

RACISM: BACK TO THE BEGINNING.

Part III of a talk by Dr. Roland Chrisjohn on the roots of racism as they pertain to Aboriginal People. This talk was recorded on March 14, 2002 as part of St. Thomas University's Native Awareness Days organized by the Native Student Council. Dr. Roland Chrisjohn is currently the Director of Native Studies at St. Thomas University (Fredericton) and amongst other works is co-author of *The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Residential School Experience in Canada*. An Oneida of the Iroquois Confederacy, he has spoken and written extensively about social issues which affect Indigenous peoples of North America.

Thank you for inviting me. My topic is racism with a sub-text of the roots of racism. It's not hard to get me to talk about racism because it's my least favorite subject and it's taken enough bites out of my butt that I have gotten to know it over the years and I don't like it and I don't want to have to deal with it and the fact that it keeps coming back time and again means that it's something that I have to pay attention to. I take a very different view of racism that is typically done. I absolutely reject the notion of different kinds of racism that are current in the literature. My own background is in psychology so I believed these kinds of kinds for a long time but as I grew up and got smarter, I became less a psychologist and more interested in really understanding my subject matter. So one of the things I'd like to start off with to address "back to the basics" with regards to racism is what do we mean by racism. This is one of the things that we are going to have to come to grips with; and I mean by racism something very different from what you are going to get from a lot of other people who want to talk about the similar subject. So I've worked out a little definition today and what I mean by racism. Racism is an ideology of dehumanization and there are others such as sexism, ageism are also ideologies of dehumanization but racism is another ideology of dehumanization deployed to conceal and or deny the material content of dispossession, discrimination and prejudice.

That doesn't sound like racism that we run into in Alport's classic study of racism, which I don't agree with at all. What I am saying is that racism is a material relation that it is an ideology deployed to conceal and or deny dispossession among other things. Dispossession and theft! The former being a big word for the latter. What racism allows to happen in a material condition is that it gets to put forth the premise that you cannot really steal anything from something that isn't a human being. If you chop down a tree that a squirrel happens to live in, you haven't stolen their house, you've just chopped down a tree. If you drain a swamp that a moose stands in to eat, you haven't stolen the moose's land, you've simply made the land more useable. So one of the material conditions that racism is deployed to hide is these kinds of thefts. That what is going to happen is if we can pretend that the people who we are stealing things from, if we can pretend that they are not really people, then it's not a theft, is it?

We don't talk about stealing the chicken's eggs, stealing the cow's milk, that's just the way things are. We also do not talk about stealing the Indians' lands to the extent that we want to believe that Indians are not human beings. It's not really a theft from them, they're kind of like mosquitoes and badgers. Occasionally interesting to have around, but a nuisance in the long run that has to be eliminated in order for the real world to take hold and operate. And when you say dispossession, I don't just mean land, you can also take the property of the people such as the minerals in the lands on which people reside, the timber, the water, the air and you can take their lives also. So another aspect of the dispossession, of racism as a material dispossession, is the theft of lives. Black slavery began at much the same time as the dispossession of North America

did by Columbus. Columbus was also part of the slave trade. He was not involved in stealing Africa right off the bat but he was involved in stealing the lives of Africans and when he got over here, because the Indians were not putting up with his shenanigans, were committing mass suicide, he needed people to replace them. So you have a fundamental dispossession that is going on in racism. So it is deployed to conceal or deny the material content of dispossession.

Discrimination is the second thing. What do I mean by discrimination? Non-humans, sub humans have no presumption of comparable treatment under the law, under morality, under codes of ethics ordinarily given to other human beings. So, in other words, we can discriminate against them. Even peasants in Europe had rights! They had fewer rights than nobility and religious authority or whatever but they still had certain wee worn lines that would have applied to First Nations people in North America had the Europeans been willing to recognize them as human beings. So racism performs a material function here. We don't have to treat them in any ethical manner whatsoever! Columbus' men were lining Indians up to see who could go farthest in terms of slashing them in two with a saber. Whatever they were doing to the peasants in Europe they were not doing that to the peasants of Europe but they did decide to do it to the Indians and the dehumanization allows, creates the material conditions for that kind of discriminative activity.

Thirdly, prejudice. By this I don't mean the emotion prejudice. What I mean by prejudice is vocalizations: protests, complaints and arguments of non or sub humans are a priori and by definition only worthy if the attention humans may choose to accord them. So if we complain about something well it's just the Indians. If they say get off my land, well it's just Indians. If they are sub humans what you can say is occasionally I can pay attention to the noises that are emanating from those creatures. Any good farmer knows when a cow is upset or will pay attention to a barking dog under certain circumstances but what you choose to do about it, and when you choose to pay attention to it is your presumption as a human being not something that you have to accord to somebody by virtue of being another human being with rights, that you have a social relationship with, that there are mutual responsibilities to uphold. So this is a big problem: I don't talk about racism and I don't want to talk about or understand racism as an emotional, felt thing, I want to emphasize that it has a material basis. That if you are going to steal people and not allow them to do anything about it and not allow them to complain about it, it's a really good thing if you can pretend that those are not people. By the same token if you are going to run out into Africa and take people up by chains and ship them in millions to be worked to death in mines and in farms on an entirely different continent, it is a pretty good thing that you can pretend that they are not human beings.

Those are the origins of racism, not in Columbus walking up on shore and saying, "well, they look like people and chatter as if they are talking to each other and they seem to be shaped like us, but, hmm, maybe they are not really people." I have to say over and over again, Columbus was not confused by whether or not these human beings he was running into were really human beings, but he had a material basis for denying their humanity and racism is that fundamental dehumanization deployed to pretend that these are not issues to argue about: discrimination, prejudice. Instead, we should say, are they really human beings, do they have a soul, do they have a perfectible nature, do we have any moral obligations to them. We can argue about that endlessly. When we are arguing about that we are not arguing about whether or not

what we are doing is theft or discrimination.

Me and the students who are working with me on this new book on racism do not consider the emotive content of racism. What's the emotive content of racism? Inferiority statements: Blacks are lazy, oversexed; Indians are stupid; there are emotive inferiority statements. Or expressions of intolerance: Chinese people smell bad, Australian aborigines are stupid. So we do not consider that the emotive content of racism is the heart of racism, we consider it the backside of racism. Garcia believes that it is the heart of racism and when he analyses racism what he tries to do is understand the emotive content and what I am trying to assert in the work that I am doing that that comes later, that there is a material basis that comes first and these specific emotive justifications come afterwards and they are deployed to get us to argue about the wrong thing.

Where else am I going with this? In arguing about the reality status of inferiority statements when someone comes along and says that Blacks are oversexed, Indians are stupid, Indians have a different learning style than everybody else, etc; when we argue about it "no, no Indians do not have a different learning style; no, no, Blacks are not oversexed; etc" what are we doing? We are spending our time in following an agenda that somebody else is setting for us that is irrelevant to the task at hand which is resolving the material conflicts that are the basis of those statements in the first place. What do I mean by that, is that blather? No!

There are, as we will see, plenty of people willing to make statements about Indians this way or that way and if we spend our time arguing about whether or not we really are different in terms of our learning style, different in terms of our intelligence, we have to understand first of all that our time and effort is going into that agenda and then we have to look and say what are we not arguing about? We are not arguing about whose land this actually is, what kinds of laws have been broken, human and Canadian, in their application of imposition of policies and procedures against First Nations peoples. None of that is up for discussion. What is up for discussion is whether or not Indians are stupider than everybody else. Hmm, let's look at the evidence, let's gather the data. "Roland, you're a psychologist, you should go out and gather the data and help prove that Indians aren't really stupider than everybody else." You know, for a while I did that until I realized that nobody cares because the evidence is always completely disputable. I've told at other times that one of my advisers, my first two published papers as a psychologist are published with Phil Rushton. He is that idiot running around saying that taking a tape measure and measuring someone's head will tell you what their IQ is, that Blacks are oversexed and stupid, that Indians are some kind of throwback Asians stupider than every body else. He wrote two papers with me so he didn't seem so concerned with my stupidity in those days. I did all the technical work because he is not capable of doing that since he has no math sense whatsoever.

I've worked in various ways trying to dispute supposedly the facts of our kind of inferiority there or here and I have to ask myself what evidence could I ever have produced that would have changed his mind? If you don't want to change your mind about something, it's really easy not to. Has anyone ever found that? If you think so and so over there is a real dodo, well you know he speaks Sanskrit, everybody can speak Sanskrit. If you want to, you can interpret any kind of evidence the way you want, these are solidified positions and he didn't

make up his mind and I would have to assert that most scientific and non scientific racists do not make up their mind on the basis of evidence because there is no evidence that logically, rationally could be conveyed one way or another. They don't tote it up on a board and say I'll believe this because of that and this because of that; these are rhetorical arguments and means by which positions are established. And I say why, though. Don't ask about how you came to believe that, ask why are we arguing about it at all.

One of the things that I would like to do in emphasizing the material basis of racism is that by thinking about the emotive content of it as the central focus of what we should be involved in is beside the point. It forces us, it requires us to take our time and our effort and our energy and put it in a wrong direction that in the end is not going to convince anybody.

Part of my first real job, more than thirty years ago (my god), was that I was supposed to go around to high schools and elementary schools and convince the people in London, Ontario that Indians weren't dirty, ravaging, raving lunatic dirty, smelly savages. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. I noticed that the people who had already made up their mind that we were raving lunatics of various sorts didn't change their mind one way or the other after listening to me, it didn't make much difference. Those who were kindly inclined toward First Nations people in the first place, well they were kindly disposed afterwards. I didn't do anything to destroy that particular image. It was only with a really small group of people that didn't make up their mind that I could have an impact one way or the other. So one of the things they did when we had to rewrite our job descriptions was to rewrite it so that I didn't have to do that anymore because as far as I could see I was wasting my and their time by pretending that there was any content that I could present that would literally persuade one way or the other. That's not why people were making up their minds, at least in London, Ontario, about those things.

So this is what I mean by "what are the basics of racism?" Let's eschew the notion that what we are talking about when we talk about racism is fundamentally an emotive condition of some sort with reality status that may or may not be empirically true, let's forget about that. Instead, let's inquire into the material conditions of what racism is doing, why is it deployed in our society; to what ends? And what is it that we are not talking about when we talk about racism as if it were an emotion.

Secondly. What does going back to basics of racism mean? If we want to go back to basics and we want to consider going back to basics concerning racism, what is it that we are supposed to be doing? What are the basics? Here I have to again assert a well hidden past, something that is covered up and not talked about at all. To put it simply, racism never had any role in indigenous life and has no role in our lives today. Historically speaking, racism had nothing to do with Indian people's relations with one another or even Indian peoples relations with Europeans. Going back to basics in regard to racism means exposing the material content of dispossession, discrimination and prejudice and rejecting an invitation to think of it in terms of an emotive content, that's what going back to basics is. Some people have heard in some of my prior harrangs that racism has a birth date. A really good argument, not a complete one but a really good one, could be made that racism begins on October the 12th, 1492. If you want to put a date to the birthday of western racism, that's the date you can give because from that moment when Columbus walks onto the shore and realizes that there are people here already and what my

charter says is that I become the great admiral sea lord of uninhabited lands, here you give him the material basis for saying but if those aren't people, then this is uninhabited and I'm the lord!

It says right there in his charter that that's what he gets to be: the admiral of the ocean sea and the governor of the unoccupied lands that he runs into. Well, you cannot give a person a greater material incentive than being king of everything he surveys than that particular material incentive. Later on when he is trying to get these people to bring him something that they don't have, millions of them start committing suicide. Bring me bags of gold every month, the first month that you don't do that you lose your left arm and the second month that you don't do that you lose your right arm, and then you better learn how to prospect with your feet because you won't have any arms left after those first two months. Those people didn't put up with those circumstances but did not have the technological expertise to resist those incursions, so what so they do? In many cases they committed mass suicide.

The island of Hispanola, the estimate nowadays is that, between 2 and 3 million people died; some by disease, some by interventions, thousands upon thousands by suicide at the hands of people who were part of Columbus' men. So you can say that when you give Columbus or western Europeans that kind of incentive to create racism, then racism is a very easy thing to create. In history you have little precursors to this type of racism here and there but when Columbus had to replace an obliterated population with other people who were going to go out to do the prospecting or the plantation work because the people he is bringing from Spain want to become millionaires (they're not coming from a peasant life in Spain to become peasants in the New World) they say you get someone to do my work for me. So Columbus has to sail south from Europe in order to pick up the prevailing trade winds to get across the ocean. What's south? You have the gold coast, you've got east Africa, you have the slave ports that you can go in and load up to bring the slaves across, offload them, pick up the goods that the last group of slaves have produced for you whether it is tobacco, sugar or gold and you pick up the northern currents and winds to come across and land in Spain. A trade triangle grows up and that happens within three voyages of Columbus' first voyage. Drop off the goods, pick up the slaves, take the slaves over, pick up the goods, sail across, drop off the goods and so on and so on. And you have the dispossession created and you have Black racism, anti Black racism again for material conditions being created for the first time.

Hanneford, Snowdon, Saunders have countless historical references that show over and over again that Black people were considered a little bit odd because they were numerically, in some places, small but they were not considered sub humans or natural born slaves or anything until Columbus gets his trade triangle in operation. You have to understand that our ancestors knew what responsible, scientific theorists know today. That is that racism is content less, that race is a contentless concept. That it's empty, that it's vapid and that it's dangerous and destructive. We had our differences or we may have our differences, really the only real evidence that we have for differences pre existing Columbus is that some of the white people say that the Indians didn't get along with one another. Maybe we did and maybe we didn't. I've never found the Jesuits, for example, very good record keepers of what was going on. Whatever our differences were it was not based on race. I have an actual long quote that I like to use on that which I lost when my computer crashed before the talk so I will try to do it from memory and it comes from Horatio Hale in 1883. Hale was widely considered the first Canadian

anthropologist, and what does he say when he is commenting on the Iroquois? “Oh yeah, the Iroquois used to have wars with others but the interesting thing was that immediately after the cessation of war, people were simply adopted in the Iroquois confederacy. Either wholesale or they were just allowed to have their own lands under their own chiefs to follow their own customs and then after several generations of living next to each other, sharing a community of interest, sharing hardships, sharing family lives, they would become recognized as separate or distinct or members of the confederacy.” The confederacy had the requirement, make the confederacy strong by adopting other people. So as long as we are not fighting with each other, we haven’t got anything against you sharing this area, sit down, and enjoy yourself. If we have more than you, then we’ll share with you and vice versa. In three or four generations, we will not notice. This did not just extend to other dark skinned, brown-eyed people. It also applied to white skinned, red haired freckled people and that also was not unique to the Iroquois Confederacy. The fact that you don’t have a heck of a lot of accounts of it for other First Nations is simply because they got around so late to actually documenting what different First Nations across this continent were doing. But I’ve never found an Indian language, a First Nation language in which the concept of race, in a western sense, translates into an Indian word. Even our word for non Indian, white Anglo Saxon protestant western European people has got nothing to do with the color of their skin or physical characteristics. It is a rude word but it has more to do with the effect that corn soup has on some people and has got nothing to do with the putative, race- based distinction between human beings. Like I say what can be said for the Iroquois Confederacy can and should be said about other First Nations as well. Our ancestors were as smart as the most advanced de-bunkers of race and racism are in western civilization today and that is we knew that it was a stupid concept.

So let’s ask the question are we going back to basics? So I’ve told you what racism is as a basic and I’ve sort of sad id what going back to basics would involve and that is that adoption of a particular program in respect to understanding the role of racism; are we doing it? Is this actually the program that we are adopting as indigenous peoples? And the answer is no. It’s one of the hardest things for me personally to ever run into is when I run into expressions of anti Black prejudice, anti immigrant prejudice, anti, I don’t know, Swedish prejudice or whatever, that I hear as stupid phrases coming out of indigenous peoples as I hear coming out of anyone. That’s on an anecdotal basis though and you say to a certain extent, we’re not really responsible, maybe we didn’t originate it, we’re just buying a load of non sense that is being sold to us by the mainstream European society that, for whatever reason, has decided that maintenance of racial tension is still a good way to maintain control of society. The fact that we are susceptible to that kind of propaganda ploy as anybody else does not so us any credit, but it doesn’t make us particularly worse than anybody else. So the fact that we can mount as many blithering racists as anybody else is neither here nor there.

But we go beyond that. We go beyond that in a number of ways. First of all, in education indigenous individuals (many in prominent authoritative positions) are all too often willing to accept as explanations blatantly racist, scientifically vapid slanders about our children, our brothers and sisters, our parents and ourselves. Indians aren’t as intelligent as normal people. That’s interesting, when I was a little kid, they came up to my reserve and said that three quarters of us were mentally retarded and that they could prove that because they gave us the Wechsler intelligence scale for children and three quarters of us scored two standard deviations below the

mean, so that proved it. I remember that great day in 1983 when I was told triumphantly that that total study was totally wrong because they reproduced the study with the new WISC revised and only 50% of the Indians out at Oneida were mentally retarded! Oh how I gloated with pride that day!!

To hear it from a non Indian academic who doesn't know enough statistics to properly use a bathroom is one thing; to hear it from other people who are in a position of control with Aboriginal education is another and something that I do not tolerate and will not tolerate in the future. That is just one thing, though. If you don't want to call us stupid, say that we have a different learning style than everybody else: "oh, yeah we can go down the hill and learn about different learning styles, they've got papers about it there." Except that I have to tell you that as stupid as the things are for telling how intelligent you are, they are even worse for telling whether or not you have a different learning style. It's just away of saying that Indians are stupid that sounds more acceptable. We can modulate this further: "well, Indians are right brained people." I have heard that from mainstream academics, bureaucrats, politicians and I have also heard it from all varieties of skin color. Once again, when I hear it from lighter shades, I can go onto an offensive attack, but I am kind of at a loss when I hear it from people pigmented even darker than myself. Where did you get this idea, who told you this, why are you repeating this? Please, please give me a hint here because the basis is non-existent for reaching those kinds of conclusions. We can go further: "oh Indians have bad self esteem, that's why they are failing from school; it's an identity problem of some sort. See, that's not even saying they are stupid, it's saying they hate themselves and have a poor self image and that makes it OK." Oh OK, because we're not actually calling Indians stupid. Is this a step up?

Attention deficit disorder, people really love that one. First Nations parents say "oh, now I know what's wrong with my kids." Do you? How far have you gone? Because I'll tell you if you go down to the US the estimates up in Canada in various provinces where they have actually carried it out is that 40% of people they talk about as being ADD children are First Nations children. You want to find out what 40% of them are in the US? They are the Black kids. Why did god put on the whacked out people, the Black ones, not in Africa, for some reason their ancestors are going to get on this boat 500 years ago and come across to North America and then they are going to find a group already there and that is why we need 20 times more Ritalin, diagnosings in North America is that for some reason god is a very cost effective person, he decided to put all of the funny kind of stupid people in one place, thank goodness, that's a god for you, he can really plan ahead! (By the way, twenty times more diagnosis and drug prescriptions for that disorder take place in North America than in the rest of the world)

Again, these slanders have no scientific content whatsoever, it's only to lead well intentioned people because I've never met a First Nations or non First Nations educator who sat around and said "he he he I'm gonna do it to those Indians, oh I'm going to make it bad for them..." They're well intentioned! They think they are doing right; they are trying to do good. They couldn't live with themselves as human beings if they thought that what they are dedicated to doing over and over again is just to grind certain people under their heel. You couldn't live like that, they can't live like that, extend to them the same courtesy that you extend to yourself. When you find out that you are doing wrong, what do you do? You stop! I'd extend them the same courtesy. The thing is that they just don't know, so it doesn't matter what their intentions

are, you can still do harm with the best of intentions. Racism is, however it is disguised, another example of that. So that is one area in which Indians are making it worse for themselves; they accept these slanders, they accept them uncritically, as explanations. They say don't try to change the subject here, we're talking about the quality of education, we're talking about treaty rights, we're talking about proper support for our educational programs. We are not talking about whether or not we have got a specifically retarded group of children running around here. They are children, they have their rights, and those rights are being denied so let's talk material conditions here, let's not talk blaming as a response for it. We are being led off in misdirections by that.

Secondly, indigenous nations, even traditional ones, have gotten this notion in their head that really to be an Indian has got something to do with the genetic material and they have asked people I know "what are the racial markers for being a real Iroquois?" They were totally taken aback by this because, you know what racial markers are for Indians? Maybe we are a little darker, maybe our hair tends to be a little blacker than people, we do have five roots to our molars, and we have shovel incisors that non Indians don't have to put up with. What I don't know is how those things can come to be correlated with coming up with the Great Law, lobster fishing, tanning moose hides? What's the correlation? There isn't one. So my friend was asked to come up with these markers and he comes up with them saying that is what it is to be an Indian but it is devoid of any content because I don't remember any part of the Great Law that says "open the guy's mouth and check his molars, and when he has passed the molar test, then you can do the following." Membership in the Confederacy was a volitional act to a person who demonstrated their understanding of and their willingness to abide by the Great Law, the Great Way. The color of the person's skin and the shape of their teeth had nothing to do with whether or not they were acceptable as a member of the Iroquois Confederacy, period. And yet we have people who are saying that we are simply protecting our own by enforcing race non-sense as a condition for membership in First Nations.

I was telling my class in Resistance and Liberation about my experiences thirty years ago when I was running around in South Dakota and although I was way off somebody took a shot at us when Michael was stupid enough to open the car door to read something and the glove box so that he had reading light and somebody who was not working for the Indians at Wounded Knee put a bullet through the glove box and when it was all over I had to take the car back because I had rented it and try to pretend that the hole was there when we rented it. What I wanted you to know was that that person who took the shot was probably not WASPs, that when we got run around by 300 people, that 150 of them were BIA police with dark skin, dark hair. The GOONs squad that Dick Wilson had that was running the Pine Ridge reserve was as dark or darker as any of us. Their genes didn't prevent them from beating people up, shooting them and destroying their lives nor did it prevent the BIA police from standing around a bunch of unarmed people with sub machine guns. These all-powerful genes could have done nothing to prevent the massacres that took place in those particular instances. I'll take a person of good conscience as opposed to somebody who is willing to do whatever someone who pays them enough money wants them to do. There is a material condition for you: if you ask the question "how am I going to pay my rent? And Dick Wilson will pay it if I shoot that person" then bang! The genes will not do much to interfere with that. The genes have less to do with the behavior than the material conditions being enforced with respect to them.

Finally what I want to suggest in falling into this racism is what traps are we falling into? I've mentioned a few of these. When we accept that being Indian is a genetic thing, a racial thing, if we accept that being a non Indian is a genetic or racial kind of thing, what do we necessarily do? Well, we are accepting a deformed way of life being dictated by the Dick Wilsons, the GOON squads and the FBI and other people who are deployed to manage, reduce and oppress marginalized populations. That somehow we are looking past their actions and saying, "Well, they're still Indians." I'm sorry, when you look like a duck and you quack like a duck and are seen in the company of other ducks, it's a pretty good guess that you are talking about a duck. The person that I will be willing to throw in with is somebody who is quacking with me as opposed to quacking and walking with the people holding a gun on me. I don't really care if he is a duck with white feathers or a duck with white feathers, somebody shares my burden, my form of life, those are the ones I will identify as my friends. Secondly, by accepting this genetic determinism for race look at what we do to ourselves. There are all kinds of First Nations people or indigenous people that we deny a relationship to on the basis that well, they haven't met some other kind of race-based litmus test for inclusion as one of us. Oh, the Metis. Well, you know, the Metis are not really Indians, they are just treated like them and they don't have any treaty rights and so the fact that they share to a great extent our oppression, that they went to residential school like we did; when we study, for example the history of Manitoba we can see that here is another group of people who were really royally ripped off by the Canadian government. But we put that all that by the wayside saying "you're not really Indian enough for us." Or we do it to ourselves, "oh Chrisjohn, you're kind of like..." You know, yeah, if we are going to do this calculation I am five eighth Indian, three eighth Scottish and one eighth Jewish. Oye vey! I'd like to think that I've picked a little bit up about what the people have done to the Jews over the centuries, to what happened to the Scots during the highland clearances and what happened to First Nations groups that are my background; My historical background, not my genetic background. "Well if you listen to Chrisjohn, you listen to someone who is only five eighth Indian." I hate to tell you this but the most recent research on the genetics of humanity: there is an interesting paper that says that humanity is so uniform that in many ways humans are virtual twins. Compared to other animals, human beings are overwhelmingly similar. That the difference between one and another is almost, just slightly short of being identical twin ship. And we can go a little further of that and say that 98% of our genes are in common with the chimpanzee. The only thing I can say is that I've met many chimpanzees and many Mohawks and I can always tell the difference. I'm not confused, it's not a problem. Related to that is a third thing.

That is that regardless of the genetic background, by putting racism front and center in our considerations, we are burning bridges and not building them. There are many people who may not be going to the same exact position that we are but they are walking more or less in the same direction. There are relations between racism, ageism, and sexism and to deny that, to say, "Well because racism doesn't have a hundred percent overlap with sexism and neither of them have 100% overlap with ageism, then there is nothing in common about our struggles." I say then you haven't talked to very many old people. You've forgotten what it was to be young and being discriminated against because of your youth. You don't know yet how you are going to be treated when you get really old; you haven't got sufficient insight into that. They say there is not really able and disabled people, there are only the temporarily abled and the disabled because we

are all getting there people. We will all end up along that line. The same with sexism, that the treatment of women historically and contemporaneously is nothing for anybody to be proud of and by saying “no, no our solidarity is based on some sort of race based criteria” means that we will not have common cause with other people. We cannot even sort out the differences that there may be to say how far we can help each other along particular lines because we are not even going to discuss it. “Don’t bother us, your struggles are not our struggles.” Well, nobody’s struggles are 100% someone else’s, but sometimes you can help somebody along the way even though you may not be ending up in the same place. We have to have those kinds of discussions.

Finally, we become horribly complacent, and there is no other word for it, about our own forms of life. If you take seriously the notion that what defines being Indian and that what being Indian really is your genetic material, then what do you have to do about your languages? What do you have to do about your traditions? What do you have to do about your philosophies, about your worldviews? You don’t have to bother with them. In order to ensure that there are going to be Indians in the next generation is procreate: if your genes make it to the next generation, then the Indians do and we can burn down Brazilian rain forests like anybody else and we can rape indigenous peoples in other parts of the world and we can pollute the air and the ocean as much as we want and we’ll still be Indians because to be Indian is a genetic thing and it has nothing to do with the actions that we engage in. I submit to you that it is absolute non-sense; it’s not just non-sense, it’s non-sense on stilts. It is dangerous non-sense and we should be avoiding it.

Conclusions. I said I would keep it short and I have no idea whether I’ve done that. If being an Indian is sharing a culture, a language, a view of the world and not just the gene pool, then we must take the steps necessary to ensure that we in the future generations have the option to behave the way that we have chosen to behave. Being a First Nations person, an indigenous person is a choice and it’s a choice that engages us in practice. There is nothing theoretical about being an Indian it’s up front and in the face. We do it and if we don’t do it, we cease being it. Back to basics means doing everything ourselves for our won reasons is our predominant mode of thinking. We don’t do a few things, this that and the other, we do everything. Why do we do it? Because we have chosen to do it. By any other criteria, we are not behaving as First Nations people. Back to basics means that if there are mistakes to be made, let’s make our own. Are we going to be perfect? There’s nothing in the Iroquois Confederacy that says that we are going to be perfect by being Iroquois, but we try. And we recognize that as human beings that we are going to make errors. And what do you do when a human being makes an honest and sincere error? You say, “Ok let’s try again.” We resist being drawn off into irrelevancies and mind traps that they have set out for us. Our biggest mind trap is that racism is meaningful, that it has some content. In conclusion, I’d like to end on this note: there is no need for us to be as stupid as they have been and our ancestors showed us that a long time ago. Thank you.