

The Métis in the 21st Century Conference

June 18-20, 2003

Saskatoon

Day 3 – Tape 4

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Paul Chartrand: I think I mentioned before this conference that one of the things that really impressed me in, in a sort of a negative way was what I discovered in the early 1980s, after having spent quite some time away from Canada, from my home country. I'm from St. Laurent, near the lake area in Manitoba, and I went and I lived in Australia for almost a decade. And there, when you get away from your own people, your own homeland, you get a totally different perspective on, on many, many, many things. And so I came back and I, I worked in, in law but also in policy and history. I was at a Department of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba and, and there, as a result of my work, I inquired into history and legal history and, and so on. And I was really appalled at a, at what I discovered, you know, in reading about my hometown, my people, and finding out what so-called professional people thought about us. And I, I really didn't know how to react to that, because here I saw that in these books people were describing us, us as inferior, sort of sub-humans. And I didn't realize that when I was just a little kid, I was just a snot-nosed little kid like everybody else, and I didn't know we were so bad. I thought we were just folks, you know.

And since then, what I've tried to do whenever I can is to try to organize the professional work that I do in such a way that we can very subtly make the point to Canadians, and to those who might read the literature that is out there that gives you that impression about Métis people, and to try to very subtly change their minds. And the way that I like to change those minds is simply by having Métis, Métis people there. And that was one of the goals that I set for this conference. And that's why you saw an overwhelming number of Métis scholars and artists and so on, participants of this conference. It was done deliberately. I know some people said, "Well,

look, he sort of had a favourable audience, sort of weighted towards this view and that view." Well, you know, that's, that's why, in a way, I wanted to make the point which needs to be made, and I don't need to go into all the recent examples of that. That not only do Métis people have a culture and a history—remember, it's often been said we don't feature much in the history books except as a, as a sub-set of somebody else's history, and the reason, of course, is that history is about people that matter. And I like to say that I wanted to show that we, too, we, too, matter, and we do have a history that, that matters. And I think the best way to do that is simply by having Métis people participate like that. And I wonder if you might agree with me, that the, the exhibition, in a sense, in a good way, of talent of the many Métis scholars, artists, thinkers, politicians, all the people who are participating here in various ways was, was really, really quite, quite impressive. So I, I hope you will think that that is a good thing to do. That was one of the objects of the conference anyway.

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