Aboriginal Peoples and Racism - Critical Readings


Cultural racism, was and still is a more sophisticated and insidious form of eurocentrism. It is the degradation of and prejudice against Aboriginal life styles, including language, dress, food, and traditional social mores. Unlike the more obvious biases and gross errors that typify vulgar racism, cultural racism is more vague and flexible to suit new generations and is, therefore, harder to dispel from the mainstream's consciousness." (p. 29).

This book provides a history of Canadian colonialism and the role the government has played in its maintenance and character transformation. An analysis is provided concerning the relationship between Canadian colonialism, Aboriginal consciousness and Aboriginal political culture over time. In an effort to explain the roots of the Aboriginal struggle for self-determination, including recent militant resistance to state-policies, the author examines Canada's colonial legacy by covering the following issues: The Local Nature of Colonialism; Sources of Colonialism; The Challenge to Colonial Oppression; and Maintaining Colonization Under Neocolonialism.


Regardless of the society in which we live, regardless of our milieu, Justice always has a place. It must, however, be organized in such a way as to respect the people it is to serve. That respect begins with the setting up of mechanisms adapted to their cultural traits, so that parties to legal proceedings are able to grasp the meaning of the principles applied to them." (Atikamekw Community of Weymontachie, preface).

The main purpose of this study is to consult with the Aboriginal communities in Québec in order to devise a model of justice, specific to each community, which would both respond to the needs of the community and be respectful and inclusive of their traditions, customs, and socio-cultural values. The suggestions presented in this study are the result of extensive consultations with First Nations communities in Québec and are intended to represented both the needs, and desires of each specific community in regards to the administration of justice. The report proceeds by presenting suggestions for very specific areas of the justice system, including, mediation, diversion, sentencing, legal aid, judges, interpreters, youth, and local authorities. The primary conclusion reached by this report is that none of the suggested reforms will be effective without the full participation of the First Nations communities.


For the vast majority of Indian students, far from being an opportunity, education is a critical filter indeed, filtering out hope and self-esteem. The Native student who sees the 'teacher as enemy' may have the more realistic, and in some ways, more hopeful view than the student who fails to see beyond the apparently benign purposes of schooling. The failure of non-Native education on Natives can be read as the success of Native resistance to cultural, spiritual, and psychological genocide." (Eber Hampton, p. 7).

This book chronicles the many changes that have begun to take place since the adoption of the 1972 Indian Control of Indian Education Policy by both First Nations Peoples and the Government of Canada. Resting on the reports of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experts, this book assesses the following philosophical and pragmatic aspects of the past and future of First Nations Peoples education: Reconceptualizing First Nations Education; Redefining Indian Education; Peacekeeping Pedagogy; Science Education for Aboriginal Students; Aboriginal Epistemology; Native Education Pedagogy; Language and Cultural Content; Learning Processes and Teaching Roles; Aboriginal Retention and Dropout; Teacher Education and Aboriginal Opposition; Universities; Non-Native Teachers Teaching in Native Communities; Treaties and Native Education; First Nations Adult Education; Locally Developed Native Studies Curriculum; and An Aboriginal Approach to Healing Education.


"Official bounties had been placed on the scalps of Indians- any Indians- in places as diverse as Georgia, Kentucky, Texas, the Dakotas, Oregon and California. They remained in effect until the resident Indian populations were decimated or disappeared." (p. 75).

The author illustrates how North American First Nations cultures have been grossly commercialized to such an extent as to threaten indigenous struggles for sovereignty, justice and freedom. Specifically, Churchill addresses the issue of genocide and American genocidal policies, misrepresentation and dehumanization of First Nations Peoples, and appropriation- in terms of land, art, religion and culture. Ward Churchill illuminates how pop-culture, pop-psychology, popular novels, movies, advertising logos and cartoon images contribute to both the cultural and physical genocide of North American Native Peoples.

Le but ultime du Comité est de développer un projet judiciaire qui répond, avant tout, aux besoins distincts de toutes les communautés autochtones québécoises. De plus, il souligne qu'il est nécessaire de respecter et d'incorporer les traditions, coutumes et valeurs socioculturelles de chacune de ces communautés. Cette étude et ses recommandations ont été élaborées suite à une démarche de consultation facilitée auprès de communautés autochtones québécoises. Surtout, le rapport examine certains aspects clés du système juridique tels que la médiation et la consultation, les intérêts des jeunes autochtones, la participation des femmes autochtones, l'aide juridique, les juges, les obstacles linguistiques et l'usage des interprètes, les tribunaux et les recours juridiques locaux comme les services parajudiciaires. Suite à l'élaboration de ses recommandations, le Comité de consultation constate et souligne le fait que ses recommandations puissent avérer inutiles sans la participation centrale des membres des communautés autochtones ou encore, sans préconisation d'une stratégie globale d'action.


If any one theme can be traced throughout the history of Canada's Amerindians, it is the persistence of their identity. The confident expectation of Europeans that Indians were a vanishing people, the remnants of whom would finally be absorbed by the dominant society, has not happened. If anything, Indians are more prominent in the collective conscience of the nation than they have ever been, and if anyone is doing the absorbing it is the Indians. Adaptability has always been the key to their survival; it is the strongest of the Amerindian traditions. Just as the dominant society has learned from the Indians, so the Indians have absorbed much from the dominant society, but they have done it in their own way. In other words, Indians have survived as Indians and have preferred to remain as such even at the cost of social and economic inequality." (p. 412).

This is an extensive history of First Nations Peoples in North America, from their origins, to the present time. Throughout this study, Dickason concentrates on the period of contact with Europeans and the effect that this had on First Nations peoples cultures, lands, religions and existence. There is also a serious study of the period of time prior to the arrival of the Europeans, in which First Nations Peoples civilizations are analyzed and presented through both anthropological and oral evidence. This study is unique in that it is written largely from the perspective of First Nations Peoples, thus, many historical inaccuracies are addressed and corrected. The book concludes with an account of the issues which face First Nations Peoples today, which is well balanced with the history of the racism and oppression which is responsible for the present reality.


"This history of residential schooling for Indian children in Prince Albert seeks not only to focus upon the policies and purposes of missionaries and federal officials, but to highlight the sustained efforts of Indian communities to pursue their own goals. It is by no means a history of an equal and open partnership between bands and government and church authorities. Nevertheless, it does speak to more than a century of unflagging determination on the part of Indian people to survive the worst features of church and government operated residential schooling, while working to build an educational institution that would meet some of the children's needs." (p. 15).

In addition to providing a historical overview of the residential schooling system in Prince Albert, this publication details both the transition to aboriginal control and its outcomes. The motivations underlying the community's efforts are also outlined as are the federal officials' attempts to frustrate these same efforts. Case studies and a foreword by Grand Chief Alphonse Bird are provided.


"People acculturated to the dominant worldview may theorize that 'skin colour doesn't matter', 'we are all equal', 'we all have equal opportunity to succeed'. We on the margins of society know by our daily lived experiences and by the stories of our Ancestors, our Elders, our peers and our children that this is really the "myth of meritocracy". When we are working to unveil the complex reality of oppressed and oppressor- the interconnectedness between racism and white privilege, we are expressing our Self-in-Relation. We are all interconnected." (p. 113).

The author of this book is a Metis anti-racist, feminist activist educator, who advocates the position of "critical education". Inherent in this philosophy of critical teaching is the position that the current educational system is oppressive, not only to First Nations Peoples, but to all Cultural Communities. Graveline demonstrates that the current educational system operates to perpetuate racism, sexism, heterosexism and a colonialist mentality. In order to resist this status quo, the author suggests that it is necessary to recognize the power and politics of education, and to ensure that the subjugated

The elimination of language has always been a primary stage in a process of cultural genocide. This was the primary function of the residential school. My father was physically tortured by his teachers for speaking Tseshaht: they pushed sewing needles through his tongue, a routine punishment for language offenders...The needle torture suffered by my father affected all my family. My dad's attitude was "why teach my children Indian if they are going to be punished for speaking it?" (Randy Fred, p. 16).

This collection of First Nations Peoples stories and views on the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia serves two main purposes. First, to provide a written history of the residential school system in Canada, from the perspective of First Nations Peoples themselves, not as a rationale by government or missionaries. Second, the book sets out to provide a limited overview on the evolution of First Nations Peoples Education in Canada. Despite the widespread injustices that First Nations students faced, what is of particular interest in this book is the First Nations resistance movement that developed against the residential schools for control over their own education and destiny.


The recognition and affirmation of Aboriginal rights cannot be seen as an outcome of a progressive liberalization of society, as the latest step in a process by which everyday, in every way, things are getting better. It is a history of sustained, oftentimes-ignored struggle, a history of losses and gains, of shifting terrain, of strategic victories and defeats, a history where the losers often win and the winners often lose, where the rules of the game often change before the players can make their next move." (p. 10).

In this book, the author provides an overview of eight Supreme Court decisions, namely: St. Catherine’s Milling, Re: Eskimos, Drybones, Calder, Lavelle/Bedard, Guerin, Sioui, and Sparrow. The focus on these cases is in discussing how the Canadian Courts have "framed, understood and often, ignored" aboriginal rights. In presenting a thorough overview of these main cases, the author simultaneously outlines the main legal aspects which inform the relationship between Canada and First Nations Peoples, and chronicles the most important issues for First Nations Peoples today. The cases encompass the areas of land rights, treaties, self-government, equality and Aboriginal Rights.


The Canadian criminal justice system did fail Donald Marshall, Jr. and the Mi’kmaq people. It fails all aboriginal people in various, albeit less dramatic, ways. The most basic rights to human dignity and the collective right to be respected as different peoples have been denied to Aboriginal peoples in Canada. As a result, Aboriginal peoples inhabit the margins of the "just" Canadian society. Until the reasons for this status are more fully acknowledged and accepted, and steps are taken to address fundamental issues such as land claims and dispossession, it is absurd to hold Canada out to be an international leader in the field of human rights." (p. 98).

This book is an analysis of the Donald Marshall Commission from the Mi’kmaq community’s perspective. The legality of the Commission is analyzed as well as the deep-rooted racism which led to the unjustified imprisonment of Donald Marshall. In the course of recounting this incident, the authors take on a broader perspective, to look at the implications of both the imprisonment, and the Commission, for all First Nations peoples. Included in this book is a thorough overview of reasons and procedures of the establishment of the commission, as well as how this incident is representative of the legal consciousness regarding First Nations peoples. The book concludes with further evidence of this legal consciousness in the violation of First Nations Peoples human rights, as well as a presentation of the traditional world view of the Mi’kmaq Nation, and an alternate Mi’kmaq justice system.


"My pain is all I have some days. Do not take it away from me, it is mine. Understand it, understand where the pain comes from and why. I have to struggle with that. If we cannot understand this pain that women, that Aboriginal women, that Black women, that Hawaiian women, that Chicano women go through we are never going to understand anything. All that mega-theory will not get us anywhere, because without that understanding, mega-theory does not mean anything, does not reflect reality, does not reflect peoples experience." (p. 20).

This book is a collection of works written by Patricia Monture-Angus, a Mohawk woman scholar and activist. In this collection, the author addresses First Nations Peoples experiences with education, racism, reforming the criminal justice system and feminism, by presenting her personal experiences of these issues. The first section of this book, entitled ‘Ka-nin-geh-heh-gah-e-sa-nonh-yah-gah’ or ‘the way Flint women do things', operates as a personal account of Monture-Angus's experiences as a Mohawk woman in Canada, reflecting on the particular position and responsibilities of Mohawk women as they shape the outcome of their career.
women both traditionally and currently. Monture-Angus, then proceeds to discuss three main areas, under the category "Politics of Oppression", which includes education, women and politics, and justice. Each of these categories is informed by Monture-Angus's personal experiences as a Mohawk woman scholar and lawyer, but creates a general reflection of the status of First Nations women, and the problems they encounter, in Canada today.


Like the tap root of the common dandelion, racism's roots extend deep below the surface of Canadian society. They extend far back into our history, where they are intertwined with a very pronounced ethnocentrism. In fact, since the time of first British contact with the Aboriginal peoples, Canadian legal traditions have assumed that "Indians" were too primitive to have a legal system that could be considered "civilized" and "worthy" of recognition by the British-based courts. It was assumed that they had no law and English law was imposed. To this day, a similarly arrogant orientation can be found in court decisions." (Rick Ponting and Jerilynn Kelly, p. 164).

Eleven writers from a diversity of First Nations communities contributed chapters to this book, resulting in a thorough account of many of the different issues facing First Nations Peoples, in the present and into the future. Five main areas are addressed: 1) historical overview, 2) political interaction with the Canadian government, 3) culture and education, 4) self-determination, and 5) strategies for the future. All of the topics are addressed in a very thorough and holistic manner, while explaining the problems which arise when these issues are not properly addressed.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. TAG: Review in Progress (JL) (1996). For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (CD-ROM). Ottawa. Non-Aboriginal society made repeated attempts to recast Aboriginal people and their distinct forms of social organization so they would conform to the expectations of what had become the mainstream. In this period, interventions in Aboriginal societies reached their peak, taking the form of relocations, residential schools, the outlawing of Aboriginal cultural practices, and various other interventi

Amongst these wampums will have been offered to all those who the history concerns, so that they then may come "to their seat", we may listen and understand the Autohistory American. (G. E. Sioui, p. 12).

The main purpose of this book is to arrive at an integrated theoretical framework, therefore facilitating the understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal issues in Canada today. The main objective is to provide a review of the political and economical aspects of aboriginal/non-aboriginal relations in Canada from existing British, American and Canadian literature. The premise of the authors is that in order to have positive social action and change in Aboriginal Rights issues, it is necessary to first have a wider theoretical understanding of the nature of inequality and oppression within capitalist societies. The book proceeds by presenting both an overview of existing theoretical understandings of Aboriginal rights issues and suggestions for change and state policies. The authors then go on to critically assess the position of First Nations peoples in Canada today, at social, political and economic levels. The final sections of the book address First Nations peoples' educational issues, and trends in leadership and political organization.

Sioui, Georges E. (1999). Pour une histoire amérindienne de l'Amérique. Québec. Les Presses de l'Université Laval. 2-7637-7657-4. Quand ces wampums auront été offerts à tous ceux que l'histoire concerne, soit pour essuyer les larmes qui gênent la vision, soit pour libérer la respiration, soit encore pour rendre à l'oreille sa sensibilité, ou pour aplatis les chemin des rencontres jusqu'à ce que la beauté de la vie réillumine tous les yeux et que la raison, apaisée, puisse "revenir à son siège", nous pourrons écouter et comprendre l'autohistoire amérindienne. (G. E. Sioui, p. 12).

Ce texte de Georges E. Sioui se veut présenter une "autohistoire" autochtone et, est-à-dire, une histoire qui correspond aux valeurs, aux perceptions, et à l'&rsquo;éthique sociale et culturelle amérindienne. À cette fin, l'auteur explore les attitudes sur lesquelles sont axées les interprétations autochtones de l'&rsquo;écologie, du cercle sacré, de la création, de la conception de l'&rsquo;être humain, et du rôle des sexes. Surtout, Sioui se réfère à la culture Iroquoise et à la nation Hurons-Wendats (dont il est membre), pour en dégager les valeurs sous-jacentes. Il est de l’avis que l’&rsquo;autohistoire autochtone se prête à une réorientation de l’&rsquo;histoire conventionnelle (blanche) qui elle, n’&rsquo;a servi qu’&rsquo;à nier la valeur et la grandeur des contributions autochtones et qui aussi, continue à se prêter aux malentendus entre l’&rsquo;Homme Blanc et les membres de communautés Autochtones.