

# *Contemporary Productions of Colonial Identities through Liberal Discourses of Educational Reform*

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To speak of “colonial identities” is to invoke history. While history is interesting enough in itself in white settler societies, I refer to it in this paper to suggest that what happens in Canadian education, specifically in the example of Saskatchewan, is really not so different from its historical antecedents, as much as a surface glance and a separation of time might suggest otherwise. This is not to deny the significant ruptures in discourses from past to present. In late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Canada, discourses of race and racial and national purity were central in thinking about education. Languages spoken, faiths professed, and the daily ways of living of some groups of people were targeted for consumption (in the sense of the “swallowing up”, or the “overtaking” of something), and replacement by British, Protestant, and middle class ways of living marked by temperance, sexual restraint, and other forms of self-control. In contemporary Canada, we speak much less openly about race. As seen in an official articulation of the discourse of multiculturalism (Government of Canada, 2002), the language of race is subjugated by the discourses of culture and multiculturalism. In this contemporary context, cultural practices remain targeted for consumption. Although it bears recognition that what are considered problematic aspects of some cultures remain targets of reform, today in Canada, “consumption” of culture now refers primarily to the acquisition of the commodities that cultural differences have become. In this paper, I will argue that the consumption of racial differences then,

and of cultural differences now, have been and continue to be justified by the consumer's sense of moral responsibility and entitlement. I will argue further that contemporary discursive practices of educational reform in Saskatchewan, as articulated in current education policy documents and recommendations for reform, re/produce colonial power relations as the consumption of cultural differences, by a dominant and normative white Anglo center, in the name of the well-being of cultural Others and the nation as a whole.

## History and Colonial Education

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed history of education in Canada. My reading of authors dealing with education in Canada during the late 1800s to early 1900s (Anderson, 1918; Stanley, 1991; Valverde, 1991), in the context of the work of authors dealing with education during approximately the same historical period in colonies other than Canada (Bacchus, 1994; Stoler, 1995), suggests the possibility of recognizing a general colonial ethos during this period that I will refer to as the nation-building period in Canada. I understand colonial education to be both the expression of, and a crucial means of producing this general colonial ethos. In short, 19<sup>th</sup> century colonials, and the policies, laws and institutions they produced, were inherently white-supremacist, patriarchal, and bourgeois in nature. At the very core of this ethos was the inviolable conviction of the supremacy of imperial white, Protestant, bourgeois, and masculine values, ideals and ways of living.

As the following quote from French colonial Jules Harmand makes very explicit, historically, the conviction of white racial superiority underlay colonizers' sense of moral superiority and by extension moral responsibility.

It is necessary, then, to accept as a principle and point of departure the fact that there is a hierarchy of races and civilizations, and that we belong to the superior race and civilization, still recognizing that, while superiority confers rights, it imposes strict obligations in return. The basic legitimation of conquest over native peoples is the conviction of our superiority, not merely our mechanical, economic and military superiority, but our *moral superiority* [italics added]. Our dignity rests on that quality, and it underlies our right to direct the rest of humanity. Material power is nothing but a means to that end. (Harmand, 1910, cited in Said, 1993, p. 17.)

Based on this was the belief in the divinely ordained moral imperative to assimilate all others, to the varying degrees believed possible. It appears that in Canada, this sense of moral responsibility justified efforts of the colonial discursive apparatus which included education, the penal system,

the health and mental health system, the immigration system, and Christian churches, to:

- produce Canada as a nation and a citizenry that was white, middle class, English speaking and protestant [the construction of the colonizer identity] and
- to protect Canada and Canadian citizens from the threat of degeneracy said to be posed by racialized, classed and gendered Others [the construction of the colonized identity].

Colonial education in Canada seems to have been approached in 3 different ways relative to 3 different groups of people. Colonial education consisted of:

- “character education” was to nurture the inherent yet fragile “character” of those Canadians who were middle class, protestant, English-speaking, and not least, white.
- “assimilative education” designed to to consume—in the sense of “swallow up”, “make disappear”—non-British European cultural identities.
- finally, segregated education and residential schooling was available for non-white immigrants and First Nations people. This education complemented the imposition of political and economic measures designed to subjugate and render economic competition with white settlers impossible.

In this first section of this paper, I will elaborate on these approaches to education in order to support my initial point that during the late 1800s-early 1900s in Canada, the consumption—in the sense of eradication—of those cultural practices considered undesirable because not British, was central to the project of building a white, Anglo nation and citizenry of the British Empire. This, in turn, lays the foundation for my argument in the second section of the paper, that consumption of commodified cultural differences remains central to the way Canadian national identity is imagined. Moreover, this consumption continues to position white, middle class Canadians as normal, normative, and “good” by virtue of their consumption of Other cultures.

### *Character Education for White, Anglo Canadians*

In the years around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of “character” was central to thinking about differences between human beings. Character was believed to be a matter of breeding—an accident of birth. “Good character” was contingent upon being born in the British race. You were either born

into it—and with the potential to develop it (through education)—or you weren't.

Ideal Canadian citizens were those who were born into the British race. They spoke English, proclaimed a Protestant faith, were middle-class, and had white skin. They lived in specific ways characterized by “self-control, self-discipline, self-determination... self-mastery “ (Stoler, 1995, p. 8). They embraced “property ownership, rootedness and an orderly family life” (Stoler, 1995, p. 128). They were “well-to-do; Church-going; English-speaking” (Anderson, 1918, p. 27).

Character was also seen to be the link between the individual, the nation, and Empire. In his 1893 foreword to *Round the Empire*, Lord Roseberg wrote:

A collection of states spread over every region of the earth, but owning one head and one flag, is even more important as an influence than as an Empire....With the Empire statesmen are mainly concerned; in the influence every individual can and must have a part. Influence is based on character; and it is on the character of each child that grows into manhood within British limits that the future of our Empire rests. (cited in Stanley, 1991, p. 226)

As Valverde writes, “an individual without character ... was a miniature mob: disorganized, immoral, and unhealthy as well as an inefficient member of the collectivity” (1991, p. 27). Therefore in Canada, the concern was not only to populate the country with people skilled enough to build a thriving national economy. Rather, central to the issue of nation-building was the concern to populate the country with people who possessed the appropriate “ethical subjectivit[ies]” (Valverde, 1991, p. 17). Canadians were to be people of “good character”—as clear, clean and *white* as Canada's pristine water and air and its snow-capped mountains. Canadians were to be pure not only in body—through physical hygiene, temperance and sexual modesty—but more importantly, they were to be pure in spirit, as modelled by the colonizing peoples.

Although good character was considered a question of breeding, this birthright was also believed to be vulnerable to degrading influence from degenerate Others. Therefore, children born into good character were seen to require a curriculum of rigorous character-building. This was true not only of Canada, but other European colonies such as the Dutch East Indies (Stoler, 1995), and British West Indies (Bacchus, 1994). As Valverde writes, “the production of self [through] ... character-building was an inner, subjective task. It involved learning to lead a morally and physically pure life, not only for the sake of individual health and salvation but for the sake of the nation” (1991, p. 27).

Historically, this was the production of the colonizer identity—the best, most desirable, normative people were white, British, English-speaking

Protestants. Moreover, their dominance and normativity was contingent on the degeneracy of Others, and their moral responsibility, born of the conviction of their racial superiority, manifested in the conquest and colonizing of Others.

### *Education for Assimilable Others*

[S]ome may be convinced that 'the sty makes the pig.' There can be no question but that the pig makes the sty, and to prevent sty conditions the porcine nature must be transformed. (S.W. Dean, 1914, cited in Valverde, 1991, p. 47)

As this 1914 quote from S.W. Dean, a Methodist missionary suggests, flaws in some people's characters (like being non-white, poor, and female) rather than socio-economic injustices were considered to be responsible for social problems ranging from poverty to prostitution. Hence, it was believed that such social problems would be solved not through social and economic reform, but through the discursive practices of character education and moral reform. These practices served both to re/produce the dominance, normativity, and *moral goodness* of the colonizer, and to simultaneously produce non-British European immigrants as well as non-European immigrants and indigenous people as racially degenerate, and hence as dangerous to the well-being of the new country and citizens. Because the colonizer's claim to moral superiority was confirmed by Christianity, the triple efforts of deculturation, assimilation and policing that Carlson (1997) ascribes to colonial education, were framed as moral obligation, and taken up with missionary zeal.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, many non-British immigrants were not wanted in Canada and were not desirable as Canadian citizens. As a vast and fledgling nation, Canada needed to protect its sovereignty through the building of a railroad, the clearing and planting of the prairies, and the settling of towns and cities (Boyko, 1998; Francis, 1997). Thus, non-British immigrants were admitted to the country largely because their numbers and their labour were needed to do the job of nation-building. However, the following 1910 quote from Rev. Samuel Dwight Chown, General Superintendent of the Methodist Church is an example of discourses of the time that produced non-Anglos as racially degenerate therefore threatening to the health of Canadian citizens, and the nation itself:

While many of our non-Anglosaxon population are amongst the best of the people from their native lands ... it is lamentable that such large numbers have come to Canada during the last decade bringing a laxity of morals, an ignorance, a superstition and an absence of high ideals of personal character or of national life ... [and] may constitute a danger to themselves and a menace to our national life' <sup>35</sup>. (cited in Valverde, 1991, p. 53)

Moreover, it was accepted that “the paramount factor in racial fusion is undoubtedly the education of the children of these non-English races” (Anderson, 1918, p. 89). Therefore assimilative education designed both to deculturate and assimilate non-British, but white, European immigrants to the English language, and to British ideals and ways of living, were accepted as a vital means of protecting Canada and Canadians from the threat of degeneracy. Rooted in the conviction of British superiority, assimilative education was also accepted as an act of moral generosity, hence confirming the colonizer’s claim of superiority. As an example of this, German Mennonites were not regarded as ideal potential Canadians specifically because of their tendency to resist assimilative education, insisting instead on their legal right to educate their own children in their own language and faith tradition.

J.T.M. Anderson, a Saskatchewan Inspector of Schools and later to become Premier of Saskatchewan during the years 1929–1934, insisted in 1918 that “no tolerant citizen asks that the Mennonite schools be forthwith abolished” (1918, p. 223). Anderson nevertheless urged Canadians to “insist upon the state exercising its right to see that every one of these New-Canadians obtains what in free Canada should surely be one’s birthright—a public school education!” (1918, p. 34). Therefore, Canadian colonial identity as morally magnanimous is confirmed through the insistence on fulfilling Mennonite rights—not to educate their own children in their own language and faith tradition as provided for in the law of the time, but to be improved as human beings through assimilation to British ways of living. Canadians like Anderson were so convinced of British superiority and the attendant moral obligation to assimilate Others, that it was believed necessary to rectify “mistakes”, such as laws allowing for parochial schools, “even at the expense of giving offence to a minority....They will before many years thank us for our work” (Anderson, 1918, p. 78–79).

### *Education for Unassimilable Others*

To assimilate Europeans is one problem; to assimilate Asiatics quite a different problem. (Braithwaite cited in Stanley, 1991, p. 195)

What was at stake was race—and race referred not only to country of origin, but also quite simply to skin colour. Race was understood in biologically essential ways—it was believed to be carried in the blood, and the blood of non-white skinned people was considered degenerate. On this point, Stanley cites Ernest McGaffey, 1912:

Racially he [the Oriental] is as opposite to the Anglo-Saxon in life, thought, religion, temperament, taste, morals, and modes, as ice is to fire. AND HE CAN NEVER BE OTHERWISE. ... He cannot be changed, even by centuries of

contact, any more than the leopard can change his spots... racially, the yellow man can never become a white man. (1991, p. 194, original emphasis)

Thus some immigrants were considered assimilable, because language and faith could be taught. But skin colour couldn't be taught; therefore for some dominantly positioned people, people who were non-European, non-Christian, and non-white, were simply considered "unassimilable". Even intermarriage was not considered a viable means of assimilation, because "color is not assimilated through intermarriage" (Stanley, 1991, p. 193). While "good character" was considered flexible enough as to be developed in those who were born with enough potential for it, the character of non-white people was considered fixed and immutable—no amount of education could make them white.

#### *Implications for non-white, non-European, non-Christian immigrants*

The easiest way to deal with the threat of racial degeneracy posed by non-white, non-European and non-Christian immigrants, was simply to refuse to let such people into the country. Canadian history is replete with examples of immigration policies designed to do exactly that (Ashworth, 1979; Boyko, 1998; Ormond & McKague, 1991). For those who were already here, life was made incredibly difficult: race riots were not uncommon, schools for non-white children were segregated, *and a major aim was to prevent "unassimilable immigrants" from becoming economically competitive with white settlers.* The intention seemed to be that if things were bad enough in Canada, "undesirable" immigrants would leave (Ashworth, 1979; Boyko, 1998).

#### *Implications for First Nations people.*

These white supremacist beliefs applied as much to First Nations people as to non-white immigrants. However, because First Nations people were already here, they could not simply be denied entry. They were here—and their very presence, their refusal to just "vanish" (as the "vanishing Indian" discourse of the time would have them do) was the essence of "the Indian problem" of the time. The ideology of white supremacy together with their insistent presence produced Indigenous people in Canada, as in other colonies around the world, as the embodiment of the "internal enemy" (Foucault cited in Stoler, 1995). "Unremitting effort[s]" (Said, 1993, p. 168) were made to ensure that Canada and Canadians would be protected from the alleged threat within their midst. Such efforts took the form of imposed political and economic limitations such as the pass system and permit system. Under these laws, "Indians" were not permitted to leave

their reserve, or to sell produce or purchase items required for agricultural labour without the consent of the Indian agent. Carter's examples of Plains Cree history (1986) demonstrates that contrary to explanations given at the time, their failure to farm successfully was not because they were racially ill-suited to it or because they were evolutionarily not ready for farming. Rather, their failure was imposed on them by specific policies and practices of the Canadian government. It was made impossible for Plains Cree people to succeed at farming. Like non-white immigrants, First Nations people were *prevented* from self-sustainability and economic competition with white settlers.

It was in this political and economic climate that amendments to the Indian Act mandated the attendance at Residential School of First Nations children from 6–16. It is generally well-accepted that assimilation was the objective of these schools. However, the words of a 1904 Indian Department memo, "it was never the policy of the department, nor the design of the industrial school to turn out Indian pupils to compete with the whites" (cited in Deiter, 1999, p. 16).

Paralleling the means taken to prevent agricultural success, this memo states very clearly that residential schools were not intended to give First Nations students the skills needed to live independently and well in the so-called "white man's world." Rather, they were designed to teach the basic language and faith "requirements" of civilization. In this way, residential schools for First Nations children might serve to protect white settlers from the threat of indigenous racial degeneracy. Residential schools provided the added bonus of producing an underclass of farm labourers and house servants for white settlers.

## Educational Reform in Contemporary Saskatchewan

At first glance, contemporary Canadian understandings of differences between people, the implications of such differences on national identity and well-being, and how such differences ought to be taken up in education, appear to be very much different than they were 100 years ago. Race discourses have largely been replaced with discourses of culture and multiculturalism. Canada now holds a special place among nations as an example of such liberal virtues as equality of individuals, multicultural tolerance, and inclusion (Canadian Heritage, 2002, Respecting our Differences section, para. 1). Multiculturalism has been placed on high moral ground, with multicultural discourses such as inclusion and tolerance of difference encouraging what Wetherell and Potter refer to as "the moral identity of tolerance" (1992, p. 211). Moreover, in Canada, multiculturalism is widely seen as a sort of antidote to the racism and ethnic conflict seen



to plague *other* parts of the world (Canadian Heritage, 2002, Valuing our Diversity section, para. 3). The rupture from then to now is also reflected in public education documents with the deep embedding of these discourses of multiculturalism and cultural difference in Saskatchewan Learning's policies, goals, curricula, and suggested teacher practices (Saskatchewan Education, 1994; Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment, 1995; Saskatchewan Education, 1996; Saskatchewan Education, 2002). Multicultural education is promoted as the solution to the problem of racism (Saskatchewan Education, 1994; Saskatchewan Education, 2002), and Aboriginal education is promoted as part of the solution to the "socially toxic" (Garbarino cited in Tymchak, 2001, p. 82) socio-economic and psychological factors that are deemed responsible for placing Aboriginal and poor students "at risk" of school incompleteness (Saskatchewan Education, 1996; Tymchak, 2001, p. 125).

In this section, I explore the ways in which education in Saskatchewan continues to function as part of the larger discursive apparatus positioning some groups of people as dominant and normative, while constructing Other identities as dysfunctional, at risk, and dangerous to themselves and to the community as a whole. Regarding the "pastoral pedagogy" orientation of Canadian Social Science curricula, Cavanaugh argues that "the Canadian child is constituted as future agent of global care, and the Third World recipient of that care (who is both a living subject and a Canadian social fiction) is constructed to be in need of care" (2001, p. 402). I argue that this "benevolent, yet colonizing, pedagogy of care" (Cavanaugh, 2001, p. 403) is taken up in multicultural education and performed *through* the Canadian "celebration" of cultural differences and the literal "consumption" of cultural commodities at various "perogies, eggrolls and bannock" events. Such contemporary discursive practices of multiculturalism confirm both the normativity and the moral righteousness of those dominantly positioned Canadians who perform themselves as non-racist through their interest in, tolerance and even celebration of the cultural differences of Others.

### *Ripe for Consumption: Culture as Problem, Culture as Solution*

Stoler (1995) suggests that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the "culture" concept has been connected to race, and has been used to do the political work of providing the "psychological scaffolding" for exploitation. I suggest further that the culture concept has since become a bifurcated one, and that culture, as both problem and solution, is ripe for consumption. Through the failure to see themselves as "having" either race or culture (Bannerji, 1997, 2000; Goldstein, 2001; Mackey, 1999; McIntosh, 1988/92; McIntyre, 1997; Sleeter, 1993; St. Denis, 2002), and through the conferral of race and culture

as properties of Otherness (Bannerji, 1997, 2000; hooks, 1992; Mackey, 1999; Sleeter, 1993; St. Denis, 2002), to be consumed in various ways, colonial identities and colonial power relations are re/produced.

Where racial degeneracy used to be cited as the explanation for non-white European immigrants' and Aboriginal peoples' inability to live "properly," culture has replaced race as a determinate quality. In Razack's words, "cultural differences perform the same function as a more biological notion of race ... once did: they mark inferiority" (1998, p. 19). Thus contemporary discourses of cultural deficiency blame poor and Aboriginal victims for their poverty and social marginalization. This is the discourse of culture as "at risk" or "dysfunctional" or otherwise problematic and subversive to the mainstream. This manifestation of culture is considered *intolerable*, endangering to children born into it, and dangerous to the social body. A second manifestation of culture is that of "traditional" (Tymchak, 2001, p. 104), or "authentic" culture (Bannerji, 1997, 2000; Saskatchewan Education, 1996, St. Denis, 2002). This is the form of culture that is "tolerated" and "celebrated" (Government of Canada, 2002; Saskatchewan Education, 1994; Saskatchewan Learning, 2002). St. Denis, an indigenous scholar writing specifically about Saskatchewan education, shows that in the particular case of Aboriginal culture, traditional culture is the form of culture that various government documents and Aboriginal organizations claim there's "not enough" of (2002). It is this traditional culture that is proposed as the solution to the problem of "cultural dissonance" (St. Denis, 2002), Aboriginal students' consequent incompletion of school (Saskatchewan Education, Training and Employment, 1995; Saskatchewan Education 1996; Tymchak, 2001), and in turn, "[their consequent] ... non-participation in the labour market, and ... correlative probability of entrapment in a cycle of unemployment, poverty, ... welfare, and ... running afoul of the justice system" (Tymchak, 2001, p.12). Herein is a cyclical connection between the two discourses of culture: without traditional culture, dysfunctional culture will reproduce itself from generation to generation. Traditional culture is assigned the responsibility of breaking the cycle, thus making life better and safer for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike. This is strikingly similar to Wetherell and Potter's (1992) findings of white New Zealanders' dual understanding of Maori "culture-as-heritage" and "culture-as-therapy," according to which Maori culture is claimed to be a crucial element in solutions to Maori poverty and marginalization. In Canada, both discourses of culture perform the political work of keeping Aboriginal people, poor people, *and* white, middle class people in their respective places of marginalized to the dominant, and invisible-*because*-normative, center. Both discourses are generally well-known and accepted by Canadians. Both discourses produce the "Indian as cultural" (St. Denis,

2002). Both discourses connect specifically to “ways of living,” and both discourses appear repeatedly in Saskatchewan Learning documents. When culture is produced as both the problem, and the solution to the problem (see also St. Denis, 2002), white middle class ways of living remain normative, raceless, cultureless, and allegedly vulnerable—today, as they were 100 years ago.

*Culture as the problem: The discourse of “at risk” Aboriginality.*

St. Denis (2002) shows how educational thinking has psychologized and commodified culture since the mid 1960s. Culture is seen to consist of the attitudes, values, beliefs and practices of a group of people that can be taken up or not, largely as a matter of personal choice (Sleeter, 1993). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the characteristics of culture considered degenerate, therefore dangerous, included precisely those characteristics that were reasons for exclusion from the bourgeoisie. These include the *lack* of “good reason and ‘character’ ... class breeding ... [and] managed passions, self-discipline over unruly drives and the education of sentiment and desire as well” (Stoler, 1995, p. 130). It appears that precisely these characteristics continue to be produced as dangerous, to place Aboriginal and poor children “at risk,” and to justify the exclusion of some people from normative, white middle class “respectability” (Fellows and Razack, 1998; Schick, 2000) in contemporary Canada.

As St. Denis argues, the ways that many Aboriginal and poor people live are considered to be culturally informed choices rather than the effects of systemic racism and poverty (2002). For instance, St. Denis (2002) shows the repetition in government documents of the idea that “the system of values of some Indian communities tends to devalue formal education” (Hawthorne 1967 cited in St. Denis, 2002, p. 51). This idea persists in contemporary Saskatchewan Learning policies as evidenced in the acknowledgement in the Community Schools policy document, of “the *challenge* [emphasis added] of involving parents who have *traditionally* [emphasis added] not played an active role in the education of their children (Saskatchewan Learning, 1996, p. 8). Supporting the idea of the cultural devaluing of education is the metaphor of two worlds (St. Denis, 2002), in which a gap exists between Aboriginal and dominant society culture, which must be “bridged” in order for Aboriginal students to acquire the skills to be successful “in the white man’s world”. In the more recent Report of the Task Force and Public Dialogue on the Role of the School (Tymchak, 2001), the foundational document for educational reforms to School<sup>PLUS</sup> currently underway in Saskatchewan, 10 of the 14 “tectonic factors” described reflect disproportionately the life situations of Aboriginal and poor children. These include: demographic shift

(the increasing proportion of school-aged children of Aboriginal ancestry); poverty; “family changes” (especially single mother (and employed mother) homes; student mobility (high transience rate); high special needs rate; increasing ratio of “at risk” indicators; cross-cultural issues; curriculum reform; human services integration; “student attitudes and behaviours” including behavior “disorders” such as emotional disturbances and suicide (Tymchak, 2001, p. 6). An eleventh issue *not* included among the tectonic factors is the issue of “hidden youth”—those students not in school at all—a situation which demands “intervention on a more massive scale, and in a more determined manner” (Tymchak, 2001, p. 83). This issue also reflects Aboriginal youth disproportionately, and again, confirms the idea that education is devalued by Aboriginal people.

I take this as evidence that the discourse of racial degeneracy has been largely replaced by the discourse of “at risk” Aboriginal culture. I propose further that Aboriginal and poor children in the 20<sup>th</sup> and now 21<sup>st</sup> century, continue to be constructed as endangered, now by their cultures—or lack thereof—rather than their race, and as threats to the well-being of Canadian society as a whole. Indeed, these are precisely the children identified in the very title of Saskatchewan’s community school policy; they *are* the “at risk and Indian and Métis students” (Saskatchewan Education, 1996). The indicators of “social crisis” or “tectonic factors” presented in the *Role of the School Report* (Tymchak, 2001) are criminalized and pathologized, and they are the targets of educational change lest, as noted above, they lead to children taking up the pathological lifestyles of their parents. Hence, as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, aboriginal and poor children continue to be produced as the “internal enemy” (Stoler, 1995). The threat posed is no longer articulated as one of “racial dilution”. Rather it is recognized primarily as a socio-economic threat. The discourse of the injustice of the “hard-working Canadian taxpayer” having to support “free-loading Indians” is very popular (Canadian Taxpayers Federation, 2003). A similar discourse about welfare recipients in general is also common (Wardhaugh, 2003), as is the discourse that white Canadians are victimized by “the implementation of race-based privileges for Indians” (Pankiw, 2003). These discourses articulate with other discourses about irresponsible, incompetent and corrupt Indian Bands and Aboriginal businesses; with discourses about the unfairness of special hunting and fishing rights for Natives; with fear about the legal realities of the Treaty Land Entitlement in Saskatchewan; with fear and anger about various Land Claims processes across the country; with concern about the ongoing process of financial compensation for residential school survivors; and so forth. These various discourses all serve to construct Aboriginal people as a major economic threat to the Canadian body.

*Compensatory education and...more character education.*

As it was in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, education is again invoked as the way to consume the threat posed by “at risk” Aboriginal and poor children. Stoler notes that the 19<sup>th</sup> century “Dutch campaign for popular education was framed as a reform of an ‘orderless’ morally corrupt society ... [and that] reform rested on the instillment of ‘personal self-discipline’ as well as collective moral control” (Lenders, cited in Stoler, 1995, p. 119). More than a century later, the Task Force on the Role of the School recognizes its project as “more than accommodation and adjustment—we are in the throes of creating a new society!” (Tymchak, 2001, p. 39).

Many of the specific changes recommended by the Task Force are forms of compensatory education—education designed to “make up for” people’s weaknesses, for instance, in their ability to make “good choices” around issues ranging from career, to sexual activity and drug use. Moreover, in considering the question of the purpose of schools, the Task Force “was reminded” that:

the primary ‘good’ at which schools should aim is the *humanization* [italics added] of children and young people or of helping them *become persons ‘more fully.’* [italics added]

... [Moreover, the role of the school is] to empower individuals to make greater sense of the world and of who they are, a progressive ‘initiation’ into the achievements of human mind and spirit. ... These achievements ... include the natural sciences, the human or social sciences, mathematics, literature and fine arts, *moral understanding* [italics added], and religious or spiritual understanding. (Stewart, cited in Tymchak, 2001, p. 38)

Of course, this “canon” has been soundly critiqued by various scholars including feminist theorists, post-structuralists, post-colonialists, critical anthropologists, as androcentric and Eurocentric (Harding, 1996; Haraway, 1988; Rosaldo, 1989).

Unlike late 19<sup>th</sup> century thinking, the *Role of the School Report* no longer dismisses anyone as beyond the reach of a purposeful program of character formation. In concluding a discussion on “student attitudes and behaviours”, the Task Force stated its strong belief

that the needs of children and youth today have created for us as a society, and for our schools, *an imperative with respect to character formation that we ignore at our peril* [italics added]. We see the need to bring fresh vigor to the task of promoting character education in our schools. We see this as a positive task that involves nurturing and promoting values, ideals and wisdom, rather than merely facilitating discussion and clarifying values (Tymchak, 2001, p. 106).

The Task Force does “recognize that many oppressive values have also been perpetuated by such means, especially relating to race and gender”

(Tymchak, 2001, p. 104), however it remains unclear how character formation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will avoid these systemic barriers.

*Culture as the solution: The discourse of traditional Aboriginality.*

Since the National Indian Brotherhood's call for *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972), Aboriginal cultural revitalization has been a major concern in education, and has been seen as rectifying the deculturation perpetrated in Residential Schools. To a large extent, this inclusion is an important counter-balance to the exclusion imposed in history. As St. Denis (2002) attests, attendance at various Teacher Education Programs (TEPS) designed to educate Aboriginal teachers, can and does instill a sense of pride in heritage that is new for many First Nations and Métis students. In addition to the work of the TEPS, provincial policy and curriculum documents in Saskatchewan have been looking at increasing Aboriginal content and developing partnerships with Aboriginal parents since the 1980s. The *Role of the School Report* certainly continues in this direction.

I suggest that cultural revitalization is not as transparent as it may seem. In the context of Canadian multiculturalism, culture ceases to be an organic process, a way of living that is dynamic and flexible, and to which *all* people are subject. Rather, culture is regarded as the property of Others, while dominantly positioned people remain "Canadian Canadians" (Mackey, 1999, p.3), or "just normal". The multicultural focus on cultural diversity and its encouragement of people to retain their *traditional* cultures *commodifies* culture (St. Denis, 2002, p.5). Moreover, the discourse of multiculturalism *essentializes* Other cultures, usually in some primitive and romantic (St. Denis, 2002, p. 29) formulation. In Said's words, "this object [culture] is a 'fact' which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable" (1978, p. 32). Traditional culture is considered to be pre-contact culture—culture not influenced by assimilation to modern, Eurowestern culture. In Saskatchewan, traditional culture includes such historical artifacts as tipis and buffalo, as well as life models such as the medicine wheel, and social and spiritual practices such as Pow Wows and various ceremonies. Commodified and objectified, traditional culture thus becomes available for consumption—an object of knowledge to be taught and learned about in classrooms.

The front page of the Regina Leader-Post on February 5, 2003, featured a large picture of precisely this type of lesson. In it were several visibly white children, some with "war painted" faces, some with Hallowe'en costume feather bonnets and plastic bows and arrows, and others sitting on colourful, woven South American rugs in front of large construction paper tipis. The caption below identified them as a Regina grade 4 class "learning about

Plains Cree culture". This picture served as an invitation to all of Regina to participate in this consumption of "traditional" culture, and in so doing, perform themselves as tolerant, liberal, and essentially "good" people. It also confirmed the knowledge of who "real Indians" are—or were.

The discourse of traditional or authentic culture is also available to be taken up by First Nations people themselves, and in this context, arguably serves a "gate-keeping" function such that participation in traditional practices confers authenticity to group insiders, while undermining the perceived legitimacy of those Aboriginal people who don't participate. Sometimes, even success "in the white man's world" is enough proof of assimilation to result in the ascription of the label "apple": red on the outside, white on the inside. I suspect that even those people whose lives are marked by the poverty and social dysfunctions discussed earlier in this paper may be considered more truly "Indian" than those First Nations people with university degrees and mortgages on well-kept houses in nice suburbs.

## Conclusion

Many well-intentioned people work very hard to reform policies and procedures with the objective of helping people to break the cycles in which they're stuck. However, this work is fuelled not only by good intentions, but also by an acceptance that some groups of people are dysfunctional—that they are the source of their own problems. This is supplemented with the pastoral ethic that "we" need to help "them" because they are incapable of living well without our intervention. In this paper, I've explored the ways that contemporary discourses of culture do similar political work as historical discourses of race with the effect that some groups of people continue to occupy marginalized positions in society, while other groups continue to maintain their positions of dominance, normativity, and ultimately, goodness. As much as many of us are intent on redressing the social injustices of our colonial history, the liberal discourses we espouse have the effect not only of re/producing colonial and racist power relations and identities, but of working to mask this process. In the end, those who are complicit in this re/production through their well-meaning practices of cultural consumption still enjoy the comfort of the moral high ground.

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