7th LaFontaine-Baldwin Symposium: George Elliott Clarke

George Elliott Clarke
December 30, 2006

Imagining the City of Justice

Calgary

Thank you to all of you for being here. I don't think it's important that you're here to hear me but that you are here to take the ideas that I'm going to try to help to promote and put them to work in your communities.

I want to thank the Dominion Institute for having invited me; John Ralston Saul for having asked me a year ago to think about helping out with this lecture series, and come up something to discuss and to promote discussion that might result in an improved democracy for us all.

But I also wanted to say it's a very heady position to be in for someone who's merely a poet, but then again, we do live in a democracy and not Plato's Republic, so I guess there is a place for poets after all, in terms of taking part in these discussions.

I'm going to commence with a series of denials. As I say, I'm not an anthropologist or an economist or a political scientist or a sociologist or an urbanologist. I am merely a writer and also as a Professor of English, a student of literature, and I want to confess at once that I have no expertise in critiquing the operation of cities, whether in Canada or elsewhere. However, I cannot escape, and none of us can, our inscription and action and a necessity that we all have to take an active role in thinking about our society and how it may be improved.

The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, says that just thinking about change is itself action. And so, I quote him:

“Thought is no longer theoretical. As soon as it functions, it offends or reconciles. It cannot help but liberate and enslave even before prescribing, suggesting a future, saying what must be done. Even before exerting or merely sounding an alarm, thought at the level of existence in its very dawning, is in itself an action; a perilous act.”

So to follow with his thinking: To just simply consider what might become or what might be described as a city of justice is already to begin moving and acting towards making it come about.

Two, I have to say, in terms of defending my role in promoting these ideas or putting forward some ideas, I live in a city, like most of us. And I’ve lived in cities my entire life: Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Durham, North Carolina, in the United States for a few years, Kingston, Ontario, and now Toronto. And as I writer, I find myself drawn to various cities in order to find inspiration to colour my imagination, and also just to have an excuse to travel.

It’s a nice thing about being a writer, is that at least some of us might decide that we can only write certain books in certain places such as Istanbul or maybe Monte Carlo or maybe Paris or Venice, as well as Vancouver and Calgary and Toronto and Montreal and so on. So it’s really great to have excuses for wanting to go certain places as a writer.

I have to ask you to excuse this rambling preface to the topic but I do want to just simply establish the fact that I approach this discussion as a wanderer, not as a settler, and as a dreamer, not as a planner.

I do feel some joy in having the honour in being asked to publicly think about the functioning of our democracy via the arena of the Lafontaine-Baldwin Lecture Series, and in the context of urban issues.

Certainly, I do not believe that we Canadians can create what Pierre Elliott Trudeau dubbed “the just society” unless we draft it, especially now, with due regard to our urbanity. And what I term “the City of Justice” very simply is one where all citizens bear responsibility for the success or failure of their community,

where resources are shared to assure adequate assistance for the poor and the equitable distribution of the wealth gained at least in part by extraction of the peoples' natural resources, and where initiatives are undertaken to ameliorate past injustices. The City of Justice should be the goal of all so-called urban agendas, for while potholes must be filled as soon as possible, so must minds be expanded and hearts enlarged.

I move into this part of my talk which I title "Entering the city: Routes, (R-O-U-T-E-S) Roots, (R-O-O-T-S) and Roadblocks," which are always there, too, to be overcome. But I face a conundrum immediately. It's hard to focus the attention of Canadians on our cities. We always have to talk about putting forward an urban agenda because it's so hard to get people to actually focus on one. And our national self—and I think the reason why is that our national self-image has been so indelibly constructed by the iconic Group of Seven painters and Emily Carr, not to mention by the designers of our coins, paper money and postage stamps, so we imagine ourselves as a wilderness people.

I could have mentioned some beer commercials too, which are also very important in setting us in the countryside, but we're also a very urbanized people. And I think it's wonderful that there's this incredible immediate satire that the Queen herself is backed up in our society, on our coins, by a maple leaf, a sailing ship and by animals. And the surrealism of removing the Queen from Windsor Castle and plunking her down in the wilderness renders the Royal Canadian Mint a version of the Royal Canadian Air Farce, I like to think.

And this is a great country because it is—we like to do some really unusual things here. And when we fantasize Canada, we conjure up the tourism images, and we've all seen, especially when CBC or one of other television networks, Canadian television networks, goes off the air at night, in the early hours of the next day and so on, we'll have this wonderful montage of scenes of the country. And we all know these scenes. They're iconic scenes. The wheat farms and the mines and the fishers at work and so on. And I agree, these are wonderful, important images of ourselves, and they do speak to certain truths; a major truth of our country, which is a lot of our wealth comes from resource extraction. We should never forget that.

And we also need to be reminded, I suppose, that we in fact do inhabit the world's second largest country and a lot of it is beautiful wilderness so it's nice to

have these images in our minds. At the same time, this nature-censored sensibility sometimes causes us to forget the fact that we live in cities. But it is perhaps charmingly humble that we have this self-concept of ourselves as a wilderness people because it erases us in favour of highlighting a hinterland who's who and reminding us that real honest to goodness Canadians earn their keep by felling trees and mining coal. And there's of course nothing wrong with that. Nevertheless, we must never forget that the vast majority of us live in cities, despite this national self-image.

I think, also, that Canadians meditate on our perceived roots as a rural nation because of a lingering sense, I think, that to belong to a city is to admit residence in Hell with a capital H. We prefer the collective hallucination that we all live amid the wilderness because it's supposedly closer to Eden, while the cities are presumed to be the warrens of Satan, and that might be true of some city councils in some places. But, nevertheless, we like to imagine that every skyscraper is a steel-and-glass Babel and every condo is brick and mortar Gomorrah. Not every condo is, though. Some are …

But in any event, no less an authority than Thomas Jefferson once opined, "When we," of course meaning Americans, "get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, we shall become corrupt, as in Europe, and go to eating one another as they do there." For Jefferson, who preferred the morality of agriculture to that of industry, the city is akin to Mammon and Moloch.

And I'm reminded here, too, of my first visit to Calgary and, for that matter, to the west. I hitchhiked from Toronto to Vancouver in the summer of 1981 and I remember coming into Edmonton. It was a wonderful trip because I was actually riding in the back of a pick-up truck that was being driven by a Saskatchewan farm woman who had to get to Edmonton the next morning because her daughter was getting married. And so, she was breaking all the speed limits and everything in order to rush to get to Edmonton and so on, but she bothered to stop to pick me up on the side of the highway in Saskatchewan and let me jump in the back of the pick-up and away we went. And the first thing I saw when we arrived in her truck, with me in the back, arrived in Edmonton, the very first thing I saw, looking up from the back of that pick-up truck was a big billboard on the outskirts of Edmonton that said, "Repent or burn forever in the lake of fire." And given the location of this sign at the city limits, it seemed to suggest that all

travelers who did not heed its advice would soon find themselves blazing in the hellfire of flesh-pots in taverns of Edmonton, and so forth.

But I think implicit in this view, in the sense that the sheer plenitude of human beings in cities gather in one place creates moral degradation and social disintegration, is behind what I think of as being pseudo-religious attacks on cities. For one thing, cities are places that have to invite people from all over, attract people from all over, and so from a real and fundamentalist perspective perhaps, every city replays Babylon and Rome. They are sites, not only of strangers but also of strange people with strange beliefs, strange customs and strange accents, and there are too many of them for public safety and the public good.

And so we read about tensions between various elements of a society or elements of a city and from there, from this precept, from this perception, it's a very short step to begin to attack immigration and multiculturalism, for these policies seem to transform the city into a bazaar of the bizarre.

And I find it really interesting. It's intriguing that while cities are often accused of being overcrowded, developing nations, especially those that are not—that consist mainly of non-white populations are also often accused of being overpopulated. And I think these critiques are based on the same phobia, namely, xenophobia, fear of "the other," fear of "foreigners," in quotation marks.

From this vantage point, again, the city seems to be a kind of cosmopolitan monster, with a heart from Pakistan, a brain from Somalia, a lung from America, another one from France, a right hand from England, a left one from Cuba, and so on and so forth. So instead of becoming, instead of being seen as a centre of riches, the city is depicted as a sty of disreputable traffic, for instance, as in drugs, or heavy traffic as in automobiles, and rough trade, of shady deals and dark conspiracies.

However, if we embrace the multicultural, immigration-defined city, we embrace a reflection, of course, of the world. A city's heterogeneous population allows its shimmering layers of different cultures. Each citizen contributes an atom of his or her heritage civilization to the complexity of the urban mass.

And I wanted to think about Calgary here in this instance and I think it provides a special irony when we consider immigration here. For as Mike Robinson of the Glenbow Museum told me in January, and he was citing Tom Hiller, “Calgary is an arriviste city, most of whose immigrants are really migrants from other parts of Canada. So, Calgary’s chosen as a new place to start over by Canadians internally,” Mike Robinson says, “because of its open spirit, inclusivity and lack of class distinction.” So, to be anti-immigrant in Calgary is to be absurdly anti-Canadian.

And Reflections of a Siamese Twin: Canada at the End of the 20th century, from 1997, John Ralston Saul states that “The central characteristic of the Canadian state is its complexity and I think this is a fact that has much to do with its origins in domesticated imperial conflicts and its evolution into a network of diversely populated cities.” Saul points out that “Canada’s complexity has been constructed upon three deeply-rooted pillars, three experiences: the Aboriginal, the Francophone and the Anglophone. And this fact underlines my own view that Canada has always been multicultural, providing state recognition in the British North America Act itself of two linguistic communities, two religious communities, and two or three ‘racial’ communities”—I always put that word in quotation marks—“all called upon to live in more or less official harmony.”

And Saul goes on to speculate in his book: “Within the complex arrangements of the original groups, there were the elements of a social vision or what I would call a sensibility, and I think we might also call it a social contract. This original experience in multiculturalism became the model for our current reality of plurality.” And Saul remarks as well, “Since the 18th century, Canada has functioned as a confusion of minorities, major and minor. More vital still is the truth that multiculturalism, far from being divisive in the manner always supposed by ethnic purists and demographic dead-enders, furthers social cohesion by instructing individuals that their private cultural affiliations are as legitimate as their public adherence to the creeds of the crown.”

According to the urbanologist Richard Basham, “Generally the problem is to channel people away from ethnic alignments to those formed around personal achievements and common citizenship.” And I think this point recalls the Trudovian project of inculcating pan-Canadian patriotism through measures such as repatriation of the Constitution. And I wager that the feeling of belonging

might be intensified, however, if one is allowed to feel more, say, for example, Iraqi, but specifically Iraqi-Canadian, and specifically in connection with, say, Calgary, its typical modes of being.

In Toronto, in Montreal, in Vancouver and in Calgary, too, the fear is raised that culturally cohesive communities or ethnic enclaves deny the possibility of assimilation and this worry is used to buttress assaults on multiculturalism but what these naysayers are really saying, I think, is that heterogeneity of population breeds social disorder. Yet, I've got to say it, to use a dicey expressionist idea of ethnic enclaves, which is very problematic given its origins in the Bosnian conflict, but if we want to use that phraseology, I have to say that historically in looking at Canada, it has consisted of many ethnic enclaves in many different parts of it and one might even want to argue that Francophone Quebec provided the first model, the first major model, for other ethnicities in wanting to group themselves together and defend a common heritage and so forth.

Some people become very upset about the idea of Little Italys and Little Indias and Chinatowns and so forth. But I think we have to remember that these are efforts to maintain fellow feeling, affiliation and aspects of distinctive culture, such as language and sometimes, too, religion. And I think that's absolutely healthy because I think if people feel that they have the right and the possibility living out their cultural heritage as far as it's possible in a new land at a different place and so on, then they more they're going to feel at home, I think, perhaps ironically.

Culturally distinctive communities only become ghettoes when they are forced into existence because of the prejudices of a majority ethnicity. They only become perverse when they refuse permission to others to join or when they expel their loyal dissidents.

One social scientist reminds us the crucial factors in determining kinship are the cultural values of the society, not its degree of urbanization.

Another way to put this is society is threatened not when citified Hispanics say they want to speak Spanish, but when we tell Hispanics they must speak English or French to be considered Canadian, and I use that as an example.

Likewise, the beautiful reality of Little India does not endanger Toronto's social cohesion, nor does Caribana. Rather, it is the absence of adequate opportunity for visible minorities and youth that endangers that city's, my city's, tranquility.

Verily, the purist type of Canadian must be a Métis, combining language, religion, race and culture in a fascinating mix, and I think that the youth of our society know this. I think they already know this and are already living out this truth. And just for fun, I want to suggest that the archetypical Canadian is a Vancouver-born, part-Sikh, part-Irish, who loves Sushi and Québecois literature and who votes maybe for the Green Party.

In any event, in any event, such examples of Métissage are easier to realize in cities than elsewhere, and let us note that the Canadian Constitution itself is practically unique in its endorsement of mixed-race people, but specifically those of partial Aboriginal heritage; a legal fact which I think may stimulate the further mingling of peoples and cultures in our major cities.

Although the Canadian countryside, especially the Prairies, are multicultural and have always been so, the reality of multiculturalism is, of course, far more present and far more obvious in the cities.

For those who deem cities domains of degeneracy, any distinctive group is more threatening there than they would be in the countryside, whose relative vastness allows them isolation.

Ironically, however, no one is truly an outsider in the city for its streets are always an unofficial parade, an accidental Mardi Gras progression of nonconformists, eccentrics, outlandish and outré and outlaw types, actual runaways from home and dissidents of all sorts. Think of 8th Avenue here or Rue St Catherine in Montreal or Spring Garden Road in Halifax.

Add to these galleries of the unusual, the extra distinctions of minority cultural status, racial, ethnic, linguistic, sexual or religious, and the city street becomes even more a phantasmagoric congress of types.

What is a city if not a theatre, where one may act new roles with confidence, even roles that may involve changing one's name and becoming a true actor, a player in more than one sense of the word? For those unable to assimilate to the

city and its generous allowance of difference, its democratically motley assembly of citizens may seem again dangerous and destructive.

In reality, however, its surreal mishmash of types is alluring and seductive. One falls in love with the city because of its incongruities; its gargantuan glittering buildings and its rivers; its Scottish bagpipes on one corner and its African drums on the other; its Jewish deli down one street and its Italian dress shop up another. The city is always a conglomeration of the domestic and the different. The factory of steel, brick and glass manufactures dreams of prosperity, liberty and equality.

The city of course is the essence of civilization, a word itself. It is the citadel of urbanity, of civilized exchange, of culture. In the eyes of the city dweller, the villain is well-named(?). He or she originating in a village is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, a rustic boor and one may say an uncouth person, a bumpkin who requires re-education and uplift. I know this may sound extremely harsh but nevertheless, it's interesting that that's what the word suggests.

The city of comprised of civilizing elements, namely education, literacy, various skills, trades and arts as well as bureaucracy. And of course, cities are also great in terms of them being places where universities tend to be centred. I consider Halifax with its six universities as well as, of course, endless, endless, endless, never-closing bars. And such positioning makes sense, for the local labour skills and money markets may benefit immediately from the proximity of a generator of new ideas, new workers and new managers.

And to quote Richard Basham again, "Many of the major cities of Europe, among them London, Vienna, Belgrade and Paris, began as forts and regional administrative centres of the Roman Empire." And I find that comment interesting. So we think about Canadian cities, too: they evolved classically, as local bastions of British and French, imperial administration.

In downtown Toronto recently, while stopped at a red light, I happened to glance at a building that still bore the historical inscription from a century ago: "British Colonial Office". And I was reminded—this is I think around King Street and Yonge—and I was reminded thus of our national origins and the machinations of one of the world's great, if relatively short-lived empires. Even Toronto, still the financial capital of Canada, began as Fort York, just one more outpost of British

military and mercantile imperialism. And later these various fortresses, naval stations and military bases, not to mention the Hudson Bay Company's network of trading posts, coalesced into our major cities, all of them in turn spawning their own often city-named universities, including the University of Calgary, the best university in Alberta! Okay, let's say the West too. Let's say the West.

I know John Ralston Saul's persuasive thesis that Canada is profoundly un-European. Its attitudes and policies are largely a product(?) of local circumstances in part because we have constructed a country on the margins of Western civilization. And I appreciate this insight but being on the margins does mean Canada is immune to European and European-American ideals. The Queen of Canada is also the Queen of England, a truth which could mean, if you turn it around, that England is our vassal state. That might be interesting to try that out sometime.

In fact, I'm sorry, I'm going to share this anecdote with you. I went to England a couple times last year and it was really funny going through the immigration and so forth. I had my passport checked and so on. Now what I found really ironic about is that if you look on the inside of the Canadian passport it says that, somewhere in the opening paragraphs or preamble that you find on the inside page of the passport, it says that Her Majesty The Queen asks whatever authority, whatever country you're visiting, to allow you to enter the country. And I just thought it was really ironic that Her Majesty The Queen was asking Her Majesty The Queen if I could enter the country.

But anyway, all that to one side. I really think, though, that the key difference is that Canada is gothic, Nordic and classical Mediterranean Europe, both plunked down and mixed together in a half-blizzard, half-mosquito wilderness monarchy where the subjects are allowed to vote about everything except the exalt hereditary monarch whose paper rule exists only on currency stamps and official documents.

Importantly, too, the evolution of Canada may be described as a distillation of the nation into a conglomeration of city states. Venetian Halifax. I like saying that, Venetian Halifax. Why not? Parisian Montreal. Amsterdam-like Ottawa. London-like Toronto. Dallas-esque Calgary. Skyscrapers … Skyscrapers; I'm really thinking about the soap opera here, of course. No.

Skyscrapers erupting from plains and Hong Kong-like Vancouver with its seascape of skyscrapers, mountains and water.

And this distillation was inevitable in an under-populated demi-continent, tasked by its one-time dominant parent, the British Empire, to be its rump empire of the northwest, so as to contain American expansionism and keep both the West Indies and the true north British.

John Ralston Saul notes that John A. MacDonald imagined the Dominion of Canada as "an independent parallel kingdom to that of Great Britain." And no wonder then, our architecture is a miscellany of borrowed imperial styles. Note the classical Hindu temple fashion of Queen's Park in Toronto, the Empress Hotel in Victoria. I'm serious. And the British Columbia legislature, all are, I think, memorials to the British Raj, loyally maintained in Canada.

Consider also the gothic inclinations of the cliff-situated Parliament buildings in Ottawa. Of course, being on a cliff is also useful(?) and interesting. Plus the French revolutionary traditions gestured to by the figure of the Golden Boy atop the Manitoba legislature, which in fact was designed by the same sculptor who designed the Golden Boy which sits atop or stands atop, rather, the column at the Place de la Bastille in Paris. Plus the Greek revival inclinations of all three Prairie legislatures. Canadian urban architecture is itself a gallery of imperial influences, and this fact alone should propel mighty conservationists' efforts. When we gut our cities of their architectural heritage, we deny our lived past.

Although the fact remains unrecognized in our constitution and resisted by our legislatures we are, in sum, a Canada of cities.

According to Richard Basham, there are several types of cities: the administrative cultural city of the literati and indigenous bureaucracy, and I think of Quebec City and Vancouver as models of that type of city. He also talks about the city of native commerce and I think that that kind of city is represented by Halifax and by Calgary as an oil financial centre. Basham also talks about the city of the global managerial and cultural class, and I think that that kind of city is represented in this country by Montreal and Toronto. And there's also the city of modern administration, which, for Canada, is probably, most clearly, Ottawa. But a fifth brand of city might be in Canada what I will term "the frontier city" and

examples for me would Windsor, Ontario, Winnipeg and Whitehorse. The variety of cities that constitutes Canada represents its distinctiveness as an east-west-north Anglo-Franco multicultural and pseudo-imperial alliance of urban states.

None of the above erases the long-lived anti-urban attitudes that rule our national imaginary, and I've already discussed this and won't go into again with a whole lot of detail except to say that we tend to be distrustful of cities and people who live in cities and I think it's really, really unfortunate and unfair and something we have to change. We like to think of cities not as being communities but as clutches of multitudinous solitudes, prey to either suicidal or homicidal impulses. And that idea still resounds today in terms of our discussion of youth gangs, ethnic enclaves, gun violence, ghettoes, and social alienation.

We should be aware though that this kind of critique is very unprogressive, and distinctly unprogressive and conservative. Really, it is a yearning for the supposedly more pacifist, corporatist society of medieval times, when everybody supposedly got along together, you knew your neighbours, you didn't have to lock your doors and so on. And that idea is a really romantic idea of what a community should be like, and we often forget that if we actually followed that medieval ideal, you wouldn't have to lock your doors because if anybody ever broke into your house, they'd get hanged anyway, and of course—and these tended to be societies ruled by a whole lot of superstition and so forth, and tended not to be bastions of human rights and so on. So people really got along together because of great fear for each other and so on.

And I have to think that we have to be suspicious of this feudal model of how cities should be constructed because, again, feudal villages are hardly bastions of human rights, being governed as they were by the illiterate and the superstitious, and there might even be a hint of a very strong word and I'm going to say it: fascism, too, in this denunciation of the city as a haven of rootless cosmopolitans united by nothing but commerce or mutual exploitation.

Yet, far from waxing nostalgic for the chimerical joys of Sherwood Forest and Walden Pond and Little House on the Prairie, we might want to accept the cautionary note, at least from Hollywood, and especially those horror splatter movies such as Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Night of the Living Dead and even David Cronenberg's A History of Violence, we must remember that these movies sound a cautionary note regarding the potential for real, serious,

immedicable(?) violence in towns, villages and the countryside. Better the jigsaw puzzle interlocking solitudes of the city than the enforced unity of the countryside, at least at times.

Analyzing the plague of handgun shootings and murders that Toronto, in particular, has lived through last year, and noting that many of the perpetrators and victims were of the same demographic, namely, young black men, one might want to agree with the sociologist Émile Durkheim, and this is an example of what he describes as anomic suicide. What he's trying to suggest here and what I'm trying to get at here is the sense that these murders, these shootings, might constitute a kind of mutual-assured destruction, exercised by vendetta slayings which almost guarantees for the murderer his homicide later at an avenger's hands. Assuredly, the youths who grab guns and kill each other over turf wars or a misplaced chivalric response to ridiculously minor affronts and grievances seem to be acting suicidally, seem to be expressing anomie and alienation. Yet, I doubt it is because of the fact that they do not have good influences and so on. Instead, I propose it's because they are too close to certain influences, especially to those that advertise self-worth as a function of material acquisition and to those that devalue, in this case specifically, blackness, in particular as a legitimate cultural attribute.

In Toronto, in recent years, there has been a discussion of whether Ontario should fund black-focused schools as an appropriate social intervention to rescue and salvage black youths from the self-destructive and communally-destructive crime of our mean streets.

Predictably, this plea was silenced by the summer sounds of gunshots and the resultant cry of reactionaries for black-focused jails. Sadly, while African and Aboriginal peoples face rejection and trials in our workplaces and schools, they are welcome, overly welcome, in our penitentiaries and cemeteries.

Ironically, the descendants of former slaves or human capital are now expendable human capital.

South of us the word "urban" is a synonym for "black," yet a similar usage has spread to Canada, at least in the context of music videos and pop music awards where urban music means hip-hop and rap. Thus, we Canadians must ask ourselves, "Is there anything about how we have ordered our cities that relegates

certain communities, mainly Aboriginal and African, to the margins of social economic life?" And this complex question demands a far more complex answer than I am capable of giving but I will assert that many of our cities have been structured on class lines that reinforce the visions of religion, race and ethnicity.

The classic example for me is Halifax, the city I know best. There, the principal split is between the rose garden bourgeois south end and the combat zone, lumpenproletarian north end, and this cleavage was ordained by the primary urban planners of many a North American city, namely the British Navy. Hardly a democratic entity.

With Halifax's class divisions clearly drawn as early as 1749 when the city was founded, it was viciously simple in 1783 to relegate incoming black loyalists to the poor and working class district of the nascent city and there they remained with a fragment developing in the next century into Africville, a harbourside enclave of poor blacks, working class blacks, with a smattering of middle class blacks. This community was officially part of the city of Halifax and its residents paid property taxes but received no municipal water and sewage services. By the early 1960s, Africville was branded a slum, its 400 residents removed in the City of Halifax garbage trucks and relocated to downtown slums and to new-built public housing that was more asphalt than grass.

Though the city-built housing for ex-Africville residents may have been of better quality than the homes they had been forced to vacate, their experience of the concrete environment of the inner city was one of alienation. Indeed, they had fallen from being homeowners, no matter how modest their properties, to being renters of housing they could never own and had little incentive to upgrade or maintain. Over time, not only did the public housing projects of Mulgrave Park and Uniacke Square, the principal recipients of Africville residents, deteriorate but social dysfunctions increased for the next, now-dispossessed, generation.

When I consider the sad fate of the exiled people of Africville, then ponder the unacceptably high incidence of young black men who, in essence, assassinate each other for paltry cause, I can't help but consider what these two situations have in common: in my view, a loss of ownership and thus, for those so affected, a decline in a sense of personal and familial responsibility.

I, again, am no expert in sociology but I have to wonder, perhaps naively, if the answer to anomie, disaffection, dysfunction, might in fact be home ownership and responsibility for one's own property.

I recognize the attractiveness of gangs mainly organized around ethnic lines for many youths. Indeed, they have always been a feature of urban life, though they tend to recede into the frameworks of legitimate businesses once the ethnic group that constitutes the gang has achieved economic takeoff.

Arguably, what we call a "gang" is merely a grass-roots economic association willing to use violence and to commit crime to create an economic base for its members. I do not justify such behavior but I understand it as a willed response to poverty constructed along ethnic lines. Given the ethnic separatist composition of many gangs, one means of dissolving their appeal is to inculcate a vigorous affirmative action program of employment equity, one with a legislative mandate and vivid penalties for non-compliance. The provision of well-funded and professionally-staffed community centres, schools and libraries is also essential to neutralize the call of the wild. The presence of well-endowed institutions of this sort along with committed clergy of any faith or every faith will serve to breed, I think, the real builders of democracy: dissenters and dreamers.

I think what black immigrants of urban Canada have in common with urban-placed Aboriginal peoples is, again, the experience of dispossession. So, a renewed sense of ownership of real estate might be one answer to these respective experiences of cultural segregation.

Two weeks ago, I read in the New York Times of Thursday, February 23rd a germane article, "Bronx complexes going co-op and the tenants are behind it." And the reporter pointed that basically the tenants of these two large working-class apartment complexes in the Bronx have agreed to accept turning these units into co-ops and buying them at current prices that they can afford, and in this way, some, almost 2,000 apartments become moderately priced co-ops offered for sale to the tenants at a discount. And this complex is expected to remain affordable to moderate income tenants for at least 25 years. And I think if these opportunities for ownership can be available in the most advanced city of the most advanced nation in the world, should we not aspire to replicate this model in our own social housing units in Canada?

Something must be done. The construction of the city with regard only for needs of business and the wealthy must generate collateral damage, namely the eviction of the poor. So, something has to be done in terms of providing a greater sense of ownership.

The city as utopia is possible but only if its perfections(?) are fashioned according to the dictates of experience. Likewise, the blueprints for the City of Justice must emerge from practical forerunners. This city must be like all cities: a pastiche of possible cities as they once existed in dream. Without such a visionary nostalgia, its urban planning will be violent because it is ahistorical.

As I move towards the conclusion of this paper, I'm going to talk about Calgary, and this is the second and last part of my speech, "Concluding with Calgary."

I return to John Ralston Saul who comments in Reflections of a Siamese Twin. "The romantic approach to politics is invariably built on a belief in some sort of end of history and the arrival of a hope for utopia."

What I am suggesting is the exact opposite: The continuation of both history and complexity. From a geopolitical perspective, Saul's advice is wise for Calgary and its position as a prospective city of justice must be viewed as realpolitik. Certainly, it is instructive to us to remember that during the fiasco of the initial governmental American response to hurricane Katrina, the Vice President of the United States, Mr. Richard Cheney, Dick Cheney, was helicoptering above the Alberta tar sands as opposed to hovering benignly over flood rescue operations in New Orleans and on the Gulf Coast.

These peculiar optics may not be well known but they are meaningful, especially if we observe that, as Saul puts it, "Canada has the disadvantage of sitting on the northern margins of the west in an overly-exposed position beside the United States." And I am tempted to add, "Beside the energy-starved United States," a description of some consequence for Canada and Calgary.

Assuredly, the northwest location of Calgary relative to Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto, but also Dallas, Washington and New York, makes it an anchor of territorial Canadian sovereignty on these prairies opposite the American Great Plains. Recall here that Alberta and Saskatchewan were established first as colonies of Ottawa, the sub-imperial capital that retains in our nation the sole

power to unilaterally create provinces. These two western provinces comprised the Northwest that the Mounted Police was organized to administer, and that Royal Military College graduates were dispatched to garrison and to survey, and that central Canadian capital was to dominate under the terms of MacDonald's National Policy.

In fact, I think the roots of western separatism and alienation lay in the simple truth that the west, in this case, really, Alberta and Saskatchewan, were, in truth, until 1905, subjects directly of Ottawa and by extension, of eastern elites.

After the major discovery of oil at Leduc in the late 1940s and the modernization of the Alberta government by Peter Lougheed's progressive conservatives in the 1970s and 1980s, Calgary has emerged as an international energy capital, forward-looking, dynamic, and of course, the fourth largest city in Canada.

However, that growth is based on contradictions, beginning with the major and obvious one: that the city's futuristic skyline and avant-garde sculptures, all nicely humbled by the mountain backdrop, is set in a region of dinosaur extinction and based on million-year-old fossil fuel extraction. Talk about burning your library to heat your house.

This space age city lives off of stone-age-created wealth. Its hinterland is just a provider of resources that get priced elsewhere and transported elsewhere. This economic model is not unfamiliar in the Third World and one may doubt its long-term feasibility. So Calgary is, perhaps more than most, as a post-colonial city, a gorgeous phantasm whose economic power derives from its proximity to an intense trade with oil-thirsty America, while it also continues to dream of its classical relationship to Britain, now tenuous and nostalgic, and to celebrate—but only fitfully—its First Nations citizens and culture who are otherwise too often positioned as "Indians versus white cowboys who sometimes dress up in police uniforms." But it is also a post-post-modern city according to Mike Robinson, one requiring a workforce with flexible skills.

These basic realities of Calgary, its frontier position, its tussle with a colonial past, its foreclosed future as a pasture of oil donkeys and its heady economic expansion and mounting diversified population must influence its cultural expression.

In my recent conversation with the Calgary poet, Ian Samuels, he mentioned that the city wishes to be competitive economically and creative culturally, that one million Calgarians require an arts-friendly city. And I just wanted to pause here to say that I really like that image of one million Calgarians saying, "We want a culture-centred city. We want an arts-friendly city." That's a great image.

Surely as the city sprawls outward, it also needs to develop inwards. However, Calgary is, relatively speaking, cash-strapped, especially when it comes to support for the arts. And support for the arts depends on executive noblesse oblige and private public partnerships as opposed to the healthy largesse represented by the Alberta advantage.

Noting the resilience and versatility of Calgary's creative class, Ian Samuels said, "The Calgary artist is an urban animal." I like this insight because it unites the city and the wilderness and it suggests that the job of artists is to bridge these two archetypal and essential settings.

In Calgary, dance studios brush up against kung fu schools. Not to mention the kinetic clowning and athleticism of the Stampede and its rodeos. In a city where can-do becomes must-do regularly, it is important to note that the artist is just as entrepreneurial as the business person and is just as hard working, 24/7, if not more so. This city boasts 26 cultural arts companies, even though the provincial government undervalues the arts and niche funding is dependent upon the generosity of the old ranching families. It is also the city of excellent writers like Ian Samuels, Aritha van Herk, Christian Book, Clare Harris, Suzette Mayer and the inimitable, Sheri D. Wilson, the founder and director of the successful international Spoken Word Festival.

The Calgary artist or writer is necessarily someone who must bring his aesthetics or her aesthetics the force and dynamism of a Kung Fu expert. But the trained eye of a martial arts master is also necessary to spy the accidental art that is everywhere in Calgary, those giant steel feet set in the midst of the sidewalk grills. And I know that they are functional, I know that they are important but the first thing I noticed about Calgary was those feet, those giant feet in the grills, and I just think "It's accident art. They're wonderful."

Before art, of course, there is study, and before one is an artist, one is a student. To ensure that Calgary may flower as a creative centre—and let us

remember that renaissances are always based in cities—university and college students must be encouraged to apply their intelligence, leisure, energy and idealism to the revolutionary transformation of the city's look, feel, socioeconomic relations, and political structures. Their youth and their dreams are the greatest resource available to all the communities of Calgary, for youth, who will apply the best ideas with the greatest passion, usher Calgary closer to fulfilling the promising of social justice. Such a vision requires however that student debt loads be dramatically decreased, thereby freeing students to continue to play en masse the crucial task of imaginative agitation for social change. That is to say, to quote Mike Robinson again, "A speaking truth to policy."

Increased funding for student is one means of generating a superb urban experience and perhaps suppressing what Robinson again dubs, "the horrible sprawl of bad design," and what Aritha van Herk calls, "breakneck chameleonic change."

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away" must be a well-known gospel in Calgary given the boom-and-bust cycles that often afflict its commodity-based economy. No wonder then that the buildings and sculptures, like provincial electoral majorities, tend to be biblically oversized, supersized, as if largeness could suppress risk or manifest unity. Goliath is not a bad name here and the behemoth and the leviathan are idolized much like the spirit of Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Spy the soaring Husky Oil Tower and the sculptures along or near 8th Avenue, including the great sculpture of a metal horse that resembles a fossilized dinosaur. These erections project confidence but are they truly grounded, truly rooted, or are they as transient as prophets? Assuredly, their constituents are not always committed to Calgary. Business attracts executives but will they grow families or retire here? Calgary is led by itinerant CEOs, managerial drifters who may run away as soon as the oil runs out or the economy tanks.

Given the innate uncertainty of this city's resource enterprise, faith in progress tends to be literalized via the practice of fundamentalist biblical Christian evangelism. According to Robinson, "Economics and finances are the key imperatives of the city but they also offer moral difficulties." I suspect that one popular solution to these moral challenges is to seek solace in a pioneer religion, one where an essential player is Jobe, a good and prosperous family man who

nevertheless sees all his fortunes go bust. And I cannot be the only one to read or say “Calgary” and think “Calvary”.

Robinson told me that a gene structure for risk is what people have in common here, but I think that the psychological need to manage risk also compels faith in messianic and apocalyptic beliefs, and so the ex-Calgary mayor, Ralph Klein, is King Ralph to some, a pancake-flipping distributor of booty to others. That is kind of funny.

[Applause]

Holy smokes! And to others he is a scourge: he calls metaphorical hellfire down upon homeless shelters. Robinson also pointed out that Alberta politicians are really proselytizers; they’re almost always economic evangelists but with a puritanical social gospel.

But there is an upside to the subtle religiosity of Calgarian and Albertan life and it is the rancher tradition of cooperation. Contrary to the cash-cow emphasis of the oil patch, the perils and vagaries of ranching help produce a culture of cooperative behaviour while Blackfoot traditions have emphasized the need for environmental sustainability.

And so Calgary is the site of the largest co-op in North America while the Glenbow Museum is the largest cultural facility of its type in the Canadian west.

Oil wealth generates great opportunity, as Mike Robinson has explained to me, but it also tends to limit ideological choices. But must a monopolistic resource-based economy restrict a culture of dialogue? It appears the answer is yes, for even though Calgary is richly diverse, Diversity Calgary has disappeared due to lack of funds. Moreover, youth and cultural alienation in the suburbs combined with the lack of sufficient infrastructure, parking lots, street widening, snowplowing and street cleaning may endanger Calgary’s status as a reasonably peaceful city.

I do not prophesize roving bands of ethnically marginalized youth setting SUVs alight and ransacking shops as occurred in Paris last fall. However, legislators who truly seek to deliver peace, order, and good government must fund infrastructure, public transit and social programs, and this point holds true for

Toronto as much as it does for Calgary. Cities must no longer be punished by provincial legislatures where gerrymandered rural majorities are used to enact rhetorical jihads and crusades against supposedly corrupt and wasteful cities.

Calgary is a beautiful city set amid alpine and plain and river. Now it must become more just and there are inklings of this progress. Nevertheless, to uplift the most severely disadvantaged persons in the city, especially those of First Nations heritage, I think 1% of all property taxes should be dedicated to their health and welfare, in perpetuity, and in gratitude to them for allowing trespassers and interlopers to settle upon their land and exploit their resources.

In addition …

[Applause]

Thank you.

In addition, given that Calgary is a city of migration and immigration, settlement programs generously funded by provincial and federal sources must be implemented for newcomers, whether from Newfoundland, New Delhi or New Zealand. We must fine-tune the fiction that says that when immigrants arrive in Canada they become first and foremost Canadians. No, I think their first orientation is toward the city where they choose to settle, whether it's Quebec City or Calgary. Identification with Canada must follow later. Urban Canada has proven its ability to integrate newcomers socially with relative peacefulness but we are failing to promote integration where it counts, in employment, in business, in the professions, and in politics.

Sixteen percent of our citizens consist of visible minorities. To correct this situation we need to apply the same vigorous will to achieve equitable racial representation in the workforce that we have applied to improving the representation of women and Francophones.

Our political parties might begin by reserving a percentage of their ridings for contestation by women and Aboriginal and visible minority candidates. We also need to begin recognizing the credentials of foreign-trained professionals so we stop asking successful doctors and engineers, well established in their

professions, to start all over again just because they have decided to employ their training and talents in Canada.

Similarly, we need to outlaw the demand for a Canadian experience often hurled at prospective hires. It is just polite racism. In her op ed piece, “Qualified immigrants shut out,” in the Toronto Star recently, March 1st, Carol Goar reports that a new Canadian Labour Congress study shows that “Workers of colour, whether born in Canada or overseas, don’t get hired as often, promoted as quickly, or paid as much as their Caucasian counterparts. They earn $20,000 a year less than the Canadian average. Yet, a more diverse workforce pays dividends. According to Tim Penner, the president of Procter & Gamble, ‘We believe that a diverse organization will outperform a homogeneous one every time.’”

That is precisely the strength of cities and a chief virtue of the City of Justice: To actualize peace and prosperity for a many-hued, multifarious, multicultural multitude. To reverse a famous slogan of the once-upon-a-time Reform Party, “Cities and their various beautiful minorities want in.”

Thank you.