

## West Coast Caledonia

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, April 26, 2006

<https://politicsrespun.org/2006/04/west-coast-caledonia/>

Today's afternoon rally and march starting at the Vancouver Art Gallery was a moving, enriching time. It was in support of the First Nations in Caledonia, Ontario defending their lands, rights and identity.

Rallies I attend at the Art Gallery are often intense, highly motivated, sometimes angry and righteous as we loudly proclaim that various global or local injustices must stop.

Today's rally, however, was much different. There was a silence to it, a reflective mood. A time when people from First Nations and non-First Nations communities agreed about a history of abuse and exploitation, and acknowledged a need for a future of healing and common cause. It was simply uplifting.

The march after the rally down Robson Street was typical of other marches--befuddled looks on shoppers' faces as people did a strange thing: stroll down the street, displacing traffic, trying to speak a message to the most conspicuously consumptive place in BC. This march was different, though, from StopWar.ca rallies, for instance. Every block or so, we all stopped and speakers addressed the crowds with an explanation of things that really matter.

My family and friends were not able to continue with the march to Stanley Park to close some traffic lanes. I wish we could have. Solidarity is important.

Also important is what a number of speakers mentioned at the rally. Non-First Nations Canadians are woefully ignorant of our nation's history of exploitation, abuse, rape, murder, and cultural genocide of the First Nations of this land. This perpetuation of ignorance is our fault.

What grows from this ignorance is a speedy and hearty embrace of native stereotypes and a desire to dismiss them as disturbing us and our right to self-actualize—they have their reservations, after all. Despite the fact that virtually none of BC has been legally acquired by the crown according King George III's 1763 Royal Proclamation, we [non-First Nations] think they [the original settlers of Turtle Island] are in our way.

This is a heinous injustice.

Evidence of the injustice reeked forth from the evening's news coverage. Among all the local TV channels, none fully described the breadth of reasons that motivated today's solidarity rally. One in particular, CTV, best illuminated our cultural ignorance of the issues that led Six Nations member Lindsay Bomberry to movingly describe at the rally how her whole life has changed because of how the Caledonia event has played out. Her words were weighty, resonating and compelling. I could see that dozens were visibly moved by the words she shared.

CTV's reporting of the day's actions, however, took place with David Kincaid, the station's reporter in the traffic helicopter!, acting as point man describing the event as a traffic impediment, with shots of the group blocking the Lion's Gate causeway lanes.

The First Nations rally was primarily a traffic disruption issue. CTV, likely in trying to gauge its target market's interests, did not consider the event to be primarily a political, social, legal, justice or human rights event at all.

Further, their meek attempt at exploring the background that purported to justify the day's events was a poorly chosen sound bite of less than 10 seconds that only peripherally addressed the situation in Caledonia and the support that First Nations and others in the country are providing.

The parting comment of the "news" report mentioned that the natives threatened more protests on more lower mainland bridges if there is violence in Caledonia.

This news presentation demonstrates the racist and ignorant attitude our culture carries about First Nations. We demonize them: they are primarily a traffic problem. They are threatening us if there's violence in Caledonia. They are a threat to our economic and real estate development in Caledonia. They are a threat to our rush hour zombie behaviour. They are a threat to who we are.

The reality is that for five centuries, as newer settlers to Canada [itself a native word], we have been threatening, exploiting, marginalizing and destroying First Nations culture consistently. We refuse to acknowledge them as independent, sovereign nations. To do so, politically, would be to set a precedent that undermines Canada's ultimate sovereignty of this land.

As long as non-First Nations cultures in Canada continue to keep their heads in the sand and avoid recognizing our role in abuse, we can continue with the charade of being the only sovereign nation around here. To maintain this fiction means we get to grumpily sneer when "they" block "our" bridges, all along thinking, hey, why don't "they" just leave "us" alone, anyway.

In the end, along side the rich, beautiful images and moments my family, friends and I shared in at the rally and march, is a memory of a disturbingly not so surprising event. While strolling down Robson Street blocking intersecting roads, at one particular intersection, one driver several cars back from the front of the waiting line honked incessantly.

The television cameras, not surprisingly, rushed to interview that person. It's so simple. At that moment, the story became the angry driver inconvenienced by an uppity political rally.

How easy it is for us to forget what is really going on around us.

How easy it is to make the world revolve around us again. Caledonias all over the country—and the world, be damned.

Podcast at <http://dgiVista.org/pod/2006.04.25.mp3>

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