

INDIANS AS COLONIALS  
A CATALOGUE OF PARALLEL EXPERIENCES

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by DIANO @ 1968.

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With the passage of time events sometimes take on an aspect of givenness or inevitability. The relations of the Indian in Canada and the United States with the white population have this inevitability about them. The naturalness which characterizes the situation allows us to think of Indians as one more ethnic minority to be assimilated to the national whole. In Canada we may have to speak of two founding nations, but basically the Indian is a minority assimilating to the overwhelming majority and a European norm. To some extent the same situation pertains in Latin America where the Hispanic and Portuguese variants of Western civilization are the norm and the aborigines are thought of as assimilating to these. In Latin America, however the very high percentage of Indians in several regions of Latin America creates certain complications which are absent in the countries north of the Rio Grande.

Other parts of the world--Asia, Africa, and Oceania--have undergone European colonialism and colonization, but, excepting in Australia and New Zealand and some other Pacific islands, especially Hawaii, (the Republic of South Africa presents further complications), the aborigines have reasserted themselves. In doing so they have employed organizational and technological skills learned from the West, as well as ideologies which they are blending with their indigenous cultures to create a synthesis that is uniquely theirs. They have created or are creating new cultures, and they are doing it within the context of independent political entities. Thus they are relatively free to shape their own political and cultural futures.

At the time of first contact, Indians were treated as separate states or nations in much the same way as were their African or Asian counterparts. However, the later course of events has resulted in sharply different situations for the Indian and the other non-European peoples. The former have become a numerically overwhelmed people. Immigrant peoples have continued to increase and have reduced the Indian to the status of stranger or tolerated guest within his aboriginal homeland. While the mosquito prevented the European from settling West Africa, and the White Highlands of Kenya are reverting to the black man, the Indian seems to have found himself resurging too few and too late. The efforts of men like John Collier and Oliver LaFarge in the United States, and of less famous, but equally understanding men in Canada, have helped to give a new life to Indian culture, but the Indian will never be able to expel the white man or bring him to terms in order to create an Indian synthesis in his own new nation. Instead the impetus will remain with the conqueror. Biologically and culturally swamped, the Indian's renewal and reawakening have required the aid of white men and a respite from the assault.

In the minds of most North Americans, to be an American or Canadian is to be white, westernized, and conformable to the pattern of life held by those who are white and westernized. The white man has made himself the norm of North America--has declared himself to be the new native, in fact--and has defined the Indian into outsider status. The Indian for his part, continues to see the white man as the person who has intruded himself, no matter how many and how dominant. He continues to hold the evaluation of himself (as first introduced by the earliest European colonists) as the native.

It is here that the colonial and post-colonial experience of other non-Western people is useful in thinking about the Indians. The black Ghanaian and the black Kenyan too are the natives of the lands they occupy. They have survived colonialism, though changed, and have re-emerged as the centre of the history of their own area. They are still African, though modified considerably in their culture. Some of the whites in South Africa have called themselves Africans (Afrikaners), thus urging themselves as natives, or at least as having as great a claim to the land as the black peoples who also arrived on the scene in the seventeenth century. In this way South Africa offers an interesting middle posture between the re-emergence of an indigenous people to control of their own territory and the complete takeover of the territory physically, numerically, and culturally. In South Africa, apartheid is, among other things, a perverted vestige of the idea that each culture had and should be allowed to have integrity and respect and should not be destroyed, but allowed to continue in its own right.

In the three examples--i.e., Ghana-Kenya, South Africa, and North America, assimilation to Western civilization for the previous occupants (original "natives") of a territory has been urged on and argued against in various ways, and due to differing numerical, economic, political, and historical factors, the following varied results have occurred. In South Africa, where the whites dominate, but are numerically inferior, it is expedient for the whites to forestall the day when the vast majority have added to their superior numbers the skill and education necessary to exercise authority for the whole territory. In the case of Canada, the indigenous population, though

resurging both in numbers and in education, has or will do so too few and too late. Their effort will be regarded as foolish, inadequate, delaying by those who interpret Indian experience primarily in terms of their adjustment to the white world. The presence of white domination will not allow the Indian to pick and choose in an atmosphere of political independence as in Kenya and Ghana, that is certain. Nor does he possess the comfort of numerical predominance despite subordinate status as does his counterparts in South Africa. The Indian has thus, though his colonial experience was parallel in its early phases, been forced into a position where he is culturally and numerically a stranger in his own country, and is likely to remain so for some time to come. One is reminded of Jomo Kenyatta's parable of the Elephant, who thrust into the hut first his trunk, then his head, then his whole body, with obvious results *to his host.*

The white man of Western culture, then, sees himself as the norm in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, in relation to the aborigines of these nations. In the total world picture, however, white civilization and the white man himself, while very influential and penetrating everywhere, are not the norm. The non-white and non-Western peoples in the white-dominated areas can thus find a corrective or counterweight to their situation by looking outside their own boundaries to the total world-picture. There is some evidence that some of them are doing this and are deriving moral, if not physical, consolation and inspiration from what they see.

Most of the histories then of the two nations have been written by the descendants of the conquerors. Their emphasis has been on the majority, and Indians are treated as one factor in the history of the

majority. Thus the aborigine, while not totally excluded, is sometimes treated, it has been said, as part of the natural environment which had to be overcome. Having conquered the aborigines (this is especially true for the United States), the harshness and repression with which the conquest took place has been lost to the popular accounts. The outrages were too many and too great to be admitted: a suppressed record of attempted genocide. The "salt water fallacy" has further contributed to our frequent failure to see the Indians as a colonial people. The contiguity of one occupied area with another, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, minimized the sense of a foreign adventure of imperialism and made the process Manifest Destiny instead. There was an inevitability about it which justified it.

Although we can find differences in Indian policy on the national and local levels, there was none of the contrast between the frontier and the Metropolitan power which caused the British to vacillate in West Africa between 1820 and 1875. With plenty of settlers and no impeding disease, the westward impulse of the white populations in Canada and the United States was unhindered. Lands were bought, Indians removed, pushed westward across the Mississippi, then into more restricted areas, into more remote areas, as more settlers came out to occupy the land.

In Kenya and central Africa, white settlers, as in the New World, justified themselves on grounds that they would use the land more effectively than the Africans: Africans were forced off the land coveted by the settlers. Local self-government was demanded by the whites. In the New World, however, white population, technology, and disease had determined the Indian's status before Anthropology, Communism, self-doubt, colour-consciousness and the rise of the non-Western world



could go to work to give serious help to him. We have seen that these forces did go to work in the 1930's and 1940's to give the Indian some respite. Nevertheless, no Indian Kenyatta wrote his ethnographic apologia, nor did an Indian John Sarbah or Joseph Casely-Hayford (as in late 19th century and early 20th century Ghana) combine a detailed knowledge of traditional culture with an understanding of Western culture to further employ the organizational techniques of colonial protest.

We begin to see the Indian as a colonial people more clearly as we gain perspective on the colonialism of other parts of the world. Recurrent themes appear in the examination of Indians as they do in Africa and Asia. One of the most frequent aspects of the colonial situation was cross-cultural misunderstanding and conflict. Attitudes and practices concerning land are a striking and recurring illustration of this. The English, for example, arrived in Africa and America with land tenure concepts totally foreign to their hosts. At first tolerated as useful or welcomed as guests, they soon forced themselves upon their hosts in greater numbers. Desirous of detaching the Indians from the land which the English had already been granted before leaving home, they negotiated treaties for sales which it is now thought the sellers had neither the right to sell in terms of traditional authority nor any very clear concept of what they were doing anyway. Thus land was acquired with the same zest and in the same vast amounts as those meant to accrue to Germany through the enthusiastic efforts of Dr. Karl Peters in late nineteenth century East Africa.

Another and related parallel is that of land problems or land questions as a focus or catalyst or yeast for the growth of early movements for native unity, native resistance, or proto-nationalism. Passing reference to this phenomenon has been made above. In such varied places as the Ohio Valley under Tecumseh, in nineteenth-century New Zealand's "King movement", in the former Gold Coast of West Africa, in Kenya with the Mau Mau, and in British Columbia in the early decades of the twentieth century, land pressures caused native peoples to engage in protests, peaceful or violent, against the whites, and to resist, if possible, the increasing encroachments. In some cases these early manifestations are seen as part of the early growth of nationalism leading eventually to independence. In places where the aborigines were or outnumbered and out-gunned, nevertheless the course of developments has striking parallels to early aspects of nationalism in other colonial situations. Regarding Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce, Joseph asserts,

"The war, like most Indian troubles, has stemmed from a conflict over land."(1)

A second pattern in the colonial situation has been studied extensively. It is the appearance of certain religious manifestations in the face of colonial domination and restrictions. Frustrated in political and social channels, some colonial peoples exhibited their protest through religious movements. These movements varied from peaceful withdrawal and quietism to militant and insurgent groups seeking by violence to expel the white man and restore the good old days before colonialism entered and attacked their society. At times they incorporated elements of the Europeans' religion and culture into



Messianic and millenarian religions. John Slocum, Wovoka, and Handsome Lake are examples in North America.

A.F.C. Wallace illustrated the applicability of the notion of the colonial parallel in his Foreward to the most recent edition of Mooney's The Ghost Dance Religion by calling attention to Mooney's identification of the Indian struggle against whites with the Irish struggle against the English. Commenting on Mooney's awareness of the larger implication of the Ghost-Dance Religion, Wallace says,

"Mooney not only provided a vivid and detailed account of a major revitalization movement, but also recognized--albeit in a crudely classificatory way--the essential similarity in process between this one Indian nationalistic movement and the many comparable efforts at cultural renewal among other peoples, both primitive and civilized."(2)

John Collier, in his From Every Zenith, clearly states his idea that Indians are colonials and that during his administration they were being administered under a form of indirect rule. He idealized this approach as the best means to preserve and extend the Indian's culture. Collier indicates the context and aim of his effort when he asserts:

These policies, all formulated in general terms in the years preceding 1933, were derived from some knowledge of anthropology, a rather wide knowledge of colonial administration, and a knowledge of the colonial administration, of Indian affairs history of the hemisphere from the time of Las Casas onward. They expressed a philosophy intended to reach beyond the United States Indians to all Indians and to all colonial peoples, and generally to the government-citizen relationship. In administration, they related essentially to the equation between government viewed as a necessity, and the Indians viewed as groups thinking and striving in their own being. This entailed a maximum of stimulus and permissiveness between headquarters, the field, and the Indians: and with minimum of any kind of pressuring or rushing, whether of the Indian Bureau personnel or of the Indians.(3)

Elsewhere in the same work Collier states,

" . . . the generations of multitudinous disaster for Indians were generations of direct rule by the United States: while the radical, methodical shift in the Indian New deal--shift to indirect rule, or better, indirect administration--changed Indian disaster to Indian victory."(4)

The creation of missionary "havens" for aborigines is another common feature of the colonial experience. This is well-known in the case of Paraguay and the aldeias of Brazil. The Jesuits were also active in Canada attempting to shield the Huron from the worst aspects of white civilization. Less well known was the establishment of an indirect-rule theocracy, the Durieu system in British Columbia, under O.M.I. Bishop Paul Durieu. Here too the Fathers hoped to serve as a buffer for the disadvantaged red men until they had acquired the skills to operate on their own in the new world of the white man. Duncan's Metlakatlas, British Columbian and Alaskan, are other illustrations of the same impulse though sponsored by an Anglican missionary. These efforts have their parallels in South Africa where the London Missionary Society, an ecumenical Protestant group led by J.T. Vanderkemp and John Philip, sought to protect the Hottentot from the depredations of the Boer settlers. The Wesleyan missionary T.B. Freeman in the nineteenth century Gold Coast, with the aid of George Maclean, also established farm settlements, in this case to shelter and aid freed slaves and introduce them to Christianity, which to the nineteenth century missionary meant Western technology, apparel, and social customs. Villages for freed slaves had been created in India, Mauritius and the Seychelles. These in turn became the models for comparable Anglican and Roman Catholic settlements in East Africa. In Australia, the C.M.S. and the L.M.S. were active in creating havens for aborigines. In

Tasmania a Methodist bricklayer, G. A. Robinson, directed an ultimately unsuccessful effort to spare the Tasmanian aborigines from their destruction by white newcomers and introduced them to a sedentary, agricultural (and therefore "civilized") way of life. The protected status which Europeans attempted to give converts in China is a reminder that these new Christians sometimes needed protection from their non-Christian fellows, protection against relapse into former beliefs and practice, and protection from physical abuse. In this too Indians shared the experience of Africa and Asia. Residential schools for young Indians were in part an effort to deal with these problems. Isolation of the young from the "retrograde influence" of their elders has been practised more recently to create and maintain not religious, but secular ideological purity.

The employment of a system of reserves for natives is such a familiar pattern in a number of colonial countries that it need only be mentioned in passing. The "havens" described above were themselves reserves, whether privately or governmentally sponsored. The reducción or congregación of Mexico, the reserve system in Africa, including the recent Bantustans, provide a further illustration of the extent to which the Indian experience may be seen in the context of colonial experience. Unlike examples in Africa, North America's reserves were not to be labor pools for white industry, mining, and agriculture.

The "haven" created for freed or runaway slaves, or for persons escaping to missionaries from some native practice to which they had learned to object, are found in the New World and the Old.

It is necessary, however, to distinguish these from the reserves which were created to settle or relocate aborigines on a smaller portion of



their land after they had by one or another kind of treaty <sup>of</sup> agreement been detached from the greater part of it. Frequently these latter reserves were viewed as havens by the Europeans instituting them and some segments of those accepting them, as our illustrations show. It is not the purpose of this essay to weigh the relative importance of economic versus humanitarian concern of the Europeans who initiated and directed these changes.

The impact of new disease on Indians and other aborigines is another phenomenon which is so well known as to need no new exposition. Less well-known except among specialists, until very recently, is the fact that aboriginal populations and half<sup>l</sup>caste populations are now increasing rapidly. The increase has been due to the application of medical and hygienic knowledge in all of the colonial world. Thus old diseases and recently introduced diseases are being checked and we have witnessed an explosion of population not only in Asia and Africa, but in Latin America and among Canadian and American Indians. In this way the Indian is participating in yet another aspect of the resurgence of the non-European peoples, even though many of the new generation are in fact of "mixed" race.

Internecine rivalries and wars have for the Indian as for many other colonial peoples, contributed to their subordination to the European invaders. The practice of the Europeans allying with a given tribe or state against a second indigenous people is universal in the history of Western expansion. In North America the Iroquois-Huron dichotomy and their respective English-French alliance is an obvious example. Cortez's alliance with the Tlaxcalans, traditional enemies of the Mexicans, is well known. From India and Africa further illustrations are available.

Like other colonial peoples, Indians are attempting to "find themselves," to establish a sense of their own identity. This has led to protest organizations, frequently weakly based and requiring the aid and support of white sympathizers. These organizations spasmodically appear in the headlines and periodically have their meetings. They call for greater government aid and greater freedom for self-expression concurrently. They have leaders who vary from flamboyant though ineffective persons, to organizers and effective manipulators of Western organizational techniques. In some cases the individuals, organizations, and their activities may be compared to earlier phases of nationalist movements in such countries as Ghana or Nigeria. As in the nationalist movements in those countries it has been necessary to create symbols of identity. In the case of the North American Indian, they have, with the aid of the white tourists, begun to bring together a kind of composite, pan-Indian culture. This had been remarked upon by a number of writers. A synthesis of totem poles, birchbark canoes, music and dance, feather headdresses, tepees, bows and arrows, tomahawks, and buckskin clothes, has amalgamated these culturally divergent features into an "Indian" culture in which elements of the Eastern woodland, the Plains, and the Pacific Northwest are merged. Perhaps it will not be straining the search for correspondences of experiences if we cite the search for the "African personality" and the African Paradigm of Nkrumah and W. Abrahams as parallels, if not exactly on the same plane. Again, the efforts to manufacture a "National culture" in India described by Mariott as India's "search for inspirational symbols in her tangled pasts" may be a corresponding development.(5) In the case of the

North American Indian, as already indicated, this " pan-Indian " culture is in part a response to a commercial opportunity offered by the white majority. There is however a more significant aspect to this development. It is the emergence of the pan-Indian organization. Aided by white friends, these organizations are becoming active as lobbyists and as mechanisms for allowing Indians across the continent, whether in Canada or the United States, to meet and explore common problems and their solutions. At the same time there is a willingness on the part of the non-Indians to consider redress to grievances. Thus in Canada Indians from Ontario may profit by a legal decision in British Columbia recognizing and alleviating some restrictions on hunting or fishing.

The North American Indian Church has also in it, though not by design, the seeds of a developing unity among the participating Indians over a wide area.

All of these topics can be fruitfully examined for comparisons and contrast. Other topics which might produce evidence of colonial parallels may be found in biographical studies illustrating the nature of contact and adjustment and personal accomplishment in the context of the contact situation. Knowledge of these matters may lead to further generalization about aboriginal response to colonial status. In the independence movements of non-Western countries it may be possible to find analogies for constructing accounts of and a general pattern of Indian agitation efforts, for rights and privileges, locally and nationally. A comparison, for example, might be drawn between militant anti-Europeans among Indian and other non-European societies. Comparisons of religious leaders and assimilationists,



Indian and colonials or erstwhile colonials, would contribute to a broader understanding of the effects of colonialism.

The problems faced by Indian rights organizations and nationalist movements have certain parallels already suggested. Particularly noticeable is the problem of securing firm local support and participation. In their early years some nationalist movements have, like some contemporary Indian groups, found it difficult in between crises to maintain membership and enthusiastic support.

This catalogue, then, while it does not exhaust the list of parallel experiences of Indian and other colonials, does provide an indication of the range of related situations and responses. It also suggests the variety of topics available for study in the field of aboriginal response to colonialism.

By describing the experience of the Indians in the vocabulary of nationalism and imperialism the history of Indian-white relations can be placed in a larger context. The continuity of colonial experience of Asians, Africans, and New World Indians can thus be illustrated.

If the colonial parallel approach is used as a model for telling the story of North American Indians, then an occurrence such as the Indian participation in the War of 1812 becomes not only clearly explicable but assumes a different aspect that it has in a strictly "Canadian" historical setting. In this case, Tecumseh, for example, as Josephy has portrayed him, becomes a patriot chief, joining with British (and not necessarily out of opportunism alone) to check the encroachments of the Americans into the lands of the Indians of the Ohio Valley. In so doing he can be seen as trying to create a kind

of pan-Indian state or confederation of all the peoples between the Appalachians and the Mississippi. In attempting this he may then be a New World example of the kind of movements to unify which are found in other areas, e.g. Ghana and New Zealand, in an early era of European impact. So Tecumseh prefigures pan-Indian nationalism!

Pan-Indianism provides the vehicle for Robert K. Thomas' view of colonial parallels between Indians and others. In his interpretation of the growth of common identity among Indians he compares this to similar movements in Asia and Africa and urges that the Indian experience will give clues to the future of Asiatic and African developments. In so doing he has omitted the important factor of the Indian's position in his homeland, which, unlike that of the Asians and Africans, is to be one of permanent minority status. (6)

Elsewhere Thomas has seen Indian administration in the United States as colonialism. "Classic colonialism" of Asia and Africa is characterized by him as having an "outside bureaucracy" and a lack of contact between the masses and this bureaucracy. This colonialism, he finds, causes "social isolation," which "seals off the community from relationships with other people in other communities." The result, he concludes, is that change "doesn't take place under such conditions, except in the form of internal decay." (7) Working from this definition, which would seem at the outset to rule out developments such as nationalism or pan-Indianism, he asserts that an Indian reservation is "the most complete colonial system in the world," (8) though it is what he terms "hidden colonialism." Other viewers support him in this statement (see Margery Perham, above).

~~him in this last statement. (see Margery Perham, above).~~

In this colonial situation as he describes it, the new native elite are not the fore-runners of independence, but government stooges, who "keep their mouths shut and their noses clean."<sup>(9)</sup> Some of the phenomena which he find among Indians seem to be at variance with the experience of the Africans and Asians. In Africa and Asia the coming of the white men frequently meant "decay," but it also meant ferment, synthesis, and resurgence, as in the nineteenth century Hindu renaissance, and the rise of nationalist and independence movements.

Though some of his illustrations, then, point to aspects of colonialism, Thomas fails to account for the fact that in the newly-independent countries, Western-educated leaders are working out syntheses of the old and the new, and are leading governments which use experimental policies and are in touch with the masses. That is, he fails to complete the parallelism between the colonial scene of the United States Indians and the African and Asian scene as it appears today. This may spring from a view of colonialism as a static situation excepting for change as decay. Recent studies in the history of the colonial eras of Africa and Asia reconstruct accounts which show that all change was not decay, and that this period was one of gestation for modern Africa and Asia. Furthermore, Thomas in examining actual Indian situations, gives examples of similar vitality and synthesis at work.<sup>(10)</sup>

The usual historical account of European expansion into Asia and Africa includes a description of the early phase of contact for trading purposes. The growing contact and the resulting impact of the European culture is then recounted. The cultural transformations



lead eventually to nationalist movements and the road to independence. Thus the political history is outlined.

On the American continent the white settlers occupy the center position. The same can be said for Australia and New Zealand. (South Africa is the ambiguous case which helps to reveal the continuity of colonial experience indicated above.) It is the white man's nationalist movements and political development which command the attention of most historians. In this approach the Indian is redundant. Politically insignificant, he is ignored. What is desired is not to ignore the Europeans! Instead it is a recognition that the emergence to political independence of aboriginal peoples in Asia and Africa has provided an advantage for examining the experience of the New World aborigines. Ethnohistory can supply some of the tools for such a study. The colonial parallels are by no means complete, but they may be significant.

That the Indian has not political predominance in his homeland does not preclude the historian from studying him in the context suggested. It may on the contrary offer new insights into the history of European versus non-European relations in the colonial situation.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Josephy, Alvin M., The Patriot Chiefs, Eyre and Spottiswoode (London: 1962), p. 313.

<sup>2</sup>Mooney, James, The Ghost-Dance Religion, University of Chicago Press (Chicago: 1965), p. v.

<sup>3</sup>Collier, John, From Every Zenith, Sage Books (Denver: 1963), p. 172.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 345. See pp. 348-350 for other comments which show that he viewed American policy in the context of world-wide colonialism.

<sup>5</sup>Marriott, McKim, "Cultural Policy in the New States," Old Societies and New States, ed. by Clifford Beertz, The Free Press of Glencoe (New York: 1963), p. 35.

<sup>6</sup>Thomas, Robert K., "Pan-Indianism," Midcontinent American Studies Journal, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Fall, 1965), pp. 75-83.

<sup>7</sup>Thomas, Robert K., "Colonialism: Classic and Internal," New University Thought, Vol. 4, No. 4, (Winter, 1966-67), p. 38.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>10</sup>See Thomas, Robert K., "Powerless Politics," New University Thought, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter, 1966-67), pp. 44-53.