

## Oh, Canada? Our Home and Racist Land

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Monday, November 28, 2011

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Canadians' racist neglect of our first people's seems unshakable.

We had [Davis Inlet](#), and we didn't wake up to any systemic problems. That was just a one off?

And now Attawapiskat? Perhaps it was just a tragedy of homelessness that happened in the last few weeks, so we couldn't expect the government to be on top of it all. It turns out no. There have been systemic funding problems going back years.



But we learn a few things [here](#):

- 2,000 people live there and the federal government has committed \$500,000 to renovate five vacant homes. Five.

- The chief said the federal government has committed \$2 million more but Aboriginal Affairs Minister [John Duncan](#) [[john.duncan@parl.gc.ca](mailto:john.duncan@parl.gc.ca), 613-992-2503, 250-338-9381] denies that decision has been made. Maybe that would be another 20 homes renovated?

- This community has "a litany of problems," so "officials would travel to the area this week to ensure that recent aid is being used effectively," which for most of us trained in the code of Canada means that they can't take care of themselves because they're drunks, addicts, politically corrupt or incompetent, or just not educated enough to manage. This in itself, beyond being one of Canada's biggest racist black eyes, is sufficient evidence that there are systemic problems throughout our country with respect to how we even think about "the other."

- But everything's ok now because the federal government will, "send our people in to **make some, help**

*make some*, decisions with the chief and council" [emphasis mine]. While there are undoubtedly a series of problems, "Canada" prefers to deal with problems like this by equating first peoples' communities as sad, unfortunate dorm rooms that our suburban children inhabit--rooms that are riddled with a litany of problems that stem from them living alone for the first time. Like children.

- And of course there is a chance to make the prime minister look good by saying his economic action plan had completed another 44 homes. Remember there are 2,000 people living there. Doing a little bit is good enough, eh? 44 homes. Plus 5. Plus maybe 20 more.

While I had Attawapiskat on my mind for days last week, I was stuck on how to figure out what I wanted to say about the situation beyond just phoning the prime minister [[stephen.harper@parl.gc.ca](mailto:stephen.harper@parl.gc.ca), 613-992-4211, 403-253-7990] and screaming.

But as I think about the holidays, I think about helping these people. I can [send some money to the Canadian Red Cross](#). And tell my friends.

But the best thing I can do is to help change the dialogue in this country that allows us all to sleep soundly at night as hundreds of thousands of families in our country live in varying degrees of abject poverty, all preventable in a rich nation like Canada.



This post started out as one of flabbergast at how police tried to [disperse protesters with motorcycle exhaust](#) at Science World in Vancouver on Friday when the prime minister showed up for his photo op with the premier. Gassing protesters seemed unbelievable until I saw the picture [[film at 11](#)].

But in a country where we can justify or explain that tactic away, Attawapiskat came into clarity for me.

Certain people are disposable. Protesters, first peoples, anyone who makes us uncomfortable. If there are mass [Occupy Christmas](#) actions that "threaten" the brinkmanship inherent in capitalism's suicidal retail model, those funky guerilla theatre protesters dressed as elves or whatever will become non-persons to mainstream Canadians who are continually molded by corporate media.

Perhaps we only have binary switches: people are like us because we are told we can relate to them, but if they are "other", we can ignore them, like the hundreds of thousands of Canadian children still living in

poverty today, 20 years after the House of Commons unanimously pledged to end child poverty 11 years ago.

So if you are still agnostic on the Occupy movement, it seems pretty easy to get behind fixing the systemic problems in our first nations communities. They need help. They need resources. They need the rest of Canada to start thinking about dignity and screaming at our politicians, embarrassing them if need be to realize that it's not just about handouts and auditors, but about community, inclusion, healing, justice, respect, cordial international relations, and an authentic willingness to fix a problem that is centuries old. And let's face it, largely/completely our [non-first peoples'] fault.

This is a solution we can all be a part of...because we all are actually a part of the solution. The politicians work for us. We constantly forget that because they constantly behave as if they don't. We're in charge of them. Make them get moving on starting a national healing. As long as we let them sleep at night while others live in [Home Depot lawn sheds](#), we're not getting the job done.