Constructing Friends and Foes: Uncovering a Value Hierarchy in First Nations Newspaper Coverage

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Canadians pride themselves on their commitment to multiculturalism, citing the Heritage Program, language policies which involve two official languages, and general tolerance for minority rights. However, when resources become scarce, self interest re-emerges and such generosity of word and spirit appears to be submerged under a wave of concern for one's own position. In this paper I address ways in which the mainstream press in southwestern Ontario reflects, replicates, creates and promotes Anglo-Canadian values in its portrayal of First Nations peoples and issues. Values of the editorial staff, and assumed values of the consuming public, are evident in the presentation of Native peoples within this medium. The data are taken from mid-September 1995 (shortly after Dudley George was shot and killed by a member of the Ontario Provincial Police [OPP] at Stoney Point/Ipperwash) to the end of October 1996. This analysis is focused on the London Free Press, with a few comparative pieces gathered from the Globe and Mail and the Toronto Star.

Given the increasing visibility of First Nations peoples in the news, I am interested particularly in the construction of a (relatively undifferentiated) First Nations identity by a relatively conservative press holding an assumed liberal Euro-Canadian ideal. In this paper I am addressing the construction of identity by the press, not the veracity of claims or statements found in the articles themselves. On a general review of the news stories two primary constructions emerge: "Natives" as romantic oriental (in fact, the term "noble savage" is utterly appropriate to this presentation), otherwise "friend"; and "Natives" as the enemy. These constructions will be addressed and placed within the context of the basic cultural values of

1 The research for this paper was conducted under a SSHRC grant, "Constructing First Nations Identity". I wish to thank Allan McDougall for his excellent criticisms and many suggestions — and a generous editorial hand.
mainstream Anglo-Canadians in southwestern Ontario which emerge from the data.

In this discussion of portrayals of First Nations people (almost exclusively focused on Chippewa peoples of southwestern Ontario), I do not attempt to construct the press as an alternative enemy; rather what I hope to demonstrate is that even when a group has an underlying positive attitude towards undefined "others", prevalent values underpin both overt and covert constructions of those others, often in ways which apparently contradict the stated values. This follows closely what Baba noted when he wrote:

Th[e] borderline negotiations of cultural difference often violate liberalism's deep commitment to representing cultural diversity as plural choice. Liberal discourses on multiculturalism experience the fragility of their principles of 'tolerance' when they attempt to withstand the pressure of revision. In addressing the multicultural demand, they encounter the limit of their enshrined notion of "equal respect" ... [Baba 1996:54]

It is the delicate balancing act between being "tolerant" and promoting "multiculturalism" that is addressed here.

FUNDAMENTAL CONTRADICTIONS

J. Murray Edelman in his analysis of the political spectacle describes the fluid construction of "enemy" and "other". His analysis offers an overarching framework for the construction of "Native" as reflected in the regional press. He argued as follows:

Clearly, there is nothing distinctive or inherent about adversaries or enemies as people that makes them one or another. To understand such language in politics it is necessary to focus upon the social situation and self-characterization of observers rather than upon the people who are labelled. Only then can we explain why changes occur so often in the definitions of political enemies and why, in some situations, anyone is likely to define others as enemies or to be defined as such. [Edelman 1988:68]

By 16 September 1995 the labelling was well advanced, as illustrated by this excerpt from a relatively supportive article in the press:

The sign marking the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation territory had been torn down and burned. Painted in large letters on a nearby roadway just outside the territory were the words "KILL INDIANS".

The ugly head of racism, raised as expected in a violent summer of aboriginal standoffs, was finally pointing a finger into the London–St. Thomas area.
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It happened several days ago. The fact this band of Chippewas hadn’t been involved in any of the wide-spread disturbances didn’t matter to the perpetrators. The only thing that counted was the knowledge Indians lived here. [London Free Press, 16 September 1995]

Those of us who have worked in First Nations communities over extended periods recognize that mainstream (Euro-Canadian) newspapers present some oddly disjointed pictures of First Nations communities and issues, but these are by no means uniformly negative. For example, one of the few explicit editorials (London Free Press, 9 July 1996) about perceptions of “natives” [sic] discussed the results of a national poll asking about perceptions of the standard of living of First Nations peoples in Canada. It begins, “There is little to be gained from the apparent shift to a collision course over native issues in Canada.” The article concludes with the following:

As Canadians, native and non-native, we could have endless chicken-or-the-egg arguments about what has caused these latest shifts.

Native militancy will cause more sympathy to evaporate. But a lack of public sympathy, and lack of accurate knowledge about the history and current living conditions of native peoples, will hamper peaceful and fair settlements to redress the wrongs of our past.

Both sides must continue to talk and negotiate. Otherwise, we’re on a collision course fuelled by intolerance.

This statement, titled “A dangerous shift in views on natives”, illustrates the high value placed on the ideals of “tolerance” and “fair play” by the editorial staff. However, the editorial is also intended to be a warning to First Nations communities that “militancy” (with an assumed definition of what actions “militancy” covers) will undercut what the editors consider the First Nations communities’ most critical weapon, “sympathy” from mainstream Canadians.

Edelman, who deals with such encounters as a form of “political spectacle”, discusses such apparent internal contradictions in constructing the other as enemy:

While beliefs about enemies are typically intense, they are seldom consistent with other political perceptions and are often in conflict even with concurrent beliefs about enemies expressed by the same individual. They must be understood as stock stories exercising influence when the

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2 Introduction to the article “Raising barricades: simmering native disputes are now boiling over across Canada — it is a revolution born of 400 years of grief”, by Don Collins.
appropriate cues are present... Individuals reflect social currents, even when the currents flow in opposite directions. [Edelman 1988:71]

Rather than merely stating that such contradictions exist, I would like to examine what these “appropriate cues” are which trigger either positive or negative portrayals of First Nations peoples. After an investigation of the newspaper articles and letters to the editor (printed at the discretion of the editorial staff) addressing either First Nations peoples or issues, an underlying hierarchy of values/domains emerges. That hierarchy, which remains constant, has predictive value since if one knows the values espoused, one can predict whether the article will construct the “Natives” as friends or as enemies. The potential to generalize from this finding must be tested further however, since the issues are specific to a given period (September 1995 to October 1996) and for the most part to a given region. While other First Nations groups and/or representatives are occasionally included, the overwhelming majority are found in the region of southwestern Ontario extending (for the London Free Press) from London west to the U.S. border and from the Bosanquet region on Lake Huron south to Lake Erie.

THE VALUE HIERARCHY

The hierarchy is a cross-cutting of themes or topics which fall into the category of doxa using Bourdieu’s terminology. Such themes/topics are rarely argued because they are viewed as inherent, unquestionable, and self-evident. While the term “value” could be somewhat problematic in naming this the Value Hierarchy, it catches some of the emotive energy invested in the topics/domains. The value-laden issues which emerged on reviewing the data are described below. They are ranked from the most strongly held beliefs/values, those at the top of the list, to the least strongly held ones at the bottom:

Value Hierarchy Found in Print Media

Most valued...

First Nations Peoples and interests negatively portrayed

- Human life
- Personal property
  - Rights of property owners
  - Price paid (by individual) determines private property
- Access to goods and jobs
CONSTRUCTING FRIENDS AND FOES

- Law (both civil and criminal)
- Human rights (under liberal democratic ideals)
  - Multiculturalism (as subset of human rights)
  - Democracy (benevolent majority rule)
- Circumscribed, long-standing community-owned and -occupied lands (reserves)
- State Intervention (when threatening individual rights)
  - Government representatives (as separate from law)
  - Police power

First Nations Peoples portrayed positively

- Religious groups
  - Organized mainstream (Eurocentric) religions with large resource bases
- Temporally removed events
...Least valued.

ILLUSTRATIONS

When First Nations peoples, communities, or issues are addressed in the local print media, the overall impression of a positive or a negative construction has a high correlation with what domain is being addressed. With a liberal press, values of multiculturalism and tolerance rank reasonably high but when other values come in conflict, they will either eclipse that commitment to tolerance or, conversely, they will reinforce those values depending on their relative standing as portrayed in the chart above.

Using the data provided by the London Free Press, illustrations will be presented of the appearance of values in Edelman’s terms, as appropriate cues for the construction of the “other”. Following the hierarchy presented in the chart the construction will be analyzed to show how the values are ranked.

Constructing foes

We find the most likely places where First Nations peoples will be constructed as the enemy are when their interests are perceived to flaunt or impinge on (a) mainstream members’ personal property, (b) access to goods and jobs, and (c) legal standards (both civil and criminal). Edelman states:
When an enemy hurts, there is an incentive to end the threat by doing away with him. But the opposite incentive comes into play when the enemy helps marshal support for a regime or a cause; in that case those who construct an enemy have every reason to perpetuate and exaggerate the threat he poses. [Edelman 1988:66]

In the press (including letters to the editor), we find this dualism of construction coming into play. For example, the threat that First Nations people apparently pose with respect to private property, goods or the law simultaneously define these as central to the quality of life for the majority and the defense of these items/ideals as the defense of humanistic values.

Examples of how First Nations peoples are negatively portrayed are best exemplified by a series of articles dating from 22–24 July 1996. The reporting began on 22 July with an article in the London & Region section, “US man claims boat looted: he says police watched as natives stripped his beached craft.” This story focused on an American cabin cruiser washed up on the shore of “Indian occupied Ipperwash Provincial Park” by high waves. According to the owner interviewed in the article, “natives systematically looted the craft... while police watched.” The single column story was followed the next day by a front-page article which was continued on the second page. The 23 July article was accompanied by two coloured photos, a large photo of an angry boat owner in front of her boat and a smaller one beneath displaying two empty beer cartons in the galley. The editors added their voices to those on the front page in the first editorial on The Opinion Pages, “Native occupation must be settled.” The coverage in this series of articles illustrates many of the themes on the hierarchy, especially in the areas of personal property (and its value in dollars) and law (both civil and criminal).

The first section of the front-page article, addressing criminal law issues, discusses the OPP’s lack of intervention early in this situation. By obliquely invoking the earlier interactions between the OPP and the Stoney Point First Nations people at the former Camp Ipperwash — “we’re not going to go storming down the beach and take back the boat. You know the history of this area...” — Sgt. Doug Babbit attempts to defend the OPP against charges of differential application of the law for aboriginal peoples, but in doing so, he squarely places the Native population into the category of “dangerous” individuals.

In the paragraph directly following Babbit’s defense of the OPP’s actions, we get a detailed description of “Eshkanian’s boat” complete with
a numeric value, $50,000, and the boat owner’s estimate of the damage, “more than $3,500”. The paragraph continues with indirect discourse of how the boat owners were intending “to sue the Canadian government for neglect in failing to protect them and their property.” Most of the rest of the report continues with the boat owners’ activities in contacting the U.S. State Department and the FBI and Canadian agencies to complain. Nestled in the midst of this report is a fascinating statement: “The controversy has served as a rallying point for locals who say they’ve long been harassed by natives.”

This article presents an overwhelmingly negative portrait of First Nations people. Interestingly, no First Nations voices were presented. In most cases, the negative statements were attributed either through direct quotations (that is, direct discourse) or through indirect discourse as in the case of the “locals who say...” or through a combination, as found in the caption “Eshkanian says the people who ransacked her boat after it was beached at the former military base were ‘animals’.”

The editorial run on 23 July reiterates the theme of “law” and of protection of “private property” as primary values. While prefaced by sympathy for the dithering of the provincial and federal governments in dealing with aboriginal land claims, the editorial continues “there can be no sympathy for this flagrant violation of the law” and later by the statement: “There should be no double standard in enforcing the law. If people can’t feel they can rely on the police for protection of their property, our whole concept of security will break down.” In both cases the editors have declared an entire Native community guilty of unlawful activities and of being on the receiving end of preferential treatment under the law. In so doing, they have also reasserted the paramountcy of law and the state in the preservation of a peaceful society.

The follow-up on 24 July, again front-page coverage with colour pictures of Euro-Canadians, was given an interesting twist by the coinci-

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3 One month earlier the London Free Press ran an article, “Chief’s cottage at Kettle Point ‘definitely’ arson”, when a cottage owned by Kettle Point and Stoney Point Chief Tom Bressette burned down. The estimated loss in this fire was set at $110–150,000. The article ran on page C3.

4 The second-to-last paragraph on page 1 presents a somewhat different picture. Here the boat owners blamed the federal government of Canada “for not returning the land and dealing with other land claims in the area”; this is very positive toward First Nations people in the area, but it was offered in an effort to establish the claim they wished to make against the government.
dence of an “OPP officer charged in native’s death” as the top article (colour photo of the officer in combat gear) and “Locals call it ‘lawless land’” beneath (colour photo of two Euro-Canadian residents talking of “the problems they have run into with natives from the Stoney Point band”). Both articles are under a small umbrella heading, IPPERWASH. Both articles continued on page 3 with, in this case, black and white photographs of First Nations people attached to each.

On 2 August 1996, yet another article about the cabin cruiser appeared (page B2), this time under the heading CRIME: “Cabin cruiser beached at Ipperwash vandalized again; OPP boat looted”. Five days later the London Free Press published a letter to the editor which they positioned in the centre of their letter section within its own black-lined box. This letter brings the values inherent in the initial article to the fore. In this letter, the author calls the incident “nothing short of a revolt against law and order in Canada.”

The author then outlines what he considers the “only way” to address what he sees as the fundamental problems with “native bands”. That is to “have them operate like any municipal government” which would then “abide by the provincial laws” under the control of the “authority in that province”. This section of the letter attests to the high value on both civil and criminal law. In the second part of the letter he addresses the second issue on the hierarchy, access to goods. The author outlines three questions: “1. How much, per capita, was spent in the last 10 years in Canada on reserves? 2. What percentage of natives on reserves are on government assistance? 3. Who is paying heat and electricity for the barracks at Ipperwash military base?” The author concludes by stating that he had many more of these questions to ask. In these three questions, the author is striking at the core of what many Euro-Canadians view as the “problem” of tolerance for multiculturalism: it costs too much. It doesn’t matter whether the questions are legitimate or not — either way the answers (legitimate or not) are assumed and implied in the asking — the questions are enough to establish values central to the author, and given the prominence of the letter on the opinion page, to the reading public.

The following day, 9 August 1996, there were two more letters to the editor in the centre box, “The real issues at Ipperwash” and “Support for

5 The fourth question returns to the issue of law as the author queries why “natives living on reserves get away without filing the latest census forms.”
natives is gone”. The first letter, pointing out the implicit racism in the manner in which the First Nations people had been portrayed in the press, addresses the values head on: “Every day I read in the paper or on the news I see people destroying private and public property and I do not recall this much attention being given to any of these incidents. Is there a difference?” The second letter declares support of the “natives at Kettle Point and Ipperwash” based on bad treatment by the government, but retracts it on the basis of how “a mariner in distress, a visitor to our country, was treated by people who I had considered fellow Canadians.” The law takes over in the final statements: “This is not political activism. This is despicable criminal action.”

In the coverage of this series of events, the Stoney Point First Nations people are constructed as emerging enemies of both the state and local non-Native populations.

Creating mixed messages

When addressing values/domains further down the hierarchy, the reporting is much more ambivalent. The most likely support for First Nations struggles are addressed in terms of human rights and stolen lands (jointly owned, as with reserves). These, and several other of the highly held values, were explicitly presented in a letter to the editor sympathising with the Stoney Pointers: “Somehow, Canadians don’t get too excited about federal and provincial governments denying rights to natives who are forced to spend much energy and resources in trying to persuade Canadians to enforce their own laws [involved in treaties].” This one sentence manages to reinforce values of human rights, law, personal property or resources, and even of criminal law in the reference in the next sentence to “stolen lands” (“they have been waiting for more than 50 years for the government to return their land as promised”). Thus we find that these same values may be used to construct a positive argument for sympathising with First Nations peoples.

This is not only true in letters to the editor. If we trace the “background” statements, the newspaper’s summary of events in bullet format often included beside the articles on “Ipperwash”, we find an interesting shifting of position. On 1 April 1996, the initial statement read “Stoney Point natives, who say they are a separate group from the Kettle and Stoney Point band, moved back on land at Camp Ipperwash army camp May 6,
1993... The land was taken from the Stoney Point Natives in 1942 under the War Measures Act.” The initial statement remained verbatim through the last week of July 1996, but on 1 August, just a week after the newspaper led with an article “OPP officer charged in native’s death” it changed to “The federal government appropriated the Stoney Point reserve from the Stoney Point people in 1942 under the War Measures Act to build Camp Ipperwash, an army training camp. Twenty-two families living there were moved to the Kettle Point reserve and the land was to be returned after the war.” The latter, more sympathetic construction is created by foregrounding ownership. In the first, the Stoney Pointers are portrayed as moving onto army land, which incidentally had been taken under the War Measures Act, but in the second, the paper has the federal government “appropriating” the land in the active voice, and building the camp on Stoney Point land. The information in the two statements covers the same underlying referential meaning. However, by focusing on prior ownership, and appropriation of land, one group (the government or the First Nations community) is given a more favourable construction. The values on which these constructions pivot remain the same, however. Much of the reporting about the Native (re-)occupation of the Stoney Point land was covered relatively positively, although the majority of the letters to the editor published were far less sympathetic.

As we move further down the hierarchy, we find that mainstream Anglo-Canadians in this region are also sympathetic toward First Nations people when the state intervenes to threaten individual rights, or when police power against individuals is deemed too great. When addressing the shooting of Dudley George by a member of the OPP, the coverage is often accompanied by colour maps of the area, a run-down of the appropriation of the land under the War Measures Act, and almost always by a picture of Dudley George. These positive (or mixed) portrayals of First Nations people by the London Free Press are marked by interviews with Native people from the area. In these topics, however, we have some of the higher level values either supporting state intervention (when it supports mainstream Canadians against criminal First Nations people — especially to protect private property as in the situation earlier), or when state

6 In the first two days of coverage of the cabin cruiser story, where there is a generally negative construction, Native voices were not included. On 25 July 1996, the day that the OPP officer was charged in George’s death, these voices finally appeared, and the coverage became less overtly negative.
An interesting contrast is found in the caption beneath the same photograph of Dudley George on 24 and 25 July 1996. On 24 July, the front page carried two articles, “OPP officer charged in native’s death” and below it, “Locals call it ‘lawless land’”. The caption beneath George’s smiling picture reads “Police have maintained Anthony (Dudley) George, above, was shot and killed as officers returned fire from a rebel group of natives who occupied the park which they say is a sacred burial ground. Natives have said they were unarmed.” The following day, the caption below the same picture — this time in black and white and on page A5 — reads, “Anthony (Dudley) George was killed during a confrontation with police at Ipperwash Provincial Park on Sept. 6.” The earlier caption focuses heavily on the construction of “a rebel group of natives” who were obviously shooting at officers as they “returned fire”. This structure is so ambiguous as to open the potentiality for either the police or the Native people to have shot George. The second caption leaves agency out entirely with the use of the passive voice “was killed”; the statement is much abbreviated but much more positive in not labelling the group which was involved in the “confrontation with the police”. The mixed messages come in these cases from the assignment of agency for actions. Where there were first armed rebel natives, they were given agency. When these “rebels” were proven not to have been armed, this construction of agency is superseded by an armed, individual police officer who was criminally negligent. The institutional agent, however, is always given the benefit of the doubt in the first instance.

What we find with the mixed messages, then, is that while the values remain constant, the evaluation of actors may shift, pivoting precisely on those values/domains.

**Constructing the romantic other**

The final positions on the hierarchy, the least valued, are the areas in which coverage will always favour First Nations peoples. When an article involves members of an organized, mainstream religious group (in order of (dis-)preference: Catholic, Anglican, fundamentalist Protestant, mainstream Protestant, and other Eurocentric religious groups), the newspaper will always portray the First Nations people more positively than the
religious group. In fact, the most unambiguously positive constructions of First Nations peoples are typically found in the *Religion* section of the *London Free Press*. Native spirituality (however conceived or portrayed) is, in fact, in the category addressed below, "Invariant positive associations..."

Many of the most positive constructions are found when religious groups are found to be at blame for historical wrongs. The 26 July 1996 *London Free Press* article "Natives see bishop’s conviction as victory in school-abuse saga" and the 20–21 October 1996 exposé by the *Globe and Mail* of mistreatment of children in residential schools by Catholic priests and nuns ("School’s electric chair haunts natives" and "Electric chair scars pupils memories") exemplify this potent combination. Not only were religious groups and/or members of a religious hierarchy at fault in the past — in both cases the events occurred 20 to 30 years earlier — they were contravening basic human rights and criminal law.

The second category, *Temporally removed events*, includes all events which are considered history. The more temporally removed (that is, the more ancient the history) the event addressed, the more the press presents First Nations people and issues positively. Land claims, which might appear to fit squarely within potential impingements on personal property and access to goods by people living on or near the land under contention, have strong positive constructions in part because the blame lies with parties in the remote past. In general, the press is much more sympathetic to First Nations peoples of the past.

**Invariant positive associations of First Nations peoples by the media**

The data set also present an interesting flip side to the construction of potential enemies in the construction of "the romantic other" or "orientalism". In these cases, a positive portrayal is a sympathetic acceptance or construction of the First Nations persons or position in the article. Evidence of positive portrayals come in several forms: first-page coverage (including the first page of a section of the newspaper), interviews with the people involved using their voices in direct quotes, and the use of photographs (with colour photos often indicating the underlying perspective or voice of the article, and black and white photographs more often simply illustrative). Similarly, the preferential position for letters to the
editor, which vary in their content, is in the centre of the page within a black-lined box.

In the following situations, First Nations people are given consistently positive portrayals. In these cases, the First Nations people are presented as being “in role” (Gardner 1984:150) or acting appropriately for their social categorization:

- As a display of multiculturalism or as an object of consumer gaze (“tourist attraction”)
  - In costume
  - In dance
  - In other artistic endeavours
- As victims
  - Of physical or sexual abuse from outsiders
  - Of poverty
- When standing up for the environment against big business

Articles containing colour pictures of First Nations people in costumes, particularly in headdresses, buckskin, and feathers were well represented during the period under examination. Black and white photographs of First Nations peoples included one in the Globe and Mail of two men standing in front of a teepee with the heading “Kenny McCloud, a native Indian from Oregon, and Peter, a make-believe Indian from Berlin, chat at a festival.” An article which tied these appropriate cues together appeared on 24 May 1996. The London Free Press ran a unique photo of two young women from Walpole Island First Nation, dressed in jeans and T-shirts, holding hand-lettered signs under the heading THE ENVIRONMENT, “Walpole natives battle waste plan”.

Contradictions: constructing the dangerous other

Those who fear enemies are likely to impute traits to them that make them dangerous. [Edelman 1988:66]

Two of the pictures which appeared to fit the category of “in role/costume” and thus would appear to be positive portrayals were subverted by their captions. The first, in the Globe and Mail, was a large black and white photograph of two Native women standing “between a sacred fire and a wigwam”. The caption reads “Native councils facing challenges from within” with a subheading “The promise of self-govern-ment on reserves is being accompanied by battles for control”. The second
was a front-page colour photograph in the *London Free Press* (9 July 1996) of Ovide Mercredi adjusting “his headdress during opening ceremonies of the assembly’s annual gathering in Ottawa”. The image of the aboriginal leader in feathered headdress fits the positive construction addressed above. However, in this case the positive photograph is subverted by the bold-face, capitalized caption beneath the picture which reads, “A CALL FOR MILITANCY”. Mercredi in feathers and beaded vest, worn often as an ironic resistance to stereotypes,7 is portrayed as “in role” — but his role, according to the caption, has extended to his being a potential terrorist leader.

The subversion in this case is subtle, as it can be traced back to the final article addressed here which appeared in the *London Free Press* on 15 May 1996 under the heading NATIONAL SECURITY. Entitled “CSIS cites dangers in Quebec debate, land claims,” its subheading, “Canada’s domestic spy agency, in its annual report warns about the activities of political extremists and armed native militants” clearly constructs any Native “militancy” as an issue of national security. This coverage of the annual report of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, which singled out “militant aboriginals”, cited the rationale that “[i]ncidents that have a potential for live-threatening violence include blockades and occupations by armed native activists in support of treaty claims.” This construction has placed virtually all civil disobedience by First Nations peoples into the role of “threats to national security”. In portraying a positive image of Mercredi in costume with a caption which evokes images of militancy, it demonstrates how positive messages are reconstructed by juxtaposing a positive stereotype with a potential threat to the most deeply held value, human life. The construction in the article on CSIS makes Mercredi’s message urging “chiefs to take a new, more militant path in relations between aboriginals and Canadian government” a direct threat to human life and Canadian security.

The construction of enemies makes it psychologically ethically possible to hurt or kill them, but everyday political language typically reverses that causal and time sequence, naming the enemy’s inherent dangerousness as the cause of trouble, while masking displacement of grievances or guilt onto vulnerable targets. Such reversals of cause and consequence are endemic in political discourse when it justifies aggression and enemy construction. Communication about enemies... exemplifies the performa-

7 Thanks to Cory Silverstein for pointing this out to me.
tive nature of language in a striking way; this language is manifestly a form of action, not a tool for describing a situation. [Edelman 1988:88]

CONCLUSION

Edelman’s statement holds true in all sorts of language use but it is particularly powerful in the constructions of print media. By understanding the underlying value system inherent in the local, public news coverage of events involving First Nations people in southwestern Ontario, we uncover some of the tensions found in the constructions of these events. The coverage during the period under study was both positive and negative, creating both friends and foes, but the tensions between deeply held values often resulted in dangerously one-sided evaluations of First Nations peoples, especially when they were not seen as “acting appropriately”.

The ordering of values also offers an insight into the underlying framework upon which social constructions rest. Tolerance is possible when the “real values” are not transgressed either in fact or in potential. But when they are, they become the vessels for the generosity previously espoused, and the defined transgressor becomes an enemy. The threat thus reinforces the system itself. When our values aren’t threatened, we can all feel good about our diversity.

REFERENCES