials suggested giving First Nations an equivalent amount in cash. However, officials in Canada rejected this idea because "money to Indians is instantly spent in spiritous liquors" (63). They portrayed Indigenous peoples as improvident to justify the continued distribution of items of goods. Part of this stemmed from the Indian Department's efforts at self-preservation: handing out cash reduced the department's role to simple accounting and meant its eventual demise.

Interestingly some (certainly not all) Indigenous leaders also resisted the distribution of cash. Gettler cites several instances from different First Nations in which the leadership told Crown officials that access to money would result in horrible consequences. Past scholars examined this issue from an institutional perspective: the bureaucratic struggle over the continued existence of the Indian Department. Gettler brings a new perspective to this crucial period in the history of Indigenous-state relations—a period when the state stopped perceiving First Nations as valued allies and instead saw them as a problem to be solved.

Gettler's examination of Treaty Nine is also unique. I disagree that Treaty Nine is not well documented. One always wants more documents but, compared to the other Ontario treaties, there are multiple sources for Treaty Nine and valuable Indigenous oral histories. However, Gettler highlights the impact treaty money had on the Mushkegowuk and Anishinabe. Indian Affairs officials thought these northern na-

tions had limited experience with money, but Gettler demonstrates how fur trade companies such as the Revillon Frères offered hunters payments in cash compared to the HBC's store credit and debt. This practice forced the HBC manager at Moose Factory to break company policy and provide cash payments to entice hunters to sell their furs. Contrary to Indian Affairs' fears, Indigenous access to cash did not lead to profligacy.

There was, however, an additional consequence of distributing treaty money: it became a way to integrate the Mushkegowuk and other Treaty Nine nations into the Canadian state apparatus. Distributing treaty money meant taking an annual census of a population that dispersed over a large area during much of the year. One official noted in 1946, "...we know where our treaty Indians are because they have a treaty ticket. They have that ticket in order to get their payments..." (127). Receiving treaty money was a right but, in so doing, people became tied ever closer to the Canadian state. As Gettler notes, treaty money had more than just an economic impact on First Nations.

One would think that as time went by, Indian Affairs' racist attitudes towards Indigenous peoples and their access to cash would wane. Gettler shows this was not the case. Indian Affairs reduced its relief payments to Indigenous veterans during the Great Depression to save money. It also intercepted veteran's pension and distributed it to recipients as credit rather than cash. Rachel Chum, whose deceased husband served in the First World War, was owed a monthly pension of \$97. Indian Affairs directed the money to a savings account the woman could draw upon (in credit) when shopping at the HBC store for her family, but only for provisions and clothing and limited to \$60/month. In the 1940s, the Ontario government created a beaver pre-

serve at Kesagami to preserve a once numerous animal approaching extinction in parts of the north. When trappers from Moose Factory brought their furs to auction, they weren't paid in cash. Instead, the first installment paid their debts at local stores. Later installments got the hunter through the summer and set him up for his winter advance. No one received cash because that would result in the trappers going on "a little spree in Cochrane" (181), a town accessible by rail. If a trapper wanted his money, he had to ask the local Indian agent for permission. Even when the preserve closed, the Indian agent continued to intervene in the ability of trappers to sell their furs.

Gettler provides unique insight into

the how the state's control of currency impacted Indigenous peoples in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was, Gettler concludes, another form of dispossession that limited First Nations' ability to take part in the economy. Gettler's story of Mrs. Chum led me to use a compound interest calculator. It shows that the \$37 a month Indian Affairs held back was \$444 a year. Over 20 years, this amounted to \$8,820. A low rate of return, perhaps 2%, increases the principal to \$11,003. One wonders how much money the state owes Indigenous families and their descendants.

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*Hawkins, Hound Dog, Elvis,
and Red—How Rock and
Roll Invaded Canada*

by Greig Stewart

Toronto: Quick Red Fox Press, 2021, 416 pgs.
Illustrations. \$39.95, hardcover. ISBN 978-1-
7751876-1-5, (www.quickredfoxpress.com)

Before starting to read Greig Stewart's new book, there were a number of questions that I felt needed to be asked and then answered.

Firstly, was there a need for a publication explaining how rock and roll invaded Canada? To try and answer this question, I looked at the extensive bibliography of over 125 titles which the author had consulted and listed. Amazingly, there were only twenty-one entries that had any Canadian connection, the most recent being from 2015. This answered my first question; yes, the book would be a timely and welcome addition to this genre of literature.

Secondly, what qualifications/past expe-

riences did the author have to write it? Greig Stewart's first book, *Shutting Down the National Dream; A.V.Roe and the Tragedy of the Avro Arrow*, was the winner of the National Business Book Award, and the basis for CBC Television's popular docudrama, *The Arrow*. Mr. Stewart also had a rock music background. From 1966-68, he was the drummer for the Toronto band *The True Image*. Later, he was deeply involved in the fields of arts, culture, heritage and tourism, and from 1981-2011, he worked as a field consultant for the Ontario government. Seems like a good pedigree to write a book on the history of Canadian rock and roll!

Thirdly, how would new evidence be uncovered to add to existing literature in the field, and to help prove the author's thesis? During an eight-year period while researching and writing his book, Stewart conducted over one hundred personal interviews. These were with individuals who were intimately involved with or participated in the Canadian music business of the time. Some of these included Bobby Dean Blackburn, Ray Hutchison, Dave