



History Program
University of Northern British Columbia



History Master's Theses completed at UNBC



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**"Building Dams, Constructing Stories:
The Press, The Sekani And The Peace River Dam, 1957-1969"**

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ABSTRACT

Between 1957 and 1969, the print media overwhelmingly portrayed the construction of a large dam on the Peace River in northern British Columbia as necessary for economic development in the region, while failing to discuss the repercussions of the project for the Sekani who lived in the valley that would be flooded. This study explains how and why that happened. Media coverage, analyzed in the context of communications theories, reveals that although the local and regional mainstream press showed interest in aboriginal issues, it ignored the potential consequences of the dam for the Sekani despite concerns raised at the time, particularly by an aboriginal press seeking to politicize the general public. Because of the significant role of mainstream press structures and journalistic practice, stories conveyed notions that development had no negative consequences, and that marginalization of "Indians" was caused by factors unrelated to industrial resource exploitation. This study contributes to our understanding of aboriginal history, the history of hydroelectric development, and the history of the media by exploring press coverage of the W.A.C. Bennett dam and the Sekani during a period marked by significant changes in the structure of the Canadian media and the practice of journalism in Canada.