

CHAPTER ONE

“a net-work of machinery”¹

The Liberal Surveillance Complex

SAMUEL H. BLAKE, TORONTO LAWYER, CHAIRMAN OF THE ADVISORY Board on Indian Education for the Anglican Church, must have been suitably impressed by his reading of the Department of Indian Affairs’ (DIA) *Annual Report* for 1906.² In February 1907, Blake wrote to Frank Oliver, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, and declared that Oliver indeed must have “such a net-work of machinery” at his disposal to “be able to ascertain with accuracy and despatch what it would be impossible for the ordinary individual to discover.” Certainly the department displayed for public review a vast array of data, collected by its army of employees stationed throughout Canada, in its over 600-page report. The information presented in narrative and tabular format touched on every aspect of the administration of Indian Affairs and, it seemed, on all aspects of the lives of Indigenous people. There was more than awe though in Blake’s letter. He also offered a warning: “We cannot afford to run the risk of a rebellion or of great dissatisfaction with our dealing among our Indians. We must seek to draw them by persuasion and to educate them up to the privileges which are freely open to them.”³

These few comments seem innocuous enough, but they point to the heart of the complex and often cloaked nature of the relations between Indigenous people and the newcomers to their territories in western Canada at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Taken together, the network of intelligence gathering, the fear of “rebellion,” or at least the inconvenience of dissatisfaction, the rehabilitation project, which was believed better accomplished by “persuasion” than by force, and the presentation of opportunities as “freely open” indicate a project that had much in common with liberal colonial intrusions in other parts of the former British Empire.

The study that follows flows from a desire to understand how these notions operated together as parts of a web, informed by liberalism and driven largely by market economics, to create structures that continue to oversee the life-threatening material conditions faced by many Indigenous peoples in Canada. It will examine the specific application of liberalism in the period between 1877 and 1927 in the parts of western Canada that became known as southern Alberta and the British Columbia interior. As elsewhere, liberalism as it was applied in western Canada was an exclusionary rather than inclusionary force that allowed for extraordinary measures to be employed to remove Indigenous peoples from the territories of their ancestors.

Since my aim here is to explore the material impact of liberalism and a market economy, and since this study begins with an understanding that juridical equality is an insufficient remedy for any resultant inequities, it would seem that Marxism should provide an obvious interrogatory framework with which to start.⁴ While I owe a debt to the many scholars who write with a Marxian understanding of social relations and political economy, I also recognize the tensions identified by some Indigenous thinkers, between their ideas of a sovereign future and a liberatory theory that is arguably evolutionary, industrial based, spiritually bereft, Euro-

centric, and contextually bound. As American Indigenous activist Russell Means explained:

Revolutionary Marxism, as with industrial society in other forms, seeks to 'rationalize' all people in relation to industry, maximum industry, maximum production. It is a materialist doctrine which despises the American Indian spiritual tradition, our cultures, our lifeways. Marx himself called us 'precapitalists' and 'primitive.'... The only manner in which American Indian people could participate in a Marxist revolution would be to *join* the industrial system, to become factory workers ...I think there's a problem with language here. Christians, capitalists, Marxists, all of them have been revolutionary in their own minds. But none of them really mean revolution. What they really mean is *continuation*.⁵

Clearly Indigenous thinkers are unwilling to resign spirituality to a Marxian delineated superstructure. As Taiaiake Alfred put it recently “true revolution is spiritual at its core” whereas “violent, legalist, and economic revolutions” have been successful in “rearranging only the outward face of power.”⁶

There are, of course, Indigenous scholars who place at least some value on a Marxian class analysis and various reflections of Marxian thought are evident in what follows below.⁷ The point here, though, is not to engage in the debate concerning the extent to which Marxism offers, or at least implies, a universal program for liberation, but to suggest that Marxism's complicity with modernist thought and its acceptance of the inevitability and value of industrial progress serves to depreciate Indigenous lifeways and visions for the future.⁸ Since there is a threat that modernist notions might render any Indigenous struggle to preserve time-honoured and time-proven cultural elements primitive or senseless, there is little wonder why Marxism does not seem to offer sufficient liberatory potential for many Indigenous activists.⁹ Marxism is useful in any examination of the expansion of liberalism and capitalism in western Canada, but is less helpful in interrogating modernity and progress themselves, or in examining the conditions that have naturalized these as self-evident objectives leading to personal and community fulfillment.

To this end, the study that follows draws on elements of the work of Michel Foucault and those scholars who have more directly applied some of Foucault's ideas to colonial encounters. My use of Foucault is suggested by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow who, echoing Gilles Deleuze, remark that “Foucault should be seen not as a historian, but as a new kind of map-maker – maps made for use, not to mirror the terrain.”¹⁰ Refusing to be cornered in any “isms,” Foucault says that he prefers to use the writers he likes rather than obediently accepting their instruction.¹¹ It is in character, then, that he should say in reference to *The History of Sexuality* that “it is not up to me to say how the book should be used.”¹² In the introduction to *Archaeology of Knowledge* he is more adamant: “Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order.”¹³

Foucault offers a number of interrelated “maps” useful to the work below. At the foundation, is his discussion of power rooted in ways of “seeing and knowing” and his examination of how discourses, “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak,” limit alternative ways of seeing and knowing and so restrict alternative truths from emerging.¹⁴ This, quite simply, is the construction of truth and this “will to truth, that prodigious machinery designed to exclude” exerts a pressure which constrains other discourses, other truths, from

surfacing.¹⁵ These are not simply matters of academic interest though. The understanding here is that discourses are not simply ideological formations disconnected from material conditions or merely representations of class relations, but rather are themselves acts of power directly affecting people's lives.¹⁶

As liberal Canada expanded westward in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it carried with it a discourse of reason and Western scientific truths, itself inexorably linked to modernity and its notions of progress. This discursive formation drew on a "schema of possible, observable, measurable and classifiable objects" that stipulated and limited the ways in which knowledge could be produced, verified, and determined useful.¹⁷ All of this, including ways of knowing Indigenous peoples and their territories, was facilitated and fashioned by means of surveillance. This process of surveillance leading to the construction of a particular knowledge network was not the natural selection of a superior form over an inferior one, but rather a historically contextual one that can be investigated and interrogated. An exploration of surveillance, then, its operation and its production of Indians that had little meaning to living Indigenous peoples, but that made liberal expansion possible, looms large in this work.¹⁸

In his investigation of surveillance, Foucault drew on a particular formation promoted by liberal theorist Jeremy Bentham. Bentham called the idea "the panopticon" and stated that it was applicable to any sort of establishment, in which

a number of persons are meant to be kept under inspection. No matter how different, or even opposite the purpose: whether it be that of *punishing the incorrigible, guarding the insane, reforming the vicious, confining the suspected, employing the idle, maintaining the helpless, curing the sick, instructing the willing* in any branch of industry, or *training the rising race* in the path of education....

In a prison situation, the building would be circular with a guard tower or "inspector's lodge" occupying the central space. From here, the inspector could see into every part of each inmate's cell located around the building's circumference and also, through "a small *tin tube*" that connected "each cell to the inspector's lodge...the slightest whisper of the one might be heard by the other."¹⁹

Foucault explained the development of the panopticon as a coalescence of confinement and disciplinary projects like those that had previously been applied to leper colonies and plague-stricken towns respectively. For Foucault, the nineteenth century was witness to the gradual combination of the exclusion and stigmatism of the leper colony and the control of confusion and disorder associated with the plague. The panopticon is the architectural embodiment of this coming together.²⁰

The panopticon is primarily a self-disciplinary mechanism. An individual might not be observed continuously, in fact she or he must not be aware when or if they are being viewed at any particular time, "but he must be sure that he may always be so."²¹ This internalization of the possibility of surveillance allows for power to function automatically. In broader application, panoptic disciplinary surveillance signals a shift from the absolute control of a monarch to "a synaptic regime of power" that is exercised "*within* the social body, rather than *from above* it." As Bentham put it, "[e]ach comrade becomes an overseer."²² For Foucault, the

panopticon provides a “cruel, ingenious cage” that has spawned many adaptations, even in the present.²³

The “diabolical aspect of the idea and all the applications of it” is that no one individual is in total control. While there is a hierarchy, and not everyone occupies the same place, everyone is caught up and observed in the machine.²⁴ For Bentham, the panopticon represented the opposite of monarchical power. For him, its gaze was generalizable, self-regulating, and ensured democracy. For Foucault, too, panoptic surveillance was designed to generate a body of knowledge rather than create the disciplinary display that might be employed by a monarch, but its primary function is to normalize individuals, not to democratize power relations.²⁵ As Dreyfus and Rabinow suggest, its purpose for Foucault is to reform individuals as “meaningful subjects and docile objects.”²⁶ It was fundamentally an economically efficient disciplinary method that demonstrated a break with extravagant monarchical applications of power.²⁷

Within this construction, the possibility of resistance seems bleak. It is, indeed, easy to view the panoptic net cast over society as debilitating to any attempt at opposition especially since everyone is subject to its normalizing power so that there seems no way of knowing if any act of resistance is simply a function of that power and not an independent liberatory act. Yet especially in Foucault’s later interviews and in *The History of Sexuality* there is a definite trend toward an acceptance of the possibility of resistance. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault states that “neither the caste which governs, nor the groups which control the state apparatus, nor those who make the most important economic decision direct the entire network of power that functions in a society.” Leaving little room for misunderstanding, he remarks “[p]ower is everywhere” and that “[w]here there is power there is resistance.”²⁸ Further, Foucault argues that there is no simple binary division between those who resist and those who seem to accept their subjugation. We need to take into account, he argues, “resistances whose strategy is one of evasion or defence.”²⁹ He presents no utopian program for global transformation. Rather it is localized struggle that he views as effective both historically and for the present.

Foucault, at some points at least, recognizes the possibility of alliance politics among “women, prisoners, conscripted soldiers, hospital patients, and homosexuals” who are “actually involved in the revolutionary movement to the degree that they are radical, uncompromising and non-reformist, and refuse any attempt at arriving at a new disposition of the same power with, at best, a change of masters.” But he fails to recognize the heterogeneity of these categories that he would be forced to acknowledge if he would have considered more carefully disjunctures created by race, gender, and class.³⁰ Nonetheless, the formulations Foucault presents encourage us to look beyond isolated instances of violent upheaval and to consider the mundane, but arguably more important examples of what have been referred to as “everyday” forms of resistance.³¹ In the case of Indigenous people they also allow us to view survival itself as a victory, even if this in itself is insufficient for a just future.³² At the same time however, while more will be said below concerning the efficacy of defiance, there is no intention here to overstate the potential of resistance on a global scale. This work proceeds with the understanding that power and resistance are formed dialectically and that this permits

the possibility of challenge, at least in a localized sense, but also that power is reformulated in opposition to these new challenges. The diffusion of power throughout the social fabric, and embedded in each of us, rather than its isolation in the state or in some institution, makes it more, not less, difficult to assail.

Undoubtedly, there is a degree of tension built into a project that wants to use an activist interpretation of Foucault and to recognize the possibility of localized opposition, but at the same time understands the constraints on the possibility of resistance presented by the operation of power discussed above. Further, I think it important to maintain an additional tension that Florencia Mallon has referred to as “between technique and political commitment, between a more narrowly postmodern literary interest in documents as ‘constructed texts’ and the historian’s disciplinary interest in reading documents as ‘windows,’ however foggy and imperfect, on people’s lives.”³³ While I will investigate the conditions surrounding the construction of a massive colonial record related to Indigenous people in western Canada, I am also interested in the material impact of that record and of the ways of knowing Indigenous peoples that it represented and helped to maintain. Finally, I will explore the ways in which Indigenous people acted to subvert these understandings.

A final point raised by Foucault that is directly relevant here is his exploration of the necessity of panoptic discipline to capitalism and, by extension, the importance of liberalism to capitalist expansion. The maintenance of capitalist relations of production required

techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions (the family and the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies), operated in the sphere of economic processes, their development and the forces working to sustain them. They also acted as factors of segregation and social hierarchization, exerting their influence on the respective forces of both these movements, guaranteeing relations of domination and effects of hegemony.³⁴

Imperialism and Colonial Expansion in Western Canada

Both the nature of imperialism and the term itself have always been difficult to establish definitively or universally.³⁵ Many scholars of European and European based imperialism have shifted their focus over the last few decades from studies of territorial expansion by direct and explicit political, military, and economic control to considerations of “informal” means of empire. These scholars investigate the imposition of imperial values on colonized subjects by what might be seen as the less overt means of missionaries, businessmen, and settlers, among others, who were supported only when necessary by military intervention.³⁶

Further, a growing number of scholars have recognized that colonial occupation is concurrently based on “a complexly related variety of cultural technologies.”³⁷ The ways in which imperial powers came to know colonized peoples allowed the creation and maintenance of boundaries and oppositions that were formed in the process of colonization and at the same time justified colonial encroachment. Through the knowledge and classification of colonized groups, and the representation of this knowledge textually, imperial powers were able to clarify their own position in the world and to naturalize boundaries between themselves and the objects of their knowledge.

Culture, both that of the colonizer and of the colonized, is never a static collection of identifiable traits, but is “inventive and mobile.”³⁸ It is a historically variable medley of naturalized values, convictions, and practices that are constantly adjusted to meet changed circumstances.³⁹ Since European and European based imperialisms were developed at particular economic, political and social moments in the flow of cultures, it follows that they too would, by necessity, be multifaceted, creative, and adaptable. Colonialism was a dialectic encounter in which all involved were altered by the experience. Further, since the colonial project was extended by men and women, individuals from the economic, social and political elites as well as the working class, and by those advancing economic, religious, social and political objectives, it seems certain that they would view their own involvement and purpose in different ways.⁴⁰ I have chosen, then, to examine the shifting, adaptable, and variously perceived colonial project and also its limitations. Further, I resist both essentialization—of the west, of Canada, of colonists, of “Indians”—and a presentation of colonialism as the only matter of significance to Indigenous peoples.

While imperialism and colonialism are never the same in any two situations, Euro-Canadians imposed themselves on the territory and First Nations of western Canada in many ways parallel to British interventions elsewhere. They brought with them generally British cultural understandings, legal and political structures, social and gender hierarchies and capitalist economy. They were just as prepared as Britons in Africa or India to promote and protect their economic interests and cultural values, with force, if necessary. While the specific contours of pre- and post-Confederation policy in regard to Indigenous peoples will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, a fundamental difference in the Canadian case is the creation of isolated enclaves called Indian reserves which represent a degree of segregation and potential for surveillance unparalleled in the British empire, with the possible exception of South Africa.

These reserves created a physical geographic border in addition to the cultural and racial barriers in evidence elsewhere. As historian Noel Dyck has stated, “Indian reserves served to signify the moral boundaries and preferred values being constructed in Canada.”⁴¹ Reserves provided closed sites where missionaries and agents of the state could indoctrinate Indigenous populations in economic behavior, political activity, religious practices and social conduct acceptable to liberal Canada. In this way, Indian reserves had much in common with the institutions identified by Bentham and Foucault that might effectively employ disciplinary surveillance as a reformatory strategy. It is important to appreciate, though, that reserves, despite their inherently transformative objective, also provided safe havens for Indigenous people in which community and family could help mitigate against the staggering isolation that was experienced in nearby non- Indigenous communities. On their reserve, residents were removed, partially at least, from the disapproving eyes and discriminatory actions of Canadian citizens, even as they remained under the liberal gaze of the state and the church.

This gaze was extended, beginning in the 1870s, when immigrants of British descent from eastern Canada, Europe, and the United States, sought, with increasing fervor, to extend their economic, social, and political interests westward. The response to the establishment of a Métis provisional government at Red River in 1869–70, the acquisition of Rupert’s Land in

1870, the entrance of British Columbia into Confederation in 1871 and the promise of a transcontinental railway, the establishment of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) in 1873, the national policies of John A. Macdonald, the signing of Treaties 1 through 7 with the First Nations of the prairie west between 1871 and 1877, and the creation of the first of the joint Dominion-Provincial commissions in 1876 to settle the “Indian land question” in British Columbia are individually and collectively illustrative of particular facets of the shifting and adaptable colonizing project that would soon be felt advancing from a growing number of directions.

In both British Columbia and the prairie west “informal” imperialism was backed, when it was thought necessary, by direct armed intervention and also by the ever-present and visible threat that force might be applied at any time. As extensions of central Canadian liberal values and interests, these initiatives inevitably and immediately intruded on the political, economic, social, and cultural systems of First Nations. The efforts of colonialism were directed precisely toward integrating Indigenous people while, simultaneously, an array of forces was aligned to deny them the advantages of the “mother country.” While several other scholars have noted the persisting effects of colonialism long after “they withdraw their flags and their police forces from our territories,”⁴² in the case of Indigenous communities in western Canada, the colonizers and their symbols remain.

There are no longer many scholars who would insist that vast spatial distance between imperial centre and colonial periphery is a pre-requisite of colonialism. But to some the situation in which Indigenous peoples on reserves find themselves is best described as “internal” colonialism.⁴³ Canadian sociologist James Frideres, for example, has identified the structurally imposed inequities that are markedly similar in “underdeveloped countries” and Canadian Indian reserves.⁴⁴ The adjective “internal” is helpful in illustrating the socio-political and economic disparities that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, but the term should be used with some caution. Indigenous peoples of today are living on fragments of their original territories, or sometimes fragments of others’ territories. In British Columbia, with the exception of the fourteen Douglas Treaties made on Vancouver Island, the Treaty 8 region of the far northeast of the province, the Nisga’a Treaty at the end of the twentieth century, and most recently the Tsawwassen Treaty, the lands of Indigenous peoples were never ceded. In the case of the prairie west the methods used in arriving at, and subsequently the meaning and significance of, the western treaties are the subjects of continuing challenge.⁴⁵ These territories are not internal colonies then, in the same sense as working class areas of Detroit or London, but are more accurately seen simply as occupied lands similar to British colonies of the nineteenth century. Viewing these territories as “internal” to the Canadian polity could be interpreted as mitigating against claims of First Nations that their land was never surrendered and that their sovereignty over them has never been legally interrupted.

The appropriation of Indigenous land and resources under questionable circumstances is a common enough theme in the history of Indigenous and newcomer relations in Canada, but it should be recognized that the colonization of the west occurred unevenly in time, across geography, and in intensity. For a variety of historical reasons, colonial rule was applied and

experienced differently in the Kamloops and Okanagan areas than it was in the Treaty 7 region. Even within each district there was significant disparity. Further, this empire, or these empires, of the west were never static. The versatile and multi-layered colonial project, once set in motion, here as elsewhere, was shifting and organic and served a fluid and flexible array of interests and purposes. It was never a totally rational endeavor consisting solely of the hope of rich rewards, but always included ennobling and other aspects. It is this multifaceted and adaptable nature of colonialism that allowed shifting strategies and justifications to emerge in concert with changed circumstances and that in turn mitigated against, though never completely neutralized, the ability to resist colonial intrusion.

Liberalism

Without doubt one of the most obvious components of the colonization of western Canada was the expansion of capitalism and its attendant structures. The most visible and rudimentary vehicle for the extension of English Canada, the Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.), was itself one of the largest corporations in the world in terms of assets in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁶ The C.P.R. certainly served purposes other than economic ones including bringing British Columbia into Confederation, but railway building and railway operation were primarily capitalist endeavours.⁴⁷ The capacity of the C.P.R. to transport eastern manufactures and western agricultural products and to spawn or enhance other business ventures was fundamental to colonialism in western Canada. Railways, like the mining, forestry, ranching, and farming enterprises that followed, encroached on First Nations territory directly, immediately, and continually, and permanently altered the physical environment Indigenous people lived in. Further, at least some First Nations in western Canada were not inclined toward capitalism so unlikely to participate in its “advantages.” As Gerald Conaty, curator of ethnology at Glenbow Museum, argues, “[i]n Blackfoot eyes, success is not necessarily expressed as possession of material goods or the means of production. Success comes through access to spiritual power that, if honored and respected, *may* result in material wealth.”⁴⁸ This point, and the linkage between notions of civilization and material wealth was confirmed, albeit in a somewhat backhanded way, by DIA officials. As Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (DSGIA) Frank Pedley wrote in 1909, “[t]he idea which is ingrained in our civilization appears to be that a race must be thrifty and must surround itself with all manner of wealth and comforts before it is entitled to be considered civilized. The Indian has not yet reached that stage, and it is doubtful if he will - were such desirable.” Pedley, though, thought that the reason was that “the Indian constitutionally dislikes work...”⁴⁹ Finally, even if they had chosen to participate, Indigenous peoples were largely excluded from the capitalist marketplace by a matrix of policy, regulation, and legislation.

In western Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, like many other locations and times, capitalism was connected to a network of interrelated economic, social, political, and cultural forces most clearly related to liberalism. Where acquisitiveness and hierarchy are integral to capitalism, liberalism presents itself as a champion of freedom and equality. Further, as Thomas Holt tells us, “almost by sleight of hand, it makes market-governed social relations into *natural* phenomena, ignoring even as it does so the fact that

historically such relations initially were nearly always coerced and that places and people who have been slow to conform have been harshly dealt with.” At the same time, genuine democratic and egalitarian institutions threaten capitalism as a system based on inequality.⁵⁰ Without inequality, what C.B. MacPherson referred to as a “modern competitive market society” could not function.⁵¹

Liberalism permitted the expansion of Anglo-Canada and drives the nation-building model in Canadian historiography. Liberalism was both the means of, and the justification for, colonialism, but little attention has been given to the ways in which it and its attendant ordering strategies were able to manage such a mixed population residing over large expanses of geography. Liberalism, as it emerged and found expression in Canada, was not self-contained, monolithic, or impervious to change, but rather is best seen as a matrix of flexible formations.⁵² It emerged at particular nodes in the Canadian social fabric at specific times and in different ways to assuage the frictions that class, race, gender, and an array of other fractures created.

In the most elementary sense, liberalism can be seen to include three primary goals: individual liberty, protection of private property, and equality, though the meaning of each of these objectives and the procedures thought best to achieve them have varied over time according to historical circumstances.⁵³ These aims, which form the basis of the way liberalism is presented in this study, seem to provide a clear and coherent, and even honourable program, but liberalism’s Canadian manifestation at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries was often a contradictory affair when put into practice.

Liberalism is selective about upon whom it bestows its benefits. It has a curious knack for passionately demanding freedom and the rights of individuals to diverse understandings and beliefs while seeking at the same time to efface imbalances in relations of power. It has a long history of similarly finding pride in its inclusive nature while at the same time this history is “unmistakably marked by the systematic and sustained political exclusion of various groups and ‘types’ of people.” Political scientist Uday Mehta argues that both the seventeenth century writing of John Locke and that two centuries later by John Stuart Mill place limits on those groups and individuals considered capable of participating in the political constituency. At the same time it relegates others to government without consent based on factors “it identifies with human nature,” but behind which lay “a thicker set of social credentials that constitute the real bases for political inclusion.”⁵⁴ Further, Mill, for example, presents a hierarchy of “civilization,” the elements of which for him, not surprisingly, “exist in modern Europe, and especially in Great Britain, in a more eminent degree Great Britain.”⁵⁵

Liberalism presents individual autonomy as a natural and ultimate good. It assigns “a higher moral value to the individual than to society or to any collective group,” as Anthony Arblaster points out. The individual has form, which allows her or him to exist in a way that nation, society, or culture cannot and so is morally entitled to have his or her demands heard and desires met before those of collectivities.⁵⁶ However, the supremacy of individual autonomy does not have historical roots as deep and is not as “natural” as liberal theorists would like to suggest. Over the longer course and greater breadth of human history it was rather integration

into the social group and the psychological support and physical security that this provided that was more often valued as the greatest “good”—not the rights of the individual.⁵⁷ While liberalism in practice tends to exclude peoples who place more emphasis on collective rights, Mill is not above emphasizing “savage” individualism to depreciate those who are not White and not European.

Consider the savage: he has bodily strength, he has courage, enterprise, and is often not without intelligence; what makes all savage communities poor and feeble? The same cause which prevented the lions and tigers from long ago extirpating the race of men—incapacity of co-operation. It is only civilized beings who can combine. All combination is compromise: it is the sacrifice of some portion of individual will, for a common purpose. The savage cannot bear to sacrifice, for any purpose, the satisfaction of his individual will. His social cannot even temporarily prevail over his selfish feelings, nor his impulses bend to his calculations.⁵⁸

The experience of liberalism in western Canada, as elsewhere, demonstrates that its benefits can best be seen as rewards for being able and willing to comply with its mandates. Despite the outward appearance of tolerating, or even embracing, difference, liberalism ultimately seeks to homogenize and this is particularly evident in relation to Indigenous peoples.

In 1914, Duncan Campbell Scott, Canada’s long-time DSGIA, boasted that as “far as the general life of the country is concerned, an Indian is almost as free as any other person.”⁵⁹ Even when the significance of “almost” is ignored, Scott’s declaration is unjustifiably jubilant. While liberalism held out the dreams of freedom and equality, in the colonial theatre these notions were invoked consistently and solely to support Euro-Canadian conceptions of civilization and progress. Freedom was only permitted where its pursuit aligned with accepted cultural formations. Real freedom, in the sense of the autonomy to choose economic, political, social, and cultural systems, was fundamentally denied to First Nations in Canada. Scott could state in all sincerity that Indigenous people could “engage in business,” could “own property anywhere,” and, “subject to certain restrictions,” could “exercise the franchise.”⁶⁰ Yet, not only was there a myriad of legislative and social factors mitigating against these possibilities, but they could only be exercised within the narrow parameters set by the dominant culture. Again, liberal notions of the supremacy of the individual are key here.

To many First Nations in Canada the interests of the individual are inseparable from those of the community.⁶¹ Taiiaki Alfred argues that Canada continues to reject the notion of collective rights and instead “Indigeneity is legitimized and negotiated only as a set of state-derived individual rights aggregated into a community social context—a very different concept than that of collective rights pre-existing and independent of the state.”⁶²

Since, like most of the First Nations resident within the boundaries of Canada, the Indigenous peoples of the Treaty 7 and Kamloops-Okanagan areas followed the practice of holding land and resources collectively, they were particularly isolated from any benefits that liberalism might seem to provide. Not only were they denied formal equality or even citizenship, land ownership, or the franchise except under prohibitively onerous conditions, they could also be denied freedom of movement and the right to follow well established economic, political, and social practices. The logic of collectivism was antithetical to liberal individualism and had to be contained if not eradicated.

When former Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Frank Oliver rose in the House of Commons in May 1914 to oppose an amendment to the *Indian Act* that would restrict the sale of livestock by Indigenous people in the four western provinces, it was not because he objected to the obvious inequity or restriction of freedom that the bill represented. Rather he said:

It does not give scope to the Indian to grow in his sense of proprietorship, of personal ownership, which is really essential to his progress and civilization. Ownership, selfishness, which is foreign to the mind of the Indian in his normal condition, is really the foundation of civilization.⁶³

Thus, guilty of lacking the quality of selfishness and apparently restrained from individual participation in the marketplace by their belief in the efficacy of communal ownership, Indigenous people were found bereft of the kind of individual autonomy that liberalism demanded before offering equality or freedom. Additionally, Indigenous peoples, like children, were not considered part of the Canadian “civilized community” and so were not entitled to the liberal protections against state interference that were guaranteed to others.

Clearly then, the objectives of liberalism were not all of equal import, but rather were ordered hierarchically with equality of opportunity and freedom of choice holding a position of far less stature than, since it is a prerequisite of liberty and equality in the first place, the right of the individual to privately possess property.⁶⁴ It was, then, not freedom and equality that were ultimately secured by coercive violence in Canada, but rather private property and defense of the propertied individual.⁶⁵ As discussed above, the potential for Indigenous people to possess real property was severely restricted and consequently the possibility that they might derive any benefits from liberalism was similarly constrained. The DIA did issue “location tickets” or individual allotments on reserve land to those deemed “advanced” or “civilized” enough and so had thereby achieved a kind of quasi-individual status, but this was a rare and inconsistent practice. Where it was done, the hope was that this would not only bind them more strongly still to the interests of the colonizers, but would provide a positive influence on their less “progressive” fellows and simultaneously wrest reserves from collective control. The program of enfranchisement of which encouraging individual land holdings was an integral part, though, was resisted by Indigenous people and was considerably less successful than its promoters hoped.⁶⁶

The maintenance of established lifeways or the conscious opposition to liberalism, its objectives, or its contradictions, was portrayed as “backwardness” by commentators. Liberalism insists on compliance with its values and energetic participation in its objectives. On Canadian Indian reserves, the instruction and prescription that occurred in society at large was amplified to mitigate against the occurrence or flourishing of “unprogressive” behaviour, or logics that were condemned by liberalism. Among Canada’s still newly expanding disciplinary institutions, Indian reserves joined prisons, asylums, and schools as instruments designed to “normalize,” or to segregate and reform those who exhibited behaviour that was inimical to the maintenance of liberal order. The possibility that Indigenous cultures, in operation for millennia, might include elements that could prove beneficial to Anglo-Canadians was rejected *a priori*.⁶⁷

The methods and means of the application of liberalism have always been the subject of open debate in Canada, but the meaning of its primary objectives: individual liberty, protection of private property, and equality have only at extraordinary moments of disillusionment been seriously challenged. Liberalism as an ideology won acceptance and was maintained through debate, but as hegemony it was perpetuated in schools, factories, hospitals, prisons, and on Indian reserves. It was spread through language, nationalist rituals (and national history), and organized religion, and its contradictions justified by census taking and other modes of measuring and comparing individuals. Electoral politics gave it the appearance of popular control well beyond the threshold of what it could actually provide. Since as hegemony it was constantly shifting and adapting in order to subdue new threats and suppress new challenges it was more insidious and, for the activist, less assailable than overt forms of subjugation.

Liberalism and Surveillance

Fundamental to the application of liberalism, and to judgments of its successes, was surveillance. While intelligence-gathering modes may appear neutral, their effects caused and justified a range of discriminatory treatment. The study that follows focuses primarily on instruments of the state, especially the DIA and the relevant police forces. However, the observing apparatus, the “net-work of machinery” that S.H. Blake claimed could be brought to bear to gather information related to Indigenous peoples, included not only policemen and officials employed directly by the DIA: the inspectors of various sorts, commissioners, superintendents, agents, and clerks, but also farmers, stockmen, ration issuers, interpreters, part time mill and machinery operators and trades people, medical personnel, and teachers. Additionally it included justices, spies, private detectives, game wardens, fisheries inspectors, timber inspectors, cruisers and valuers, orchard inspectors, missionaries, ranchers, farmers, settlers, merchants, contractors, business owners, workers, surveyors, politicians, academics, and sometimes members of the First Nation under observance or of another Indigenous group. The sources and values of income, land use, educational achievements, literacy in English and French, material possessions, extents of fencing and cultivation, quantity and types of buildings, livestock and poultry, sanitation, morality, mobility and even clothing styles of Indigenous people living on reserves were observed, measured, judged, and compared with their neighbours. In the period between 1877 and 1927 at least, no other groups of people were subjected to similar levels of observation over the entire course of their lives for such an extended amount of time. As John Lutz has stated, “Indians found themselves in a civic cell shared with felons and the insane.”⁶⁸

The hope which sustained the surveillance network was in some ways parallel to the objective of the wider Canadian census which “was more than a count of population: it was a means by which the state codified and sanctioned certain values.”⁶⁹ The information gathered and published by the DIA, though, far exceeded that of the published censuses in breadth and depth. Where individual level data was included, the detail of the DIA’s annual reports went well beyond the unpublished decennial censuses as well. However, the accuracy of the department’s tabular statements is another matter. As will be discussed in [Chapter Four](#), the statistical data presented by the DIA were at times subject to sloppy compilation and at others

purposeful manipulation.

The underlying impetus of all this observation and intelligence gathering was to provide a portrait of the progress of colonial rule. It identified individuals and groups that were adhering to state policies, and singled out those who were not for further remedial discipline. It identified the quantity of land that could be removed from reserves as “unused” or “unneeded” in addition to expenditures that appeared unwarranted.⁷⁰ The strategy of including tabular statements produced the further benefit of increasing the impression of scientific legitimacy in the reports and of the efficiency and rational understanding of DIA compilers. These impressions in turn ensured continued funding of the massive DIA surveillance network. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the categorization of Indigenous people by non-Indigenous indices, by choosing to identify the number of “those who wear civilized clothing,” for example, the tabular reports included in the *Annual Reports* helped to emphasize illusionary and inaccurate images that served to maintain and fortify the boundary between “Indian” and “non-Indian.”

Through observation, measurement, classification, judgment, and representation, the colonizers of western Canada created a body of “knowledge” about Indigenous peoples, their use of land and resources, the way they provided for themselves and their families, their way of life, and a myriad of less significant details. This knowledge did not represent any universal reality, but was constructed in accord with culturally accepted philosophical tenants, discursive practices, Euro-Canadian categories and indices, Christian morality, capitalist values, and liberal objectives. All were cultural products that together served to normalize colonial power relations and to mitigate against the emergence of any other way of knowing First Nations people.⁷¹

This mechanism or web of observation was not simply neutral or the impulse of wide eyed innocence hoping to gain an understanding of the “real Natives” in order to more efficiently negotiate the sharing of the resources of the continent. Even at best, as literary critic David Spurr has articulated, “[t]he sympathetic humanitarian eye is no less a product of deeply held colonialist values, and no less authoritative in the mastery of its object, than the surveying and policing eye.”⁷² Constituting an individual or group as an object of knowledge is to assume power over them.⁷³ Surveillance is a technology of power aimed in this case exclusively at promoting non-Indigenous interests and values. The perceived attributes of Whiteness, Protestantism, and British heritage were the reference points for normality against which all was judged. Constant monitoring and recording of Indigenous people’s actions in all aspects of their daily lives inspired behaviour that complied with this culturally defined frame of normality. The slightest deficiency, aberration, or stubborn endurance of “Indianness” was singled out for further corrective action. As I will illustrate below, Indigenous peoples in the Treaty 7 and Kamloops-Okanagan areas were rarely afforded the basic protection of personal and collective privacy afforded to other residents of these regions.

Knowing Indians

The methods by which Euro-Canadians came to “know” Indigenous peoples established and

maintained differences that were elaborated by prior and contemporary theories of race, gender, and class and were maintained by the observation of state officials, missionaries, and other non-Indigenous residents. All of this was converted into a systematized array of economic, political, social, and cultural understandings that “both enabled colonial conquest and was produced by it.”⁷⁴ Knowing colonized peoples in this way allowed the construction of new oppositions between “the savage and the civilized” or between progressive modern Euro-Canadians and stubbornly retrograde and tradition-bound colonized peoples.⁷⁵ If Indigenous people were dishonest, simple, lazy, prone to violence, promiscuous, and self-indulgent, then non-Indigenous Canadians were honest, intelligent, hard-working, reserved, morally upright, and generous.⁷⁶

While colonial knowledge of Indigenous peoples was not universally negative, even positive depictions were disfiguring simulations that took the place of Indigenous peoples’ understandings of themselves.⁷⁷ The convictions that arose from the creation of this knowledge served to convince decent well-meaning people that they had a God-given obligation to “assist” Indigenous peoples by governing them and their lands without the necessity of consent, which would otherwise be a liberal requirement.⁷⁸ Knowing First Nations peoples in this way justified draconian forms of political control and scandalous appropriations of land and resources. At the same time, however, “advances” and “progress” of Indigenous people toward “civilization” could be recognized as the result of the benevolent influence of the colonizers. The relative position of Indigenous peoples was therefore seen as both the reason for, and the result of, colonial rule.⁷⁹ Again, this is not to say that some, perhaps many, newcomers to western Canada did not view aspects of Indigenous cultures in positive ways or that they did not have altruistic objectives, but only that very few were able or willing to challenge the dominant discourse of “the Indian.”

The colonial binary, thus established between Euro-Canadians and their constructed “Indians,” formed a basic premise for colonial authority: that the colonizers constituted an homogenous, but discrete cultural and biological body whose interests and values could be easily distinguished, while the boundary between themselves and Indigenous peoples was visible and unmistakable.⁸⁰ Though the categories “Indian” and “White” appeared to represent a fixed and natural division, both the line of demarcation and the categories were artificial and necessarily flexible. If the boundary was threatened by the exposure of some contradiction in policy or its application, by the emergence of a successful economic or political adaptation on the part of an Indigenous person or nation, by the cultural accommodation of a particular community, or by the presence of an individual or family who appeared or acted “White,” the boundary was shifted in order to maintain the exclusion of these people and so keep the White/Indian binary intact.⁸¹

“Indian” from its first appearance in reference to the Indigenous peoples of North America was a simulation that transposed and submerged real Indigenous peoples: “the *indian* has no ancestors” no “memories, or native stories.”⁸² The “Indian” was initially the product of chance encounter resulting from a navigational error and from the very beginning was a European construction. As a result, and in a similar way to what Said has said of the “Orient,” the

surveillance of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian west was never able to produce simple innocent reflections of Indigenous reality.⁸³ What appeared as the “Indian” was a collage of images that were often contradictory, but always inferior to Anglo-Canadians. The “Indian” was not mere fantasy, though, but an enduring political, economic, and social instrument. It was a device that bolstered the colonizers’ images of themselves as benevolently superior while at the same time ensuring the advancement of their material interests. Yet, within the construction, not all “Indians” were the same. Whereas it was stated that the “Six Nations [were] amongst the most intelligent, if not the most intelligent, on the North American continent,”⁸⁴ some at least believed that “some of the tribes or nations of the Indians living to the West of the Rocky Mountains [were] reckoned together with the Bushmen of South Africa among the lowest types of humanity as regards civilization.”⁸⁵

There were many distinctions made between different groups and between individuals within groups. For the most part, judgments were made on the basis of the degree to which an individual or group cooperated with the venture of the person doing the judging or the extent to which the attributes held as fundamental to “civilization,” particularly individualism and the adherence to Christianity, were accepted or at least were demonstrated to the observer. As liberal Canada moved west it needed “Indians” who could be reformed in order to warrant the massive “civilizing” effort of the state and organized religion, but it also demanded a perpetually inferior “Indian” to justify the appropriation of land and resources and the economic, political, cultural, and social subjugation of Indigenous peoples.

In western Canada, the contemptible image of the “Indian” that was created and reflected back to Indigenous people was undoubtedly a form of oppression in itself that continues to mitigate against social, political, and economic equality even as some of the structural impediments to parity begin to be removed.⁸⁶ Not only was the “Indian” constructed as part of the colonial project, but every person, object, and idea connected with this venture in all of its shapes, objects, and manifestations was affected, though clearly not all in the same way or to the same degree. Colonialism was a dialectic encounter that was fundamental in creating the identity of the colonizer as well.

The colonial project was a multifaceted, creative, and flexible one. Further, ignoring the fundamental heterogeneity of the categories colonizer and colonized only serves to continue to mask the historical significance of class, gender, and race for those of us living in the present. Not everyone in settler society acted simply as local agents of colonialism, either consciously or unconsciously. The DIA, the administrative bulwark of colonial expansion, was almost exclusively White and male, but the Indian agent at Kamloops, for a portion of the period under discussion here, was John Freemont Smith, a Black man born in Fredricksted, St. Croix. Colonialism in western Canada was far more complicated than a simple Manichean duality despite the forces that harmonized to make it appear to be an uncomplicated binary. Shifting the emphasis away from these categories as homogenous entities allows us to examine, with considerably more historical and geographical specificity, the constantly innovating colonial relationship including internal fractures, collaborations, and moments of resistance which emerge at various points in the colonial dispersion.

The Homogenizing Impact of “National” History

Exploring the expansion of Canada as a colonial encroachment on Indigenous lands and lifeways is itself a challenge to what has been described as a “national mythology” where Euro-Canadians simply occupied a mostly uninhabited and certainly undeveloped west and so were most fit and entitled to both its resources and to whatever political benefits liberalism might provide in the expanding state.⁸⁷

Yet this “national mythology” has been a central unifying theme of Canadian history writing as this country’s development from a colony of Britain to an independent nation has been indoctrinated into generations of students of Canadian history. Within this model the main lines of historical inquiry paid little attention to internal fractures or divergent interests created by class, gender, or race. These inquirers have, for the most part, perceived the expansion of English Canada’s values and interests as a narrative of dauntless “nation-building” not as a colonizing project. As a result, treaties between European nations, like the 1763 Treaty of Paris, are awarded central position in both academic and popular accounts, while treaties with First Nations, and even more so between First Nations, are given relatively little attention.⁸⁸ Indigenous peoples, where they were described at all, were considered mostly insignificant. Stephen Leacock summed up this position succinctly during World War II.

The continent remained, as it had been for uncounted centuries, empty. We think of prehistoric North America as inhabited by the Indians, and have based on this a sort of recognition of ownership on their part. But this attitude is hardly warranted. The Indians were too few to count. Their use of the resources of the continent was scarcely more than that by crows and wolves, and their development of it nothing.⁸⁹

Historians in the post-war period sometimes acknowledged the presence of Indigenous peoples, albeit peripherally, in regard to prairie settlement, but in these accounts they remained Leacock’s passive, tradition-bound, and mostly irrelevant, bystanders.⁹⁰ At best they are portrayed as the victims of fundamentally inequitable land policies.⁹¹ At worst they are seen as primitive, uncivilized and witless casualties sacrificed in the inevitable westward march of decisively superior Euro-Canadian culture. As Simon Ryan has noted in a related context, European exploration was fabricated “as an heroic practice furthering the frontier of empire” and individual explorers “used as a focus for imperial discourses of vigorous, manly expansion and occupation of land.” Against this heroic construction, Indigenous populations, most often depicted as a singular homogenous body, are “easily portrayed as being composed of lazy wastrels.”⁹² Where they are discussed at all, First Nations people are depicted as no more than aspects of the wilderness. Since the land itself was perceived as wilder than that included in Europe, the efforts of those who came to tame it were all the more heroic.

When one does not centralize nation-building and does not ignore the impact of Euro-Canadian colonialism or disparage the role of those outside the economic and political inner circles, Canadian history and the nation itself become far less axiomatic entities.⁹³ Canada’s past can no longer be traced as a single line of chronological ascent, but appears rather as a set of relations that were constantly being challenged and realigned. This recognition forecloses on the possibility of producing an all-encompassing account, but it forces us to challenge the apparent obviousness of the truths that emerged in Canada’s “march of progress.” At the same

time it causes us to analyze the conditions under which these seemingly self-evident truths appeared.⁹⁴

The Agency/Coercion Binary

While this work proceeds with an appreciation of the significance of resistance, it seeks at the same time not to underestimate the creative potential of power to reformulate in response to challenges to it. The understanding here is that at the very least any consideration of agency has to be opened up to include the entire network of relations between Indigenous peoples and Euro-Canadians, which included resistance, coercion, refusal, acceptance, negotiation, imposition, compromise, assistance, alliance, cooperation, collusion, and violent rejection among a variety of other actions and reactions.⁹⁵ Further, simply inverting the binary of oppressor/oppressed or agency/coercion by demonstrating the ability of Indigenous people to resist European intrusion, without examining the conditions that produced and maintained the binary in the first place, diminishes the theoretical and political values of conceptions that could have profound implications.

What needs to be explored then is not Indigenous agency, but the more theoretically interesting and politically important conditions that fostered the “‘mythology of racelessness’ and ‘stupefying innocence’” that Constance Backhouse suggested “would appear to be the twin pillars of the Canadian history of race.”⁹⁶ The relative silence of racialized discourse in Canada and the “common sense” belief that racism has never existed here, at least to the levels that it occurred south of the border, is what really distinguishes racism in Canada where “the ‘colour bar’ was far more muted and informal.”⁹⁷

Similarly, a recent collection of articles on race and the law states that its objective is to challenge “the racelessness of law and the amnesia that allows White subjects to be produced as innocent, entitled, rational, and legitimate.”⁹⁸ For the most part these authors argue that racially determined sanctions depended on the disposition of White proprietors, patrons, and local officials. This does not mean that racism here was necessarily felt any less sharply than in the United States, only that it could not be resisted in the coordinated way that it was south of the border. Racism extended well beyond intentional, if not legislatively approved, acts. It was both endemic and dispensed through all Canadian institutions: schools, government bodies, and the courts. It was also manifest in Canadian popular culture, in social, political, and economic theory, and often in the family. Whiteness is the norm against which all else was judged. Its invisibility allowed the privileges that being White provided to be obscured.⁹⁹ The recognition of the silent operations of racism forces us to consider the violence inherent in seemingly benign acts and less than overt modes of power such as classification, measurement, calculation, and representation, each of which is made possible only by observation and surveillance.

Investigating Colonialism as Cultural Formation and Concrete Experience

With all of the above discussion of cultural formations, representation, liberalism, hegemony, and ideology, one might think that colonialism was only a cerebral initiative, a figment of

speech, or a textual project. Yet a focus on land and resource issues and the impact of these on Indigenous peoples in the study that follows ensures that the material aspects of colonialism are very much a part the analysis. It is clear from the historical record that Indigenous peoples in the Treaty 7 and Kamloops-Okanagan regions experienced colonialism in concrete material ways that must be understood in that light.¹⁰⁰ The surveillance, measurement, and judgment of Indigenous peoples was not only directed at isolating aberrant behaviour or illustrating Anglo-Canadian superiority, but at expediting the material undertakings of the colonizers. Further, in the period between 1877 and 1927 in southern Alberta and the southern interior of British Columbia, liberalism operated in more brazenly collaborative ways with the political and economic demands of Euro-Canadian imperialism than perhaps at any other time in the history of Canada. While the “Indian” may be offered as a discursive effect, real Indigenous people lived in western Canada, struggled, adapted, and raised families under the oppressive weight of colonialism, the imposition of decidedly exclusive liberal values, and the racism of many of their neighbours. The psychological and material effects are still being felt.

The approach taken here proposes moving beyond the simple insistence on the constructed nature of knowledge and identities. In addition, it does not suggest examining Euro-Canadian colonialism only to chronicle its history of domination. Rather it is the inconsistencies, the contradictions, the fractures, and the failures of liberalism and colonialism that will be examined. The intent in exploring these fault lines is to investigate the possibility of divergent understandings that were never allowed to surface, but rather were sacrificed to liberalism’s normalizing and exclusionary strategies.¹⁰¹ The chapters below explore the ways in which particular truths emerged and were reframed in the specific situations of the Treaty 7 and Kamloops-Okanagan regions. They also investigate the ways in which liberalism merged with colonialism in the creation of wealth through the transfer of land and resources. Finally, they explore the strategies of resistance, accommodation, acceptance, negotiation, compromise, alliance, cooperation, and fierce rejection of Canadian colonialism and its attendant liberal capitalist values and mandates as they unfolded in western Canada.

This work also flows from the understanding that one “cannot just *do* colonial history based on our given sources” because, as Anne Stoler and Frederick Cooper confirm, “what constitutes the archive itself, what is excluded from it, what nomenclatures signal at certain times are themselves internal to, and the very substance of colonialism’s cultural politics.”¹⁰² The non-Indigenous historian finds him or herself in a triple bind, caught between a European-based colonial discourse as presented in an archive, and his or her own cultural reality, while attempting to uncover the voice of the colonized. While no historical methodology can produce a distortion-free reflection of the colonial experience, it is understood here that simply replacing thorough archival research with the tools of literary criticism is insufficient. The intent in the chapters below is to similarly maintain the tension between the recognition of archival documents as constructed texts and reading them as portals, albeit disfiguring ones, into peoples’ lives.

In practice, history must always prowl the borders between past social acts, present cultural understandings, social and political imperatives, disciplinary requirements, and personal objectives. I would argue that historians need to be more self-conscious and open about their

own subject position and complicities, their methodological assumptions, and the tentativeness and constructedness of their analyses and claims.

The focus on liberalism and colonialism in western Canada at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries is of more than academic interest. We must of course find ways to confront the residual effects of past colonial practice, but we need also to navigate the challenges of the present Canadian political climate. In the 1970s George Manuel stated that to the extent that Indigenous people will choose to integrate into Canadian society in the future, it “will occur only when there is no longer any dilemma between retaining our status as Indian people and becoming part of Canadian society. The Indian peoples want to enjoy the same rights and recognition as the ‘two founding races’ now enjoy in our land.”¹⁰³ In the last few decades Canadian liberalism has promoted policies of multiculturalism and engaged in treaty-making with Indigenous peoples, but continues to offer a particular understanding of history, and to contain the nature of equality and the extent of self-determination that it permits. As Taiiiake Alfred has said of the British Columbia Treaty Commission:

In essence, stripped of its rhetorical ‘treaty’ façade, the BCTC uses a base form of manipulation of [I]ndigenous peoples’ post-epidemic poverty and weakness in the attempt to validate and legitimize the conditions and structures that are an inherent part of the economic dependency foisted on them, and to achieve a final and crucial degree of control over the futures of [I]ndigenous peoples by binding and subsuming their identity and political existence to that of the Canadian state.¹⁰⁴

Twenty-first century Canadian liberalism works to mask its efforts at assimilation and homogenization. It presents a degree of juridical equality to First Nations people, but is careful to limit any official discussion of Indigenous sovereignty or nationhood, in the past or in the future, that might challenge the legitimacy of the liberal capitalist state itself. As has been suggested elsewhere, the critique of Canadian society being offered by many twenty-first century Indigenous thinkers is relevant not only to those defined as “Aboriginal” by the Canadian government, but to all of us, and this perhaps is where the greatest challenge to liberal hegemony lies.¹⁰⁵ As long as liberalism is able to obscure its own inherent contradictions, Indigenous people in Canada will not be in a position to control their own land or economic strategies.

In order to investigate the specific conditions in which liberalism was applied and disciplinary surveillance emerged on western Canadian Indian reserves, the study below focuses on the colonization of two regions of western Canada in the period 1877–1927. The first, the southern Alberta region that became known as Treaty 7, included the Siksika (Blackfoot), Piikani (Peigan), and Kainai (Blood) Blackfoot nations as well as the Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee) and Nakoda (Stoney) First Nations.¹⁰⁶ The second, the southern interior area of British Columbia that became the DIA administrative region known as the Kamloops-Okanagan Indian Agency, included the Secwepemc (Shuswap), Okanagan, and Nlha7káp̓mx (Thompson) First Nations.¹⁰⁷ The decision to examine two locations, especially ones as close together geographically and both overseen by a singular but fledgling Canadian state, was made to provide an opportunity to explore the elasticity, the mutability, and the pluralities that exist within the colonial project even within nearby regions of a single nation.

The reasons for choosing to examine the contours of colonialism at the local level stems from an understanding that while imperialism is global in scope “even in its most marauding forms it necessarily takes hold in and through the local.”¹⁰⁸ This is not really a comparative study in the traditional sense then, though there were significant differences in the two regions under investigation, and comparisons will be made. Rather, what follows is an exploration of the ways in which colonialism and the application of liberalism, both of which are better seen as dispersions than monolithic enterprises, can shift and adapt to meet specific local conditions. The central argument here is that liberalism, as it was applied in western Canada, served to exclude Indigenous people in various ways from the equality, liberty, and protection of property that it was purported to promote, and that others in Canada took for granted. This expansion of liberalism, multifaceted in construction and diverse, but undeniably debilitating in its impact on First Nations people, was facilitated, fashioned, and justified by means of disciplinary surveillance. In addition, the surveillance network described in the chapters that follow clearly operated to inculcate Anglo-Canadian liberal capitalist values, structures, and interests as normal, natural, and beyond reproach. At the same time, it worked to exclude or restructure the economic, political, social, and spiritual tenets of Indigenous cultures. While none of this proceeded unchallenged, surveillance served as well to mitigate against, even if it could never completely neutralize, opposition. Further, to protect the chimera of what liberalism had to offer Indigenous people, those about whom the massive textual record was created were routinely denied access to it.