

## The Interests of Province, Not Party

*The scene in the last act of Brandon's tragedy was indescribably sad. It was one of the most dreaded enactments humanity is compelled to resort to for self-protection.*

—*Winnipeg Daily Tribune*, 27 December 1899

During the late nineteenth century the press figured centrally in state executions, and so, before we approach Blake's final hours, we turn first to the press's response after the execution. The day after Hilda Blake was executed, the *Montreal Gazette* summed up the record of state killings in Canada for the last year of the nineteenth century: Blake became the second woman and the fourteenth person hanged in 1899. From the perspective of the *Gazette's* editors, these were remarkable numbers, especially so for a country with a small population of generally law-abiding citizens. If there was any consolation for readers amid such carnage, it was that 'four of the law's victims were Indians and two Galicians newly arrived in the country.'<sup>1</sup> In the *Gazette's* Malthusian-like assessment, 'Indians' and 'Galicians' were expendable: they stood beyond the 'deep, horizontal comradeship' of bona fide Canadians.<sup>2</sup>

The *Gazette's* mordant intervention on the question of capital punishment could be read as a kind of public meditation on the state of the nation. For Canada's daily press, ruminations about state executions (particularly those fresh in the public imagination) provided opportunities to clarify and reaffirm the bonds of society while evoking in the minds of respectable readers of all classes 'the image of