

# **Segregated Spaces: Aboriginal Response to Cultural Regulation**

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Space, like sport, is socially constructed, and thus (re)produces the social relations which undergird society. “Racialized spaces” are social spaces defined in terms of Aboriginal access or non-access. Aboriginal boundaries have been dictated largely by Euroamericans in keeping with the unequal race relations which exist in Canadian society. Aboriginal responses have varied. One response to the exclusion from certain spaces has been the creation of segregated “aboriginal spaces” which lay under aboriginal control. These segregated spaces have been largely ignored by sport historians, due to their marginality in dominant Euroamerican cultural practices. Yet it is here that we begin to glimpse agency as it is expressed by aboriginal peoples.

This paper examines agency within selected segregated spaces. These cultural spaces have been used by Aboriginal groups to dance, to play traditional games or to participate in all-Aboriginal sport in a self-defining context. For example, despite the structural removal of Indian athletes from amateur lacrosse in the 1880s Aboriginal athletes continued to participate both in segregated

competitions, and in a covert fashion in the mainstream championships. Traditional dance rituals provide another example of the use of segregated spaces to resist Western control over aboriginal cultural practices. These ceremonials, which continue today, promote spiritual and emotional well-being, responsibility and self-esteem, feelings which may be difficult to achieve in North American society. More recently, all-Indian sports competitions, traditional games festivals, and pow wows have experienced a resurgence. These events, initiated and defined largely by Aboriginal organizers, provide meaning for Aboriginal participants, and cultural education for those interested Euroamericans who attend. While such actions have not fundamentally altered the power relations undergirding Euroamerican domination, they do provide a space for Aboriginal self-definition and the celebration of their chosen social reality.

This paper offers some tentative thoughts concerning the relationship between aboriginal agency, cultural regulation and power relations, using the concept of “racialized spaces” for this analysis. We need to focus for a while on the resilience of social life, and specifically on conscious actions taken by the oppressed to find meaning in life, and to alter the repressive conditions within which they have been placed. The examination of aboriginal agency within segregated, “racialized” spaces is a useful place to begin such an analysis.



**Chief Arcand (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations),  
President Joan Paul, and Host John Dewar**