G. F. G. STANLEY:

EMINENT THEORIST, OR DATED ETHNOCENTRIC?

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"If a self-conscious region is consistently made aware of its ineffectiveness in the national decision-making arena, and if its members believe that issues are decided contrary to its vital interests, it will inevitably become suspicious and come to regard the national decision-making institutions as instruments of oppression."

from The Unfinished Revolt
(Anderson 1971:35)
G. F. G. Stanley:

Eminent Theorist, or Dated Ethnocentric?

The purpose of this paper is to analyze G. F. G. Stanley's theoretical position that the origins of the Metis protest in Red River lay in an "inevitable" conflict between so-called "primitive" and "civilized" cultures. It is imperative that this theory be examined critically because Stanley has been accepted as the definitive authority for over thirty years. As a result of his preeminent stature in the field, much of the writing on the Metis, from high school essays to M. A. and doctoral theses, have been based on the assumption that Stanley's theory is valid.

It is the contention here that the reliance on Stanley has been misplaced. First of all, Stanley's use of defining terminology is not only unscientific, but in the end analysis, essentially racist. Secondly, it is clear that Stanley's application of his theory to the Metis is not in keeping with the true nature of the political or sociocultural situation in the North-West up to 1869-70. Before proceeding with the critical analysis, it is necessary to delineate Stanley's position.

Stanley (1936:vii) believes that the conflict in the North-West was basically a manifestation of what he believes to be a sociological universal: i.e., the "inevitable" clash between "primitive" and "civilized" peoples. Stanley (1947:428) attempts to ground his theory in a "sociological truism" by stating that conflict is inherent in the meeting of two cultures:

...where one of the peoples involved has lagged far behind the other in material and social development, the impact of the civilized upon the culturally retarded group leads all too often, to rapid moral disintegration and physical decline of the latter.

Stanley (1936:vii) asserts that,

By character and upbringing the half-breds, no less than the Indians, were unfitted to compete with the whites in the competitive individualism of white civilization, or to share with them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship. They did not want to be civilized; they only wanted to survive.

Stanley (1936:48) continues his thesis by stating:
"There was in the half-breed mentality an inherent opposition to any political or economic change in Rupert's Land." Further, Stanley (1936:49) maintains that the Metis, as a "primitive" people doomed to give way before a "more progressive" society, reacted in protest because they could not adjust themselves to the "new order" and because they were afraid and bewildered by it (Bowsfield 1969:12). Denying that the struggle in 1869-70 was over responsible government, Stanley continues with his theme of basic cultural conflict by tying in "religious and racial" causal factors (Stanley 1936:61, 190).

The whole of Stanley's (1936:179) thesis seems to be founded on the idea that the Euro-Canadian society was inately "superior" to that of the "poor", "simple" Metis. The reasoning behind this position is that there were a lack of institutions of law and order among the Metis (Stanley 1936:190), and that the Metis community was only a "simple, elementary, static democracy", unsuited to agriculture (Sealey and Lussier 1978:77, 135).

A good indication of Stanley's attitude toward the Metis can be found in the descriptive terminology he uses besides "simple", "retarded" and "primitive". For example, he uses phrases such as "savage origin", "indolent, thoughtless and improvident, unrestrained in their desires, restless, clannish and vain", "roving", "credulous", "suspicious by nature of changes", "sullen, suspicious and estranged", "ruled by emotion rather than reason", "sons of Ishmael", "a race little removed from barbarism" (Stanley 1936:7, 8, 9, 11, 61, 179; Sealey and Lussier 1978:72, Redbird 1978:23). It is also apparent from his more recent writings (Sealey and Lussier, 1978) that he has moved little, if at all, from his original position.

As noted above, Stanley's influence is pervasive and has effected, or at least paralleled, the positions of many other scholars such as W. L. Morton as well as Sealey and Lussier, who, if not totally agreeing with the basic tenet of his theory, tend to accept its deprecating tone. Morton (1956: 53, 1957:67, 90) refers to Riel's "rude even primitive following", "Ishmaelite wildness" and "slovenly barbarism" of the cart brigades. Even D. B. Sealey and A. S. Lussier (1975:75) subscribe to the theory that the resistance was based on a fear of "inevitable" "progress" and
was, as a result of their implied backwardness, doomed to fail.

The Stanley theory can, and I believe *must*, be attacked on
two levels. First, we must examine Stanley's concept of the
actual meaning of "primitive" in order to determine whether the
term does in fact have any validity in his analysis.

Among Stanley's contemporaries, the term "primitive" seems to
have been used to denote "low level", "simple", "isolated", "savage"
cultures characterized by a supposed "arrested development". Among
the few positive or even neutral concepts involved were
those of "cooperative social relations", "homogeneity" and "tra-
ditionalism". Early anthropologists such as E. B. Tylor and his
more recent colleagues such as S. Diamond have equated "primitive"
with a sub-standard level of social development, representing
any non-Euro-American culture, and as essentially marginal to the
mainstream of modern history. Combined with what we have already
identified to be Stanley's perception of the Metis, it is obvious
that the concept was used as one describing a truly undesirable
and undisguisably inferior state (Hsu 1964:169, 173).

It becomes obvious, therefore, that the term "primitive" has
acquired significant "evaluative baggage" and has developed beyond
a purely descriptive term into a heavily "value-laden" one. Of
course, social scientists ideally must scrupulously avoid any such
value judgements.

Not only is the term unacceptably value-laden, but L. K. Hsu
(1964) is critical that it has in fact become empirically, theore-
tically and practically obselescent. He believes that it is no
longer acceptable (if it ever was) to attempt to dichotomize world
cultures, especially on a civilized/primitive basis. Hsu (1964:173)
points out that the term is employed in any number of ambiguous
and inconsistent ways throughout the literature. The resulting
conflict of meanings as used by different scholars makes the term
scientifically useless. Hsu also contends that redefinition, even
of the most positive kind, will not solve the problem. In social
science, terms are supposedly utilized as a type of intellectual
short-hand to be a means of classifying data as a point of refer-
ence. If they fail to clarify, then they are worse than useless.

This unacceptable state of affairs has developed according to
Hsu (1964) because of a serious inertia, lack of scholarly rigour and an unscientific ethnocentrism among social scientists who refuse to subject their own culture to the rigorous analysis they give to others. Yet, they use their own culture's standards for judging others. Again, this is scientifically reprehensible. Therefore, the use of the term "primitive", Hsu (1964:177-8) concludes, is not only of no intellectual or analytical value, but actually a detriment to science, in that it obscures rather than clarifies.

Thus, at the very least, Stanley's insistence on basing his theory on the concept of "primitive" is analytically invalid. At its worst it is a theory based on an unacceptable ethnocentric, even racist viewpoint. In reality, Stanley does not actually deserve the praise (or at least lack of criticism) afforded by J. W. St. G. Walker (1971) in his analysis in which many other scholars have been criticized about their biased and distorted presentation of Native history.

The second and perhaps more important level of criticism concerns the actual application of Stanley's theory to the Metis. Accepting only for the sake of argument that the concept of the "civilized/primitive" dichotomy has some validity, it becomes clear that the Metis society which Stanley attempts to classify as "primitive" was by no means whatsoever any less "civilized" than the society it was compared to. It was merely somewhat different, while at the same time exhibiting many trappings of the so-called "civilization". J. E. Foster (1976:71) maintains that not only are the ethnocentric value judgements inherent to the Stanley approach entirely unacceptable, but that "It would appear to be self-evident that such unacceptable assessments of the cultural ways of the Mixed Bloods spring from equally unacceptable historical understandings of the nature of the origins of the Mixed Blood peoples of the Canadian west" (emphasis added).

In a nutshell, Stanley's thesis rests on the following foundations: 1) that conflict between "civilized" and "primitive" was inevitable because 2) the Metis were "retarded", "inferior" and unfitted to compete, 3) they were unsuited to agricultural pursuits ("indolent", "improvident"), 4) they were not fitted for civic duties, 5) they lacked "civilized" institutions, they not only feared change, but 7) exhibited an inability to change.
they did not wish to be "civilized", 9) they were a "simple",
  elementary" and 10) static society, and 11) were not truly nation-
  alistic. Each of these assertions will be examined below.

Stanley's fundamental premise of the inevitable conflict be-
  tween primitive and civilized societies is contradicted by Duke
  Redbird (1978:vii). He points out that the initial contact be-
  tween the European and Native cultures was basically cooperative
  rather than conflicting in nature (even in the nascent Selkirk
  Settlement). The major vehicle of continuing contact, the fur
  trade, could not in fact have existed without fundamental coopera-
  tion between the two groups. Stanley's theory then, ignores
  essential characteristics of early "civilized/primitive relations.

In contradicting Stanley's assertions that the Metis were
  inferior and did not wish to become "civilized", we should perhaps
  go beyond W. L. Morton's position to say that Metis society was
  anything but the "primitive" one Stanley understands it to be.
  Metis society simply cannot be equated with the isolated, simple,
  undifferentiated, irrational, barbarous or illiterate elements
  of the "primitive" concept. 

Stanley (1964:44) himself asserts that by the 1860's the Red
  River community was in fact no longer isolated. Any circumscript-
  tive nature had begun to break down in the second decade of the
  century with the coming of the Selkirk Settlers and later with the
  increasing American contact.

The social structure of the Metis was, again, anything but
  simple and undifferentiated. J. E. Foster (1973:15) indicates
  that the Country-born for example were a quite diversified, even
  ranked, group on the basis of their relationships to the Hudson's
  Bay Company social structure. According to Foster, as a whole,
  the Metis were involved in creating a new type of society, a more
  egalitarian one based not only on rank, but on merit. The society
  was by no means backward or static.

P. Charlebois (1975:16) indicates that the social life of the
  Metis was just as fully developed as its contemporary in the east.
  Religion and education for example, formed the foundations of
  "civilization" as much in Red River as they did in any part of the
  Victorian world. Morton, Adams, Howard and Forster all acknow-
  ledge the strong influence of the churches on the Metis. Even
Stanley would be forced to admit that such influence would, by
definition, be a major aspect of a "civilized" society as he
understands it.

Of course, hand in hand with the missionary came education,
Forster (1973:107) maintains that the Metis saw education as a
major means of social mobility and both the Brules and the Country-
born'availed themselves of it at every opportunity ever since the
advent of the Catholic school in 1818 *(a Protestant school was
established by Reverend West in 1820)*. Well established by 1827,
this school was to "...create a literate group among the Metis,
capable of defending the interests of their fellows" (Morton 1957:71).
As an indication of the scholarly interest among the Metis, Morton
(1957:90) reports that Peter Fidler had donated his books to the
Red River Library founded in 1847; hardly the action of a "primitive"
frontiersman!

Sealey and Lussier (1975:29) maintain that it was customary
for Metis families to ensure that at least one of their children
received an education. This led one historian to write "...that
quite a number of prairie people, in whose veins French and Scotch
blood was mixed with that of the native race, had received a fair
education". A. G. Morice (1935:63) asserts that even those who
lacked education among the Metis were possessed of a highly practi-
cal "common sense". This contradicts the portrayal of the Metis
as irrational, a characteristic inherent in Stanley's use of
the term "primitive".

Men such as Grant, Riel Sr., Isbister, Lepine, Nolin, and
of course Riel Jr. had received a higher education outside the
community. Such men became community leaders and their activities
caused A. K. Isbister to note "...it is an interesting fact that
the half-breeds or mixed race, not only far out numbered all other
races in the colony put together, but engross nearly all the more
important and intellectual offices...(eg all the teachers but one)
(Morton 1957:91).

The final proof that we are not dealing here with a group of
"primitive" illiterates is found in the record of the debates of
Gabriel Dumont's council at St. Laurent on January 27, 1875. An
unanimous resolution was passed to raise money in order to build
a school for the growing settlement, which was in fact outside the
influence of the so-called "higher form of civilization". Stanley (Sealey and Lussier 1978:139) himself reports this action. How then can he continue in his belief that these were a "primitive", illiterate people who did not want to be "civilized"? This idea is patently false.

Stanley has also insisted that the Metis were unsuited to compete with the incoming "new order" because they were not agriculturally oriented, but rather "indolent" and "improvident", presumably because they did not all remain year-round on their farms. In reality, however, the Metis were not being "primitive" in their tendency not to depend on full-time agriculture but rather rationally pragmatic. It is clear that, because of a lack of markets, available technology and natural disasters, farming was not really a viable economic pursuit until mid-century. A. S. Morton (Sealey and Lussier 1978:31) reports that George Simpson had recognized the limited markets of the period as being a major factor in the Metis not "seating themselves down as agriculturalists". G. H. Sprenger (Sealey and Lussier 1978) cites the technological and environmental factors which militated against successful adaptation to a permanent, settled farming lifestyle. Nevertheless, according to W. L. Morton (1956:2) it is quite clear, "That the majority of the Metis of Red River were hunters and freighters did not make them nomads. The long conflict between nomadism and settlement was being ended in favour of the latter." Beyond Morton's implication here concerning nomadism, it is not necessarily so that nomadism is characteristic of "primitive". We must only examine migratory labour patterns and jet-setting businessmen in today's society to counter this assumption.

Indeed, few of the inhabitants of the settlement did better at farming than the Metis. Morton (1957:84) refers to a group of Metis who were "solid farmers" at St. Francois Xavier. Their success was repeated in other parishes as well. Perhaps the factors militating against agricultural success mentioned above had not a little to do with G. MacEwan's characterization of the so-called "civilized" elements of the community.

By the assessment of George Simpson who was always brutally frank, the Swiss and de Meurons as settlers were neither industrious nor provident, and were constantly
talking about leaving, the Scotts, on the other hand, would never leave and never stop complaining, "grumbling being the characteristic of the Highlanders". He paid the Scotts a further doubtful compliment, saying they were honest in their dealing, except with the Company and the Executors" (MacEwan 1978:162).

Morton (1957:61, 64) too indicates that the de Meuron group were "slovenly and restless pioneers", perhaps because of the difficulties with grasshopper plagues and poor crops. It seems, then, as if even the so-called "civilized" elements in the community were disillusioned with the fruits of their farming endeavors, particularly in the early years of the agricultural colony. By 1825 for instance, the de Meuron settlers had left the area and according to Morton (1957:85), the farming situation did not improve until the 1850's. By this time the Metis were in fact becoming more committed to agriculture as is indicated by the founding of the Agricultural Improvement Society in 1850 under the auspices of William Ross (Morton 1957:92). J. E. Forster (1973:34) indicates that by mid-century most of the Country-born were year-round farmers.

It therefore becomes difficult to place any validity on Stanley's assertion that the Metis were "primitive" because they lacked interest in agricultural pursuits (or vice versa). It seems obvious that full-time agriculture was initially impractical with the existing level of technology, the unsuitable strains of crops, lack of markets and environmental disasters etc. Little wonder that the Brulé in particular had turned to the commercial buffalo hunt in order to support themselves. When agriculture did become more practical by mid-century, the Metis began to adopt it more and more. Their actions here are not indicative of "primitive" leanings, but of rational practicality, something has no place in Stanley's concept of "primitive".

Another major foundation for Stanley's theory is that the Metis society was a backward-looking, static one which feared change, and indeed was unable to modify itself to new conditions. On the theoretical level Stanley is partially correct in assuming that culture is generally a conservative force. Neophobic tendencies are present to a greater or lesser degree in all cultures. Some cultural elements, such as language for instance, are quite
resistant to change. It is a serious error however to generalize this to be a major characteristic of all aspects of a culture. In reality, the sole constant in culture is in fact its constant change. No culture is truly static.

In reading Sealey and Lussier (1975) it becomes clear that the Metis were far from being the stagnating culture Stanley portrayed them to be. In reality, they were a highly dynamic and adaptive society as indicated by their many "accomodations" between the two parent cultures. (Redbird (1978:ix) refers to this process as a "synthesis of perceptual differences"). The Metis were in fact constantly adapting to the changing conditions and, in fact, according to Morton (1957:94), were a major force behind much of the change instituted in the community until the 1850's (It can be argued that this was true later on as well). For example, the Metis agitation behind the movement toward free trade was a major cause of innovation in Red River (Morton 1957:78). In contrast to Stanley, D. Redbird (1978:14) refers to "response-ability", as opposed to inertia, as being one of the major characteristics of Metis society.

Beyond the cultural factors, it is clear from the political situation that the Metis were not resisting the changes coming about because of a "primitive" fear of change per se, but because they in fact wanted to exert their own control over the directions of the changes taking place. Stanley, on the other hand, argues that the Metis were politically backward; that they were unsuited for "civic duties" because they lacked the necessary familiarity with "civilized" institutions.

However, J. E. Forster (1973: 261, 265-6) maintains that, since the 1820's, the community had existed under British institutions and, in fact, that it was the Country-born in particular who were "...the primary foundation which supported the institutions of British civilization..."established in the colony. Their majority numbers gave them political weight and they supported the schools, churches, courts and legislative body. As Charlebois (1975:27) indicates, the civil authority of the Company was able to operate only upon the good will and cooperation of the Metis. It is also important to remember that at no time did Riel and the Metis deny their tie to the fundamental institution of the in-
vading society, namely loyalty to the British monarchy. (Howard 1952:150). During the protest and until his death, Riel maintained his loyalty and that of his people (D. Morton 1974).

Stanley (Sealey and Lussier 1978:131-46) himself deals extensively with the Metis' activities in establishing governmental and educational institutions in the St. Laurent settlement during the early 1870's. It is difficult to understand how Stanley is able to isolate these two ideas in his thinking. On one hand, the Metis are supposedly "primitive", disorganized people, working energetically at establishing democratic governments, settlements, churches and schools. Stanley (Sealey and Lussier 1978:76) argues weakly that the Metis concept of democracy, based as it was on the Native institution of consensual democracy, was not really what would be considered the modern (read "civilized") idea. He maintains that because it was "democracy in the sense of government by the consent of the governed", it was not a true democracy in the "civilized" sense. One wonders whether Stanley would place the American system, which ideally is founded on the same concept, in the "primitive" category.

Stanley's application of his theory is again found to be wanting. All societies have institutions. The Metis institutions were demonstrably no less "civilized" than any others and in fact paralleled or were modeled on those in the so-called "civilized" system.

Stanley's contention that the real basis for the Metis protest in 1869-70 lay in the "inevitable" conflict between "civilized" and "primitive" does not seem to be supported by the overwhelming majority of analyses of the causes of the Resistance. There is near unanimous agreement among sources at the time and right on up to the present that the major causes of the conflict were Metis concerns, not about being overwhelmed by a "superior" "civilization", but concerns over their land rights, the lack of consultation and the political implications of the Canadian takeover. It becomes readily apparent that these concerns are by no means "primitive" ones.

In order for Stanley's version of the frontier thesis" to be valid, the Metis of Red River would have to represent essentially a non-agricultural opposition to an advancing agricultural
frontier. However, in the very early years of the settlement, the Metis actually supported the faltering agriculturists. In addition, as has been demonstrated above, the Metis were becoming increasingly committed to agriculture as it became more and more practical by the 1850's. According to W. L. Morton (1956:2), Red River was not in any significant sense a "frontier", but rather an "island of civilization".

Morton (1965:xv) has also asserted that since the "old order" was based on wealth from the fur trade, while the "new order" was based on the value of agricultural land, the Metis were in fact acting to ensure themselves a place in the "new order" rather than merely defending their "old order" position. They had begun to realize that their traditional concept of land ownership was not going to be recognized by the new government. At least the Canadian Party had attempted to make this abundantly clear to the Metis, both in their words and in their actions. As early as 1845 the Metis had been submitting formal petitions to question the status of their land rights as well as their trapping and trading rights (Sealy and Lussier 1975:62). Stanley (1936:14, 1964:54) himself recognizes the uncertainty of land title to be an "important cause of unrest among the half-breed squatters". He even brings to light McTavish's comment that,

It is unfortunate that any survey should be commenced till the Canadian Government was in authority here, as the whole land question is fruitful of future trouble which it will take much time and great labour to settle. I expect that as soon as the survey commences the half-breeds and Indians will at once come forward and assert their right to the land and possibly stop the work until their claim is satisfied (Stanley 1936:56).

The point is that the Metis, after not having received satisfaction from the Hudson's Bay Company in their earlier petitioning, were determined to secure their rights to the land before any take over by Canada. This was a key issue because the Metis realized the significance of having a secure land base under the "new order" (Morton 1965:xv). The conflict, therefore, was not immediately concerned with the vast buffalo hunting territory which supported their so-called "primitive" pursuits, but rather over the presumptuous survey of lands which had been settled by the Metis in the river lot system. In Stanley's frame of reference then, the Metis concerns were based on agricultural ("civilized") issues, not hunting ("primitive") questions.
The importance of the actual land title concept to the Metis is demonstrated by the symbolism inherent in their first protest action, the halting of the survey on Nault's hay privilege. W. L. Morton (1957:120) states that the interruption of the survey party here was "...a symbolic act, duly considered, not a sudden local skirmish. They challenged the right of a Canadian survey party to make surveys in the Northwest before the Indian and half-breed title had been extinguished.

The Metis and other people in the North-West were fully aware of the symbolic content and effect of this action (Ryerson 1970: m8). The Metis had made Governor McTavish quite aware of the import of their action. "The men who stopped the survey told McTavish they knew it would do no harm (the survey) but was a way of letting Canada know it had no right in the country" (Morton 1956:47).

This has led D. B. Sealey (1975:52) to state,

The fundamental question that bothered the Metis was only partially that of land. More important was the control of any government of the Northwest...would the Natives control it or would the flood of immigrants from Canada gain control?

Such motivations and concerns are hardly "primitive" ones arising out of a "fear of progress".

An important facet of the truly political concerns of the Metis to be examined is the lack of consultation with the people over the Canadian take-over. In countering Stanley, it is important to realize that this was an extremely significant factor to the Metis. A. G. Morice (1935:56) and several other scholars find the lack of consultation to be a critical point. Stanley (1936:53) himself recognizes the importance of this lack of consultation in actually precipitating the Resistance. In a recent work he also states: "At no time, during the negotiations of 1869 or, for that matter, any of the previous negotiations which went back to 1857, did the authorities concerned consult or contemplate consulting the people of the Northwest (Sealey and Lussier 1978:78). Even the notoriously unsympathetic Toronto Globe editorialized on December 31, 1869, "The original fundamental error of the Government lay in ignoring altogether the opinions and feelings of the inhabitants of the Selkirk Settlement."
The question then becomes would "primitive" people be as concerned about the actual lack of consultation, as opposed to the actual take-over itself, as the Metis obviously were? The answer again is no. Stanley has ignored the valid political concerns which were decidedly not "primitive".

By definition, "primitive" peoples are simple, unsophisticated and non-rational, with limited concern beyond circumscribed limits. The Metis on the other hand were quite aware and concerned about the political implications of the take-over itself. Mason Wade (Bowsfield 1969:8) indicates that the Metis were quite cognisant of the fact that to accept the take-over by Canada as proposed would be a retrograde step for them in terms of their political rights and powers. At the very least, they had had some representation on the Council of Assiniboia. They were to have none under Canadian control. As a matter of fact, since the Buffalo Ordinance and the Pemmican Proclamation of 1814, the Metis had been agitating because of their lack of political efficacy. Even Stanley (1936:46) points out that since the 1847 petition, they had been officially agitating for their rights as British subjects. Further, W. L. Morton (Bowsfield 1969:25) interprets the root cause of the 1849 Sayer trial protest, not as being merely over the free trade issue, but over the question of responsible government. Their lack of participation in the governing of the colony made the Metis protest an unavoidably political one.

By the late 1860's, the Metis saw that they could exploit the impending change (rather than resist it) in order to gain the political rights which had been previously denied them. A. G. Morice (1935:97) quotes early historian Tuttle as follows:

The French half-breeds, he says, did not consider that they ever rebelled against British authority; but, on the contrary, that they had only asserted their rights as British subjects to a voice in the management of their own affairs by resisting the encroachments of Canada on their rights, and that they would not have obtained those rights had they not taken up arms against Canada. They laid down their arms when they thought the object for which they had been taken up was accomplished.

Morton (1956:31) asserts that the Metis resistance was really designed to "...safeguard their survival as a people, (and) to perpetuate the "new nation" within the framework of the new order..."
in the North-West", not as Stanley maintains, to protect their "primitive" lifestyle.

An examination of the political actions and stances taken by Riel and the Metis indicates that they were anything but "primitive". For instance, their military discipline evidenced none of the atrocities couched within the contemporary stereotype of Native warfare (Morice 1935:139). The execution of Scott was carried out as a military court marshal, not as "primitive" vengeance or sacrifice.

The political goals of Riel himself, spawned in his association with Quebec nationalists, were certainly not resistant to "civilization". Even Stanley (1936:71) recognizes that..."His aim was not to fight Canada, but, with the whole body of settlers, French and English, behind him, to force the Canadian Government to negotiate with the half-breeds the terms of their entry into Confederation." H. Adams (1975:56) concurs here.

Riel and his associates had recognized the real vacuum in the government of the colony and had resolved to fill it under reasoning from the "Law of Nations". As a matter of fact, Macdonald himself used exactly the same reasoning (Howard 1952:154).

How can the interest shown by the Metis in the presentation of Donald Smith be interpreted other than as the actions and interests of a sophisticated, politically aware people? How can the debates of the National Committee, the Council of Twenty-four, or the Provisional Government, given the overriding concerns for law and order, administration of justice and the land question be read other than as documents of a highly "civilized" people? How can the Declaration of Rupert's Land (Flanagan 1968) or the Bill of Rights be considered the product of "primitive" unenlightened minds? J. K. Howard (1952:130) and others see just the opposite. Again, Stanley seems to have missed the mark by portraying the Metis as a backward-looking people, unresponsive to the political situation. It becomes blatently obvious that the political ideals and actions of the Metis place them in the ranks of a highly sophisticated, politically aware people.

The final pillar of Stanley's thesis is that the Metis were not acting under truly nationalistic motivations. He states in a 1970 article,
These people, these mixed bloods, did not, however, form a self-consciously cohesive group. They were not yet fixed, either in place or in time... They had no national consciousness, because they were not a nation. They were too thinly spread over a vast land, they had no common ambitions beyond those of the immediate present, they had no appreciation of the role that they were playing in the Canadian fur trade, they had no awareness of belonging to an identifiable or historic group (Sealey and Lussier 1978:68).

Stanley (Sealey and Lussier 1978:72) maintains, as do Lussier (Sealey and Kirkness 1973:42) and Howard (1952:32, 34), that the nationalistic feelings which did arise originated from the prodings of the Northwest Company. Nevertheless, Stanley (Sealey and Lussier 1978:74-5) does recognize the existence of a nationalistic sentiment among the Metis by his statement that a "national identity" was fostered by the struggle over the Selkirk colony and strengthened by the Battle of Seven Oaks was developing along with the increasing population, mettssage, and a land base at Red River.

However, given the definition of nationalism as a feeling or loyal attitude recognizing a national consciousness among a people who are independent, politically organized and who have a defined territory, it is clear that what Stanley and the others are describing is true nationalism which had developed much earlier.

It is clear that the increase in the Metis population and the development of distinctly Metis villages around trading posts in the latter half of the eighteenth century (Sealey and Lussier 1978:4) would give the Metis a sense of community. It is clear to A. S. Morton (Sealey and Lussier 1978:31-2) and W. L. Morton (1957:63) that the cooperation inherent to the organization of the buffalo hunt had a good deal to do with fostering "nationalist feelings" and a "corporate sentiment" among the Metis. Their conflicts with the Sioux during this period would also have contributed here.

It is also clear that by the mid 1830's and into the 1840's the Metis were coalescing to engage in political agitation based on their concept of themselves as a particular group with common interests (Morton 1957:75, Sealey and Lussier 1978:30). By 1849 W. L. Morton (1957:77) can state that, "...the metis were
to a man in sympathy with the accused (Sayer)." It is difficult
to deny the Metis unity and consequent nationalism under these
circumstances.

Charlebois (1975:14) focuses on the cultural base for Metis
nationalism. He states, "They had a common ancestral background
common culture and customs, and were fluent in a number of Euro-
pean and native languages, in some cases developing distinct
dialects. They lived in distinct communities which formed the
basis of a potentially thriving and self-sufficient economy. They
had developed their own local laws and attempted several times to
institute their own form of local self-government." Foster (1973:9)
quotes Giraud who maintains that the Metis of the "new Nation"
"...saw themselves not only as a distinct cultural entity in Rupert's
Land but, by virtue of their origins as its paramount community."
The Metis were indeed a self-aware nation.

J. E. Foster (1973: 234) asserts that Metis nationalism was
a logical response to the continuing difficulties with the Hudson's
Bay Company.

From the Metis viewpoint, however, Duke Redbird (1978) would
place the development of Metis nationalism at a much earlier date.
Redbird rests his antithesis to Stanley's frontier thesis on the
theory of C. Jung that a geophysical location or zone will create
a unique and indigenous consciousness. For the Metis, this meant
the development of a "psychological nation" arising out of a
"participation mystique" (Redbird 1978:x-xi, 6). Redbird (1978:7)
maintains that the Metis identified themselves as a group as early
as 1670 and that by 1780 metissage had created the concept of a
"New Nation" in places such as Pembina where significant populations
of Metis had gathered. Redbird (1978:12) counters the assumption
that Metis nationalism grew only out of the buffalo hunt, or
pressure from the North-West Company, or from conflict with the
Hudson's Bay Company. He states, "The idea that the

The fact is that the Metis developed their sense of
nationhood not because of white civilization or the
Northwest Company or even Louis Riel. Rather it was
the natural expression of their own reality in the con-
text of their own social development.

This means that Metis nationalism would have developed
(under the theory of Jung) when their population had increased
sufficiently for them to see themselves as a definite group. Redbird does not produce evidence to actually prove that this nationalism was apparent as early as 1670 as he claims. However, it seems that Metis nationalism did in fact develop much earlier than is generally supposed, if the theories of Jung have any validity.

At any rate, it seems obvious that whether developed sooner or later (and certainly by 1869), the Metis were in fact responding with nationalist sentiments. This again contradicts Stanley's designation of these people as "primitive." Nationalism can only be considered as a characteristic of a society that is aware of itself, unified in interests, founded on a definite land base, possessing forward-looking ambitions and a sense of their own significance. The Metis people demonstrated these very characteristics, even several years prior to 1869-70, and thus cannot be considered as the "primitive" people Stanley understands them to be.

Other scholars do not entirely escape the traps into which Stanley has fallen. For example, W. L. Morton (1956:42, 1965:xii) also exhibits a tendency to deprecate the entire legal, political and moral basis of the Metis protest in 1869-70. He asserts that there was little doubt that the Canadian Government had no "intention" to be unjust toward the Metis, and would have granted their wishes eventually without the necessity of the drastic measures taken by the Metis in 1869-70. If so, what caused the conflict?

He bases his reasoning on the fact that visiting cabinet member Joseph Howe had assured the Metis that their political rights would be granted in due course if they would stand up for them. Well, the Metis were standing up for their rights and they were not so "primitive" or naive as to overlook the important fact that Howe had no official capacity. Smith too made these assurances, but the Metis were to rely on other such promises (concerning the amnesty for example) which did not bear fruit. The fact is that neither Howe nor Smith could actually guarantee what Morton believes to have been inevitable.

This becomes obvious from the fact that many of the same grievances (beginning with the Metis being largely ignored in the appointments to the new administration in 1871 (Howard 1952:233), arose in the following fifteen years leading up to the conflict in 1885. As Riel was to state in his address to the court in
Regina in 1885, the troubles in Saskatchewan were only continuations of those in Manitoba. The Canadian Government was obviously unwilling to grant these rights unless pressured into doing so.

J. K. Howard (1952:18) has addressed himself to the question of the government's intent as follows:

The races with which we are concerned in this book were martyred in the name of Manifest Destiny or Canada first or an Anglo-Saxon God. There were no gas chambers then, but there was malevolent intention; and there were guns and hunger, small pox and syphilis" (emphasis added).

The government's real "intent" becomes clear in Macdonald's own private correspondence in which he states, "These impulsive half-breeds...must be kept down by a strong hand until they are swamped by the influx of settlers" (Bowsfield 1969:34).

Even G. F. G. Stanley (Sealey and Lussier 1978:189) has recently stated,

That Manitoba should have achieved provincial status and responsible government in 1870 -- for good or for ill -- was the work of Louis Riel. A glance over the history of the North-West Territories is enough to set aside any fond belief that the federal government would willingly have conceded provincial status to the infant half-breed colony at the time of the transfer of the territories to Canada, had it not been for Riel's protest.

Morton, therefore, seems to be a trifle over anxious to place such naive faith in the ultimate "good intentions" of the Canadian Government. To do so denies the justice of the Metis cause and depreciates the validity of the Metis perception of their political predicament.

In conclusion, it has often been said that history, being based on non-Native biases (Charlebois 1975:3, Morice 1935:17), is in reality too often a "conspiracy against truth". Redbird (1978:x, 12) regards history as myth which has been recorded to support the prevailing economic and social system that originates it. G. F. G. Stanley seems to be caught up in this approach to history. He appears to echo the very same attitudes exhibited by the Canadians who were attempting to usurp control of the North-West. Their position and that of Stanley is founded on the racist idea that the take-over by the "superior society" was inevitable. As discussed above, however, despite Stanley's preeminent stature, his analysis becomes merely an ethnocentric, scientifically
invalid one, based as it is on the totally unacceptable term, "primitive". The term simply has no empirical, theoretical or practical application.

Beyond this primary failing, Stanley has not realized that the Metis were obviously not the "primitive" people he paints them to be. They protest not out of a "primitive" fear of change, but out of rational and justified concerns about their political and social future. They had accepted the fact that change was occurring. They resisted only the form of that change because it denied them their political and legal rights.

The Metis protest movement therefore, becomes not a "nativistic" movement based on the preeminence of a traditional culture as Stanley seems to interpret it. Rather, it becomes a political movement based on rational concerns about political, legal and moral questions. These questions did not arise out of a "primitive" outlook, but out of a similar moral and legal framework to the one possessed by the so-called "civilized" society.

The protest in Red River in 1869-70 was not a clash of cultures, but a clash between two politically motivated groups; neither of them, and certainly not the Metis, was a "primitive one." (If either can be designated "primitive" under Stanley's definition, we should look at the Canadian Party who ignored the rule of British common law, who usurped settled land from its true owners, who fermented the "Portage Rebellion", who attempted to raise the spectre of Native warfare by recruiting and arming Indians, and finally, who occupied the country in 1870 like a barbarian hord, driving the law-abiding Metis people from their homes.)

The difficulties with the Stanley theory are not merely semantic. They are part and parcel of his questionable theoretical approach to the history of Native people.
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