

Australian-Canadian Studies

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Feature Articles

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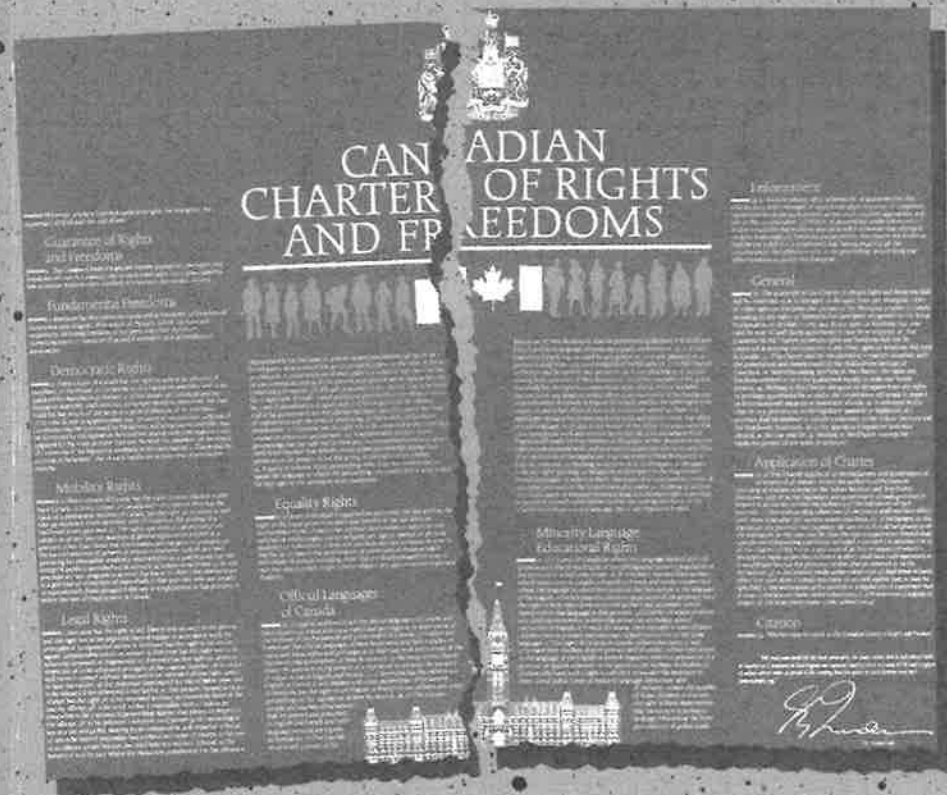
School Accountability: Lessons from British Columbia

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Judy Chicago's *Holocaust Project*

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BARNETT RICHLING
**APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY AND
ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA,
1910-1939***

INTRODUCTION

One hundred and twenty-five years ago European colonialism threatened indigenous societies around the world with imminent extinction. Victorian anthropology's response to the looming crisis has been dubbed "salvage ethnology", the field's stock-in-trade into the 1930s. The urgency and scale of the work before them led many ethnologists to lobby their home governments for the institutional supports and financial wherewithal to carry on systematic and sustained research. Learned societies in Great Britain and its overseas dominions coordinated much of this politicking, optimistically pointing to the Bureau of American Ethnology, operating under United States government auspices since 1879, as worthy of emulation because it combined scientific investigation with the production of valuable intelligence on that country's Indian tribes (Avrith, 1986).

In effect, anthropologists sought to garner public patronage for their research (and simultaneously begin the science's professionalisation) by convincing politicians of the work's usefulness in administering native affairs. Campaigning at the turn of the century for an ambitious, London-based Imperial Bureau of Ethnology, for example, A.C. Haddon asserted that successful governance of indigenous peoples depended on detailed understanding of their cultures (Haddon, 1897). Similar views were voiced in the South Pacific where Augustus Hamilton urged Australian and New Zealand government backing of a Bureau for the Advancement of the Study of the Ethnology of the

Pacific (Hamilton, 1897). A decade earlier Horatio Hale called on Canada's leaders to endow research among Indians in the wake of the 1885 Northwest Rebellion. He argued that such work might "have the effect of averting a very possible conflict of races", thus yielding the same "great benefit" to Canada as George Grey's studies of the Maoris reputedly had done to Maori-European relations after the New Zealand wars (Hale, 1890, 801).

For reasons too numerous to detail here, such proposals failed to gain acceptance in Whitehall, Wellington, Ottawa and elsewhere for some time (Avrith, 1986; Urry, 1984). Yet when the situation changed, as it eventually did in the early 1900s, anthropology gained increasing standing in the sphere of native administration. The U.S. case aside, formative steps toward an applied focus—that is, a focus on issues with policy implications—were taken in Great Britain where anthropological expertise was to become closely tied in with the conduct of colonial affairs, and where the universities at Cambridge, London, and Oxford (as well as at Sydney and Cape Town) trained missionaries and colonial officers in the discipline (Kuklick, 1991). The practical connection was no less evident in Australia's administration of Papua New Guinea during the long governorship of J.H.P. Murray (West, 1968). Elsewhere the state was reluctant to engage anthropological know-how in these ways. This was especially so in Canada to mid century, something of an oddity since the federal government supported, indeed effectively monopolised the more traditional (i.e. non-applied) work of the country's anthropologists until after the Second World War.

CANADIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

R.W. Brock, director of the Geological Survey of Canada, recruited Edward Sapir to head up the Survey's newly-formed Anthropological Division in 1910, the empire's first government-supported research bureau (Haddon, 1912). This breakthrough came twenty-five years after the British Association's Section H (anthropology) organised a special committee, chaired by E.B. Tylor, to urge such a step: creation of a publically-funded agency to investigate aboriginal peoples right across the country. The day's politicians were not easily persuaded, the prevailing climate of opinion then, and for years to come, that governments "don't care for science enough to do anything purely for its own sake" (cited in Avrith, 1986, 136). Accordingly, Parliament's lone concession was an annual vote of \$500, given to the Geological Survey to purchase native artifacts for its natural history collection. The

practice lasted five years, stopped in 1895 for reasons of internal economy. In consequence, the British Association and foreign museums sponsored nearly all the organised anthropological research done on Canadian soil from the 1880s to the early 1900s (Cole, 1985).

Conditions began improving around 1908 when the Geological Survey received long-overdue authorisation to build a museum large enough to house its growing natural history collections. Ottawa's Victoria Memorial Museum, forerunner of the National Museum of Canada, opened in 1911. Brock hired Sapir to oversee its anthropological hall and, more importantly, to build a representative collection of aboriginal materials before such items "are lost forever, and future generations of Canadians will be unable to obtain reliable data concerning the native races of their country" (Department of Mines 1910, 8). In the process, he set anthropology in Canada, long the preserve of amateurs, onto professional footings. The Survey remained the country's sole employer of anthropologists until T.F. McIlwraith joined the University of Toronto faculty in 1925, the first, and for many years the only such academic position in the Dominion.

Over the following half-decade Sapir appointed five scientists to the Anthropological Division's permanent staff and employed numerous others on temporary contracts. Most of his associates were trained in the U.S. where anthropology's move into the university was well under way. And like Sapir, most were Americans, few Canadians being attracted to a field without academic status and offering only rare employment opportunities at home. Of the five Canadians on staff, C. Marius Barbeau alone had formal training, at Oxford. Its slow academic development contributed to Canadian anthropology's dependence on recruits from abroad for a long time to come.

Until the outbreak of war led to retrenchment, Division anthropologists made an impressive start on Sapir's national research program: a comprehensive survey of the Dominion's indigenous peoples and cultures (Sapir, 1911). The Survey deployed fieldworkers from the Maritime provinces to the Alaskan boundary to gather and preserve ethnographic, linguistic, archaeological, and anthropometric evidence, published reports, and funded museum displays and public lectures for popular audiences (Fenton, 1986).

APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY AND NATIVE POLICY

The salvage ethnology that engaged Sapir and associates after 1910 was a far cry from what New Zealand-born Canadian anthropologist Harry Hawthorn would describe years later as "useful anthropology", a euphemism for research with relevance to making and administering public policy (Weaver, 1976, 86). In fact, nearly two decades were to pass before anthropologists began studying processes and consequences of social and cultural change, let alone using their findings to resolve problems stemming from acculturation and the incorporation of indigenous and minority communities into modern states and capitalist economies.

A specialised, applied orientation began taking form in the U.S. and Britain in the mid to late twenties, largely influenced by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's functionalism (Radcliffe-Brown, 1930). During the Great Depression this trend moved anthropology away from its roots in natural history and into the realm of social science, researchers utilising ethnographic data to solve social problems, including those linked to native administration. Within the profession this was accompanied by a growing tolerance, if not expectation, of anthropologists working as activists on behalf of society's minorities (Ebihara, 1984; Stocking, 1976).

By comparison with its rapid development in the U.S., growth encouraged by Rockefeller philanthropy (Kelly, 1985), applied anthropology in Canada remained more prospect than reality during the inter-war years. A leading reason for this was that nearly all of the country's handful of professional anthropologists were in the federal government's employ, initially with the Geological Survey and then, following an internal reorganisation in the twenties, the National Museum. Both, in turn, were branches of the Department of Mines, later Mines and Resources. As civil servants, Anthropological Division staff were not free to choose the kinds of work they would undertake, or even what and where they would publish. Instead, these decisions were constrained by the Division's official scientific and educational mandate to document and preserve evidence of indigenous (i.e. unacculturated) native cultures, and by the vagaries of what sitting politicians considered in the public interest. Above all else, there is reason to assume that most public officials did not regard anthropology pertinent to national priorities because they deemed the aboriginal peoples about whom anthropologists were concerned largely irrelevant to national priorities. This view of natives, one that successive governments had tenaciously clung to for decades, was evident in

federal Indian administration since confederation in 1867. And it was mirrored in the research Division personnel conducted during the period, research dealing with the past, not the present and likely future of aboriginal peoples.

Canada's Indian administration into the 1950s rested with the aptly-named policy of "Bible and Plough" (Miller, 1989). This paternalistic approach reflected the growing insignificance to Euro-Canadians of indigenous peoples after the mid 1800s, their former status as military allies and economic partners made redundant by the spread of settlement and state institutions. The government sought to shelter Indians from the more harmful aspects of its own nation-building by sequestering them on reserves. It also meant to protect them from themselves by promoting agrarian and Christian values. A bureaucratic and legal infrastructure emerged to guide the progress of the Dominion's native wards towards civilisation, economic self-sufficiency, and eventual "absorption into the general population...". Those deemed "sufficiently advanced" by virtue of "overcom[ing] the lingering traces of native custom and tradition" (cited in Titley, 1986, 34), might then be enfranchised, a process that stripped them of their legal identity and statutory rights as "registered Indians" under the *Indian Act* and rendered them *de jure* ordinary citizens.

Enfranchisement ordinarily proved an empty promise, bringing impoverishment, landlessness, racial discrimination, and unextinguished native self-identity. The lot of the majority who remained on reserves was scarcely better, grievances over land, treaty obligations, coercive enfranchisement, and so on effectively ignored. Their resistance to the forces wanting to reduce them to irrelevancy was largely staged in isolation, native leaders denied a public voice independent of the Indian Affairs establishment, their issues garnering little sympathy among a Euro-Canadian populace convinced assimilation was a *fait accompli* (e.g., Ponting and Gibbon, 1980).

At the Anthropological Division's founding Sapir assumed that the government's willingness to fund fieldwork arose from its need for "sound scientific advice" in forming native policy (Darnell, 1990, 74). In practice, however, Ottawa openly discouraged anthropologists from commenting on or debating its conduct of native affairs, doing nothing to initiate or support applied research of any kind, and even warning foreign fieldworkers off from examining issues deemed the exclusive preserve of Indian Affairs officials (e.g., NMCJ, D.C. Scott to D. Jenness, 11.1.1927). Decades were to pass before the government sanctioned policy-oriented research on Indians, Harry Hawthorn's

nation-wide study of social and economic conditions in the early sixties (Weaver, 1976). Before then even basic information such as demographic profiles were unavailable, and next to nothing was known about non-reserve communities in the northern hinterlands (NMCI, D. Jenness to J. Robbins, 1.11.1938).

Anthropology in the nation's universities fared no better between the wars. Unlike British and U.S. institutions where research was now ongoing and where a new generation of scientists was being educated, in Canada the discipline was exceedingly slow to catch on. For many years the country's only undergraduate course was offered at the University of Toronto, beginning in 1925; departmental status, however, wasn't granted until eleven years later. McIlwraith worked alone for nearly a decade before being joined by Australian C.W.M. Hart (Barker, 1987). Struggling to establish the discipline's viability through the twenties and thirties, what research they managed bore no connection to applied matters. At Montreal's McGill University, by contrast, sociologists investigated diverse social problems: urban and rural poverty, immigrant adjustment, and so on; yet conditions among native peoples were virtually ignored (Shore, 1987). In 1937 the University of Manitoba planned to hire an anthropologist to study the province's northern Indians and Métis. The plan came undone when Ottawa refused to guarantee the incumbent employment at the National Museum if the university were unable to endow the position permanently (NMCI, D. Jenness to J. Robbins, 11.8.1943).

As it happened, the ordinary interests of Ottawa anthropology fared only slightly better than applied ones. After a five-year honeymoon that saw the Division begin nationwide research, declining annual appropriations cut deeply into its work. At first, Canada's war effort necessitated strict economies. But following the armistice money remained tight, a signal that as with public apathy toward aboriginal people themselves, study of their traditional cultures was also a low priority (Darnell, 1990; Titley, 1986). As a rule, public expenditure now favoured work that had "some good economic purpose" (NMCI, W.H. Collins to J.C.B. Grant, 4.5.1931). Like native affairs, government anthropology did not meet the test. It was merely science, of no relevance to the day's pressing issues.

The "practical" work Division personnel were called on to do took two forms: filling intermittent requests for ethnographic and historical details about natives, and investigating local administrative problems (NMCI, D. Jenness to F. Lynch, 3.4.1937). The first responsibility was mostly benign, the second controversial since it made anthropologists *de*

facto agents of state authority, a role many objected to on personal and professional grounds. In the mid teens, for instance, Sapir and other anthropologists called for repeal of the infamous "Potlatch Law", an 1884 amendment to the *Indian Act* outlawing potlatching, while openly siding with Indians who resisted its enforcement (NMCS, E. Sapir to J. Teit, 14.12.1913). Rooted in cultural relativist convictions, their protests found cool reception in political circles still given to eradicating "reactionary elements" and "stubborn paganism" among aboriginal peoples, and aiding their "irresistible movement" toward assimilation (Department of Indian Affairs, 1921, 7)

Though obligated to look into "trouble spots", doing so meant that government anthropologists ran the risk of jeopardising the supportive relations with natives that were essential to carrying on fieldwork. American ethnologist Wilson Wallis, working for the Survey in 1914, inadvertently ran into this very problem when Dakotas in southern Manitoba became worried that he was gathering evidence needed to extradite some of them to the U.S. for supposed earlier wrongdoing (Richling, n.d.). A few years later James Teit explained to Sapir that many of the British Columbia natives he worked with harboured suspicions that whites connected to the government had "some ulterior motive which in the end may work out detrimental to them.... If the Indian land (and game & fish) question was once settled in this country fairly for the Indians it would help to make anthropological work ... much easier" (NMCS, 27.3.1917).

Anthropological Division staff became acutely sensitive to this sort of professional dilemma in the wake of the storm over Franz Boas's notorious 1919 "Scientists as Spies" letter in *The Nation*, alleging that four unnamed anthropologists had misrepresented the purpose of their work for the U.S. government in Mexico during the war (Stocking, 1976). Close on the heels of Boas's resulting censure by the American Anthropological Association, Sapir counselled Marius Barbeau against subverting anthropology's good standing with aboriginal peoples by undertaking missions for Indian Affairs. Already some of Barbeau's earlier observations of Lorette (Québec) Hurons had been misconstrued in a House of Commons debate on enfranchisement. Now D.C. Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, was requesting that Barbeau look into the contentious potlatch question on the northwest coast. Sapir reminded his colleague that Division members should refrain from commenting on native administration and from accepting payment to work for Indian Affairs without the consent of Geological Survey authorities. "I hate to have to make this rule so explicit", he

explained, "but I am afraid that if we do not follow it very literally we will find ourselves drifting into the position of genteel spies for the Department of Indian Affairs. We cannot afford to be misunderstood by any Indians in Canada" (NMCS, 16.7.1920).

What little independent perspective on native problems there was in these years came from U.S. ethnologists doing research in Canada. The best known of them, Frank Speck, cited recent scholarship on the origins of the family hunting territory system among northern Algonquians to make a case for conservation of wildlife ranges and, more importantly, state recognition of native land rights, then, and still today, the most contentious issue in aboriginal-government relations. Taking the position that the system pre-dated European contact, Speck reasoned that the indigenous system constituted a valid form of land tenure and should be recognised as such. On that basis he argued that Ottawa should stop non-native encroachment on traditional hunting grounds, a contributing factor in the precipitous decline in native health and economic security then occurring throughout the north (Feit, n.d.).

In 1933 John Cooper, one of Speck's colleagues, provided H.W. McGill, Scott's successor at Indian Affairs, with a brief outlining their position, the ethnological evidence underlying it, and a series of recommendations for revising current policy (CUA, 11.11.1933). Cooper was cautiously optimistic that their effort might lead to change. Yet he was also ambivalent about anthropologists' involvement in such matters, writing to a Canadian colleague that however much the matter concerned them personally, it was nonetheless "marginal to our professional interests" (NMCIJ, to D. Jenness, 10.11.1933). High-level Indian Affairs bureaucrats certainly encouraged this opinion, adamantly refusing to sanction research touching on aspects of native administration, and seeming to demonstrate little taste for anthropological viewpoints apart from those that supported existing practice.

The Canadian scene remained unchanged into the Depression era while anthropologists elsewhere were becoming increasingly involved in policy-related research and administrative matters. The work of E.W.B. Chinnery and other government anthropologists during Hubert Murray's long governorship of Australia's Papuan mandate is a case in point (West, 1968). So, too, is Apirana Ngata's "anthropology in action" approach in New Zealand, returned to in the conclusion (Sorrenson 1986, 21). And in the U.S., Bureau of Indian Affairs Commissioner John Collier put a small army of anthropologists into the field to make detailed studies in aid of his "Indian New Deal" (Kelly, 1985). Yet in

Canada, Collier's counterpart, D.C. Scott, was nearly as averse to making use of the Anthropological Division's professional expertise as he was in taking counsel from aboriginal people themselves (Zaslow, 1988). McGill was little better in this respect despite politely entertaining Speck and Cooper's views in the mid-thirties.

Interestingly enough, McGill's main rival for the Indian Affairs post at Scott's retirement in 1932 was Diamond Jenness, an expatriate New Zealander and Sapir's successor in 1925 as Anthropological Division chief. No other civil servant of the day had a knowledge of aboriginal peoples to rival Jenness's. Though seemingly without objection to the goal of assimilation itself, Jenness was critical of existing practice as a means to accomplish that end, faulting shortsightedness in education, health care, economic development, and other areas for the deplorable conditions most natives faced. While unable to raise these criticisms publicly because of bureaucratic constraints, he did so privately, taking care to distinguish between personal and official views. Commenting on state policy in the Northwest Territories, for instance, he remarked that, "As an employee of the government concerned only with scientific research, I am not permitted to take more than an academic interest in the question" (NMCIJ, to S. Lesage, 5.4.1935). Once retired from public service, however, he openly disseminated his views, often couching them in strong language, as when he railed against the failings of a reserve system he likened to apartheid (Jenness, 1954). Given the steadfastness of Indian Affairs' "narrow vision" (Titley, 1986), a commitment to the status quo in matters of policy and funding that endured, effectively unchanged, throughout the inter-war years, Jenness's interest in making anthropological perspectives relevant to the conduct of native administration certainly constituted an unwelcome shift in direction.

What may have been Ottawa's lone concession to "useful anthropology" came in 1936 when Jenness accepted a consultancy in the Indian Affairs Branch to propose ways of furthering the "welfare and advancement of the Indian population" (NMCIJ, C. Camsell to Jenness, 10.12.1936). He feared, rightly so, that the post was a sinecure, higher-ups in the bureaucracy still unconvinced that the social and economic problems Indians faced were in any way germane to anthropology (NAC, C. Camsell to W. Foran, 8.2.1937). Whatever the government's intentions, commissioning Jenness to examine contemporary conditions in native communities first-hand, work desperately in need of doing, was not among them. Nor did the job grant license to comment on policy matters, a factor in Jenness's decision not to participate in a

much-publicised conference on U.S. and Canadian native affairs jointly organised in 1939 by Yale and the University of Toronto (Loram and McIlwraith, 1943). In a memorandum to T.R.L. McInness, secretary of the Indians Affairs Branch, he explained that "Government officials who take part [in the symposium] enter with their hands tied. For political reasons, if for no other, they are not free to express their own opinions" and therefore are better advised to stay away (NMCJ, 15.3.1939).

Jeness's appointment aside, no new initiatives in native affairs were forthcoming, a situation that continued until after World War II (Miller, 1989). In the meantime, Collier's administration south of the border, utilising considerable anthropological expertise, implemented important reforms through the Indian Reorganisation Act of 1934, legislation that ended, at least for a time, the U.S. government's tired assimilationist policies, brought native people into the federal Indian service, and lay the groundwork for a limited form of tribal self-government (Kelly, 1983).

CONCLUSION

Throughout the inter-war period Ottawa effectively denied anthropologists a part in developing and implementing native policy, and even in investigating base-line conditions among the country's aboriginal peoples. This probably owed more to official indifference toward natives than toward anthropology itself. Yet however strong the professional concerns and personal convictions to make aboriginal issues and their own science relevant to the public interest, members of the Anthropological Division were repeatedly stymied by the simple fact of their institutional dependence on the high-level officials who determined that interest. The junction of bureaucracy and the common good thus prevented any hearing for alternative perspectives on native affairs from outside the governing circle, let alone their incorporation in practice. Change in the direction of Canadian native policy, and in the role of anthropology in public affairs, remained decades away.

In the introduction I suggested that Canada was not alone in its reluctance to employ anthropological expertise in conducting aboriginal affairs. While space limitations preclude examination of comparable situations in this paper, the New Zealand case represents an especially interesting variation on anthropology's relationship to state policy-making and so, as a concluding note, deserves brief comment here.

In the main, New Zealand's approach to domestic aboriginal affairs differed from Canadian practice, avoiding the excesses of reserves and coercive laws akin to the *Indian Act*, and promoting a measure of inclusion in national life (King, 1981). Yet Wellington's indifference toward anthropology, let alone applied anthropology, matched that of its northern counterpart. In fact, apart from allowing Elsdon Best's appointment at the state-run Dominion Museum in 1910 to carry on salvage ethnology among the North Island Maori tribes and, thirteen years later, agreeing to formation of a Board of Maori Ethnological Research to assist publication on traditional culture and society, it conceded nothing more by way of institutional or financial support for the country's small but energetic anthropological community. The university colleges were no more accommodating, remaining apathetic toward social science research in general and, with the lone exception of H.D. Skinner's lectureship at Otago in 1919, doing little to establish anthropology as an academic subject. Among the consequences of the profession's uneven development was that the up-and-coming generation of anthropologists had to go overseas for training and employment, and often relied on the patronage of a dwindling group of amateurs—the Victorian-era founders of the Polynesian Society—to facilitate their research at home (e.g., Beaglehole, 1938; Sorrenson, 1982).

Even without public endorsement or subsidy, contemporary anthropological perspectives entered the sphere of policy-making nonetheless. This happened through the efforts of prominent Maori leaders who promoted both urgent ethnology and applied research, the former in aid of the Maoris' struggle to retain Maoritanga—their "Maoriness"—the latter to achieve a more equitable place in the economic, social, and political life of the country (Butterworth, 1972). Perhaps the most influential of these leaders was Apirana Ngata, a long-serving MP and avocational ethnologist who urged the application of anthropological ideas in modifying state policy toward Maoris (and other Polynesians under New Zealand's jurisdiction), and in controlling processes of culture change in ways beneficial to the interests of local indigenous communities (Ngata, 1929; Sorrenson, 1986). Ngata assisted the new generation of anthropologists, men like Raymond Firth and Felix Keesing, who had returned home in the twenties and thirties to study problems of Maori acculturation, and lobbied for recognition of anthropology and Polynesian studies in the universities. And on becoming Native Minister in the newly-elected United Party government in 1928, he transformed the possibility of an applied anthropology into practical action, implementing reforms in land and

economic development policies during the early thirties that sought to build on traditional socio-political organisation and values rather than insisting on adoption of Pakeha (European) patterns (Ngata, 1931). Arguably the most remarkable aspect of the history of New Zealand anthropology, the contributions of Ngata and his Maori colleagues to making anthropology relevant to public policy, appear to be without parallel in Canada, or elsewhere, for that matter.

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