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# Indians On Skid Row

by Hugh Brody

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## INDIANS ON SKID ROW

The role of alcohol and community in the adaptive process of Indian urban migrants.

by HUGH BRODY

This report is based on research carried out while the author was employed by the Northern Science Research Group of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. It is reproduced here as a contribution to our knowledge of the processes of social change affecting Canada's native peoples. The opinions expressed, however, are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Department.

Requests for copies of this report should be addressed to Chief, Northern Science Research Group, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa.

Northern Science Research Group  
Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development  
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## ABSTRACT

The life style of Indian migrants in a skid row community of a large urban centre is the basis of this study. The sources of income as well as the nature of drinking in the community are detailed. The Socio-economic position of the Indian migrants, it is argued, is that of lumpenproletarian: he is dislocated from both mainstream economic opportunities and traditional or pseudo-traditional Indian life. In the light of this socio-economic position it becomes possible to understand the attractions and advantages of a skid row milieu. Displaced as the Indian migrant is from any economic structure, white middle-class values can have no force: acceptance of such values, it is argued, would be irrational. Persistent drinking is intelligible in that light. By means of analysis of Indian-white skid row interaction, the recurrent violence of skid row can also be better understood. The principal finding of the study can be summarised: skid row resolves the most acute difficulties facing the Indian migrant — the very difficulties which mainstream or middle-class urban life tend most acutely to aggravate.

## FOREWORD

Indian people in Canada are moving in increasing numbers from rural points of origin to large urban centres. This study analyses social relations in one such urban terminus, and provides a basis for understanding the attractions of "Skid Row" for some migrants. It is being published in the hope that it will contribute to the kind of understanding necessary for real prevention and cure of the social malaise which it describes.

October 30, 1970.

A.J. Kerr,  
Chief,  
Northern Science Research Group.

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**INTRODUCTION**

**The Problem**

It was initially decided that this report should aim at giving some account of the role of alcohol in the adaptive process among Canadian Indian urban migrants. Alcohol on its own, however, does not provide a substantial sociological factor. The consumption of alcohol takes place within a community, and the most significant drinking community for the migrant Indian is the skid row of the booming city. The problem thus became enlarged to comprise questions about the community as such. Of course, in dealing with a skid row community one is automatically dealing with the role of alcohol. The two are inextricably bound up with one another. This report's emphasis on the community reflects the sociological perspective I have employed. It is concerned with unpacking the significance which the skid row has for the Indian, and the gratifications which life on skid row offers. Alcohol is prominent among those qualifications.

**Field-work and Methods**

The field-work for this report was carried out during the Summer and Autumn of 1969. Eighteen weeks were spent in the field, for the most part on the skid row of a Prairie city. Occasional trips were made to a reserve close to the city, and two extended trips were made to the north and northwest. The substance of the report, however, derived from prolonged stays on skid row.

The method employed in the field was participant observation. In so far as it was possible I lived the skid row life. The people with whom I shared this life considered that I was another drunken bum, passing through skid row on my way to some more lucrative field. On skid row people do not quiz one another about their sources of income. It is assumed that if someone is on skid row then he has no present source of regular income. Undue curiosity is in any case generally resented. This last factor rendered the investigations slow and nervous, but by participating fully it was possible to uncover a great deal of information. Most of that information is informal, and this report is not replete with tables of statistics of any kind. Further, as I entered deeper and deeper into the skid row life, I came to know many details of people's lives which were neither legal nor particularly wholesome. That this information should remain confidential was assumed by those who shared their lives with me. It was impossible to continue having dealings as a researcher with more official sources of data. I did not dare, for example, to ask the police for information of any kind. I did go to court hearings, but even this was very awkward. Some social workers were helpful to me, and I spent some time in a number of welfare institutions. But most of that work was in the early stages, and as my skid row involvement increased, so it became absolutely necessary to restrict all involvement outside skid row which might jeopardise my position within it.

Although that restriction did limit my sources of information, and I did have to renounce a number of possibly rewarding lines of enquiry, I am convinced that the informal contacts and the integration into skid row life yielded a richness of information and a chance for clear insight which could not be equalled by any other approach. If this report is incomplete, superficial, or simply fallacious, it is not the methods of enquiry which are at fault.

### The Indians Concerned

The city where the field work was carried out attracts Indians of many different bands. In order of numerical significance, they included:

- Cree
- Blackfoot
- Chipewyan
- Sarcee
- Hare
- Slave
- Iroquoian
- Kootenayan

There were also in the city numbers of Indians from the Northwest coast area, and some Eskimos.

Indians on skid row, however, are people who look Indian, are treated as Indians, and tend to think of themselves as Indians. There is no sure way of distinguishing between those who do and those who do not have full treaty status. It is probably the case that the large majority of those skid row Indians who speak an Indian language were educated on a reserve, and many of them will have received treaty benefits at some time in their lives; however, there are many cases where an Indian language was learned from an Indian mother who had married a non-Indian or lived off the reserve, and never were treaty Indians. Also, those who have for any length of time remained on skid row, or in urban life at all, will have ceased to be treaty Indians. In the course of the field-work it was not possible to establish what order of welfare different people were entitled to receive. In this report I follow skid row definition, encompassing all within the term Indian who are considered by skid row people to be Indian. As much as some of these Indians like to talk of their different ethnic origins, and insist that they are neither White nor Indian, for the purposes of this report skid row usage will suffice. Moreover, all skid row Indians are in need of the same benefits. In so far as this report may be connected with future administrative provision; therefore, any distinction between the various technical statuses of skid row Indians would be out of place.

In fact, this report is not concerned with explanations which turn on the cultural or traditional heritage of the Indian bands. Instead, it is the more general problems of marginality and socio-economic impoverishment which dominate the accounts given here. The arguments are thus not bound to any band or even culture area, but quite possibly apply to the vast majority of the Canadian Indians just as much as they apply to those who actually provided the information. Of course, it

must not be overlooked that the field work was located in the prairies, and the prairies are dominated by Indians of the Plains culture area – the culture which has been most profoundly affected by the European presence, and which was quite abruptly and totally disrupted more than seventy years ago. By comparison, the northern and northwestern tribes have been more effectively protected against the disruption of the European. But if the erosion of their societies has been protracted, it has been none the less sure. I should be surprised if the majority of the remarks made in the course of this report about the socio-economic plight of the skid row Indians specifically discussed are not broadly applicable to all Indians in a similar situation, whatever their band.

Moreover, in so far as this report emphasises the problems of migration and lies within the traditions of culture-contact and acculturation studies, it systematically avoids the more purely anthropological explanations. In comparison with the more standard work on the Indians of North America, or even with smaller scale monographs on specific problems which bands have experienced in the reserve period, this report is quite uncompromisingly sociological. It bears much closer relation, in fact, to a number of works dealing with marginality.<sup>1</sup> But even in relation to those studies, it will be seen that this report comes down in favour of the kind of perspective at present appearing in work on the sociology of economic development.<sup>2</sup> This report may, therefore, be vulnerable to the charge that it neglects the Indian of Canada in favour of discussion which implicates the extremely under-privileged; more specifically, the colonially exploited groups. This charge can be parried only by reference to the report itself, but it was my experience of the Indian on skid row which urged this perspective on me: a large number of Canada's Indians are extremely underprivileged, and do have a relationship to the mainstream of Canadian life which is neither that of the traditional Indian nor that of a simply marginal sub-culture. The perspective must be understood at least as an indication of my own belief that the Indians are coming to form a sub-culture at the periphery of urban life which is most fully and disturbingly to be seen on the skid row of the booming city. The dispossession and alienation of many Canadian Indians is extreme.

### The Scale of the Study

The skid row on which this report is based is not very large. It comprises about twenty blocks, includes ten bars, and houses no more than eighty Indian Families in rented homes. Its principal features are much the same as any other skid row – provision of cheap accommodation for the transient and old, small cafés, large numbers of second-hand shops and pawn-brokers, and four billiard saloons. Each winter there are between 700 and 1,000 homeless people on the streets – but that

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Devereux 1951, Lewis 1965 & 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Aron 1967, Frank 1969, Worsley 1967, Sutcliffe 1969.

includes a larger area than the twenty block skid row. It is said that in the city as a whole there are about 9,000 people of Indian descent. But not all of these *look* Indian or think of themselves as Indian – many of that 9,000 do not fulfill the skid row definition of 'Indian'. The total number of people in the skid row area on a Friday or Saturday night probably does not at present exceed 1,000 – at most only 9% of the total number of people in the city with Indian ancestry. But it is certainly a much higher percentage of the people who are Indian by skid row definition. Unfortunately the research behind this report does not establish what that figure is. But it is worth remarking that one *sees* very few Indians in the city outside skid row, and of those who do live outside skid row a considerable proportion have certainly spent some time in skid row society. I wish to emphasize from the outset that skid row almost certainly plays or has played a very significant part in the lives of the majority of the city's Indians.

It must still be made explicit that this report describes and discusses the way of life of a minority. The justifications for giving so much attention to so small a minority, however, are considerable. Firstly, the skid row community is in many ways dominated by the Indians. They have evolved many of its norms and are easy within its ways. It is a world the migrant Indians understand. In these respects skid row is a unique corner of urban Canada. It stands between the limitations and constraints of a rural reserve and the rejection and alienation of a white-dominated city life. Secondly, the skid row area is a constant attraction to the migrant Indian. Just because it has a higher density of Indians, it is likely that he will find friends there. Equally, if he has a job in a predominantly white and considerably prejudiced milieu, he can, whenever angry or frustrated, find consolation in the bars with fellow Indians. Thirdly, the Indians on skid row are always at pains to welcome newcomers, from their own or any other reserve, and that makes the skid row a natural terminal point for the urban migrant. And where skid row is the terminal point for the migrant, any attempts by Indian agencies – both provincial and federal – to draw Indians into the mainstream of Canadian life are likely to prove abortive. Fourthly, the numbers of Indians who are moving into the cities are increasing. The rural realities of the reserve, when compared with the idea of a new and exciting life in the city, seem increasingly inadequate. The numbers of children on the reserves continues to grow, and the problems of poor conditions and overcrowding grow also. Further, if the proposed revision in the Department of Indian Affairs is implemented, and the Indian lands are available to the free market, then it is very likely that many Indians will in fact sell their lands and come to the city with some capital. If the situation is as it is today, many of those Indians will make their ways to the skid rows, and will rapidly spend their capital there. The consequence of this will be a vastly increased skid row population with no larger monetary resources than in the past. The swollen Indian skid row populations will be in danger of developing into squalid urban ghettos. Subsequent developments on the reserves and in the administration of the Department of Indian Affairs will determine the proportions this sub-culture will assume in the future, and by the same token will affirm or deny the significance and value of this report. But it can be said without undue confidence that in the immediate and foreseeable future the scale of skid row is going to increase, and many more Indians will terminate their migrations there.

## Anonymity

Much of the information which is given in this report is of a personal nature. It is obviously imperative in this kind of work that the confidence of the informants be respected. No names are given, either of the people or the places where the events took place. Where anecdotes might be easily recognised, small alterations have been made to prevent detection of informants. The city in which the work was carried out is not named, and though that means some background data have not been included which would normally find a place in an introduction, its absence will not harm the main arguments of the report. Indeed, one advantage to this kind of anonymity lies in the appearance of generality: it is to be hoped that the report does not apply peculiarly to the skid row of one city, but that it offers an account which can be applied with a minimum of qualification to many other Canadian cities. That the actual city is just termed 'the city' tokens that hope.

## CHAPTER 1

### TO DRINK ON SKID ROW

The principal objective of this study was originally conceived as an account and exploration of drinking and drunkenness among urban migrant Indians. It was evident from the outset that field work for such a project would have to be centered on bars and street corners of a skid row. While the emphasis was committedly sociological, it was anticipated that the background to Indian drinking lay in the directions of stress and adjustment contingent upon migration. Thus to anticipate the form of the explanation, if only as an emphasis to the work, was to follow the general directions of former studies of heavy drinking; that is, to incline towards a perspective which places drinking in proximity with stress.<sup>1</sup>

In dealing with the skid row context, this view emphasises the loneliness and rootlessness of the milieu. Moreover, it enjoins a view of the drinker which identifies him more with the psychopathic or chronic alcoholic, isolated by the nature of his personality if not by the consequences of his addiction. Skid rows are associated by outsiders with stress and individual isolation. Theories of Indian drinking might be expected to concentrate on the isolation of the Indian within Canadian society, and the difficulties of making an adjustment to urban life. Heavy drinking placates stress, and skid row offers an environment within which such placation is conventionalised.

But to drink on skid row, like drinking almost everywhere else, is to drink within a community, and it is to drink with members of the community who offer a welcome and a way of life. This way of life provides more than recurrent inebriation, simple forgetfulness, or the palliating effects of alcoholic stupor. Drinking is basic to the community, but it is essential that emphasis be given to the community itself. The gratifications of skid row life are inevitably going to turn on that community form — it is the factor which both attracts and retains the migrant. One key question thus becomes: What has the community to offer? In answering this question it is important to isolate the discussion of gratification from the issues of stress, at least at a theoretical level. We must begin this report by turning away from any commitment to view the Indians's drinking as a direct function of misfortune or demoralisation, and towards the possibility that skid row is able to offer the Indian a more gratifying life than either the relative sobrieties and exclusiveness of middle-class White Canada, or the isolation, accompanied by the sense of weakness, of the native reserves.

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<sup>1</sup>Examples of studies which emphasise the stress in relation to drinking: Washburne 1961, Clairmont 1963, Heath 1962, Berreman 1964.



conversation. These friends keep the newcomer with them, will take him from one bar to another, and he will quickly come to meet a large number of others like himself.

This experience confirms the migrant's expectations of city life, and holds him in the bar for maintenance of the friendships he established at first. The solidarity which the bar offers protects the migrant from the isolation which cities otherwise tend to involve, but also renders non-bar life of the city relatively inaccessible and certainly frightening. At the integrated community bar the Indian can avoid the worst features of migration, and at the same time find ready acceptance in a vivacious community.

### **The Café and Street Corner**

Bars stay open twelve continuous hours each day, but some open earlier than others in the morning. By taking a first drink at the first bar to open, and a last drink at the last to close, an enthusiastic drinker could spend at least thirteen hours of every day, six days in the week, in the bars. In fact, even the heaviest drinkers spread their time between bars and other places. There are a number of reasons for this. First, bars only sell beer; second, those who seek interaction with minors must do so outside the bar; third, both sleep and unconsciousness are causes for ejection from bars, and many heavy drinkers like to lie down and sleep where they drink; fourth, the street is an important place for contacts, and when a drinker is running short of money, there are always encounters on street corners which can lead to the purchase of a bottle of wine.

It is around wine drinking that such extra bar contact tends to be built. Many drinkers converge on the liquor store, making their way from the bars to the store hoping to meet others who will either subsidise a bottle of wine or will choose to join them in a larger purchase. In this way small groups form, and these groups must find a place where they can drink in secrecy — it is illegal to consume liquor on the street or in any unlicensed public place, and the bars themselves do not allow the consumption of any beverage on their premises which has not been bought there. In empty ruined houses, along quiet alleyways, or in the back garden of a friend's house, these groups gather. They are very tight circles, their intimacy enjoined by the covert nature of the activity as well as by the need to be within reach of the circulating bottle. Moreover, they are quite silent groups, amicable and unaggressive in a feeling of solidarity but without much talk or activity. The sense of unity which such drinking fosters must be stressed: it was evident in *every* such group I encountered. Also, it is in these groups that the Indians can sometimes be heard singing their native songs; the formation of real friendships is much more a quality of the secret wine circle than the bar. This means that the circle provides an excellent location for the planning of crimes, for it secures both the bonds between the participants which a combined crime requires, as well as privacy in which to make plans.

Often a member of such a circle passes out, and others will continue drinking while he recovers consciousness. In these concealed places there is no anxiety about passing out, and no fear of either legal intervention or reproach by friends. Indeed, it

is in this form that city drinking approximates most closely to the sprees documented in much of the literature dealing with drinking on the reserves.

The cafés are usually frequented by drinkers who are completely impecunious or suffering from dire after-effects; the two conditions tend to accompany one another. As in the case of the bars, these drinkers are continually moving from one café to another, lingering on the street corners between. Many of the cafés have a Juke-Box and it is not at all unusual for a few people to gather around it, discussing each tune with keen animation, and occasionally dancing if the proprietor allows.

In these cafés and also on the street corners, the same conditions and atmosphere pertain as were noted in the bars: talkativeness, mobility, integration between people and between atmospheres of street and café. Indeed, given the degree of drunkenness attained by almost all during the previous hours and days, this vitality is as impressive as it is apparent.

Even when the bars are open, therefore, drinking and communality both take place outside them. But it is when the bars are closed that the café, street-corner, and other locations become especially important, if somewhat less conspicuous. At closing time in the bars many drinkers make their way to the liquor store to buy a supply for the night, or to a coffee bar to talk — in the hope of finding access to another drink. In both places — liquor store and café — new groups are formed. It is these new groups which tend to include the minors and the girls. Many of the groups turn into parties, in hotel rooms, rented rooms, or local homes. In any event the activity of skid row is not terminated by the closing of the liquor outlets. At night the people from the bars can join with the minors as well as with others who are relatively peripheral to the skid row world itself: wives at home; acquaintances with convenient rooms (if different life-styles); whites who have come to the more notorious coffee bars out of curiosity or with hopes of finding a prostitute.

These parties take place every night, though it is at the week-ends when they are most numerous and frenetic. They are complementary to the bar drinking, less public but just as integral to the community life. They are also characterised by much excited and extroverted behaviour: at the parties sexual liaisons have a more explicit part; there are few, if any, restrictions of the kind imposed by bartenders preoccupied by the maintenance of customary proprietaries and a minimum of order.

On Sundays, when the bars are closed, stock-piling ensures some continuation of parties and drinking, but for the most part the more regular skid row people are obliged to use the bootlegger. The bootlegging involves much visiting around the neighbourhood, and in many homes a group of drinkers sit around a kitchen table with a bottle of wine. It must be noted that these Sunday walks and visits are enjoyed for their own sake, and are not merely hysterically alcohol-dependent guests despairing for a drink. Seeking out a drink is the form social contacts assume, and these are enjoyed even when the guest is unsuccessful.

This is further evidenced by the role of the cafés on Sundays. Several of them stay open, and are frequented by many people who wish to sit and talk and sober up. The community does not expire with the closure of the bars. Equally it must be

emphasized that there are activities in the skid row district which have no direct relation to the consumption of alcohol. There are numerous billiard saloons, cinemas, a dance-hall and shops, all of which are much patronized. It is therefore quite false to suppose that activity on skid row is confined to the chronically isolated and depressed.

### Alcohol and Community

To drink on skid row is to do more than drink. This kind of drinking, stretching as it does over a long period, entails residence in the neighbourhood, with the attendant need for a place to stay, for food, and for ready cash. The needs of these drinkers are not the minimal needs of the clinical alcoholic: conversation and the pursuit of sexual conquest are elements in this as in other forms of life. The gratifications of the life here extend beyond the pleasures or palliations of drunkennes. To understand the Indian skid row drinker, it is essential to understand both the fullness and limitations of the community. There are accordingly two contextual aspects: the drinker in skid row, and skid row in terms of the norms and institutions of middle class white Canadian life. These contexts must be related in any attempt to discover what is happening; neither the individual drinker nor the skid row community as a whole exist *in vacuo*, aspire as they may to do so.

It has frequently been pointed out that the hardened alcoholic is unable to function without his daily consumption of alcoholic beverage. This leads the alcoholic into whatever drinking mode he can secure, be it in the thick of a vibrant community or in the solitude of his own room. It is not the purpose of this report to deny that there are among skid row Indians such chronic cases of alcoholism. But the insistence upon community in this chapter is intended to reflect a vitality which could not exist if isolated drinking were widespread. It is fair to say that the absence of community would precipitate an end to the drinking. Indeed, such a hypothesis is barely conceivable, since the community and the drinking are indissolubly linked. For a majority of the drinkers, to drink is to be part of the community, and to be part of the community is to drink. Chronic alcoholism has a minimal place.

The literature dealing with the use of alcohol among the North American Indians has so preponderantly concerned the situation of the reserve as to render a discussion of that literature in danger of irrelevance. It is central to this report that the predicament of the skid row Indian is distinctive; its relationship to the reserve is obviously important, but the urban milieu presents a new context, and the skid row involves a distinctive form of life as well as a unique relationship to Canadian society as a whole. It can be noted, however, that the social dimension to drinking, and the correlative absence of the individual alcoholic has been remarked upon in a number of studies of reserve drinking. Lemert, for example, writes: "The most careful inquiries failed to uncover a single instance of an Indian who drank in solitude".<sup>1</sup>

But Lemert also remarks that "In our culture, persons who get drunk usually can be presumed to have painful conflicts or tensions which they are seeking to

<sup>1</sup> Lemert 1954 p 310.

escape or narcotise; but this cannot be presumed for peoples who customarily get drunk".<sup>1</sup> Thus the reserve drinking is both community oriented and frequent. But in the reserve this observation naturally leads the sociologist into a comparison between the past or aboriginal social structures and those of today, in the belief that such comparison will bring to light the crucial change for which the persistent use of alcohol is functional. Thus, for example, one sociologist writes: "As for function it is evident that in Mescalero, drinking serves as a substitute for the various forms of institutionalised activity and group relationships that have been lost to the Apache during a hundred years of deculturation".<sup>2</sup> Similar considerations lead Edward Dozier to say: "I believe that group or gang-type drinking among Indians represents a greater problem in terms of crime rate and community disorganization than addicted drinking".<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the view of Indian drinking which has dominated the literature suggests that drinking is intelligible by use of a model which sets present disarray, the disruption of established social institutions and practices, against former social coherence. In this interpretation, the commenators have the large body of general and theoretical literature on the whole study of alcohol to support them. But the disintegration of the tribal society is long-standing, and the contrast of alcohol use among contemporary Indians with the highly integrated aboriginal life tends to be a comparison that disregards two generations of social change, within both the native bands and Canadian society.

To point to the distance between the two elements in the prevalent comparison is not to deny the disintegration of the Indian societies. But it has been suggested already in this chapter that the primary relationship for the skid row Indian, and probably for the Indian of the contemporary reserve as well, is with the urban milieu. Hence the contrast ceases to be between tribal past and present, and instead revolves upon a contrast between the integration of the white middle-class and the non-integration of the Indian into the urban milieu. In this case the emphasis remains upon the communal role of drinking, but interpretations do not concentrate upon the replacement of the solidarity associated with tribal institutions.

Indeed, the solidarity of the skid row way of life has been described so as to indicate its highly communal qualities. And the skid row does have its institutions as well as its norms. What this report must be directed towards is the perception of the relationship between the structures of skid row life and those of the large centre within which it is a small and distinctive sub-culture. That is to say, the function of alcohol cannot be asserted by reference simply to the Indian tribal past, or its demise. Further, the function of alcohol is not a single thing, and probably is not amenable to the kind of theoretical isolation that conventional functionalist approaches pre-suppose. Instead, we must deal with the community which it has

<sup>1</sup> *ibid* p 317.

<sup>2</sup> Curley 1967 p 121-2.

<sup>3</sup> Dozier 1966 p 72-3.

been the purpose of this chapter to introduce. In such a situation, alcoholic drinks do more than vitalise a quiescent society: it is transparent that they do not mark moments of indulgence or solidarity within an overall life of isolated withdrawal; they do not simply serve to ease problematic social relationships, either among Indians or between Indians and Whites; they do not provide an outlet for an otherwise restrictive sexuality; they neither temper nor permit aggression in a community where inter-personal relations are fraught with constraint and inhibition. All those features of alcohol may be well-known qualities of its use in the rural or native community. Since this report is specifically concerned with a community which is neither rural nor, within the ordinary use of the term, native, it is *prima facie* unlikely that such features will contain the heart of the issue.

## CHAPTER 2

### TO EARN MONEY ON SKID ROW

#### The Sources of Money

Drinking on skid row was the starting point of the field work: my own entry into bar life was the entry into the community, and so a sense of this community began with the field-work. But the community life is, in general, less accessible to an outsider or a casual visitor than the drinking; drinking permits a first glimpse, but it is very much more difficult to become closer to those elements of community life separated from alcohol. In the last chapter I sought to establish that such a community life does exist, and that it is both important and gratifying to participants. But in that chapter the situations described centred on drinking. In this chapter I shall describe features of the community which are not so directly drink centred.

For the most part, these features are to do with earning money, and since the earning of money frequently involves criminality, their accessibility to the non-Indian stranger is especially problematic. After several weeks, however, I was actually encouraged to join in some of the more carefully hidden parts of the Indian's daily life.

It is important to note that once the suspicion of the non-Indian outsider has ceased, he is rapidly drawn into the extra-legal parts of daily life. This rapid inclusion reflects the nature of the criminality itself. The group, as a whole, are very aware of their position outside the law. This very factor ensures a strictly defined social position, and also secures between all participants a moderately high degree of communal feeling. Equally, this communal feeling has as its corollary a mutual trust: in the skid row world there is either surity of trust or keen mistrust. All who are actively involved in the life are seen to be outside the law, and constitute a collectivity; those who do not join in the illegalities are not of the same social group. Those who retain their commitment to another social group retain in effect their commitment to legality; the opposition between the outsider and the insider is therefore the position between legality and illegality. It is important, therefore, to draw the 'legality' outsider into the group — it is important to secure his commitment to illegality.

Of course there is among the Indians a solidarity which transcends the joint participation in illegal activities. But it is generally assumed by the regular drinkers on skid row that any Indian will be quite happy to participate in petty crime, and this expectation is on the whole just: most of the Indians who come to skid row are preoccupied with participation in its mores, are in search of its benefits and gratifications. And if an Indian refuses to participate, or actually attempts to



interfere in the doings of others, his position becomes extremely awkward: he immediately encounters intense hostility, and is rejected for his non-participation. Participation is more important, ultimately, than Indianness.

The benefits and gratifications of skid row life obviously include a full participation in an active community — the making of more and different kinds of social relationships — and the sharing of the daily life in and around bars, coffee shops, and street corners. For migrant and resident alike this participation is as costly as it is necessary. Sources of money are thus of great importance.

But on skid row the very gratifications, the style of life which is sought there, are at odds with customary regular sources of money. It is extremely rare, and would require an extraordinary constitution, to both live a full skid row life and hold a regular job. Thus there are four possible sources of money: savings, welfare, begging, and theft. All four play a very important part in the lives of the skid row populace. Since few residents find that any one secures sufficient money, most people must tap different resources. Only a few prostitutes confine their earnings to routine prostitution, and they are almost exclusively non-Indian.

Before looking at each of the sources of income in turn, the matter of prostitution should be considered. Evidently prostitution offers an alternative source of money, and one which lies outside the four I have just listed. In fact, the most commercialised prostitution takes place outside skid row — in uptown bars. The reasons for this are quite straightforward: it is the uptown bars that wealthier people drink, and only the wealthy can offer the rates which the real professionals expect. These more wealthy people are afraid of coming onto skid row, partially because they actually expect to be beaten up and robbed as soon as they set foot in the first bar or café, and partially because they consider that their reputations could not stand being discovered lurking in that quarter.<sup>1</sup> So the girls prostituting on skid row are of a quite different kind. Indeed, they are best termed hustlers — their activities come much closer to the bumming of many others who are in no way prostitutes — and they are in any case looking for more than money. In general, skid row non-White prostitutes are very few, and they do not seem to stay very long as professionals. Instead, they use prostitution as an occasional or emergency source of money. Examples of Indian girls' hustling will bring this point out more clearly:—

1. Mary and Nora were sitting in a bar, both quite drunk, but not incoherent, when a White stranger came up to them and asked if he could join them. They welcomed him, and suggested that he buy them a few drinks. This he did, but soon asked if they would come along with him to buy some liquor. They insisted that I accompany them, and we all set off in the stranger's car. At the liquor store the girls told him to buy two bottles of whiskey and two bottles of rum. He did. Then one of the girls said she wanted to go home and collect her warm clothes, and asked the man to drive her there. He did, and all the way the girls insulted and abused him mercilessly. He seemed to accept this as part of the

<sup>1</sup>Fear of coming onto skid row at all is extremely strong. One middle-class girl working in a skid row department store was forbidden by her father to walk the three blocks from the store to the bus-stop after work.

business. At the girl's home he asked if we could come with the girls inside, but was refused. They went to get their things, and when they came back he suggested that we all go to a Motel for the night — he offered to pay everything. The girls said that we would all go along later, but first they wanted to go to a dance. He didn't want to go to a dance, but the girls said he must. On the way to the dance-hall the girls told the man to stop his car and go and get some ginger-ale to mix with the whiskey. He reluctantly agreed. But as soon as he was out of the car the girls suggested that we 'roll' him — beat him up and take his money. It was finally decided that we shouldn't do this, but as soon as he returned with the soft drinks the girls demanded that they be given something to eat. The man bought us all food. Then we went to the dance, but before going in one of the girls stayed in the car with the man for a few minutes and succeeded in persuading him to give her a few dollars 'in advance'. Once in the dance-hall the man began to protest that the best thing to do was to go a Motel for the night. But the girls quickly lost him in the crowd, and he eventually left in despair of ever consummating the deals. Mary and Nora had hidden three of the bottles away.

2. Alice always went around with Bob. Bob is half Blackfoot and half French. He is one of the toughest petty criminals of the area, and most people are afraid of him. Alice is Cree, and is one of the best looking girls. When Bob is short of money (which is usual) Alice hustles for him. But most of her hustling consists in getting money under false pretences, by indicating to some stranger that she is very willing to spend the night with him, getting some money in advance, and then eluding him. She also picks pockets of her clients whilst they kiss her in the street. If, however, she is quite interested in one of them, she does spend an hour or two in a hotel room. Financially, Alice is always faithful to Bob and their relationship seemed very affective — if one disappeared there would be a great deal of distress lest he or she were in jail again. One night Bob was arrested for beating someone up in the street, and Alice was extremely unhappy because it seemed likely that other charges were going to be laid, and that the sentence could be quite a long one. Alice wanted to get Bob out on bail. She prostituted that night to get the bail money. In raising the money, however, she needed another man who would help and protect her. One of Alice's best friends offered his services, and they worked together. In fact, Bob was not granted bail, and was given a seven month sentence. Alice is waiting for Bob, but as she waits she is working with Bob's friend — and living with him. Obviously, she has a sexual relationship with the friend, and sleeps with strangers quite regularly. But the majority of Alice's clients never sleep with her, and give their money in response to pleas, demands, or deception.
3. Connie is a Chipewyan girl from the Great Slave Lake area. She is trained as a hairdresser, and travelled to the city because she became pregnant and could not face her family. She has a sister in the city who is an alcoholic, and a father who is also an alcoholic. They both expect her to give them money whenever she can. She is extremely shy, and conspicuously unable to defend herself against either physical attack or the constant banter that the girls exchange. She is unusually frank and open, and certainly unable to scheme or trick clients. In fact, she is an

unsuccessful hustler, and being both timid and conspicuously pregnant does not find many clients. With those she does find, her relationship is orthodox — she does not use her boyfriend for 'rolling', and does not try to get money by false pretenses. But so few are her clients (she is in fact too frightened to work out of the toughest coffee-shop, and hence loses the most notorious and lucrative spot), that she must depend upon her friends for support. She secures such friends by being a hustler, by participating in their routines (which are extremely regular), and by having the friendship of the one pimp. In this way her friends give her money and food and friendship. And as her financial needs are not great — she neither drinks nor uses drugs — Connie's demands on others are very small. She is certainly without the characteristics of the professional prostitute.

These illustrations serve to show how the hustling on skid row among Indian migrants is very different from the more professional styles of prostitution found in the uptown bars. They also show that hustling is not necessarily an exchange of sexual relations for cash, but comprises instead — the attempt at securing cash without the sexual relations, whenever that is possible. Money is thus taken under false pretences, by sheer begging, or by some form of theft. Pickpocketing and 'rolling' represent the illegal poles of the hustling; requests for gifts are obviously quite legal. Also, this hustling does not involve the girl in social relations which are removed from the lives of others on skid row. The girls enter into effective relationships with impecunious men, and in fact hustle with the help of such relationships. These girls are not social isolates, and their manner of earning money, in fact, reduces to the customary forms. All that applies to those forms of securing money, therefore, applies equally to the majority of the hustlers.

#### Savings and Welfare

Savings and welfare payments are the two forms of money which are completely orthodox. Though they appear to be different forms of money, in skid row they are assimilated to one.

Many skid row men spend several months at continuous work in the North of Canada — on the oil rigs or in the mines. This work is extremely highly paid, and is located in regions where spending is at a minimum. On leaving their jobs, therefore, these men can take away extremely large sums — often well over \$1,000. Those migrant workers who spend their time between work and skid row thus arrive with substantial savings — the proverbial "roll". For the most part these migrants who enter the skid row with large savings are white, or Metis who have made identification with whites in employment as well as in skid row activities and relationships.

Welfare payments are monthly, and come from a variety of sources. Those Indians who are on band lists still, and who have therefore not been in the city for long, receive the federal payments. Others receive payments according to provincial and city schemes. Whatever their source, these monthly payments come regularly as a sudden and comparatively large amount. Out of these cheques the recipients must provide food for their families, and discharge whatever other obligations they may have. But for the skid row population such obligations are few or neglected. Even

the attempts made by agencies to overcome this neglect of family, consisting primarily in making cheques exchangeable in part only for groceries, fail to prevent the spending of the money on alcohol — the determined drinker can as easily exchange groceries for liquor as he can dollar bills. Indeed, the exchange of groceries for drink involves relatively less spending power, since the rate of exchange goes against the consumer; it may be the case that the system of groceries cheques actually works against its objectives; makes the financial difficulties of recipients under the system even more severe and so *reduces* the proportion of money not spent on alcohol. In any case, the monthly payment provides the recipient with a small roll.

Both the savings which come from a spell of work in the North and the welfare cheques, therefore, provide people on skid row with rolls which can, if so desired, be spent extremely quickly. Such rapid spending facilitates the spree drinking which most authors on Indian drinking have associated with reserve modes. In fact, spree drinking is very common on skid row — among migrants and regulars alike. The large savings roll may take some weeks to spend, where the welfare cheque is gone within one or two days, but the nature of their use is very much the same. The savings roll is more often associated with Whites, and the welfare spending with Indians, but the insistence with which they are spent brings the two close together.

It is extremely important to understand what is involved in spree drinking of this kind. It is a fundamental part of skid row life, and probably more money is turned over in these sprees than in any other way.

Sociologists have often noted that conspicuous consumption serves to affirm the success of the spender: he who can spend without caution has done well. Also, the spending on less than immediately useful objects or on the indulgence of far from basic needs suggests riches, and accordingly yields status to the spender. Where the spending is on alcohol, however, the situation is not quite the same. It is certainly the case that alcohol is neither useful nor a basic need, but on skid row almost all active spending is on alcohol, and within the mores and attitudes of the sub-culture it must be insisted that alcohol is invested with most of the qualities of a basic need. In this case, therefore, the fact that spending is on alcohol signifies more about the needs of the community than about the sociological quality of the spending. We are not able to judge that spending as *prima facie* irrational.

But spree spending serves many ends. The initiator of a spree is the object of admiration, respect, and friendliness. Of course, much of the behaviour towards him is also cynical and crudely exploitative. But the spending itself is a statement about the community, and about the kinds of values which it embodies: such conspicuous disregard for the dominant mores of Canadian society solidifies the community. Participation in a spree is thus reassuring as well as exciting; it brings participants together as members of a very distinctive sub-culture. It also could be the case that the spree unites the Indians as Indians, and though such a feature is not easily demonstrated, there is considerable evidence that the Indian has come to regard

himself as 'a drunken bum', and the spree embodies the ways of the drunken bum more precisely than any other.<sup>1</sup>

The more precise features of the spree, however, are probably the more important, and have a more definite place in the present chapter. In spending the roll conspicuously and generously, the spender is both building up credit and repaying debts. The repayment of debts also ensures that credit will be forthcoming in the future. This credit is central to skid row life since it is a life which precludes the possibility of customary sources of income: everyone anticipates being completely without money, while many are always impecunious. This means that it is possible to remain there only so long as at least occasional cash can be solicited from others. Of course, it is possible to depend for such cash upon begging from strangers or from crime, but most of the skid row population certainly need to feel that they can call upon others if occasion should arise. Recurrently in conversation with skid row people one hears the boast of claims on others. And such claims are built up through gifts. Gifts are made most conspicuously and most importantly through the spree.

During the spree, then, the man who is fortunate enough to have a roll of money to spend does so with an eye to the future. In objection to this interpretation of urban spree-drinking it could be argued that the spree is *par excellence* the occasion when everyone joins together regardless of prior relationship to the giver. Indeed, in the descriptions already noted of reserve spree drinking that is true: everyone participates by virtue of his membership in the community — the drinkers are tied to one another in virtue of a factor which transcends any particular relationship to the host. In such a situation the giving cannot establish anything other than a general claim upon anyone's generosity, or at least a general stake in the community as such. In order to establish that the host was seeking to establish claims or even repay debts, this argument runs, it must also be shown that in the giving there is an element of discrimination: the giver must be seen to be selecting the recipients by virtue of some factor other than geographical or social proximity.

Now it is precisely such an awareness that does characterise the manner of giving during the skid row spree. The man with a roll does not allow just anyone to come and join him at his table, and whereas he might from time to time buy everyone in the bar a drink at one enormous round, his sustained drinking takes place within a circle of friends and acquaintances whom he is evidently vetting. Moreover, the recipients who are favoured themselves ensure that the vetting process continues where the giver might be inclining towards what they consider an undue excess of careless generosity. Hence in the context I am here describing it is not true to say that the spree is shared by all by virtue of membership within the community; other considerations are brought firmly into play. That these considerations pertain to the establishment of credit and the repayment of debt is made explicit within the situation: the giver and his closer friends alike say why someone is not going to join

<sup>1</sup> See Lurie 1969, for a hypothesis of this kind. She argues that Indians drink to demonstrate that they have not abandoned their identity as Indians. She begins with the assumption that Indians are determined to regain their Indianness.

them, just as they invite someone else into the circle. In most cases the explanation is frankly material.

The spending of savings and welfare in this way means that the money is quickly used up. But it also means that some substantial part of it is put into circulation, for much of it is given away and a good deal is stolen. The mores of skid row ensure a certain multiplier effect: money is brought into use, shared around, and quickly spent. This means that even the best endowed are soon back to begging and stealing. It should be remarked that on some occasions as much as \$1,000 is spent in two days; one round of drinks can cost \$50; a man sometimes leaves \$30 or \$40 lying on the table for his friends when he goes to another bar. Whether the most outstanding cases of generosity are truly pure drunken muddle is not relevant — the forms which drunken muddle in fact takes are not without their significance. It is possible to imagine another milieu in which a muddle would take the form of manic suspicions that everyone was trying to rob. In any case, the form of the spree is central to skid row life, and its functions are understood by all involved.

### Begging and Theft

On first contact with the skid row world, the stranger finds that he is constantly approached by men in need of a quarter or more. But as the stranger becomes integrated into skid row life, so he finds that he is not approached so often, and may even be given a quarter himself if he looks in need. In fact integration of that kind presupposes that the stranger has shown he is unable to fulfill all the bums' hopes, and so he comes to be regarded as someone who either is in the same predicament as most, or has at least understood what the games of the sub-culture involve.

My own entry into skid row life offers some insight into the world of begging.

Having been warned that as a stranger it was important not to be seen as just another source of easy cash, I determined to resist recurrent bumming. In order to achieve this I made a point of spotting the man who was going to bum before he managed to spot me, and as he approached I said as fast as possible: "Can you spare a quarter for a drink?" At first this provoked considerable surprise, but it also resulted in offers of a quarter, and the chance of being asked to go and share a bottle of wine. It also meant that when I was in the bars the people with whom I had bummed and counterbummed on the street corners often came and sat with me. In order to preserve the goodwill of these men, it was necessary to strike a balance between giving and bumming. As soon as I gave too much, the recipient refused to offer either friendliness or drinks (the two running inevitably into one another); as soon as I received too much I became the object of a good deal of animosity.

As an outsider it was, of course, particularly difficult to find the balance. But it is my view that everyone in the community has to find and maintain the balance, no matter how much of a stranger or regular he might be. Bumming, therefore, is far more than a last ditch way of securing money; it is

a standard part of interaction, and pervades most people's social predicament. To the well-established and confident regular it is very much a game, very much enjoyed and always including the possibility of gain. Those who have become noted for constant bumming are despised and avoided, and find it extremely difficult to make a drink out of other skid row people. These unfortunate men dare not go into the bars without some money, for they cannot find a drinking partner at all. It frequently happened that such inveterate bums would come and join me, as a stranger, in the bars, and then be told by whoever else was with me or subsequently joined me: "Fuck off, we don't want old bums like you around."

This means that while bumming is accepted as a means of getting money, the unsuccessful skid row person is the one who falls back exclusively on bumming. There are exceptions to this pattern, but they all involve a special circumstance. One man I knew very well lived entirely by bumming, but he also played the fiddle and harmonica. He would go into the men's room and play a few tunes, get a few people dancing, then ask for a bit of money. Where the barmen were indulgent, he played in the bar itself, and then asked for a drink or two from the enthusiastic audience. He was never the object of resentment, and always had plenty to drink.

The protection against the position of inveterate bum derives from the roll already described, and which comes from savings or welfare. But welfare is received by most people, and secures neither sufficient spending levels throughout the month nor an adequate store of credit through the spree. Many older men, who received pensions, were much despised as bums because they could not do better than their welfare. Equally, the spending of a big roll will only last so long — and the credit eventually expires. It is at this point that petty theft and other forms of criminal earning become important.

Almost all the Indian crime is associated with the use of alcohol. That is to say, the majority of criminals are drunk when they commit the crime. It remains to a later chapter to discuss crimes of pure violence in relation to drink, but here the role of theft must be considered.

Most theft involves two persons. The case of the hustler who lures a client to a hotel room where he is 'rolled' by the hustler's men friends has already been suggested. It is in fact a recurrent way of making money, and is probably the most lucrative form of crime for the Indian (in general, it is the Whites who are involved in larger scale crime). For the most part theft is much less organized than that, and involves 'jumping' someone in the street, and forcing him to hand over whatever money he has on him. Much of this 'jumping' is not planned at all, but arises as the opportunities are noticed. One illustration should suffice to give a fairly clear impression of what this kind of theft involves.

Four of us were making our way from one bar to another, and we took a short-cut between some houses. An elderly man was also passing along the alley-way. As we caught up with him, two of the men I was with noticed that

he had a bag of nuts in his hand. They began to tease him about the nuts, and said that he should give us all a few. The old man was very frightened, and began handing the nuts out. Suddenly the two others grabbed him by the jacket and asked him if he had any money on him. It was fairly obvious that he would have at most a dollar or two, and he insisted that he only had a bit of small change. He handed over the small change. But the attackers insisted in their turn that he had much more than that on him, and began to threaten him with reprisals if he didn't give it up. In fact the two attackers were quickly persuaded that it would be better if they abandoned their hopes of finding a large haul, and they let the man go. It was obvious that the attack was very exciting to the attackers — and they enjoyed the old man's frightened protestations as much as the few cents they gained.

More common than this kind of attack on persons is theft of cars and property. Every night in the bars it is possible to buy stolen goods — radios in particular. These are taken from shops, houses, and out of parked cars. On one occasion a vanload of musical equipment was stolen in daylight and sold off the next night; on another occasion a police car, parked for a few minutes outside a bar while the police rushed in to stop a fight, was stolen, driven around the block, and its two-way radio set removed. The set was pawned the next day.

All these quite small crimes yield equivalently small amounts of money. But they also procure for the thief a name for bravado which earns him respect and friends. This status is obviously a functional alternative to the storing of credit, and since it necessarily accompanies money gains, combines with the credit to secure a position in the community. In fact, violence without the money interest achieves much the same result, for where the violence is directed towards a known person its import can be easily recognized. The money element in petty theft is possibly less important than the sheer bravado/status element.<sup>1</sup>

### Money from Employment

It is not possible to isolate any of the forms of money-earning as the most important. It suffices in this context to indicate how the four sources of income are integral elements in the community life. Each involves an entire system of social mores and attitudes which can only barely be touched on here. Money is drawn into the community by savings at work and by welfare, supplemented by theft from outsiders; it is circulated within the community by the conventions of spree-drinking, begging, and theft from insiders. It remains to this chapter to discuss briefly the Indians' attitude to work. No discussion of the earning of money can be complete without indicating why the most normal source of money is ignored.

<sup>1</sup>See chapter 4 for discussion of assertiveness as a source of status.



The Indians on skid row rarely take regular employment within the city. Skid row life involves them full-time; to take employment they either leave skid row or move away from the city altogether. In fact, the Indians feel they cannot find work. This belief derives partially from their awareness of anti-Indian feeling outside skid row and partially from the gratifications which skid row has to offer. If we remember that the majority of the skid row population come from rural districts, and that they come to the city in the hope of finding something more exciting and involving than reserve life, then it becomes easier to understand why skid row should constitute for so many a termination point.

The city is not looked to by these people as a source of employment. They know perfectly well that it is quite possible to continue living on skid row without a job almost indefinitely. Moreover, the urban milieu is emphatically regarded as one which affords distinctly extra-employment opportunities — camaraderie, sprees, sexual encounters. If there is frustration on skid row it is where *those* expectations have not been realised, and not where employment has not been found. Hawthorn and others have pointed out that the Indians are in any case not at all sympathetic to forms of work involved in urban industrial employment, and there is no need to rehearse all the reasons he has given.<sup>1</sup> It can be noted quite simply and briefly that passage from skid row life to urban industrial employment is neither particularly desired nor very easy: subjective pressures on the migrant, keeping him in skid row, are very strong — and also render government and provincial schemes for training, up-grading, etc., unlikely to prove very successful; objectively, the industrial employers do not welcome Indians.

Once on skid row, therefore, the migrant is easily able to make a good adjustment to that corner of urban life. It is not a corner which facilitates access to any other, perhaps more mainstream, way of life. The despondent Indian on skid row is far more likely to make a retreat onto the reserve than into the industrial sector. Money can be earned on skid row by a full understanding of skid row ways — and it is those ways which the migrant is usually best equipped to grasp.

<sup>1</sup> See Hawthorn 1967 vol. 2 p 19-63. Also Nagler, 1970.

### CHAPTER 3

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF THE SKID ROW INDIAN

Comparison between bars in and bars out of skid row, like the earning of money, offers a specific example of a general and fundamental opposition between the skid row community and the urban context as a whole. This opposition is basic to skid row life, and therefore to the appeal which that life has for the migrant. Furthermore, it offers the possibility of a theoretical perspective to the whole of this report.

Return again to the composition of the skid row population. The Indians are either unemployed city dwellers who have succeeded in making a full and long-term adjustment to a skid row milieu, or they are short-term migrants off the reserve for a taste of the city. It is normal to live fully on skid row without wages, and thus it is possible to be in the city without employment. That is to say, skid row life offers to the Indian the possibility of an urban milieu without the pressures of a middle class value system. This is further emphasized by the illegality of the money earning, and the more or less complete indifference to the strictures of puritanism in the larger society. In each feature thus far described, the Indian's skid row life is manifestly opposed to the ethics and mores which dominate Canadian society as a whole.

Within Canada the Indians do own some land. Some of this land is farmed, some of it is used for a mixture of trapping and subsistence hunting. Other than in land-ownership, the Canadian Indian's relationship to the means of production is singularly unamenable to analysis. As casual labour, some Indians have the position of what is perhaps best called quasi-working class. But since there is a feeling of dislocation from industrial employment, both in terms of qualification and attitude, a large proportion of the Indian population is *outside* the industrial economy altogether. In the case of the skid row population this situation is extreme.

The opposition that has been noted between the institutions of skid row and the institutions of mainstream urban contexts is thus a part of an overall opposition between the Indian and industrial society as such. Many writers, including Hawthorn, have emphasized the relationship between aboriginal and traditional life-styles and those of industrial life. The aboriginal life, they maintain, involved patterns of discipline and authority quite at odds with industrial employment; also, there was to the aboriginal life a set of rhythms quite unlike those which pertain in contemporary Canadian society. What these reflections amount to, is the suggestion that what aboriginal life lacked was what is today broadly designated the Protestant Ethic. In our terms, tribal life

was non-bourgeois, and in such measure as the tribal mores and attitudes have been retained, the contemporary Indian is non-bourgeois. Hence, the argument concludes, the problematic position of the Indian within bourgeois Canada.

The assertion that the Protestant Ethic was absent from tribal life, however, tends either to be a truism or in need of radical qualifications. All societies require a valuation of effort; most societies have a rational economic life at some level, accompanied by albeit highly various forms of saving. What must, by definition, be absent from tribal society are the elements of the ethic peculiarly attached to industrialisation and Christianity. Internalised value systems which endorse status systems, effort, and customary caution are common to both pre and post industrial society. Such value and status systems cohere with an economic form: success and failure receive their expression in its terms, and functioning of the system as a whole is intelligible and accountable entirely in relation to this economic form. By hypothesis, where the economic form is displaced or destroyed, so the value and status systems lose their coherence. Moreover, this loss of coherence can best be stated as a new *irrationality* to effort, discipline, and customary caution: none of them can be seen to achieve anything.

It is perhaps safe to speculate, therefore, that the moral dispossession parallel to material dispossession involves a tendency to abandon just that part of tribal life which is shared by *all* societies: effort and discipline as such. In the case of Canada's native peoples, for whom the traditional material base has not been replaced, this tendency amounts to a fundamental displacement from any kind of bourgeois life. Even in relation to their traditional life, reserve Indians must be expected to be non-bourgeois.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, there exists for the reserve Indian an alternative to the reserve, at least theoretically, in the form of urban opportunities. But we have already noted that the Indian is dislocated from these opportunities, at least in so far as they offer access to the material base of Canadian society as a whole. This means that from the Indian's point of view, the values of Canadian life are given no reinforcement, no manifest rationale, by an economic position. No material possibilities accrue from urban life for those who go to skid rows, so no endorsement is given to the ethic which the Indians are often told they must acquire. If they had already acquired that ethic, the problem would not arise. The remarks made by Hawthorn are important precisely because they indicate how ineffective attempts at disseminating among the Indian peoples the values and aspirations of industrial Canadian life have in truth been. Thus the benefits and status accruing to discipline and self-denial are, for the Indian, barely existent. Indeed, in many respects systematic refutation is the reality: a realistic Indian, that is to say, could insist that he as an Indian was barred

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<sup>1</sup>This does not mean that there is no vestigial tribal life whatsoever. The argument so far is concerned with the economic life which underpins any other aspects of social and moral practice.

from such rewards — in terms of both personal psychology and social discrimination. In this situation defendants of the industrial ethic can only insist upon the intrinsic advantages or irreducible goodness in such a life; socialized in a quite different milieu, the Indian is unlikely to find much merit or sense in that contention.

For the Canadian Indian, therefore, rationale exists for neither traditional Indian nor urban industrial value-systems: in terms of material base his dispossession, in covering the two available alternatives, is complete.

In the light of this perspective the Indian has the socio-economic position of the lumpenproletarian. Unfortunate for its pejorative connotations as the term lumpenproletarian might be, it designates a very real and recurrent social position. Unattached to any of the stabilized classes, alienated from the solidified sub-cultures, the lumpenproletarian is of all social groups the most eminently non-bourgeois. With a minimum of ideology, and few long-term goals, satisfactions for such a group tend inevitably to be exclusively immediate. The gratifications of skid row life are of just such an order.

If we now return to the skid row life, which is expressly at issue here, much becomes more plain. Dislocation from the means of production, even where that dislocation is accompanied by extremes of geographical isolation, does not in an industrially advanced society entail indifference to the attractions of city life. Indeed, the opposite is very likely to be the case: in the rural milieu there is less activity, less distraction from the emptiness of small community life which has lost its material structures. The manifold social and sexual possibilities associated with urban life, and recurrently emphasized by the mass media, make strong roots in the dissatisfactions of rural life. In such a situation, the rural Indian is faced with a problematic decision: the reserve is unsatisfying, but the city involves a milieu for which he is not qualified. The city is the very Heart of the industrial ethic, and the location for the kind of employment for which the Indian feels in every way unqualified. But he still tends to believe that a far better life is to be had in the cities.

To this problem, the skid row offers an excellent solution. Living on skid row obviously involves living in the city. But life on skid row is alienated from the economic forms of the city. Thus on skid row it is possible to find many of the social benefits which urban life claims for itself, but it does not entail economic participation. Moreover, the skid row is sufficiently Indian to protect the migrant against the more flagrant racism of the White society. Thus the things which are not wanted can be left behind on the reserve, while the lures of the city can be tasted. In this way the conflicting needs of the dispossessed Indian can find some reconciliation.

That this reconciliation is a central feature of skid row life is supported by observation of Indian reactions to leaving skid row. I can detail the first time I witnessed this, and hope that it is brought into full relief by the argument here.

Greg is among the most self-assured of all the Indians I met. He lives with a girl, Sue, who is perhaps slightly less self-assured than Greg, but nonetheless, is by no means a nervous or apparently insecure person. A friend of Sue and Greg, Barbara, is a young girl from British Columbia who is far more confident than any of the local girls. We had all been drinking together for most of the day, and I had to meet a White friend further uptown. I asked the other three to accompany me on this visit, and they agreed. We took a taxi for the journey of just over one mile. At the friend's house we had to wait for him for half-an-hour. During that half-hour the three Indians became extremely tense. They did not have an Indian language in common, so they could not prevent my hearing their whispered complaints. Sue kept repeating over and over again "what the fuck are we doing here" while Greg kept saying that she should shut up. As the half-hour went by Sue's insistence became more and more agitated, and her angry complaints got louder and louder. Greg began to get extremely angry with her, and it was evident that his anger was a reflection of his own tension: he kept wiping sweat off his brow with a quick nervous movement, and couldn't sit down at all. Barbara, on the other hand, went and sat by herself in a corner and refused to speak — she is usually very talkative. Eventually the friend arrived, and we all went to a café — still uptown. In the café Greg and Sue refused to eat, though they had eaten nothing all day. Barbara finally relaxed and ate a little. Greg kept looking around him very anxiously, and waved to all the unfamiliar people in the café, asking them if they minded if he sang them a song or two. Sue kept hitting Greg, and protesting against his 'bad manners'. Once we had left the café, Sue refused to go any further with us, and walked away down a side street. The rest of us made our way downtown, and as soon as we reached the skid row bars again Greg and Barbara completely returned to their usual selves.

Thus the Indians are aware of the demands of bourgeois urban life, and are eager to keep to a milieu where those demands are not made. Skid row, in offering such a milieu, is best understood as a sub-culture wherein the mores are specifically in opposition to the mores of the wider society. Characteristically without the disciplines, status orientations, and hierarchies of mainstream life, skid row social solidarity accrues to Indianness, marginality, and illegality. But on skid row the daily manifestations of communality are in or around the bar. We must not forget that skid row is also defined in terms of the use of alcohol. And the migrants come to skid row to drink, while the regulars centre their daily lives on drinking. Drunkenness pervades behaviour. But we must also not forget that Indians can and do drink on reserves, in the rural context. Quite simply, the alcoholic habits of the skid row population do not of themselves explain the attraction of skid row.

The theoretical suggestions of this chapter hopefully can serve as a starting point for the discussion of alcohol. Before embarking on that discussion, however, one part of the argument here must be restated in relation to the use of alcohol.

As has already been noted, many writers point to the striking connection between the indulgent form of the spree drunk and the rhythms of aboriginal life. In tribal society, most emphatically among hunters and fishermen, periods of intense activity were followed by periods of equally intense consumption; the feast or fiesta followed the hunt. This pattern of life, argue many anthropologists, reflects a social structure within which saving has no place: what is captured is immediately used. Few anthropologists could claim that this view of saving in primitive society is not in need of substantial qualification.<sup>1</sup> But where the contrast is made between the practices of primitive society and the rationalised systems of work, saving, and consumption in industrial society, the point remains more or less intact. At least a minimal thesis can hold: the feast is a total occupation when it happens, and in the feast appetites are satiated, while the feast constitutes, by industrial society's standards, a prolonged interruption to economic practice and 'pantan' ethic. Evidently spree drinking bears closer relation to that kind of feast than any aspect of industrial life: consumption is on a very large scale; there is a tendency to consume everything that is at hand; the drinking provides at least a prolonged break from economic practice.

Much as this analogy may compel students of reserve drinking, it is at best incomplete, and at worst systematically misleading, when applied to the skid row predicament.

In the first place, skid row drinking does not constitute an interruption to economic practice, for there is no persistent economic base at all. Skid row drinkers are for the most part lumpenproletarians. Secondly, the participants in the urban milieu are very far removed from any tribal economic practice — in many cases by as much as two generations. Thirdly, a large proportion of those who are in the towns are there because they have responded to the allures of the city life, and to respond to the allures of the city it is necessary to have become quite profoundly detached from the tribal or traditional values. Fourthly, the feast between hunts was integrated into a pattern of life which formed a socio-economic whole; the religious practices which surround such feasts affirm this interdependence of the feast, of economic practice, and of metaphysical beliefs: but in the Indian communities the erosion of the society, and the dislocation of the feast from the customary economic or religious practices renders the disruption of the system complete; such disruption means that it is no longer possible to account for any one part of the system in terms of prior custom. When a social system is fragmented the understanding of the fragments must pass beyond simple reference to the system; if it does not the explanation can easily become mere mystification.

But for the purposes of this report a weaker thesis suffices — though much of its strength derives a *fortiori* from the stronger thesis. That thesis is: the analogy between the recurrent, intense indulgences which ethnography

<sup>1</sup>For an excellent illustration of how this must be qualified see Vayda, 1967.



associates with the feast and the spree drunk cannot hold in the context of skid row spree drinking. Instead, we must search out some effective account, and the beginning of such an account is likely to be made with a fuller awareness of the socio-economic position, *as such*, and the role of social discipline. It is the argument of this report that the skid row Indian is a lumpenproletarian, and it follows that he has no commitment to the moral strictures of any economic life. Being dislocated from all economic practice, having the relationship to the means of production exclusively of dispossession, he finds no rationale for any of the prescribed disciplines. By this argument, the urban Indian who does acquiesce in mainstream life either has special formal qualifications, or is less pragmatic than most.

If we now look again at spree drinking it is evident that an alternative to the familiar analogy is being hypothesised. The apparent indifference to the incentives and renunciations which mainstream Canadian life enjoins is in fact a corollary of a particular socio-economic position. The spree is a form of drinking which quite categorically repudiates concern for economic security or advance, which invites single-minded indulgence in a pleasure, and which bonds the drinkers together despite their social fragmentation.

Of course the argument this far leaves many questions unanswered. To locate in this manner the Indian within Canadian society, and to locate the form and some of the substance of skid row, do not of themselves explain the role of alcohol. What the first section of the report has, hopefully, achieved lies firstly in the expansion of the problem of drinking into questions about a community, and secondly, in offering a perspective on the skid row Indian which is fundamental to all discussion of any feature of his life. I have attempted to remove the discussion from the strictures of anthropological analogy formation, and have placed the issues in a more tightly sociological framework. Constricting as this framework may be, it sets out to discuss a problem involving native people in a manner which does not entail the segregation of the native in terms of academic discipline. The skid row Indian is still an Indian, but that is not to say that all discussion of his social plight must centre on the models of traditional anthropology. These Indians live in cities, and where they do constitute a sub-culture, it is an urban one. Their social and economic relations, in the city (and probably to some degree within Canada as a whole) are the social and economic relations of urban industrial life. The problems are substantially concomitants of culture and acculturation. The methods best suited to understanding them should, accordingly, be those which aim at full understanding of urban industrial life.

The position of the skid row Indian, therefore, is not simply a marginal one. In sociological terms he is in a particularly unfortunate relationship to the means of production. Neither effective owner nor qualified employee, he exists at the periphery of the work force as he does at the periphery of the moral and political cultures. And that is the position of lumpenproletarian. Much as Marx and Russian Marxists villified the lumpenproletariat, it is worth remembering two things. First, they villified them because they did not have any commitment to any moral view, and would not find identification with the attitudes and mores of other socially

deprived groups; second, the theorists of development economics are beginning to find in discussion of the native position within industrial, social, and economic development that the lumpenproletarian has a specially important place.

In the subsequent discussion of the predicament of the skid row Indian, this theme will be returned to many times. No real inroad into the issues involved can be made without first adopting a sociological perspective which is in tune with the most striking realities. The perspective and the realities will inform one another. In the following part of the report, however, I shall indicate a number of distinctively cultural qualities relevant to the skid row context. Also, it will be important to describe the form, intensity, and some of the consequences, of anti-Indian sentiments and behaviour as *they* affect skid row life. These additions to the argument are factors which both intensify and rigidify the socio-economic plight of the Indian and in some measure distinguish it from that of whites in a comparable relationship to the means of production. In combination with the more fundamental socio-economic considerations, these elements of cultural and social distinctiveness reinforce the social structural factors. The object of this first part of the report has been to lay the basis for the discussion without which no real start into the problems at hand could be made. That basis is to be found in the skid row Indian's socio-economic plight.

## CHAPTER 4

### DRUNK AND FIGHTING

Much has already been said about the nature of drinking on skid row, most particularly its spree modes. In this chapter, drunkenness itself will be considered more closely, and the relationship between skid row drinking and fighting will be pursued. It must be noted at the outset that the majority of the violence which erupts in and around the bars does not involve theft, while the participants in fights are invariably very drunk. Sober or calculating attacks on others are extremely rare.

#### Attitudes to Drunkenness

Among skid row Indians the state of drunkenness is valued. I never heard an Indian discuss alcoholism at any length, and reference to alcoholism was made without guilt, fear, or anxiety. This contrasted remarkably with non-Indian drinkers, who often insisted that they were or were not alcoholics. Where they insisted that they were not, the insistence was strikingly aggressive; where they noted that they were, it was said in terrible despondency and self-recrimination. For the White, being alcoholic involved loss of status and missed opportunities. One White from Montreal repeated to me over and over: "I was a chemist, I had a good life; now I am alcoholic. Are you alcoholic?" Another man from Calgary took me aside many times and told me: "I come here because it's interesting. I don't need to come here. I own a truck. Would you like to come hunting for a few weeks? I have good guns. I'm going to the north to work tomorrow."

Obviously a number of the Indians decide that they do not want to be alcoholics, and the half-way houses as well as the Alcoholics Anonymous programmes have a number of Indians who are bent on self reformation. But all such people I talked with explained their presence in the programmes by reference to a chain of events which terminated in a desire to avoid alcoholism, and which began with prison and dealings with social workers; the sense of guilt, an awareness of alcoholism as such, had usually been implanted by contact with non-Indian agencies. And the small measure of success which meets the endeavours of such agencies in their work among Indian drinkers may testify to the absence of guilt and anxiety.

Lemert has noted much the same thing: "In none of the interviews I conducted with Indians in prison for liquor offences did I discover any sign of guilt or remorse on their part."<sup>1</sup> He also notes the distinction which can be made between drunkenness itself and the consequences of drunkenness, and remarks on the security with which it is made by the Indians themselves: "To the Indian

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<sup>1</sup> Lemert 1954 p 356.

drunkenness appeared as a desirable thing which outweighs its unpleasant consequences.”<sup>1</sup> This apparent lack of guilt among drinkers also seems reflected in the way in which they recount their drunken experience. There is never any emphasis on the possible folly. The characteristic phrase — “I got good and drunk” is extremely revealing, and is not one we would usually expect to hear from a non-Indian. The non-Indian equivalent is something like — “I got so damned drunk” — in which the *so*, the curse, and the tone all reflect at least a token concession to the error of having got drunk at all. Equally, it is usual to find among non-Indians a valuation upon resistance to alcohol, as illustrated by the careful quantifying of what was drunk, and patronising reference to others who got sick or just couldn’t go on drinking. Among Indians such quantifying is rare, while the narration of a spree includes quite proud reference to having passed out oneself.

Moreover, the Indians do not seem to fear the loss of self-control or awareness in the way that non-Indians do. Berreman quotes the lament of a young Aleut: “I can’t get good and drunk. It always seems like I know what I’m doing, even when I can’t walk straight.”<sup>2</sup> On skid row this distinction is much the same. It is unusual to see non-Indians delighting in their loss of self-control. This difference also reflects the apparently quite different levels of anxiety which surround drinking as between the Indians and Whites, even on skid row.

It is of course possible to over-estimate the degree of this difference. In Canadian society as a whole, as in most industrial societies, there is a degree of pride attached to having been drunk. The entry into a bar is a sign of maturity, and the drunken adventure is something like the sowing of wild oats — testament to on-going manhood. What is important, however, is the measure in which being drunk is conceived as a deviation from adherence to the social values. Among the non-Indians the way in which drunkenness is described of itself suggests that the narrator really subscribes to the values constraining drunkenness. Indeed, the very affirmation of his maturity surrounds his ability to deviate from strongly felt values — it is such deviance which our society often regards as ‘growing up’. Among skid row Indians, however, there seems to be no such qualification to the drinking. It is, in their case, the drunkenness which is valued more certainly than any moral proscription around it.

### The Form of Drunkenness

The form which drunkenness takes yields more important insights into its nature than the form in which it is described by the drinkers. Too many studies of the role of alcohol neglect to note that drunkenness has highly various expressions, not only between cultures but within cultures. That the peasant farmers of central America have traditions of quiescent drinking is regarded, rightly enough, as an example of a cultural form to drunkenness. Equally, the variety of drunken expression in our society is seen to reflect the heterogeneity of value systems, and to highlight the individuation of behaviour. But recourse to explanations of such behaviour in terms of cultural norms can too easily obscure the significance of the

<sup>1</sup> *ibid* p 354.

<sup>2</sup> Berreman 1956 p 507.

behaviour itself; the argument comes treacherously close to saying that coherent or homogeneous behaviour, as typically found in simple society, is *beyond* explanation. The importance of drunken behaviour, however, can be seen in the small villages of rural Ireland, where drunkenness varies between extremes of vivacity and despondency, according to the time of year.<sup>1</sup> An examination of that variation yields considerable insight into the societies. It is important to reduce norms as well as exceptions in behaviour to sociologically important factors.

The popular view of the Indian drunk is well known. He is liable to excesses of any and every kind; he fights savagely for no clear reason; he destroys property — even his own — with no thought to his actions; he is sexually aggressive and liable to outlandish indulgences; he becomes crazy; he can’t hold his liquor; he passes out. In every part of Canada I visited most, if not all, of this stereotype pervaded the attitudes of non-Indians.<sup>2</sup>

Before embarking on the description of the drunken behaviour that I witnessed on skid row, it is worth making a few general remarks about this stereotype. First, there is no evidence within the literature on alcohol to date to confirm the view that Indians, as a race, are less able to tolerate the effects of alcohol. Lemert has pointed out that Indians of the Northwest Coast quite remarkably seem to sober up when the necessity arises — which suggests that drunkenness was perhaps not so great as the behaviour might have <sup>led</sup> an observer to suppose.<sup>3</sup> I found no basis for the view that Indians have as a matter of chemistry, constitutionally less resistance to alcohol. It may seem laborious to continue emphasising this lack of evidence, but the insistence with which non-Indians hold the belief is disturbing since it provides in all social contexts — perhaps most relevantly in the employment situation — a rationale for discriminatory practices.<sup>4</sup> Second, the evidence that Indians tend to fight, or be sexually aggressive, or generally become ‘crazy’, is not quite as substantial as the upholders would have us believe. Berreman says of the Aleut, for example, that aggression and violence are unusual, but sexual freedom is normal; Honigmann points to the release of sexual inhibitions, a genital awareness, and a reduction of inhibition on aggression, all of which are strikingly in contrast with normal and sober behaviour, but the aggression is limited and there is no suggestion that the drinkers are excessive. Indeed, it is mostly from the writings of earlier travellers that one can glean data about the “drunken excesses” of the native people.

Yet it is the case that Indians, when they are compared with other Canadian groups, do behave distinctively when drunk. Since they tend to be more actively in pursuit of the effects of alcohol, they are much more ready to behave like drunks. And behaving like a drunk is determined by how the drunk’s behaviour is conceived. In our society there is a tendency to expect drinking to make social relations more fluent, and to allow conversation to flow. Among many Indians drink is expected to remove far more restraints than that. That many Indians are able to accept this removal of constraints, that they acquiesce in the more extravagant consequences of

<sup>1</sup> See Aalen and Brody 1969.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of this in relation to the Indian view of himself see chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> Lemert *op. cit.* p. 322.

<sup>4</sup> e.g. see King 1967.

drinking, reflects their comparative lack of fear about loss of self-control. And that in turn may reflect their dislocation from any proscriptive moral framework.

That a group of people should be less afraid of drunkenness, should in fact enthusiastically look for the extremes of drunkenness, is not in itself surprising. Probably most pre-industrial societies have been far more at ease with what we are inclined to term abnormal states of mind — from the trance to the regular use of narcotics.<sup>1</sup> The fear and anxiety which surrounds such mental states in our society, however, do succeed in impeding responsiveness to stimulants used to precipitate the abnormal conditions. It is well known that the effects of marijuana are slower in coming to those who are not accustomed to it, and this unresponsiveness to the drug reflects anxiety and fear about the drug's effects. With habituation these fears become minimal, and the effects of the drug accordingly increase. Among skid row Indians, as we have already pointed out, guilt associated with drinking and drunkenness appears to be minimal. It follows that more conspicuous drunken behaviour will set in more quickly. The evidence which is usually adduced in support of the argument that Indians can't take their liquor may, instead, be used to support two quite different arguments: one about the Indian's lack of anxiety over the stimulant itself, the other about how Indians conceive drunken behaviour. Indians do get drunk more quickly — from a *behavioural* point of view — but this has social and psychological rather than bio-chemical dimensions. The reasons for this responsiveness thus return upon the two orders of explanation — one may look at the traditional culture's attitudes to the dream and hallucinogenic experiences and abnormal states of mind, or at the moral frameworks operative on a group in that particular socio-economic position. That there are differences between forms of drunken behaviour in Indians and whites is important, but these differences reflect the difference between the Indian's cultural heritage and the non-Indian's inevitable co-operation within the more puritan value-system outside skid row. But this will be considered more fully later.

Within skid row bars, drunken behaviour is strikingly ambivalent. The drunk is full of camaraderie (with the qualifications that were mentioned in the last chapter), and gathers around himself a group of friends with whom he engages in excited conversation and banter. As he becomes drunker, so this conversation becomes less and less coherent, until eventually the drinker subsides into a stupefied silence, and eventually passes out altogether. At any point along this continuum, short of unconsciousness, the drinker can become extremely angry and violent. There is a readiness to begin fighting, and the drinker seems to be keeping a careful look out for possible provocation.

The things which count as provocation includes: malicious reference to family; suggestion of lack of generosity; attempt to take anything for nothing; comment on some former dispute. Of course, occasions for violent animosity are not confined to these, and there is often a willingness to find offence in anything that is said at all, but these particular provocations do seem to precipitate a conflagration whatever the apparent mood of the drinkers.

<sup>1</sup> See Devereux 1951 and Erickson 1950.

The ambivalence of the drinkers' moods is reflected in the sudden speed with which a bar that is full of animated and seemingly happy conversation at one moment can become in the next moment the scene of four or five large-scale fights. Indeed, the fighting actually seems to be infectious. One table gets involved in a noisy and conspicuous dispute, a glass is broken, the table is pushed over, two people are swinging blows at one another, and within moments there are other fights in the bar. Such incidents are quite a normal feature of life in these bars. It would not be possible to find a skid row bar which did not, in the course of a busy night, see at least one such fight. More often there are three or four — most particularly at weekends.

In the vast majority of these fights, however, there is a certain lack of seriousness on the part of the combatants — they do not really try to hurt one another, and are quite quick to sit down again at the same table, or if they are thrown out of the bar, may go together to another bar. Once such fight has happened, it tends to erupt through the evening, and often over a few days — but with the participants remaining on quite cordial terms between eruptions. Examples give some impression of the fights themselves, and some of the factors which are involved:

1. Dave (who is half Cree and half French) was with his old friend Harry (who is Cree) when a younger man who knew them slightly came to sit at the table with them. As soon as he sat down he asked if they would buy him a drink, and also picked up a packet of cigarettes that was lying on the table, took one, and began to smoke. Dave and Harry had been having a very friendly and relaxed conversation, but as soon as the newcomer took the cigarette they both tensed up and began to insult him. Very soon Dave and the newcomer were fighting, and soon after that Dave and Harry took the newcomer outside and quite severely beat him up. There was no reconciliation with him.

2. A large group of drinkers were at one table, and had been there for a long time. All were very drunk. One of them was much larger than the others, and was teasing a very small young Indian about his family. The small man replied at first very defensively, then fell silent. The large man began to nudge him, in a jocular way but also by way of escalating the tease. Suddenly the young man hit out at the large man. The match was pathetically hopeless for the young man, but he attacked very viciously. As soon as the fight had begun the brother of the smaller man came to his rescue, and tried to take over the fight himself. Also, the friends of the larger man tried to prevent him from fighting at all. These two secondary encounters both turned into fights themselves: the two brothers began to fight, and the large man began to hit out wildly at the friends who were seeking to restrain him. As the numbers involved in the one fight increased, so fights which did not appear to have any direct relation to the central one also broke out. Quite soon the bar was taken over by fighting groups. Eventually the two brothers agreed to a pause, and they returned to the attack on the big man. But meanwhile he had been persuaded to calm down, and they all sat at the table again. As soon as they did so all the other fights stopped as well. In the course of the next hour that central fight broke out again twice, each time precipitating others.



3. Two brothers who had just come from the Great Slave Lake area asked me to drink with them. For half an hour we got along well, talking for the most part about England. Suddenly one of the brothers asked: "Who owns the Northwest Territories?" "The U.S.A." was my tentative answer. "Bullshit", he said, "England does." At this point the other brother joined in: "I'll tell you who owns the Territories, it's England that owns the Territories." Immediately the first brother turned on the second: "What the fuck do you know about it? You know fuck all about anything. It's England that owns the Territories," The second brother defended himself, saying that he knew pretty well who owned what, and the one thing he did know was who owned the Northwest Territories. At this the first brother became extremely enraged, and warned that anyone who said he didn't know what he was taking about had better watch out. The two then began to shout menaces, and I am certain that if I had not been there actively interceding on behalf of peace a violent if brief fight would have broken out; I am also certain that it would have died down as quickly as it happened.

4. Bernard is half Indian, and comes from British Columbia. He had just arrived on skid row when I had been there about a month. He is extremely tough, but when he first arrived was unknown to many of the regulars. He tended to be very quiet at first, but was always on his guard against possible slight or criticism. One night a young local Indian asked him for money to buy a drink. Bernard said he wouldn't give him any. The young man persisted in a friendly way asking for enough to buy one beer. Bernard suddenly shouted at him to go away, but the young man didn't want to lose face in front of everyone else, and made a joke. Bernard immediately stood up and pushed him out of his chair: both the man and the chair went sprawling across the floor. A very confusing fight then broke out, involving most of the people around — especially those whose drinks had been knocked over by the falling chair, and others who seemed to want to join in. In the end the bouncer came over to Bernard and tried to push him out of the bar. Bernard then turned on the bouncer and with a sudden heave threw him onto the floor. When the bouncer picked himself up he pushed the young man out of the bar. Later that night the bouncer made a point of becoming very friendly with Bernard.

5. I was walking into a bar with some Indian friends and because I was talking very intently to one of them, almost walked into a young Indian who was coming out. The Indian as he was about to bump into me caught me by the collar and held a knife close to my neck. I asked him what was bothering him, and he replied: "some White guy's fucking my old lady and I'm going to stick this knife right into his heart." As I talked to him he relaxed his hold on my collar, and put the knife away. Quite quickly he came to suggest that we have a drink together, and that perhaps between us we could "get the guy who was fucking his old lady."

These are all examples of bar fights. There are also many fights which take place in the street. It is much harder to judge what is involved in street fights, simply because it is unusual for an outsider to have the chance of overhearing the preludes. On a few occasions, however, people I was with got involved in street fights, and on those occasions they seemed to constitute either something of a prolongation of a bar fight or were attached to an outstanding dispute of much the same order as the bar

fights. Many of the street fights take place around the liquor store, and these seem to involve almost exclusively the claims people were making on one another for money as they tried to get up the cash for a bottle of wine. The other special features of street fights lies in the involvement of the older women: several times I witnessed a fight involving an older woman, and it was also noticeable that these fights rapidly drew other participants in defence of one or other of the principal combatants. On the whole, however, there is reluctance to become involved in fights in public places for the police are quick to intervene.

Two forms of fighting need special mention: aggression directed against outsiders, and violence directed against the police and other social authorities.

The stranger is drawn into violent situations because skid row people are nervous of him — he is considered a threat to the established regulars while his intentions and strength must be assessed. In this respect my own experience is representative. On first appearing on skid row I was quite often stopped and asked a particularly provocative question, like: "What kind of fucking jacket is that?" or "We don't like people like you around here; do you want a poke?" or "What are you, some kind of fucking hippy?" In these situations the questioner anticipates a counter-attack, and also expects that the exchange will eventually become violent. In none of these cases did the encounter become violent, and in a number they provided the basis for good and lasting friendships. So long as a stranger can avoid inducing nervousness, and can establish that he has no intention of challenging the influential regulars, he is welcomed. Moreover, once he is welcomed no more questions about his doings are raised. Challenging questions of the kind just cited excepted, I was never, at any time, asked how I earned my money, why I was on skid row, or when I was intending to move along. In a sense everyone there is a stranger to everyone else. It is all the more important to the regular populace, therefore, that confrontations be effected between the newcomer and themselves.

In the case of the police, the aggression is quite different. There appears to be a tendency among them to 'go easy' on skid row Indians. The police seem to have realised that over-enthusiastic intervention in the skid row world does nothing but aggravate relations between police and Indians, and certainly does nothing towards improving the social conditions of the area. Also, the police are frankly nervous of too much intervention — there are many people who are quick to be provoked, and who, when provoked, are willing to resort quickly and effectively to violence. It is extremely rare to see a policeman in a bar, and few walk on the streets. However, the patrol car is a familiar part of skid row traffic. But when a drunk does encounter a policeman he is glad to find some way of challenging or annoying him. Two examples can illustrate the various form such challenges take:

Jim, a Cree, had broken his leg, and walked on crutches. As he was making his way down the street, very drunk, a police car drew up almost alongside him. The policemen in the car looked out at Jim and his group of friends. Jim promptly waved one of his crutches at the car and shouted: "Come on out, come on out and I'll fight you both without the crutches; come on, you . . . ." The Police did not come out of their car, and Jim walked away triumphant, shouting further abuse and

obscurities back at them as he departed. Though I heard reliable accounts of many in the recent past: skid row old-timers assured me that it was still 'tough' in other places, but that in this city a sudden and considerable change for the better had recently taken place.

It should be said that I never witnessed a case of police brutality. The second example here is more representative of the kinds of challenge which the police must be familiar to:

An old and very fat woman was asleep on a patch of grass by a waste lot. A young policeman came up to her and told her to move along. She was not easily able to do this as it was only an hour since she had passed out after a bout of heavy drinking. Moreover, it was quite obvious that the policeman had picked on her because he was nervous of interfering with the extremely tough men who were also lying around on the waste lot. After some time, the woman understood that the policeman was trying to make her get up and move away. And quite suddenly she did get up, just as the policeman was walking away from her after delivering his final warning. But instead of going the opposite way, she rushed towards the policeman shouting as loud as she could: "Come back, come back, I want to fuck you, I want to fuck you." The policeman, no doubt unwilling to be seen to run away, could not avoid being caught up with, and the woman tried to catch him into her arms, still shouting out her desire. Needless to say a substantial crowd was beginning to gather, and all of them were enjoying the spectacle. Eventually the woman sat down — almost at the policeman's feet — and he was allowed to walk away. Everyone was laughing and shouting in their pleasure at the sight, and the old woman returned to her corner to sleep, screaming with laughter. The policeman did not return.

The forms and objects of drunken aggression are thus various. But perhaps the most important, both from a theoretical and practical point of view, is the internecine violence of the bars. It is that violence which seems to reflect a situation of stress and which most demands a better understanding. Before returning to that problem, however, the discussion must move on to drunken sexual behaviour.

Sexual encounters play only a small part in the activities of the bar. Many drinkers have their established companion, as has already been noted, and couples drink together. Some women do move from table to table, flirting with many different drinkers, but it is usually the case that these women have definite partners, and everyone knows who the partners are. In general the sexual lives of the skid row people are rather limited. The younger Indian men cannot establish sexual contacts among young white girls, while the young Indian girls systematically select young whites as partners. The older men and women appear to have relegated sexual conquests to a very peripheral element in their lives. But such sexual encounters as do take place tend to be full of aggression and tension. Much of this will be discussed in the next chapter, but it must be noted here that this aggression is drunken.

The Indians, when sober, are extremely shy and reserved, both within their close groups and in more public places like bar and street corner. As in the case of criminality and fighting, drunken behaviour in sexual encounters is the opposite of

the sober norm. The drunk makes direct and almost hostile advances to the woman, and if she is not instantly compliant he often becomes aggressive. This aggression does not take the form of blows where the couple are not established, partly because anyone who hits a woman other than his wife or regular partner is quickly attacked himself, and partly because hitting would end all possibility of a successful outcome — the aggression is designated in the form of persuasion. Between regular couples, however, there is a great deal of fighting, both verbal and physical. Women are often to be seen with their faces swollen and their arms bruised from these fights, and the fights are almost always associated with drunkenness. It has been noted that the wife is frequently the target of drunken aggression on the reserves <sup>1</sup> and the same is true of skid row.

Women when drunk often fight among themselves. The rationales for these fights seem to reduce in almost every case to sexual jealousy, and involve angry recriminations about past deceptions. In many ways the ferocity of these fights is greater than any among the men. Also, when the women fight there is much greater reluctance to become friendly again, and feuds seem to last for quite long periods.

### The Consequences of Violence

If we are to arrive at a satisfactory account of the aggressive behaviour which seems to attach to drunkenness among skid row Indians, we must assume that the behaviour is in some sense purposive. Things are not done without an end at least subliminally in view. *People may fight at times because they are very frustrated, but where the fighting has some fairly precise objectives.* *becomes a part of everyday life it is worth assuming that it has some fairly precise objectives.*

In fact I have already suggested that the challenges which are issued to the stranger have a very definite purpose, namely to ensure that the stranger does not disrupt the situation to anyone's disadvantage. If this suggestion is followed more closely, it can also be noted that within the community the people have some fairly clear idea of where their advantage lies. It is *ex hypothesi* not economic, nor can it be any orthodox institutional status which is at stake. The social hierarchy which is in danger of disruption is not easily pointed. I have argued that the most important features of this group is their lumpenproletarian position *as a corollary of that position* that they have no clearly defined or orthodox social scale. Being without the customary social ethics and ideologies, it follows that they are also without a corresponding status system, whereas in more ordinary social groups assertiveness is aimed at guarding or building a particular position, in the skid row world of the lumpenproletariat it is more likely that assertiveness will constitute *of itself* the status system. Where objectives are not amenable to rationalisation, the means tend to become ends.

In a recent unpublished paper, Richard H. Robbins suggests that "a Naskapi who is exhibiting assertive behaviour during a drinking episode is an individual who is not receiving information, needed to reinforce a role that he sees himself as playing." Robbins notes three types of drunken behaviour: moving from friendliness

<sup>1</sup> e.g. see Whittaker 1963.

to stupor directly, with assertiveness, and with both assertiveness and aggression. He tested his hypothesis by correlating the presence of assertiveness with the absence of alternative role reinforcement by income level. In that paper it is a reserve group which is being discussed — people whose community status system is at least vestigially present.

On skid row no such vestigial status system exists. The Indians there do not come from any one band, or even any one culture. Instead, there exists no role of importance other than being or not being an assertive person. Given that one's reputation for assertiveness is the one form of reputation that can be maintained, it is tautological to say that assertiveness is vital to status.

But tautologies are true, and within the socio-economic group which makes up the skid row population, that assimilation of assertiveness to status is to be expected. By being aggressive a skid row drinker establishes a reputation: he is not a man who can be toyed with; he is someone to whom everyone else does well to show friendliness and generosity; he is a man of importance. What the violent behaviour achieves, therefore, is status within a community where no other criteria for status exist.

The question to which this much over-simplified account gives rise is: Why, within such a community, should there be any need for status at all? Why, in a situation where there is no extrinsic objective to assertiveness, should people actually be assertive? The answer to this question is complex, but it can be begun by remarking quite simply that skid row is not a total world. The people there have been socialized within a quite different kind of milieu, where status and hierarchy always are relevant and often a crucial part of the social structure.<sup>2</sup> Just because there is no material basis for inequality, it does not follow that inequalities themselves will promptly disappear from people's minds. If the significance of being an Indian is also considered, at least insofar as it intensifies the lack of possibility for attaining other forms of status, then the aggression of skid row drinkers becomes still more intelligible.

The explanation of aggression must be held there for the moment, for it cannot be adequately extended before the relationship between Indians and non-Indians of skid row is taken into account. But this far it is evident that the multifarious nature of the violence, its widely various precipitants, objects, and consequences, combine to indicate that we are dealing here with an extreme social predicament. Where status turns on assertiveness, then assertiveness becomes omnipresent.

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<sup>1</sup>Robbins 1968.

<sup>2</sup>The individualism and atomism which once characterised many Indian groups might be cited as evidence for a contrary argument. Two replies can be given to this: first, two or three generations of cultural decline have eroded the force of such an observation in the present; second, the culture contact has, from the first, implicated the Indians in trade and then education within a system dominated by European conceptions. In that contact institutionalised status is likely to be imported where traditional systems of status are not re-inforced.

It remains to this chapter to consider a feature of Indian drinking which most writers comment upon at some length — the measure in which the drunk is exempted from responsibility for what he does.<sup>1</sup>

Curley gives an example from the Mescalero Apache of a policeman who blinded an Indian, but who was not blamed because he was drunk when he did it.<sup>2</sup> The whole idea that a man is 'not himself' when he is drunk accompanies that kind of indulgence. And in a society where drinking is occasioned or at least intermittent, such indulgence is obviously of great social importance. But it has its importance if and only if there are times when people *are* responsible for what they do. Indeed, implicit within the argument lies the view that the deeds carried out while drunk are the very deeds which are most definitely censured in sobriety. It is this kind of Freudian account which has placed so centrally within most essays on the role of alcohol the concept of released inhibitions. The drunk, on that view, is a man without his super-ego, in a milieu where everyone else has also abandoned claims on the drunk's super-ego.

On skid row, however, drinking is too persistent, and drunken behaviour too large a proportion of total social behaviour for arguments which revolve around moral indulgence to carry much weight. It is not the case that everything is indulged or explained away on account of temporary loss of responsibility; it cannot be the case that ascription of blame is confined to sobriety. In this situation the people involved must make distinctions as well as judgements which are independent of being or not being drunk. And of course they do: a man who becomes only violent when drunk is disliked, and the consequences of his violence are blamed just because *he* is blamed for being too violent. The man who balances self-respect (i.e. a correct degree of assertiveness) with generosity in deserving quarters, is praised. The man who never pays his own way is blamed.

It is worth noting that the operations of blame and praise are also necessary because a man is accepted as a drinking partner in virtue of considerations other than community membership.<sup>3</sup> If a man is to be blamed for being too persistently a bum, and if that man is also a persistent drunk, then he has to be judged for his parasitism despite his drunkenness. The suspension of responsibility therefore requires two preconditions: first, a pattern of intermittent drinking, second, a social context where community membership secures entry into the drinking circle. On skid row neither of these conditions can be met.

It follows that the problems of skid row drunken fighting urge the sociologist to move away from the kind of considerations which dominate discussion of the reserve, and towards an awareness of the conditions which pertain in the urban milieu. This leads to social factors which involve more than either details of a particular band or generalities about 'Indianness' as such.

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<sup>1</sup>Honigmann 1945, Berreman 1956, Curley 1967.

<sup>2</sup>Curley 1967 p. 121-2.

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 1.

## CHAPTER 5

### WHITES AND INDIANS

#### The Middle Class Idea of the Indian

Canadian attitudes to the Indians seem to vary considerably according to both region and income level.<sup>1</sup> Generalisations are not easy but it seems that the middle class is effectively discriminatory if theoretically 'understanding'. Those who have any knowledge of the way in which Indians have suffered from the intrusion of Europeans refer sympathetically to the past. But many of these same people, having paid homage to past error, express their irritation with the Indian's failure to overcome misfortune. All too frequently, unfavourable comparisons are made between the Indian's demoralisation and resilience of many immigrant groups in Canada. More significantly, those who deprecate Indians find the most compelling expression of Indian failure in their non-middle class habits and attitudes: relative uncleanness, lack of reliability in work, drunkenness, and violence. Discrimination is a consequence of this view, for it entails a disinclination, if not downright refusal, to employ, house, or even interact with such unreliable dangerous people.

This discrimination is tempered by pious hopes and positive ideas about government policy. Some examples: 'Indians should be given British Columbia, so they could have their own state'; and 'they get too much money for nothing: that should be stopped, then they'd get down to work.' Even the more benign and liberal, noticeably the younger people, admit to nervousness and unease when they are with Indians — though many of them remark that their unease is a racist hang-over.

Such views are all too familiar to those who have had experience of White-Indian relations, but their frequency does reflect an extremely strong attitude adopted by the middle class, and that attitude bears keenly, if often indirectly, on the predicament of the urban migrant — most importantly in employment and housing. The confusion of myth, stereotype, self-fulfilling prophecy and truth which makes up this prevalent attitude cannot be fully unpacked here. It suffices for the present purpose to say that the attitude amounts to a racial prejudice and creates widespread discrimination.

An incident from my own experience may once again serve to illustrate the seriousness of the problem.

When I went on a trip to the Northwest Coast I gave the use of my apartment to an Indian friend. When I returned from the trip the door of the apartment was

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<sup>1</sup>For an account of the variation by regions see *Indians and the Law*, 1967, p. 55.



padlocked from the outside, and I was obliged to get the key from the caretaker. It transpired that the occupiers of the next door apartment had complained about the presence in their building of Indians, and the complaint had reached the landlords. It also transpired that the landlords did not permit the letting of any of their property to Indians, and the caretaker was instructed to refuse access to them. In protesting with the caretaker about this measure, he confided to me all the unwritten and confidential instructions that landlords in the city usually give to caretakers and whoever else may be responsible for letting rooms. I was given a great many examples from the block I lived in of extremely ugly cases of outright discrimination. One of these is worth repeating: a professional couple had taken an apartment in the block and were beginning to move in their possessions; when the other tenants saw that the couple were Indian-looking (they were in fact immigrants from Asia) they demanded that the apartment be withdrawn from the market. The caretaker said that this was impossible, and the other tenants then canvassed the landlords, saying that they themselves would all leave if the new tenant was not sent elsewhere. The landlord duly told the caretaker to tell the new tenants that there had been an administrative error, and that the apartment was in fact already let.

Examples of refusal to employ Indians came to me from many social workers and others concerned with finding employment for Indians. Some of these cases were more flagrant than others, but the overall picture was extremely unpleasant. It is most striking in the cases of Indian girls who go to interviews and are immediately told that the job is taken. One hotel makes their policy quite explicit on the phone, and justifies it by saying that they would lose business if they employed Indian receptionists. A senior Administrator of a provincial jail told me that there would be no point in developing training programmes in jail since the Indian girls who are most in need of them in any case cannot find employment outside the jail.

Finally, it must be said that on many occasions I was taken aside by middle class Canadian acquaintances who had noticed me talking to Indians, and warned against too much association with them. These warnings centred on the imminent dangers from sudden and unpredictable fits of violence and alarmingly virulent forms of venereal disease they attached to all Indians. It is difficult to take these kinds of beliefs at all seriously, blatantly irrational as they are. But their seriousness, from the Indian's point of view, is considerable indeed.

#### Skid Row Whites' Attitudes Towards the Indian

Among Whites of lower income and social status there is less sophistication and articulateness. Because the principal qualifications to middle class racism lies in the verbal concealment of it, it is to be expected that lower class Whites will at least *sound* more racist. Both the non-Indians of skid row come more directly and frequently into contact with Indians than any other Canadian group. In understanding the Indian response to Whites — a response which inevitably plays a significant role in his social predicament and adaptation — the relationships between skid row groups are likely to be important. Since these are people who have daily contact with, and even some dependence upon Indians, it is also to be expected that they should display ambivalence. It is the high degree of this ambivalence, with all the attendant confusions and tensions, which is surprising. These can be illustrated:

1. I was talking in a bar with a middle-aged Indian woman and an Indian friend of hers. The woman was very drunk and very muddled. She was telling how she had lost a child, and how badly she needed to find it, and how important it probably was to the child that she succeed. Her confusion consisted in a failure to express any way of achieving this end, which was either consistent or remotely plausible. At an adjacent table a White had been over-hearing this conversation, and eventually came and joined us. From time to time he asked me what the woman meant, and it eventually became clear that he did not speak very good English, and that he was in fact from Montreal. He was unemployed and drinking heavily. It transpired subsequently that he had been employed, but was not alcoholic. Eventually this, Montreal man began to solicit the favours of the Indian woman: propositioning her in husky whispers he laid his hand on her knee. As he sought responses from the woman he talked to me in French. As he talked the general question of the Indians came to the fore, and he began to confide to me his views. These views were quite forthright: he insisted that all Indians were good for nothing, never to be trusted, lazy, dirty, and altogether inferior — 'presque animaux'. As it happened, the Indian woman rejected his advances, and he continued to talk to me, occasionally trying to recapture the woman's attention. The talk with me simply confirmed the anomalous situation: his hand periodically reaching towards her, he meanwhile condemned and despised the object of his interest.

2. During the first few weeks of the fieldwork I became particularly well acquainted with four young Whites, all migrant workers and petty criminals, all very well known and respected regulars in the community of drinkers. Moreover, these four young men often drank together with the Indians in whose company they appeared at ease and content. One day, however, they took me aside and delivered a 'friendly piece of advice'. They insisted that I was too trusting, that the Indians I was spending so much time with were concerned only with getting money out of me and everyone else like me, that they would be nice in the afternoon and 'roll' me at night, and what's worse, when they fought with me they would 'put the boot in' (i.e. kick in my eyes and genitals as I lay on the ground defeated). Such warnings were given to me by these four and many others on numerous occasions, and always the warning involved a general view of the Indian as dangerously devious and peculiarly treacherous in both intention and action. Sometimes the explanation for this predicted behaviour (none of it actually ever came to pass) was said to lie in the Indian's failure to hold alcohol, but that was less common a view on skid row than among the middle class community. More often the explanation was purely racist — an Indian, the argument runs, is dangerous and nasty because he is an Indian.

3. As I became familiar with the bars, and came to know numbers of both Indian and White drinkers, so a very special difficulty arose. When sitting at a table alone, people would come and join me. Often it happened that one or two Whites would come and sit at my table, and then an Indian I knew particularly well might come and join me too. On one such occasion, after which I sought to minimize the possibility of recurrence, an elderly Indian came and joined me at a table with two young Whites. Both the Whites lived by crime and bumming; neither had brought any substantial amount of money into the community for several months. They did not know the Indian well, and he did not appear to be particularly poor and made

no requests for drink or cigarettes. But a few minutes after the Indian sat down, one of the young Whites said: 'Well, are you going to get us a fucking drink?' The man promptly said yes he would, and drew out a dollar bill. The White continued, shouting at the man: 'go ahead then, get the drinks, you fucking bum'. Quite soon the Indian left the table, and I was once again treated to warnings about Indians.<sup>1</sup>

These incidents all show the White's involvement with his superiority, his specific charges against Indians of material inferiority, and his concern with communicating these beliefs both to strangers and to Indians themselves. But there is another face to the whole relationship, which is brought out best by the first example above. The Whites do stay with the Indians, and they are not forced to do so. They participate in the way of life, a way of life which is as open to Whites as it is to Indians. They are always trying to form sexual relations with Indian women. They often commit small crimes with Indians. There are very rarely fights between Indians and Whites. Some Whites, including the two young men in the third example above, also insist that Indians are really good people, if and only if they are pure Indians; it is the people of mixed blood they say they despise and can't trust. And of course the vast majority of the Indians on skid row *are* partially non-Indian.

We find in the attitude of the skid row White, therefore, three principal ingredients: first, the Indian is regarded as a bum; second, he is regarded as unreliable; third, he is regarded as unduly violent. But we also find that in practice the Whites do many 'jobs' with Indians: many Whites have Indian girl-friends, with whom they co-operate for the purposes of hustling and petty theft; much drinking is done by Whites and Indians jointly. It is evident that there is considerable divergence between protestation and practice.

#### Indian Attitudes Towards Themselves

On skid row the Indians from different regions tend to keep together, at least during the day-time when groups gather in houses and on corners, talking in their own languages. Equally there is some tendency for the Indians as such to keep apart from the Whites – but this is subject to all the qualifications which arise from the various forms of co-operation just noted.

To these qualifications another must be added: the Indian girls definitely prefer to be with White men. The reasons they give for this are surprisingly similar to the reasons which the middle class White gives for avoiding Indians. They say that Indian men drink too much, that they cannot hold their drink, and that they become violent when drunk, and so the girls are forever getting beaten up by them. One Chipewyan girl told me that she had had an Indian boyfriend when she was fourteen, and would never have one again, because he treated her so badly. He was fifteen at the time. Since then this girl married a White, was beaten very badly by him three times, found him in bed with another woman, left him, and went to live with another White. That White also beat her very badly, and she decided to go back to her husband, who said he wanted her back. She went back, and was then beaten

<sup>1</sup>It should be remembered that these aggressions towards Indians were very much for the benefit of the stranger; had I not been there it is possible that they would not have occurred.

up again several times, and she again left him. This same girl refused to talk to me in the bars when I was with the Indians I knew, and when I asked her why she was being so unfriendly she mysteriously replied that there was something she would tell me about one day. Finally the day came, and she told me: 'I don't like Indian people, and I won't spend any time with them'. When I asked her why this was, she referred back to that first boyfriend and to the drunken violence of the Indian.

The Indian girls of this kind represent the extreme in negative feeling towards their own race. But it is also to be seen among older people, many of whom are extremely preoccupied with maintaining friendly relations with all whites they meet. On one occasion I was in a bar with an elderly Indian who had begun to teach me Cree. We had become very good friends, or at least so it seemed, and most of the initial tensions had begun to fade. After an hour in the bar, during which we talked about the language and his past times and exchanged notes about England (he had been in the navy during the second world war), he suddenly declared: 'You must be tired of talking to an old Indian: I'll go and find a white person you can talk to.' I tried to dissuade him from doing this, and insisted that I was very much enjoying talking to him. But since it was possible that he was using this as an excuse for extricating himself from my company without casting any unpleasant light on myself, I let him go and find this White. Eventually he returned with a middle-aged White woman – whom he had never met before – and sat her next to me. He then sat down again himself, and told the woman that I wanted to talk to her. The woman looked confused, and began to talk to the Indian. But every time she addressed anything to him, he replied: 'no, no, you talk to him: he's going to want to talk with a White woman'. After a few awkward exchanges between us, the woman went away. And as soon as she had gone the Indian returned to the Cree lesson.

This kind of over-acceptance of Whites was a recurrent feature of many of my contacts with Indians on skid row. It had a less troubling, but probably no less significant, counterpart in the large number of jokes that Indians made against each other which turned on the backwardness and violence of Indian people. Some of these jokes referred to the Indian of the cowboy and Indian paradigm, but their relevance was carried into the skid row context. One Indian would quite often go up to another and say: 'O.K. cowboy, I'm going to scalp you'. Also, it was common practice for an Indian man to say to an Indian girl something about her being a squaw. A Cree I knew tended to argue with his Blackfoot common law wife, and in these arguments he always infuriated her by stating that the Blackfoot women were only Indians, and would ask her to take him to her Tepee. Between the Indians, however, these jokes were usually taken in good part, but if a White called an Indian girl a squaw it was considered a sign of gross disrespect, and often led to very violent exchanges which culminated in blows.

The attitudes of the girls to Indian men, the older men's anticipation of the White's lack of interest in the Indian, and the jokes, all indicate a fairly high level of introverted aggression. Franz Fanon has suggested that there is an intimate connection between this incorporation of non-native attitudes into the native's attitude towards himself and the persistence of violence.<sup>1</sup> He writes of the Algerian

<sup>1</sup>See Fanon 1967 & 1968.

native: 'The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits. That is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess: his dreams are of action and aggression.' Also; 'The native's muscles are always tensed. You can't say that he is terrorised, or even apprehensive. He is in fact ready at a moment's notice to exchange the role of the quarry for that of the hunter. The native is an oppressed person whose permanent dream is to become the persecutor.'<sup>1</sup> Of course the situation of natives in Algeria was radically different from that of the present day Canadian urban migrant, but there is no doubt that internalization of the non-Indian's hostility towards the Indian is a significant factor in skid row, and one should not be hasty in dismissing the possible connection between that factor and the prevalence of violence. In many respects the Indians are hostile towards their Indianness, and the stress which that hostility imposes is all too easily underestimated.

### Indian-White Relationships on Skid Row

It transpires that the racism of skid row is no less substantial than elsewhere in Canadian society, although it receives a somewhat different expression. The puzzle which must now be faced is the acceptance both Indians and Whites accord each other on skid row. There exists a unity between the two groups, as well as divisiveness. The Whites on skid row insist upon the inferiority of the Indians, but live in a context where their relationship to the Indians is in practice greater than their relationship to the non-skid row world. On skid row, racist theory is qualified in practice. In the bars and on the street corners the interaction between Indians and Whites suggests a firm mutual acceptance which is quite different from the strikingly inconsistent with the disrespect which the Whites confer upon the Indians in word.

There are two aspects to this unity which can be discussed here: first, the unity which derives from a common socio-economic position; second, the desire for collaboration which stems from the special circumstances of that socio-economic situation. The first is a socio-economic, the second a psychological account.

### The Unity of Socio-economic Condition

The skid row Whites are either migrant workers between jobs or regular quasi-alcoholics. The migrants have spent or are in the process of spending their 'roll'. Both in spending and having spent their 'roll' they are very much part of the skid row world — they are either in the position of spree drinker or bum. One qualification to the assertion that skid row Whites and Indians are in the same socio-economic position derives from the concentration of the young Whites in migrant labour. But since skid row Whites, whether migrant labourers or not, have identified with the skid row world, this qualification is not as important as might otherwise have been the case.

The lumpenproletarian is someone who has no regularized relationship to the means of production — he is neither owner nor qualified worker, there are no continuities to his economic life. On this definition the skid row population, Indian

<sup>1</sup>Fanon 1967 p. 41.

and White, are all in the same or very similar relationship to the means of production. They may be there for somewhat different reasons, and they may have arrived by different paths, but they have arrived — be it by choice or necessity — at very much the same position. The same relationship to the means of production, in the case of skid row, also involves very similar forms of social life: it is no coincidence that people in this socio-economic predicament gather in communities which are committed to and dependent upon modes of earning and living which lie substantially outside the law, modes best defined as in systematic opposition to those of the mainstream or middle class.

Indians and Whites can, objectively, be said to have a real unity on skid row — objectively because whatever they themselves might think about their positions relative to one another they are, in fact, in a very similar economic position.

### Mutual Dependence

As well as this objective unity between Indians and Whites on skid row, there also exists a striking argument for subjective unity. It has already been noted that Indians and Whites seem very willing indeed to share way of life, while at the same time regarding one another as different. Moreover, it has been noted that the Whites regard the Indians as inferior, and the Indians seem to acquiesce in this judgement.

It is the most dispossessed of society who gather together on skid row. Although this idea of dispossession is most emphatically a conception from mainstream life, it is all the same a conception of which skid row people are fully aware. It can be repeated that almost no-one on skid row has been socialized there, and the majority of mainstream conceptions are brought in by the migrants themselves. Even in the terms of the migrant, therefore, skid row is associated with failure within the society as a whole.

But within the skid row the relative failure of the two groups is different. That is to say, while the skid row White feels he is at the base of the social system, he can qualify that position to his advantage by being a racist, consoling himself in the belief that the Indians form a substantial group below him.

On the other hand, the Indian can qualify his sense of failure by sharing his life with non-Indians. If it is accepted that non-Indians are inevitably superior to Indians, then in making an identification with non-Indians the Indian is not as socially relegated as he is in separation from the White. And if we remember that it is the urban migrant we are discussing, the argument is more persuasive. The migrant comes to the city to avoid isolation. He associates the city with a fuller — and more equal — life. In living on skid row his life is fuller, in purely status terms, in virtue of the skid row mixture of Whites and Indians. That is not the case in any other part of the city. Outside skid row the Indian is in danger of being systematically excluded from a life shared with Whites, at least on a day-to-day social basis. Thus it can be seen once again that skid row offers the Indian a milieu in which his self-respect is enhanced. But it is a corollary of this enhancement that he must accept the White's racism: status accrues just because being with Whites is better than not being with

Whites. Where Indians find that satisfaction, it follows that they are also subscribing to doctrines of White superiority.

Thus, in the bar, on the street corner, and in every part of the skid row world the White can console himself that he is not at the base of society, for there are Indians beneath him. And the Indian can feel that he is socially advanced just by being with Whites. Each sector of the community gains by sharing its life with the other. For the White this involves the merging of racism in theory with assimilation in practice: for the Indian it involves the internalization of White views of Indians. From what has been described so far in this report, it should be evident that these conditions are definitely met.

This mutual dependence in practice, combined with a shared theory about the relative status of the Indian and the White, can be seen as a social symbiosis: both social groups depend on the other for social and personal reassurance. Combined with the objective unity which derives from shared socio-economic status, and is supplemented by the joint belief in myths of racial superiority, the solidarity of the community as well as its racial divisiveness becomes intelligible. That the expression of the divisiveness should surround beliefs about economic parasitism and violence should not be surprising in the light of the argument of Chapter 4. It is now possible to add an additional insight into the violence.

It is obviously central to the present argument that skid row Indians and Whites are both, as groups, troubled about their social positions. Given that there is this malaise, assertiveness as a means of forming status *per se* becomes more intelligible. As well as using assertiveness as the one means of making an impression on others, thereby securing a position of some importance within the skid row community, assertive individuals are also compensating for their more general, but probably no less profound, sense of failure. If we add to this the remarks by Fanon about the introversion of violence *per* identification with the value systems of the socially ascendant group, class, or race, the violence of the Indians should cease to be surprising at all.

## CHAPTER 6

### SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL WORKERS

In the course of field-work I had occasion to talk to many social workers, and spent some time in different institutions which aim at meeting the needs of the groups I have been describing. In this chapter some brief outline of the people and the institutions will be given. This outline is important if only to reveal the enormous gulf that exists between the helpers and the helped: not only do they come from opposite social classes, different life-styles, and different races in a race-conscious society, the helpers do not seem to be able to grasp that there exists in skid row a way of life which is gratifying, and which has evolved around the very difficulties which the social workers regard as the heart of the problems. Skid row life, that is to say, accommodates the marginal people far more completely than any of the institutions. The operators of the institutions for the most part cannot understand how such a situation could exist. This difficulty in understanding the gratifications of skid row life reflects, of course, the vast moral and ideological gulf between social workers and the socially problematic group.

I shall divide social work into two broad categories: that which is aimed at providing shelter and the more directly material benefits, and that which is directed at moralizing or rehabilitating. The two cannot easily be separated since the second kind of work almost invariably offers many of the benefits of the first category, while many who claim to be offering no more than material benefits are, in fact, hoping, if not expecting, that the recipients will automatically be rehabilitated without any further intervention. In practice, however, the distinction is quite real, and those institutions which explicitly direct a substantial proportion of their energies towards rehabilitation can be classed in the second category – whatever their material benefits – while the institutions which offer only material benefits do not effect rehabilitation on any significant scale. And if the categories be considered from the point of view of the recipients, the distinction is plainly very real. Many refuse to have any dealings with the work which is directed towards rehabilitation, and all are very conscious of the two aspects of whatever kind of social work they come into contact with.

#### Housing and Homes

There are on skid row many people who have nowhere to live, so that housing poses a grave problem. It is extremely hard to quantify the size of the problem, but one table of figures compiled in 1969 by a group from the Y.W.C.A. seeks to give an accurate account of the housing needs for girls in one city. The figures are estimates for a one year period, 1968-9.

ESTIMATED NUMBERS FOR GIRLS ARRIVING IN THE CITY, 1968-9

<u>category</u>	<u>reported in need</u>	<u>cared for</u>	<u>not cared for</u>
A. Girls coming to city with resources, but needing accommodation and orientation to city life . . . . .	455	195	260
B. Destitute girls who may require residence and orientation to city life . . . . .	594	49	545
C. Girls who may require supervised residence away from own homes . . . . .	55	40	15
D. Girls released from institutions who may need supervised accommodation . . . . .	157	45	112
E. Girls without resources who are in the city for special purposes (e.g. education) . . . . .	134	34	100
F. Transient girls coming to the city . . . . .	78	28	50
G. Girls with pathological problems (e.g. alcoholism and prostitution) . . . . .	872	62	810
H. Expectant and unwed mother not in above categories . . . . .	215	197	18
I. Girls in need of accommodation not categorised . . . . .	2,220	1,721	499
	4,780	2,371	2,409

(Figures compiled by the Y.W.C.A., 1969)

This table does not distinguish between Indians and non-Indians, but the evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of categories B, F, G, and H are in fact Indians or Métis. Further, the compilers of the figures told me that they regarded the estimates as extremely conservative, largely because Indians who move between reserve and city are not easily quantified. Many make their way into the skid row district because they have no recourse to a route which would bring them into contact with agencies which might assist them.<sup>1</sup>

The Indians migrants would benefit enormously from a scheme aimed to provide accommodation at a reasonable rate, and which also provided an information centre about employment so those who did think that employment would help them through their adjustment to city life would be able to determine what work was available in a fairly casual manner.

<sup>1</sup>Y.W.C.A. employees keep a close watch on the bus depot for arriving girls who are conspicuously in need of help, but so do pimps, bums, and lonely people on the look out for friends.

There is, in fact, one such institution in the city, though it does not provide for residence. This is the Native People's Centre. The Centre is run entirely by native people, and every afternoon it is possible for anyone to go there and get coffee and bannock free. There is a small library at the Centre, and a few musical instruments for visitors to play. The instruments are quite popular, and most days one or two people strum on guitars or play music on guitar and fiddle. The Centre also gives news about Indian affairs, and tries to keep classes in Cree well subscribed. The staff are qualified to give a great deal of advice and help on legal and social problems. The principal staff member is a court worker, and seems to be quite influential in the city. Certainly Indians can go to him for legal help and he intercedes on their behalf in the courts. Now that the Centre has become somewhat better known, the court occasionally refers a case to him, and the police sometimes contact him over a particularly difficult problem.

There is certainly a very relaxed atmosphere in the Centre, and though visitors are not permitted to drink or sleep there, most transients in serious need are accommodated whenever possible. The Indians of the city trust the staff of the Centre, and the staff do succeed in avoiding the excesses of moralization and latent criticism which infuse so much non-Indians' dealings with Indian problems. Skid row Indians often leave the bars during the afternoon and go to the Centre for a few hours, and in increasing numbers they look to the staff for advice and help — particularly when in the courts.

What the Centre needs is a programme of massive expansion, but it seems that funds are just not forthcoming. At the moment, there is the nucleus of an excellent staff, but the building has only one large room for use of visitors. A residence which grew out of the Centre would meet a very pressing need, and could by itself do more to alleviate the problem of the migrant than any other single factor. At present there is in Vancouver such a Centre, and its progress should be watched closely for the same reasons.

The Y.W.C.A. functions in some measure as a primarily residential institution, though girls who have any difficulties are very closely watched over. In the Y.W.C.A., however, there is very little special awareness of the problem of Indian girls, and accommodation is used chiefly by people who are in the city for special purposes, such as education.<sup>1</sup> Of course, it is necessary for the majority of the girls there to pay for their rooms keep, and some women use it rather like an hotel. What the Y.W.C.A. does offer, however, is a youth club for Indians — both young men and women — which is organised extremely intelligently and could have a great deal of success. But it must be noted that the majority of the people who come to the youth club are students in the city and they tend to regard skid row Indians as people from another world. This attitude probably reflects in considerable measure a desire to convince the organizers of the club that they, the club users, are not just bums and alcoholics—but the very fact that they should feel a need to give this kind of reassurance reflects the nature of the club if not the Y.W.C.A. itself. While it has that character it will barely touch the problem of the skid row population.

<sup>1</sup>The Y.W.C.A. accommodates 60, of whom 1/3 are usually Indian.



Much the same must be said of the Y.M.C.A., though in its case the large majority of users are not Indians. Skid row men who are desperate for a place to stay do not go to the Y.M.C.A. because they do not need to. Instead they use the Salvation Army Hostel.

The Salvation Army Hostel is in the middle of skid row, and it is possible for even the very drunk to find their way from an adjacent bar into the entrance hall. The difficulty with the Salvation Army Hostel lies in its closing at 9:30 every night. This means that it is impossible for the men who want to drink until the bars close at 11 p.m. to stay there. It is not easy for a man to extricate himself from a group of friends who are having a very happy time, and make his solitary way to the Hostel. It may be that the Salvation Army regards this small act of self-discipline as a minimum sacrifice for the use of their facilities, but if the Salvation Army is seriously trying to alleviate the problem of the homeless on skid row it might reconsider its policies in the light of the objectives. It cannot be denied, however, that some do leave the bars and go to the Hostel, but they tend to be the older men who are afraid of having nowhere to stay at all. For the younger men, the Hostel has only very limited use.

For those who do not get into the Hostel, have no friend to stay with, and prefer not to sleep in the open (and in the winter this is impossible) the cheap hotels are the only resort. All the skid row bars are located in hotels where it is possible to rent a room for as little as three dollars a night, and when the bars close many people are obliged to do so. To pay for these rooms many of the drinkers spend the last hour's drinking time borrowing and begging money. It is quite possible that a substantial proportion of the small crimes in the streets after closing time are thus motivated.

Of course the purely commercial hotel is the residence least concerned with the rehabilitation of its residents. In the hotel rooms many drinking parties are continued long into the night, and they offer the most effective protection against the most pervasive vulnerabilities — the night's place is sure, there is no need to fear the intrusion of unwelcome outsiders, be they forces of law or friends. The hotels are full every night.

### Rehabilitation

The provincial jail is the institution concerned with rehabilitation which skid row Indians come into contact with the most. During fieldwork I did not meet a single Indian who had been on skid row for more than a few months who had *not* been in jail. Many of the sentences are very short, and many of the offenders make a very conscious distinction between sentences served in the provincial jail and those served in the penitentiary. The provincial jail takes all offenders sentenced to less than two years. Between fifty and seventy-five per cent of the inmates are usually Indian or Métis.

The actual rehabilitation work done in the jail is small. There are programmes for educational up-grading, but they are not popular. There are some facilities for technical training, but they are very limited, and the prisoners are allowed little time

out of their cells. Outside speakers are occasionally invited to talk to Indian inmates, but there is inevitably a great deal of suspicion and wariness of strangers.

It is necessary to emphasise the relaxed attitude which Indians tend to have towards jail. It is not, in the skid row world at least, a source of remorse or guilt to be jailed. Indeed, it is substantially the opposite: the 'rounder' is a person who is likely to build up some prestige, especially if the offences for which he is jailed are impressive for their daring or monetary returns. Many people from different towns meeting in skid row bars remember one another from jail; most conversations between Indians who are uncertain if they have met before or not centre on jails and prisoners they have known. Jail is an important shared experience, and is valued <sup>95</sup> so much by virtually all skid row people. Many Indians and non-Indians told me that they did not mind the shorter sentences at all, for they gave a chance to rest, get some better food than usual, and meet many old friends. There is never any mention of the embarrassment or stigma which attaches to jail sentences in most communities outside skid row.

It is not surprising, therefore, that recidivism among the skid row population is extremely high. It is in fact highest in the twenty to thirty age group, and next highest in the forty to fifty group. Altogether the numbers in jail have decreased in all age-groups, but not due to the deterrent effect of jail or to the success of skeletal programmes for rehabilitation: the police have decided to reduce the number of arrests they make for simple drunkenness and other minor offences, while the magistrates have realised that over-zealousness in jailing for first offences can only reap negative returns.<sup>1</sup>

In jail the Indians tend to be more friendly than the non-Indians. The social worker in the women's section told me that the Indian girls are very glad to sit and talk and laugh with the counsellor, and, once initial defensiveness and shyness is overcome, are very glad to maintain a relaxed joking relationship with all social workers who come into contact with them. In contrast, the White girls are very serious, and seem very concerned about what is going to be done for them. They aggressively insist that something *must* be done. This difference in response to the social worker is the one indication of a difference in attitude to being in jail at all.

Given that the Indians in jail are forced to be there for a definite period, and that they have very few negative feelings about being in jail, the rehabilitation aspect of the institution is not likely to be effective. The argument that going to jail at all is reformative, or at worst likely to frighten offenders out of repeating their offences quite obviously does not apply. Jail, therefore, barely qualifies as part of social rehabilitation, despite the protestations by social workers to the contrary. Perhaps the one qualification to this lies in the presence of social workers in the jails — it is in jail that most of the Indians are brought into contact with a social worker or counsellor, and in the course of their lives this contact can prove influential. But even that qualification probably applies only to the younger women.

Apart from the jail, there are a number of half-way houses and similar institutions. The half-way house was conceived as a way of easing the route between

<sup>1</sup>See chapter 7 illustration 5 for example of this.

the closed institution and normal social life. Ideally, the prisoner being rehabilitated can leave jail for a half-way house where residence is provided and counselling is continued. Here it should be possible for the resident to pursue some training or seek some job without the desperate lack of home, security, and money which customarily greets the prisoner on release.

The half-way house is the one institution in a position to overcome the paradoxical situation of the Indian prisoner who goes to jail for offences which arise out of his marginal social position (petty theft, prostitution, false pretences, drunken fighting) and his ability to integrate into the economic opportunities of the society as a whole, but who comes out of jail even less capable of integration than before. The Indian girls in jail complain that they cannot find the jobs they want, most commonly nursing or social work. But to become a nurse's assistant a girl must have attained grade ten. Very few Indian girls have reached more than grade seven. Once they have been in jail the difficulty of finding any employment is much increased, and those girls who do find some work tend to do so only with deception. I heard several cases where the deception was uncovered, the girls who for several months had proved quite satisfactory employees were summarily dismissed because they had been in jail and had not said so when applying for their jobs. It is this kind of difficulty that the half-way house aims at alleviating.

There are two such houses for women in the city, but none for men. Both the houses for women had the same difficulties: the Indian residents tended to use the house as a place to come to when in desperate straits, but would not settle into its rehabilitative modes. Living in an institution organised entirely by middle class Whites is not easy for an Indian girl. Her experience and the kind of attitudes which her experience has moulded are at odds with those of all others who have dealings with her. Hence the Indians tend to remain feeling marginal, keep to themselves, and in withdrawal do not take advantage of the opportunities which the half-way house is trying to give them. Instead they look to skid row for company, and to hustling for a source of income.

It must be added that these Indian women have a good deal of rationale on their side. The social workers and resident staff say that they should stop drinking, stop hustling, and find some other way of living. But in fact drinking is the route to friends and companions with whom they do not feel awkward, and the difficulties which face an Indian women with low educational grade attainment in a search for employment are so severe as to highlight the benefits of the hustler's life.

The half-way houses not only take women out of jail, but in fact tend to concentrate on women who are picked up on the streets and seem to be in need of help. Some women simply come to the house and ask to be taken in. Many of these are very ill from prolonged drinking when they arrive, and often have been seriously beaten. They need, therefore, a period of recuperation and some medical attention. But as they recuperate, so the utility of the recuperation comes to be outweighed by the disutility of their isolation within the homes. For the Indian this isolation is very severe. Unable to relate to the other residents, who are either non-Indian or of a

very different age-group, and forbidden to go out drinking, they increasingly feel the strong appeal of skid row.<sup>1</sup>

Much as the staff of these houses are understanding and sympathetic to their residents' problems, they are effectively unable to grasp how isolating their homes are for the Indians, and they also seriously underestimate the difficulties which would face the Indian women in a search for employment and integration into mainstream Canadian life.

If the social workers succeed in communicating to the Indians that they are there to find jobs and provide facilities which Indians need, and if they can avoid implying or suggesting that there is a price in terms of rehabilitation to be paid for these benefits, they are able to do useful work. Much effort goes into the social work that is carried out, but far too much of that effort is under-informed or too flagrantly middle class in its tones. The Indians, as this report is emphasising throughout, constitute a sub-culture within the industrial society which has moral and social qualities systematically at odds with those of the mainstream society. The opposition in these values, and ways must be dealt with intelligently by all who wish to offer benefits and services and counsel to Indian migrants. Many of these migrants are glad of help. What they are much less glad of is a presumptuous claim by the helper that the Indian on skid row is quite obviously in desperate need of reform. The experience of the skid row Indian in many cases quite manifestly disconfirms that view, for he frequently knows very well just how difficult, hostile, and alien the alternative forms of life in the city are. Skid row has much to offer, and social workers can help where there is need before claiming the right to determine the correct social paths.

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<sup>1</sup> Anyone who returns to the house drunk is in danger of being turned away. In one house the stricture is so strong that the best established residents get turned away for coming to the House drunk.

## CHAPTER 7

### ILLUSTRATIONS

The nine brief sketches in this chapter are designed to do more than illustrate some of the report's arguments. Although they are <sup>not</sup> fragments from the lives of Indians who have had varying experiences of skid row life, they should give some greater substance to the social problems of skid row as a whole. In a report of this kind there is, perhaps inevitably, a tendency to compress material so much as to eliminate many of the most immediate details. Many of these details do not fit easily or neatly into the theoretical perspectives employed. What they may offer, however, is a somewhat fuller view of the Indian's relationship to skid row than arguments alone are likely to achieve.

The illustrations are taken from field-notes. In all cases they are merely extracts from long accounts and episodes; in some cases the account is built from various notes written over a fairly long period. In all cases they are skeletal and abrupt; none of them does justice to the complexity and sensitivity of either the story or the narrator.

The stories of Connie, the elderly woman, and Barbara (Nos. 1, 2 and 3) indicate the widely differing routes by which Indians can move onto skid row. Born on a reserve but brought up in the city, Connie believes that her skid row life is temporary, but her hopes of leaving skid row for a career in social work are, to say the least, very optimistic. On the other hand, Barbara moved into the city much more easily and, like many of the younger migrants, confidently and realistically expects to find a full and comparatively exciting life. The elderly woman, in her lack of information and consequent muddle, represents a different kind of migrant – but it was only by chance that she avoided skid row on first arriving. Instead of coming to skid row because she was lost, that woman is probably going to come to skid row because her relatives either cannot accept her at home or are themselves part of the skid row world. It is certainly unlikely that a woman who is so poorly equipped for city life will, as an Indian, long ignore the adjustment which skid row has to offer. Although the first three illustrations include people of quite different social positions, they, none the less, all have in common a displacement from mainstream

Canadian life. None of them can accept the reserve life, but none of them are likely to be able to settle into mainstream life either. To them, skid row can offer a reconciliation of the dilemma this situation extends.

The account of Al's first visit to the city (No. 4) provides an example of an Indian who is *not* content with skid row life. Al and his wife have abandoned their reserve milieu, feel uneasy about persistent skid row life, but cannot in reality dislocate themselves from it. By skid row standards, Al's attitudes and behaviour are

abnormally infused with middle-class aspirations. But in feeling the blockade against realising these anti-skid row aspirations, Al expresses frustration in archetypal skid row manner. Thus he further restricts the possibility of change. In this he exemplifies a process which implicates the large majority of all the skid row population.

In many respects Lil's history (No.5) indicates the same forces. Like Al, she has highly developed middle-class aspirations; unlike Al, she has been one of the tiny minority of Indians who have realised such aspirations. In trouble, Lil was able to fall back on the conviviality of skid row. In her drinking there was probably an unusually large element of despair, but she found, and to some extent still finds, the isolation of mainstream life quite severe. Skid row always tempted her with the readily accessible alternatives to such isolation. Only with persistent and determined association with middle-class moral attitudes could the advantage of immediate gratification be foregone. In few Indians' lives can there be much real basis for such renunciation; it is the first part of Lil's story which is typical. And the predicament of her children illustrates the limitations to change in Lil's social predicament.

Vern (No.6) is the skid row Indian who has fully accepted and successfully manipulated skid row possibilities. Middle-aged and widely experienced, he is representative of many skid row Indians, most of whom achieve such a full adjustment only with time. Vern is less of a lumpenproletarian than most, but he still finds mainstream city life awkward and oppressive.

The last three illustrations — Tom, Frank and Brenda — are all young people. They represent three of the most recurrent predicaments confronting the present generation of young Indians. Tom (No.7) chose to leave his family, and in escaping the tention of being classed as an Indian at home, discovered the integration on skid row. A good fighter and a heavy drinker, Tom was quick to establish himself in the skid row community. Certainly he feels himself to be far better off, far more content, on skid row than at home. Frank, (No. 8) on the other hand, left the reserve for mainstream life and was able to find some success and satisfaction until faced with a difficulty. That difficulty amounted to sudden isolation, and Frank's response to isolation was a sudden disregard for all previous commitments and responsibilities. His experience of skid row will probably hold Frank there in the short term; in the longer term its consequences will render alternatives to skid row less and less possible. Neither his marriage nor job can survive very long. The stories of Frank, Al and Connie have much in common. All of them are young Indians who in some considerable measure have not wanted skid row life, but they all become entrenched on skid row in response to crisis. That such crises occur, and that young Indians are so vulnerable to them, is no more a coincidence than their responding by embroilment in skid row. In many respects it is the hopes, aspirations, and alternatives which are unrealistic.

Brenda — the ninth and final illustration — indicates the newest development. I suggest below (chapter 8) that skid row is likely to become less and less helpful to young Indians, if only because the needs and expectations of the migrants are going to develop faster than the possibilities skid row life can offer. Brenda is unlikely to

find reconciliation to her difficulties in the skid row community in the style of Tom, Frank, Vern and even Connie, and the alternatives open to her are few: identifying most completely with hippies of her own age, it remains the case that a huge gulf exists between them and her. Already Brenda is extremely withdrawn. She finds acute difficulty in expressing herself without using drugs; she is intimidated by the most commonplace questions; she is virtually unable to make a simple request. Brenda's withdrawal is suggestive of a personality somewhat different from that of the skid row Indian. In a sense she is far more individuated, and accordingly far less able to participate even in a defensive grouping of others in the same plight. She is ill at ease with her Indianness, but cannot express her anxiety in aggression. Perhaps over a number of years Brenda will make an adjustment to skid row styles; perhaps she will come to terms with being Indian in a society which is widely hostile to Indians. But her life will be extremely hard and no solution is at hand: it seems to me most likely that Brenda's withdrawal will persist, and that she will find placation in the privaey of this withdrawal, whether it be on skid row or with hippies. Privatisation of this kind is probably going to be more frequent, and will make a significant change in skid row modes. It could be that Brenda's predicament, a typical for the present, bodes ill for the future.

What these anecdotes may also add to the arguments of the report is some insight into the constant movement of people into skid row and a few of the multivarious pressures which lead and hold them there. But common to all is the manner in which skid row does constitute a milieu which always might be, and frequently is, more welcoming and less perplexing than mainstream life. For Indians who came either off the reserves or from uptown, this alternative to the middle-class white city, which lies actually within that city, can always be enjoyed and used. The illustrations show that for some, skid row is only the best of three unattractive milieus, but for many its life-style is more easily learned than abandoned.

1. Connie has a Scottish father and Indian mother. She says she feels more Indian than anything else, and certainly looks it. She was born and brought up near Fort Resolution. Her mother died when she was three, and Connie was the youngest of a family of eleven. She was put in a convent orphanage in the city. She completed grade ten, and after that began to train as a hairdresser.

Connie, her next older sister, and an older brother are the only three members of the family who are not alcoholic. She is out of touch with all her family — her father is recurrently hospitalized, and the other children are either still in Fort Resolution or Vancouver.

After almost completing her training as a hairdresser she became pregnant. She was at that time living in Lethbridge. She moved to the city to have her baby. In the city she knows none of her old friends, and she went to see her father in hospital. She had not seen her father for several years, but he was very affectionate to her when she visited him. No sooner was he out of the hospital, however, than was he drinking again — expecting Connie to finance him. In fact the family are all constantly asking Connie for money, and though she says she always refuses to give them any, she probably cannot resist their persistent demands.



As soon as Connie got to the city to have the baby she met other girls in the skid row area who wanted her to join them as hustlers. She did join them, and for four months worked out of a small coffee bar on the edge of skid row along with six or seven others. As a hustler she has made good friends with the most influential pimp, and has found a young white man who is very kind to her. The other girls seem to like Connie, although on the whole they regard her as rather on the soft side. As a hustler, therefore, she has a group of friends to whom she can always look for company and protection. But Connie insists that she intends to give the baby away as soon as it is born, she will return to hairdressing, become qualified, and then become a social worker.

2. An elderly woman arrived at the bus station in the city. She had come to visit her relatives. She had never been in the city before, and expected that it would be easy to find her relatives' house. She knew the name of the street, but not the number. She got a taxi at the bus station and told the driver the name of the street. As they drove along the street the woman looked out for the house and was surprised when she could not recognise it. Eventually the taxi driver said he would not go on driving backward and forward along the street, and asked the woman to pay him. But she did not have enough money to pay such a large fare. The driver then took her to the police station, and demanded that she be made to pay.

Fortunately the police were unsympathetic to the driver's demands, and it was pointed out to him that a driver is obliged to determine destination before beginning a trip. The police then contacted the Native Centre and asked if anyone there would be able to find the woman's relatives. Eventually this was done. But there are many people who arrive in the city with no clear idea of what they are going to do or where they are going to go. The Native Centre comes into contact with an average of fourteen people of that kind per week, but probably many more find their way to skid row on their own.

3. Barbara is a Blackfoot girl of 18. She came to the city from Montana with a boyfriend. Between them they had saved up \$400 for the trip. But the boy disappeared soon after their arrival on skid row with all the money, and Barbara was unable to find him. She quickly found other friends, however, and began a spree on her own without the money.

For two days she drank heavily, raising money by hustling men for drinks. As she did not meet the boy again, however, she did not leave the city, and soon settled into a house inhabited by a distant relative of hers from the same reserve. She became pregnant or had been pregnant when she arrived, and decided to stay in the city to have the baby. After two months on skid row, Barbara was sentenced to twenty-eight days in jail for taking money on false pretences. After the jail sentence she seemed to be much more relaxed about living in the city, and said she would never go back to the reserve. She did go, however, to visit another Blackfoot reserve with some friends, but when she got back to skid row she complained very bitterly about life on the reserve. Barbara has found more satisfaction on skid row than in reserve life.

4. Al arrived in the city in the morning. He spends a few weeks at a time in a southern town, where he sometimes works on a construction site, and other times just drinks. He is a Blackfoot, and remarkable for his extremely powerful physique. But although he is obviously immensely strong he is unusually generous, out-going, and kindly. Within two hours of reaching the city he was with four other drinkers on skid row, two of them Indian and two of them White. He had never been in the city before.

Al came to the city with his wife, but soon after they arrived he had an argument with her, and she insisted on going to find her mother who lives in the city. By six in the evening Al was very worried about what could have happened to his wife, and he tried to phone her mother. But the mother would not tell him anything, she has always disapproved of Al. Unable to find his wife, Al kept moving from bar to bar, asking if anyone had seen her, and asking everyone where they thought she might be. What frightened Al most was the possibility that she had been arrested for taking money on false pretences: she has been in jail several times for soliciting as a prostitute and then disappearing after receiving an advance payment. Al was especially frightened because they had decided to make a new start, and to keep out of trouble. It became obvious very quickly that between Al and his wife there existed a very strong affective bond indeed. Al kept saying that if she had been picked up then both their lives were wrecked — she would be given a longer sentence, for a recurrent offence, and there would be no point in his keeping out of jail if she was inside.

As the evening wore on, Al's nervousness and depression increased. Suddenly he turned to me and said that he would go and give himself up at the police station, and asked to be taken there. He believed that he would find his wife at the station, and that the police would let him talk to her. I said that the police would never let him talk to her until the case had been heard in the morning. Al replied that the police would surely allow them to talk if he offered something in exchange — namely a confession to a number of things they had never managed to catch him for. Eventually all four of us succeeded in persuading Al that giving himself up was completely pointless, and that first he should find out if the girl had been picked up or not. So Al went and phoned the police, and discovered that his fears had been justified: she was picked up for taking money on false pretences; her case would be heard in the morning.

At this Al despaired altogether, but decided that the best thing to do was get some bail money together. He asked everyone where he could make the necessary \$80, but nobody seemed able to advise him. One of the men suggested that he knock someone down in the street, and collect the money that way, but Al insisted on the foolishness of such a crime. He obviously didn't like that kind of personal violence. (Earlier in the evening he had prevented the others from beating up an elderly man in the street.) He wanted, instead, to get hold of a car and use that for some kind of more effective job.

It was obvious that Al didn't really know how to make the bail money, and that he was no good at planning a crime. Moreover, he was not very drunk, and his nervousness was far in advance of any drunken aggression that he might have used in

the past (he had been in jail on two quite substantial charges of robbery with violence). Instead he sat in a coffee-bar late into the night, trying to decide what he could do, and all the while lamenting his misfortune. He felt sure that his life was completely in ruins, and that his future held nothing for him any more. All the resolutions that he and his wife had made between them were finished.

At 3 a.m. Al walked out of the coffee bar and waited in the street. The first person who came by he attacked and began a very savage fight. Within minutes a police car drew up, and Al was taken away in it. He was jailed for nine months.

5. Lil was born on a reserve on the Montana-Canadian border. She married on the reserve and had three children. Her mother and sister were both alive on the reserve, and she was fairly content. Occasionally Lil went for a drinking evening with her reserve friends into the local town. In town they would meet their non-Indian friends. These visits were infrequent, but when they did occur they involved spree drinking.

On one such spree Lil was with five friends – three Indians and two Whites, all girls. All of them were picked up by the police for being drunk in the street, and put in jail over night. In the morning they came before the magistrate who fined them all the same amount. But the magistrate said that the White girls could have time to pay, whereas the Indians, if they were not able to pay directly, had to go to jail for ten days. None of the Indians could pay, and protested against the unfairness of the sentence. The magistrate justified his action by saying that the Indians were a serious problem, and it would be a good thing if they learned that drunkenness could not be tolerated.

When Lil came out of jail she found that her children had been taken away from home, and put in an institution. Lil was told that she was obviously not competent to look after her children, and she was not able to get them back.

At this time Lil says she was extremely shy of any dealing with non-Indian officials, and that when any White person was seen approaching the house all the family would hide and pretend not to be in. So when it came to going to see White officials Lil became tongue-tied and apprehensive, and was unlikely to have any success.

Having lost her children, Lil began to drink heavily. Every day she drank whatever she could find and joined all the sprees she could. In addition to decreasing the likelihood of regaining her children, the heavy drinking angered her friends and family. Her sister and mother said that if she had to drink so much it would be better if she left the reserve and went to live in town, where she wasn't so close to the people who were disturbed by her. So Lil went to town, and was soon on skid row there. But after a year of drinking and hustling, Lil's sister came to her again and asked Lil to move further away, to some place where nobody would know her, and so no news and scandal about her would keep coming back into the reserve. Lil's sister said that she was tired of hearing about Lil all the time.

So Lil moved to a larger city a good way to the north of her home town. She moved onto skid row, because she was able there to be with her friends and to find

the money she needed to keep herself eating and drinking. During her time on skid row Lil never had a fixed place to stay, and many weeks on end she spent sleeping in doorways and wherever she could find a quiet place to lie down. She was jailed more than twenty times, either for a few days or a few weeks, and always for alcohol-connected crime. She also paid innumerable fines. But the life was making her extremely ill, and one night collapsed in the street and was taken to hospital.

For several months Lil was dangerously ill and she was extremely lucky not to have died. As she was recuperating, social workers tried to make advances to her. One Indian came to see her, but he remarked on her clothing, and Lil angrily threw him out. The Indian man then sent a woman, but she was not Indian, and Lil would have no dealing with the Whites. She had asked for help, but the approaches had resulted in rough rebuttals. Once she approached a priest and asked if he would give her a job of some kind, but his answer was: "I don't know if you'll be at work or in jail in the morning." Once, when in jail, she asked to see the Church visitor, and told her that what would be best was to find her children. But the Church visitor replied to Lil with a rebuke: "What kind of a mother are you, with three children and you in jail?" So attempts by well-wishers in hospital to help her were received with suspicion and resentment.

But eventually Lil made friends with one social worker who invited her to come and stay for a few days when she first came out of hospital. This social worker also helped Lil to find a job – as a baby-sitter for \$30 per month. Lil was so pleased to get a place to live that she was delighted with the offer of a job. After three weeks of living in that strange house, however, she became desperately lonely. She had not made friends with the family, and her own friends were unable to visit her in such a middle class milieu. Despite her participation in an Alcoholics Anonymous group, Lil yearned to go down to skid row and see her friends and have a good time with them, away from the constraints and loneliness of a strange house and isolating job.

In fact, Lil was kept away from skid row by her A.A. friends, and after a year of relapses, she gave up drinking altogether. She has not drunk anything for five years. In this she has been helped by success in the realm of social work, and her rise to prominence in the Native Women's Association. Lil is an unusual and extraordinary person, and has made of her appalling misfortunes a very real success. But her difficulties are by no means over. She has her children back with her now, but is unable to find a place where she can live without the landlady or neighbours' anti-Indian sentiments intruding on her life.

When I last spoke to Lil she was looking for a new apartment; her landlady had insisted that she move because her sons sometimes got very drunk. In fact, the landlady's husband is an alcoholic himself, dying in a back room upstairs in the same house. Lil complains bitterly at the way in which Indians are forced out into the streets, into the open. Then, says Lil, the Indians are ground lower and lower: unable to go back to their reserves, they struggle in the skid row life; the only time many of them are nearly dead. Lil thinks she was very lucky, but she still despairs of how she is going to bring up her children in a milieu which expresses so much hostility towards her, and all Indians. She suspects that the boys are already establishing themselves in the skid row world. They are still at school.

6. Vern was born in the city, with a French father and Cree mother. He speaks Cree and a little French as well as English. He has worked at every kind of job in the city available to him — driving a taxi, playing music on the streets, on construction sites, in a bar band. But now, at the age of forty, he has become a skid row regular. His life on skid row is very successful — he is very well respected among the Indians and whites, though he has made his closer friends among Indians. He lives with an Indian girl, and was married to an Indian.

Everyday Vern goes to a skid row bar in the morning to have a few beers. He then has some coffee, and buys a bottle of wine. He gets his money from welfare and bumming, he plays his harmonica and fiddle, asking the audience to give him enough for a drink. As a musician he is extremely popular. People ask him for a tune, and as soon as he begins to play a group gathers around him dancing and joining in. Often Vern goes with a guitarist to the Native Centre to play on the fiddle they have there.

In the course of the day Vern buys several bottles of cheap sherry, and drinks them in old shacks around skid row. On Sundays he gets wine from the bootlegger's, sits in the bootlegger's house, and there encourages the bootlegger's wife to dance the Cree dances.

Vern says that he sometimes goes to visit relatives on reserves near the city, but on the whole he prefers the Indians in town. Certainly his own city life is full and satisfying, and there is no reason why Vern should not go on living more or less the same way for many years.

7. Tom was born on a farm in Saskatchewan. His mother is Cree and his father English. He worked on the farm when he left school, but was never able to get along very easily with his father. He found that he thought of himself as an Indian, and he states this by pointing to how he could get on so much better with his Indian mother. As the tension between Tom and his father increased, and as Tom was getting into a lot of trouble around home, it was decided that it would be a very good thing if he left and got some work in the local town.

But Tom had a great deal of difficulty in keeping his jobs. He was fired for drunkenness and suffered for his Indian background. So he decided to leave the district altogether, and go where his Indian background was not known. He chose to go and work in the mines of northern British Columbia.

Tom stayed in the north for several months, and then came south with his savings. In the city he gravitated to skid row, and there indulged in his first real spree. He was quickly accepted into the community, of course, and his Indianness became at last something of an asset. After spending all his money on the spree, Tom went with friends he had made on skid row to another city, where he began a career of petty theft. He was in jail four times, and eventually moved back to skid row. Soon after returning he became involved in a fight with a barman, who lodged charges against him for assault. A few days after that he insulted two policemen in front of a large crowd of admiring onlookers. The policemen ignored the abuse, but an hour later Tom became embroiled in a fight with three others on the street, and

the same policemen took the opportunity of arresting him. They did not arrest any of the others involved.

Tom was sentenced to eight months in jail. He was not troubled about going to jail again, and always said that he would meet all his best friends there. Certainly Tom quickly became an established figure on skid row, and when he returns there it will be to a fine welcome and a great deal of camaraderie.

8. Frank came from a Blackfoot reserve to the city when he was fifteen. He finished his schooling in the city, and then went to work on construction jobs. As an adolescent he had a bad car accident, and lost the use of one eye. His determination to work on construction is demonstrated by his refusal to admit that there is anything he cannot do. He works at great heights, and is extremely proud of both the height and the money he earns by doing it. At twenty, Frank married an Indian girl from his home reserve, and they settled into a small apartment five blocks north of skid row. They have one child.

Frank's wife suddenly had to go into hospital and have an operation. He was very disturbed about this, and he asked his mother-in-law to look after the child. The first night his wife was in hospital Frank went down to skid row. He stayed there for five days, never visiting his wife, and not going to work. He was extremely drunk all the time, and on the second night met two Eskimo girls who worked at the hospital. He slept with one of these girls the night he met them, and he was very proud of his conquest, though he regretted that they were not Whites.

Throughout this time Frank could not bear the thought of going alone to his empty apartment, and he always took friends home with him to drink there. Frank is not the typical skid row drinker, but he quickly entered into the world, and soon surrounded himself with friends. He expressed to these friends, while he was drinking, his dissatisfaction with working at construction, saying that you could never drink because as soon as an Indian drinks he is fired. Frank expected that he would be fired because of this spree.

Once he has been fired, and once his wife comes out of hospital, Frank will be in a very awkward position. He had admitted that he is not at ease within mainstream life, and he has tasted the alternative. There can be no doubt that Frank found the alternative extremely satisfactory. Once he is drinking, once he begins to take part in skid row life, he will always find it difficult to find work — he will be classed as a 'typical Indian', and will always be vulnerable to the prejudices of employers. In fact, I left the city at the end of Frank's spree, and never heard whether he did or did not desert his determination to be 'normal'. But I suspect that he is now a more normal migrant Indian than he was before.

9. Brenda was deserted by her Indian parents when she was too young to remember. She was brought up in institutions. As soon as she could she left school and tried to find a job. She is outstandingly good-looking but very shy and inarticulate. She occasionally found employment baby-sitting or doing housework. She disliked both intensely. If she did not have a baby-sitting job she had to find friends to stay with. But she had only one real friend — a White girl who had been at school with her. For a time she stayed at the home of this girl, but the girl's mother disliked having an

Indian in the house, and insisted that Brenda move out. This left her with nowhere to stay.

On moving out, Brenda stayed for a few nights at the Y.W.C.A. Then she met two young hippies at a party who took her to their apartment. She and her girl friend stayed with them for a little over two weeks. During the stay Brenda was quite happy. She became very fond of one of the two men, though she failed to establish a sound relationship with him: she was unable to talk to him without anxiety. During the stay Brenda was introduced to 'soft' drugs, and found that they enabled her to express herself that bit more easily. But her basic withdrawal persisted.

The two week stay was terminated by a police raid on the apartment and the arrest of the two men. The girls were searched but not detained. They probably could have continued living in the apartment, but were very afraid of further raids, and did not even dare return to collect oddments of clothes they had left behind. Brenda's friend returned to her own home, but the friend's mother refused to allow Brenda to stay. So once again she was on the streets: convinced that the Y.W.C.A. would not have her back, and equally convinced that there was no possibility of any employment, she walked to the skid row area. For the first time in her life, Brenda went into a bar, but disliked it intensely: she felt acutely ill at ease and was nauseated by the beer. More important, she was afraid of the aggressively convivial Indian girls she met. On leaving the bars she met a friend of the two boys she had stayed with before — another young hippy. She went home with him.

Brenda now stays with new friends or hitch-hikes up the main street late at night: when picked up by a young man she tells him she has nowhere to stay. Often the man takes her home with him. Occasionally Brenda stays with one man for a few days, but her liaisons do not last. When I last saw Brenda she had been staying with a young man for a week, but did not know if she would be able to stay much longer. Her shyness and withdrawal were unchanged, and she still felt a keen dislike for skid row bars.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSIONS

#### The Advantages to Skid Row

For the migrant Indian skid row resolves the tension which arises from the combination of a desire for living in the city with the intense need to avoid a milieu dominated by middle class non-Indians. Inevitably located in an urban setting, the skid row also offers protection from mainstream life.

The Indians can, within a few blocks, find the mainstream life if they so wish, and can occasionally make use of such employment opportunities as they may find there. Further, those Indians who have become more or less integrated into the non-skid row world can move for at least the occasional spree onto skid row; they can find, with a minimum of difficulty a milieu in which their Indianness is an asset and a welcome is assured. On skid row the Indian can get drunk without feeling that he is under fierce racial criticism for drinking.

On skid row is a life quite strikingly in opposition to the bourgeois life of mainstream Canada. The bars and the social life are highly integrative, and the drinking places as well as the coffee bars are not isolated from the street. Social groupings form without tension, and individuals can shift from one group to another quite freely. It is usually possible to gather together some small change with which to buy a drink, and the mores of skid row insist upon the spree, which has a multiplier effect that ensures the rapid and wide circulation of money and purchases.

The assertiveness of skid row at first is disturbing, but it is a corollary of the social predicament of the people there. They are for the most part best characterized as lumpenproletariat — having access to the means of production in large measure barred to them, being neither owners nor qualified for regular skilled employment. For this group there is no substantial basis to status other than personality and competence, expressed by an ability to look after oneself. But the group is not isolated from the conceptions and aspirations of the larger society and the need for a hierarchical society is deeply ingrained. But the customary sources of the hierarchy are not present. Assertiveness thus becomes a prime basis of status.

On skid row the assertive and violent mores are qualified by the sense of unity between all the people there. Whites and Indians need each other in virtue of the mutual assurance they provide — Whites console themselves that at least they are better than Indians; Indians feel enhanced in status by sharing their way of life with Whites. Indians and Whites rarely fight with one another — most assertiveness is internecine. This is a counterpart to the basis for hierarchy in a context where two

groups agree that the one is superior to the other. Yet by the same token, it also means that the Indians are in a position of considerable tension. Many of them openly state or imply that they are somehow inferior people. This subscription to White myths about Indians precipitates a certain amount of introverted violence. The assertiveness of the Indian is enlarged by this factor.

Given that skid row is a place which has many gratifications to offer, and that a principal gratification is separation from the mainstream of society, it is not surprising that attempts by agencies to involve the Indians in up-grading, training, and other schemes, have proven unsuccessful. The skid row Indians for the large part feel keenly ill at ease outside skid row, and anticipate criticism and rejection. In this anticipation they are well justified. Their socio-economic position is thus reinforced. Not only are they on the whole unqualified for entry into urban employment (grade levels are not high enough, attitudes are not in harmony with urban industrial employment) but they also do not see in such employment any rewards which outweigh the clear disadvantages in terms of anxiety and tension when off skid row.

The efforts of social workers and others to deal with the problems which inevitably arise among a group in this predicament, have on the whole been unsuccessful and a little misguided. Attempts to provide accommodation are inadequate: the determination to rehabilitate and reform the skid row personality is usually doomed to failure. Skid row's advantages are not understood by the majority of people whose job it is to tackle its problems. Few of them are Indian, and all tend to place high valuation on and have unshakeable faith in upward social mobility. It should be clear from this report, as from the work of Hawthorn and others, that for the Indian upward social mobility is profoundly chimerical. The agencies and social workers are unwilling to concede in any part of their theoretical understanding, and hence in scarcely and part of their practice, that the Indians of skid row are in the position of lumpenproletariat. Resistance to concede this is understandable, but if it can be made absolutely clear that this means no insult to the Indian people — indeed, it casts a far more disparaging eye towards the non-Indians who have either precipitated or permitted such a development — then perhaps it can help provide guide-lines for confronting problems that are at present arising and promise in the future to proliferate.

### Why Alcohol?

So far this report has not directly faced the question of why alcohol is the central feature of skid row life. It was made explicit at the outset that confrontation of this problem *per se* would be erroneous. The consumption of alcohol takes place within skid row, and this report is about a community rather than an intoxicant. But at this stage a few remarks about the role of alcohol as such are required.

In almost every discussion of the contemporary predicament of the North American Indian (as also in discussion of other acculturating racial minorities) the role of alcohol is pointed.<sup>1</sup> In the literature on the Canadian Indian, drinking on

<sup>1</sup>For such comparative material see e.g. Rivers 1922, Thurnwald 1932, Elkin 1951, Anderson and Anderson 1960.

reserves has been well described — most particularly by Lemert. It is indicated in such discussions that the cultures were amenable to the introduction of liquor or to some features of its consequences. Lemert, for example, says of the Northwest Coast culture area that alcohol was used “as a means of consciously discharging aggression” and “drunkenness appeared as a desirable thing. . . .it had pre-eminent value in the feast situation.” The more intoxicated the guests became, the more conspicuously did they attest to the strength of their host's liquor and to the wealth which permitted them to be so lavish. . . .<sup>1</sup> Equally specific factors can be applied to adoption of alcohol in the Plains or Eastern Woodlands. But to cite the reasons for adoption, as a matter of anthropological history, does not give us reasons for retention.

That is to say, the functions of alcohol in the first stages of its use are not necessarily the same functions it performs at later stages. Function can alter where behaviour remains unchanged. Scholars may with great skill and insight answer questions about original functions, and still leave another important question completely neglected: what is the function of alcohol on skid row today?

But here we face another problem. Drinking is a pleasure — at least to regular users. In any event, large scale consumption of alcohol has been associated by the Indians with the spree — with the feast, party, and holiday modes. We know from historical and anthropological literature that this was its original context. And we also know that Indians came to regard the acquisition of alcohol as a principal objective of trade and social interaction with non-Indians. Furthermore, legal prohibition and restriction upon Indians' drinking can only have promoted the significance of alcohol and increased demand for it. It is essential to realize that where alcohol is a real pleasure, and heavy consumption is regular, the kinds of explanations which might cover non-Indian norms of drinking — the occasional fling or pathological alcoholism — are unlikely to apply.<sup>2</sup>

Once heavy drinking is established as normal within a community or even within a whole culture, and that drinking is associated with great pleasure, happiness, and communality, the question “why drink?” is in danger of becoming a complete mystification. A more realistic approach to the problem might come with a reverse question: “why not drink?” Given that the non-Indians are preoccupied with the problem of Indian drinking, it is probably as well to confront the issues from an understanding of the Indian and his position in Canadian society. This report has attempted to do that, and it follows from the arguments here that the explanation of Indian sk



money, and that also inhibits one's social possibilities. Second, large-scale consumption of alcohol is bad for the health. Third, drinking is morally bad: a good and decent person does not spend his time drinking. To the first of these we can reply: self-advancement is no part of the Indian's social consciousness or practice — at least as the mainstream Canadian understands it: it would be irrational to sacrifice a rewarding life-style for the remote chance of some social success. Indeed, the social success and advancement entail integration into non-Indian society. For many Indians that is neither a realistic hope nor a pleasing prospect. The second point is true, but it must be said that mainstream life is not noted for its healthiness: there is a strong likelihood that reference to physical sickness has a great deal to do with a sense of moral and social impropriety: rival or unrespectable forms of life always strike the respectable as fraught with every kind of danger. Third, it is not the purpose of this report to embark on a discussion of the relation between moral views and socio-economic circumstances. Suffice to refer back to the argument outlined in chapter 3: by definition the lumpenproletarian does not have a socio-economic base, has neither enduring role nor persistent resource in mainstream or traditional economic forms. It follows that for the lumpenproletarian no bourgeois ethic can find substantial rationalisation. The lumpenproletarian Indian is remote, in his own most real terms, from the morality which sees heavy drinking as sinful.

The truth is that skid row Indians have more to gain, in social terms, than they have to lose by drinking. Loss or sense of loss accrues to moral and social considerations which barely impinge at all upon the skid row Indian. Just as the absence of guilt was noted in the beginning of this report, so the related dislocation from the bourgeois view of drinking must be noted now. The skid row Indian is unlikely to find in the standard or mainstream arguments against drinking any real strength until his own socio-economic situation is radically altered. Until that time he will probably go on drinking, just because drinking is or seems to be more pleasant than not drinking.

These pleasures include all the elements usually referred to: social solidarity, release of inhibition, appeasement of any sense of failure. But as we pursue the range of benefits which accrue to the skid row drinker, so the discussion moves closer and closer to questions about individuals. In the urban setting, where the personality structures of the population are more diverse and social life more individuating than within the isolated rural milieu, each man is more likely to be drinking for his own reasons. As the skid row population increases, so privatization of motives and needs will also increase. Socio-economic unity renders arguments *against* drinking ineffective for this social class as a whole. But individuals will placate their own difficulties, and resolve their own tensions, where difficulties and tensions are distinctly individual. It is often noted that individual or isolated drinking is a rarity among Indians, at least on the reserves. But when Indians are separated from their reserve community, and when the city's individuating forces are operative, then isolated private drinking will become more frequent. At present there are far more pathological alcoholics of this kind among non-Indians than among Indians — the Indians feel a greater sense of community despite their different home backgrounds. But clinical alcoholism is not unknown among skid row Indians, and as skid row

becomes larger and more impersonal, the proportion of Indian alcoholics relative to the Indian population on skid row will increase.

### The use of Drugs

One thing that has not been mentioned in this report is the use of drugs among skid row Indians. In fact their use is very small, and centres on the young people who are not allowed access to the bars. Such drugs as are used are limited to L.S.D. and 'speed' in tablet form — strong stimulants which reduce appetite, cause wakefulness, and generally do 'speed up' the user's system.

The use of drugs is not unknown among older drinkers, but tends to involve whites rather than Indians. A few men make money selling tablets of various kinds, but many of them are probably completely harmless deceptions, and act if at all as placebos.

In a community where money is so short, and drinking is keenly enjoyed, the use of drugs is not likely to reach high proportions. But among younger people, most particularly among the young hustlers, it is quite likely that drug use *will* increase substantially. The younger people have more money, and they also have more interest in participating in the quasi-hippy part of city life. The only real danger than can be anticipated in connection with this marginal use of drugs, however, is the entrance of heroin. At present there is almost no evidence at all that heroin is entering the community, but if skid row *does* develop a more substantial sub-culture it is likely that heroin pushers will find a market.

### The Disadvantages of Skid Row

To many people the disadvantages of living the skid row life will seem self-evident. It is the argument of this report, however, that they are not at all self-evident. Since this report does include recommendations to the Department of Indian Affairs it would be as well to indicate what features of skid row life really are alarming.

At present the majority of Indians on skid row find there a gratifying and welcoming environment. They find a minimum of difficulty in adopting to its mores. Skid row is thus a likely terminal point to migrations. But these migrations are occurring largely because the aspirations of the Indians are no longer satisfied by life on the reserve. The idea of a good life is coming to demand a life in the city. There is every reason to suppose that these aspirations are going to continue to rise. Whereas skid row is at present meeting the needs of the migrants, the needs themselves are going to develop faster than the skid row milieu. Within the dynamic that has made of skid row life an effective reconciliation for the Indian's needs, there reside also the seeds of large-scale dissatisfaction. Whereas skid row is at present a safe milieu for the apprehensive Indian, it could quickly become a trap. There is already a great deal of tension among the migrant Indians, and if the overall social predicament of the Indians does not change, that tension is going to increase greatly.

The demands of Indians are going to change as they move in larger numbers to urban milieus. Those demands can be met by Canadian society if, and only if, all

agencies concerned prepare for change, and begin to provide accommodations which satisfaction of those needs will require. There are a number of immediate deficiencies in the social services which are now provided, and I note these in the recommendations. But they are only the beginning. It is the argument of this report that if these or similar provisions are not made, skid row will become a source of tension and justified anger. First, the demands and needs of Indian urban migrants must be seen in a clear perspective; then they must be met. The cost of meeting these demands will be high in purely financial terms. But even if the official organizations responsible cannot recognise their debt to the Indian people, at least they should come to terms with the interest of all members of Canadian society.

## CHAPTER 9

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has been confined to discussion of skid row. The principal arguments, however, direct attention towards the overall predicament of Canada's native peoples: skid row life is intelligible only in relation to far wider social and psychological contexts. It follows that in formulating recommendations at least two quite separate kinds of issues become involved. First, there are those features of skid row life which are quite immediately in need of improvement: homelessness, malnutrition, the more specific qualities of social work and social workers, etc. It is perhaps just to say that with generosity and determination such improvements could be made in the short term. Second, there are those more fundamental social processes and forces. These include the socio-economic conditions of the Indian and the discriminatory attitudes of mainstream non-Indians. Detailed background to recommendations which could make any real impact on these larger yet more profound features is not, however, within the compass of this report. The broad areas of concern and the author's intuition can be indicated, but there is need for information which cannot be found here.

With the above reservations, the following recommendations are offered relative to immediate and long term needs.

#### Immediate Needs:

1. The "Native centre" or equivalent institution in each city should be enlarged so as to provide against the worse extremes of homelessness, malnutrition, and lack of information. A programme of such enlargement should be embarked upon in full consultation with those Indians who have worked and lived with migrants. The Centres must be able to offer extremely inexpensive food, and all the facilities which will enable migrants to meet one another in a relaxed environment. The Centres should also include well publicized advisory services, which lie firmly outside 'rehabilitation' or any moralistic framework. In so far as possible, all these services and facilities should be organized and run by native people. In Vancouver, such a centre is at present growing: its progress should be watched closely. To these ends far more money will have to be made available by both provincial and federal governments.
2. Information and advisory services available to migrants in the cities should be advertised on the reserves by Indians. It must be ensured that information which does feed back is correct. This could best be done by Indian leaders and activists.
3. Indians who are in jail, even for minor offences, should be offered legal advice. In the courts, many Indians are quite obviously very confused, and make decisions

which are plainly not in their own best interests; many refuse legal advice because they are not sure what it involves; Indians tend to overcome their lack of understanding by making whatever decision seems most likely to end legal proceedings in the shortest possible time.

#### The Longer Term:

4. Some improvement to the Indian's socio-economic position within Canadian Society can come with economic development of the reserves. But the development of the reserve presupposes a willingness on the part of Indians to accept reserve and rural life. There is much evidence, including the findings of this report, to suggest that rural life tends to be accepted for the present as a retreat where Indians are much less vulnerable to the tensions surrounding their entry into white dominated urban centres. A population with that attitude is unlikely to respond very positively to the projects of economic developers. In the longer run, moreover, younger Indians are likely to look more and more to urban life for what they are coming to regard as a satisfactory life-style. Modern aspirations correspond to the urban setting. It follows that economic development which is rural-based is likely to face the most severe difficulties, and even where the careful selection of labour-intensive enterprises can offer much needed short-term employment, such enterprises are not going to solve the most fundamental problem of the Indian's dislocation from any enduring socio-economic base.

One solution to this may lie in the pairing of industrial and agricultural development on reserves with Indian-owned and Indian-run enterprises in the cities. Primary production in the countryside, for example, could be planned alongside secondary industry in urban centres run by Indian migrants. Equally, home industries (clothing, artefacts, etc.) could be paired with finishing and retailing in the cities. The pairs would form, in effect, the principal element of a single enterprise. This system would provide continuity between rural and urban milieu for the migrants. It would facilitate back and forth migration without displacement from the enlarged employment opportunity. It would also offer a terminus to migration which avoided the brutal choice between skid row and mainstream isolation. In such a way Indians could establish a foothold in the city without abandoning the friends and associates with whom they feel most at ease. The development of such a project would radically alter the predicament of the present generation of Indians, and could give them a real and lasting place in Canada's future. Study of such a possibility, from both an economic and sociological point of view, should be undertaken as soon as possible. If the demoralisation of the younger Indians continues, it will soon be too late.

5. From much of the argument in this report and from what I learned in the course of field-work, it follows that reserve schools have not offered neither the educational environment nor the quality of teaching required of them. Many skid row Indians describes how they were extremely ill at ease school. They complained that many teachers were more concerned with cleanliness and the kind of language they should and should not use than with education. They also complained that many teachers had no knowledge at all of the language spoken on the reserve. It is

evident that teachers in Indian schools should have some knowledge of the local language and some considerable awareness of the problems which confront Indians in Canadian society in general and in the school situation in particular. But it is essential that alongside greater technical knowledge and background the teachers should also be able to identify with the situation of their pupils. Material incentives will no doubt help compensate teachers for additional study, but the appropriate federal and provincial agencies should recruit new teachers with an eye to qualities to which reserve children are most likely to respond. The schools cannot create a generation of Indians who are fully at ease with modern mainstream life – for that they would have to restructure the institutions and consciousness of Canadian society as a whole. What they can *avoid*, however, with the help of a more sympathetic and better informed teaching complement are some of the ignorance, inappropriate attitudes, and unrealistic expectations which in the past seem to have contributed to the alienation many Indian children have felt in school. Recruitment of new teachers with these considerations in mind should be a very high priority for educational authorities. Obviously, the more Indian teachers there are the better it will be.

6. Administrative measures which are likely to precipitate large-scale urban migrations should be avoided. By the same token, any move to encourage Indians to sell reserve lands should be rejected. Limited as the scale of this report has been, all the evidence and arguments here suggest that the Indians displacement from mainstream life finds one of its most complete expressions on skid row. Further, this displacement is experienced as much by the young as by the old. Only when effective provision is made for migrants, and a basis for economic development established, should such measures be contemplated. At the present time the consequences of large-scale migration could be little short of disastrous. I find no reason whatsoever for supposing that the Indian people of Canada would benefit from revision of their special status, either at this time or in the near future.

## CHAPTER 10

### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This report can best be seen as a preliminary attempt at describing and understanding the significance of skid row for Indians moving into urban life. And in so far as skid row is just one possible entry into city life, this may also be regarded as a first step in describing the whole range of routes by which Indian people come to live in cities. Far more research should be carried out, particularly in the area of the trends, forms, and origins of urban migration. Already there is a body of adequate work on traditional bands and traditional cultures. What is needed is an equally large body of work on the problems which are beginning to appear in the cities and reserves of today, and which are going to dominate both the difficulties of the administration of Indian affairs and the socio-economic predicament of the Indians in the future. Wherever possible this work should be carried out by Indians; where that is not possible the researchers should be required to learn the Indian language most useful to the investigations.

1. A study should be made of Indian people who have integrated into mainstream life. In such a study emphasis should be given to:

- a. how the migrants adjusted to the difference between what they expected from the city and what they in fact found there.
- b. the agencies and institutions which were helpful to them.
- c. the measure in which they were obliged to make a decision between skid row and mainstream life.
- d. the roles which friends and relations played in such decisions.
- e. the difficulties (in housing, raising of children, community relations for example) which they encountered.
- f. the ways in which the experience of this group informs the experience of other groups — especially the skid row groups.
- g. the extent of assistance which the successful group is intent upon offering to less successful groups.
- h. the measure in which assimilation involves the need to create new self definitions and self images, and how this affects relations with people on the reserves and on skid row.
- i. the measure in which the adaptive process among the successful groups has involved active participation in religious or social movements.



2. A study should be made of attitudes which Indian people on the reserve have towards the urban milieu. In such a study emphasis should be given to:

- a. the relation between the Indian's conception of the 'good life' and opportunities which exist on the reserve.
- b. the relationship between conceptions of the 'good life' and choice of a city milieu.
- c. the measure in which tension and anxiety surround family matters, personal relations, employment opportunities, etc.
- d. the way in which integration into city life is anticipated.
- e. the connection between the aspirations of migrants and the information received through relatives and friends who have migrated.
- f. the ways in which conceptions of city life are formed by experience in school, from the mass-media, and from returning migrants.

This study is of fundamental importance to all decisions which may be taken concerning the future of the reserve and urban milieus. It is an ambitious project, but should be carried out by a number of researchers in co-operation. In so far as possible, reserve Indians should provide the information from the reserves, and I see no reason why a team could not be organized which included a group of reserve members whose job it was to give the substance of the account. Information could be culled throughout folio 106 observation. With the full co-operation of the teaching staff of reserve schools and the assistance of a researcher in an urban setting closely connected with the communities studied, such an analysis could constitute a very substantial basis both for further smaller studies and administrative decisions.

3. A study should concentrate on white attitudes to Indians. It is important to have a much fuller account of how white conceptions of the Indian evolve, how they are transmitted, and how they are maintained. Such a study would have to use quite formal interview techniques, if only to cover a wide geographical area, for variations in white attitudes to Indians and Eskimos may well vary considerably by region. Participant observations should be carried out in carefully selected places. Most specifically such a study should attempt to uncover the connections between white conceptions of the Indian and:

1. employment opportunities
2. the Indian's experience of the work situation
3. the extent to which Indians are internalising the white stereotypes of the Indian.
4. the Indian's experience of the school situation.

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