

Review Forum / Regards croisés sur un livre

Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008, 330 pages.

Distorting the Aboriginal Industry: Widdowson, Howard, and Their Disputants

Reviewer: Clinton N. Westman
University of Saskatchewan

Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard's book, a flawed analysis of Aboriginal politics via sundry issues, is getting more attention than it deserves. In spite of its hidebound theorizing and offensive stereotyping, the book has been boosted in conservative press organs as exposing the myopic political correctness of academics. Indeed, progressive scholars have played their part in fulfilling this stereotype by attacking the book and its authors in strong terms, which do not always bring credit on the reviewers themselves. As such I am reluctant to fan the flames. Nevertheless, I believe that the inadequacies of this work deserve to be refuted publicly; equally, some of the comments of its reviewers should also be critically evaluated, as I do in this review essay.

Widdowson and Howard uncritically present a caricatured Marxist, cultural evolutionist approach in framing Aboriginal people's supposed inability to deal with modernity. Through this dated and offensive lens the authors analyze education, language, justice, abuse, governance and (most significantly) environmental management, to expose problems they suggest are inherent in Aboriginal communities due to a cultural gap. A central trope of the book is the idea that its authors are uttering truths that no one else dares speak. Nevertheless, as Widdowson and Howard acknowledge, the idea that Aboriginal negotiations, administration and litigation constitute an industry—while not accepted in all quarters—is actually not particularly new or radical. Indeed, one can see the outlines of such an analysis in many anthropologists' work over the past 30 years—Sally Weaver's being but the foremost example, though she and others may not use the term “industry.” Even so, the precise configuration of this industry or policy community remains to be sketched out and more carefully defined. A comprehensive analysis of the Aboriginal industry thus could be a valuable work: demanding sophistication, tact, balance, reflexivity and humility from its authors. *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry* is not that book. To understand, then, what

the book would look like that would address these issues more fully and fairly, let us attend to the various critiques of Widdowson and Howard's book as a starting point.

As of November 2009, few reviews of *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry* have appeared in academic journals. Indeed, I was only able to find two such reviews, by Raynald Lemelin and Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux. These authors offer cogent, balanced scholarly critiques that point to the book's few successes (like its willingness to look hard at abuses of power within Aboriginal communities) and its many missed possibilities (including the authors' failure to provide critical discussion of central concepts such as cultural evolution, ironically extending to their failure to extensively discuss the Aboriginal industry as such). I commend Lemelin and Wesley-Esquimaux for taking the high road and attempting to salvage something from a reading experience that one other reviewer (Kulchyski 2009) likened to being “slimed.” Right-wing analysts too have been forced to parse out the bits they do not like (Marxism) from those they do like (assimilationism) in their analyses of the book. This is distinct from the strategy of some left-radical scholars, such as Taiaiake Alfred and Peter Kulchyski, who, as I shall show, have attacked the book and its authors with less reserve. Their reaction has the potential of compounding the book's impacts, I submit, by riling up the free speech crowd.

I do not propose an extensive quantitative or content analysis of the media coverage or scholarly reviews to date of Widdowson and Howard's book, though I do consider some reviews in detail. Suffice it to say that one conservative columnist in a national newspaper stated:

I don't usually use this space to praise the work of Marxists. But in the case of Frances Widdowson and Albert Howard, I'll make an exception. *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry* ... is the most important Canadian policy book I've read in the last decade. [Kay 2009]

On the other hand, one academic wrote the following, while speculating about MQUP's motivations in publishing this book:

It is unacceptable in this day and age to print such provocative and demeaning texts for public consumption.

A book of this nature throws the possibility of informed discourse out the proverbial window and allows something akin to a litany of hatred and conjecture to re-enter the doors of tolerance and respect. The book is a sad commentary on where we have arrived as a society in the twenty-first century, and an even sadder reflection on what can still be identified as acceptable Canadian academic literature. [Wesley-Esquimaux 2009]

So these are the poles of the discussion; I find myself more in agreement with the latter statement.

It is not for me to defend the honour of this terrible book, its overweening authors, or their careless publisher from attacks, which are the inevitable result of this bottom-feeding scholarly discourse. Rather, in reviewing the reviews, what I think is most useful is to briefly discuss themes and tactics used by those (broadly on the right) to endorse the book's assimilationist assumptions in spite of its old-school Marxism, and correspondingly by those (broadly on the left) to discredit the authors and their claims to be politically progressive, field-seasoned researchers. Strategically, one hopes, that upon considering this entire ugly spectacle, those concerned with pragmatic politics can then respond decisively to Widdowson and Howard's scholarly attempts to weaken Aboriginal people in a manner that does not provide further ammunition to reactionary media apologists. Indeed, while Wesley-Esquimaux says she regrets reading the book, she also points out that it is critical for scholars to carefully consider its importance and its potential impacts before responding to it in a hasty manner.

In light of the controversy Widdowson and Howard create through their use of offensive language and personal attacks, I find it significant that many of the scholars reviewing the book also drop the gloves and produce work that does not meet one's expectations of a scholarly book review. As an example, in his blog, Taiaiake Alfred (2009) does not bring credit on himself when he comments on Widdowson and Howard's career success, social standing, sexuality and physical appearance for his "book review." Widdowson seems to be Alfred's main target, with Howard referred to (in terms that are arguably sexist) as "her husband." Notably, Alfred has previously used profanity, vulgarity, blanket generalizations, sexist or heterosexual terms and personal attacks as rhetorical strategies to attack Aboriginal persons. He covered all these bases in one brief article when he slammed "Indian Affairs Indians" (2001), then described them (and government employees generally) as "ass-grabbing" traitors. This offhand comment resembles a drive-by smearing of a group who are significant within the policy community and who thus have some capacity to act as catalysts for progressive change or action learning.

Another academic, Peter Kulchyski, complains about being "forced" to read the book at a moment when he had a lot of demands on his time. Kulchyski then made the point—still quite early in his review—that the authors *have worked for government on Aboriginal files*. Kulchyski considers that such associations with colonialism are nothing to be proud of. Tarring those with public sector experience on their résumé based

on generalizations (as Alfred also has done [2001, 2009]) is not necessary here, as Widdowson and Howard's book itself provides ample opportunities for ridicule on its own terms. Moreover, this divisive approach on the part of reviewers has the potential to fracture what ought to be a widespread rejection of this book by knowledgeable people, including Aboriginal people and others working within the industry.

I suggest that problems are bound to arise when authors who are unfavourably cited in a given book (as are Alfred and Kulchyski in this case [p. 74]) subsequently become reviewers of that book. Thus, while I agree with many of the substantive points raised by both Alfred and Kulchyski (mainly those involving Widdowson and Howard's use of racist language and obsolete theory), I find their tone somewhat unhelpful and their positionality predictable in light of Widdowson and Howard's attacks on their scholarship.

One of the reasons for this set-to is the degree to which Widdowson and Howard's book has moved out of the academic market into broader public and political discourse. Specifically, the authors have provided intellectual and political cover for discussions of Aboriginal policy regularly served up by right-wing press organs such as *Maclean's* (see for example, Shimo 2009) and the *National Post* (see for example, Foster 2009; Kay 2009; Libin 2009). What has compounded this feeding frenzy is the idea that the scholars condemning Widdowson and Howard are themselves using political correctness to trump academic freedom.

Shimo (2009) reports that another scholar asked Widdowson to "take it outside" during an academic colloquium, and that Widdowson's career and her person are supposedly threatened by such reactions. Moreover, Shimo turns to Kiera Ladner, an Aboriginal academic whose work is ridiculed by Widdowson and Howard (p. 73), for her predictable denunciation of their work. There is no disclosure that Ladner is one of the book's targets. Again, I suggest that for academics that are attacked in the book to add to its hype and controversy is playing into the hands of Widdowson, Howard, and their allies in the corporate media.

Turning to the *National Post's* coverage of the book and its ensuing conflict, most salient are columnists' (Kay 2009; Foster 2009) attempts to separate the assimilationist wheat from the Marxist chaff in Widdowson and Howard's arguments. Kay implies the authors are anthropologists who have conducted years of fieldwork. Also, in news coverage, a loaded story on sentencing circles is bolstered by Widdowson's expert remarks in favour of our objective justice system. (Yes, this is a self-proclaimed Marxist, making the case for respecting the blind and objective justice system currently operating in our capitalist society.) Clearly visible is an attempt by media producers to position these Marxists as fellow travellers on Aboriginal issues. As Kay states, socialists and anthropologists, like Widdowson and Howard, cannot be accused of racism or reaction as easily as right-wing newspaper columnists can, and so their work may help build political support for policy options such as assimilation.

In *Inventing Tax Rage: Misinformation in the National Post* (2004), Larry Patriquin documents how news producers systematically used misinformation in 1998-99 to create the illusion of an unsustainable tax system lacking public support. Patriquin argues that "there can be no doubt that the *Post* was a major spur behind ... alterations to Canada's fiscal policy" (2004:2) in 2000. I will leave it to the reader to draw conclusions about the relevance for Canadian Aboriginal policy of this statement, noting only that Aboriginal and taxation issues are linked in popular discourse. Overall, I suggest that academics should take seriously the power of right-wing media outlets such as *Maclean's* and the *Post* to influence policy. In any case, for progressives to decisively influence public opinion in this context will require diverse strategies, one of which should be to remain above personal attack so as to diminish the possibility of our messages being distorted by the media.

Another academic with media connections who promotes Widdowson and Howard (on the back of their book and in his own writings) is Thomas Flanagan. The relationship between Flanagan, Widdowson, and Howard is a complicated one. In some ways, Flanagan's *First Nations? Second Thoughts* (2008) is a counterpart to Widdowson and Howard's book, and shares many of its problems. Yet Flanagan has a more coherent argument, is more respectful of opposing viewpoints, takes greater notice of anthropology and archaeology, and generally avoids the harsh tone and personal attacks that Widdowson and Howard favour. The first edition of Flanagan's book (published in 2000) is therefore a key source for Widdowson and Howard, notwithstanding their attempts to parse out the small differences in their positions, such as disputing Flanagan's contention that Indian Reserves are socialist. Flanagan returns the favour in the 2008 edition, giving Widdowson and Howard notice in advance of their book. Like Kay and Foster, Flanagan clearly attempts to use Widdowson and Howard's Marxism to demonstrate cross-partisan support for an assimilationist policy agenda.

It is significant that Flanagan, Widdowson and Howard have in common a shared body of secondary source material. Apart from openly conservative sources such as Calvin Helin (an Aboriginal entrepreneur) and Mel Smith (former constitutional advisor to British Columbia), the authors also share reliance on anthropologically oriented researchers such as Jared Diamond (a biologist), Bruce Trigger and Alexander von Gernet, to support highly debatable assertions about Aboriginal people. Interestingly, the latter two are generally identified as anthropologists rather than archaeologists. Each of these sources could be interrogated to weaken Flanagan's, Widdowson's and Howard's arguments.

To take the example of von Gernet, he is an expert paid to discredit Aboriginal oral history in court cases. The critical analysis that exists to date on von Gernet's work is not mentioned by Flanagan, Widdowson or Howard. In the same manner, it ought to be possible to refute many if not most of the scientific or anthropological sources used by Flanagan, Widdowson and Howard. Breaking up this intellectual con-

clave would be a worthwhile undertaking as a clearly interlocking body of literature is forming, which is based on anthropological theories. This body of literature has political import as well as potential for media uptake, and thus should be systematically refuted, not through the application of personal attacks and generalizations, but through argument.

As I have described, a body of literature targeting Aboriginal people and their cultures is now clearly visible in academic writing, trade publishing and the media. This literature has the potential to support conservative political formations and to alter national consensus on Aboriginal policies. As such, it clearly deserves a thoughtful response. With this in mind, I now turn to a refutation of Widdowson and Howard's book itself. I aspire to discuss their work with as little rancour as possible, in the hopes that my critique may be more effective and adroit than some I have quoted above. Thus, I hope to avoid the traps set by media gadflies to catch politically correct academics who might condemn Widdowson and Howard in grosser terms.

Witnessing a disrobing can sometimes be a disappointing event, and this flabby book is no different. Rather than an exposé of the Aboriginal industry, much of *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry* is actually dedicated to a critique of contemporary anthropology, cultural relativism and all forms of difference. Admittedly, the authors also seek to discredit Aboriginal land claims, education programs, rights, oral history and traditional knowledge. Yet all the while they maintain that Aboriginal social problems are due not to colonialism, but rather to an evolutionary gap between neolithic and capitalist societies. This theoretical stance is backed up with an appeal to the "scientific" anthropology of L.H. Morgan and E.B. Tylor, among others, as against the "postmodern" (p. 60) anthropology of *Franz Boas* and his school. (Richard Lee and Marshall Sahlins are also called postmodernists.)

The authors consistently confuse postmodernism with relativism and other distinct theoretical trends. To prove that Boas was the first postmodernist, based on his adoption of cultural relativism, would be a significant scholarly contribution. This proof would require primary data on Boas himself, as well as a sophisticated discussion of the relations between modernism and postmodernism, science and social science. Of course, Widdowson and Howard show no such support for their otherwise very silly statement about a major scientist. By contrast, the evolutionist anthropology of Tylor, whom the authors promote, cannot be called scientific, since it does not rely on systematic fieldwork or data collection. Furthermore, as Robert Lowie pointed out, even Morgan (who did conduct fieldwork) was largely unaware of, or mistaken about, other relevant data that had been collected in North America and elsewhere. Yet Morgan, a 19th-century amateur, is said to be at the high point of anthropological research. Such distortions of social science itself should be a warning to those who would take other aspects of this book seriously.

Apropos of race and science, Widdowson and Howard maintain that racial deficiency does not enter into their analysis.

This defense rings somewhat hollow, since race actually does not exist among humans in biological terms. Yet we know that *racism* (assigning characteristics to members of an ethnic group) does exist. The authors defend themselves from charges of racism on the most technical grounds: the evolutionary gap they are positing is cultural, not racial. As such, charges of racism from many quarters against the authors are likely justified.

On a related note, one of the more surprising points about this book is that it generally does not take racism in Canadian society seriously as a factor in setting Aboriginal people's status. The authors repeatedly state, without documentation, that Canadians as a whole are favourably inclined towards Aboriginal people and wish to support their cultures. I suggest that this view is optimistic in the extreme. Not only do the authors soft-pedal the importance of racism, they perpetuate racist stereotypes themselves, for instance discussing the "cultural" inability of Indians to govern themselves, manage wildlife or even show up for work on time. Meanwhile, Indians themselves are accused of racism for wanting their own institutions!

Although the authors quote right-wing figures more than leftists, the book is supposedly written from a classical Marxist perspective. The authors say that the reason for their neglect of left sources is because the left has been blinded or paid off by the Aboriginal industry. Howard Adams is one of the few contemporary authors with a left-wing approach whose arguments the authors accept and develop and one of the few Aboriginal scholars whom they appear to view favourably.

Interestingly, Widdowson and Howard do not seriously discuss previous Canadian works analyzing Aboriginal politics from a Marxist perspective. Furthermore, there is no mention of the large body of Latin American literature on indigenous peoples and revolutionary movements, or even of late Soviet or post-Soviet ethnographies of Siberian people. Rather, Widdowson and Howard adopt the doctrinal approach of early Soviet ethnology. For example, Leon Trotsky is cited, apparently seriously, as a key authority on social evolution supposedly based on his experience in organizing the Red Army. Friedrich Engels is cited opportunistically early in the book, but not later when the authors attempt to refute his proposal—critical to Engels' materialist conception of history—that hunting people were the first socialists.

Just as the authors' attempts to further Marxist theory actually make a mess of it, most contemporary anthropologists will not recognize Widdowson and Howard's discussion of our discipline at the turn of the 21st century. The authors quote major figures only to damn them and rely to a great extent on relatively minor anthropologists, such as James Clifton and Morton Fried, to support their arguments. Their reading of Canadian history is also highly impressionistic: they posit direct causative connections between fur traders, missionaries and the contemporary Aboriginal industry. Widdowson and Howard, in their accustomed style, provide scant documentation of this historical missing link or of people's

lived experience during these transitions within the industry.

The authors generally avoid discussing their actual activities in the industry they are supposed to be attacking, and in which Howard is still employed as a consultant (according to the book jacket). This is not surprising as their discussion of the industry in general is wholly inadequate by scholarly standards. Issues such as the federal government's conflict of interest in land claim negotiations deserves serious exploration, as do management in Aboriginal organizations and the welfare of Aboriginal children. Instead, the authors provide a series of flat, deductive case studies that mix crassness with pedantry. Their strong secondary research in some areas is mired by blatantly inadequate scholarship in other sections of the book. While appearing to mix research methods, the authors present virtually no new useful data. Furthermore, they combine this slapdash approach to empirical research with an avowedly arrogant rationalist analysis, which, in itself, devalues systematic data collection and iterative learning.

Widdowson and Howard make a number of memorable points; occasionally they are dead-on. Such acuity is mired by omissions, distortions, errors and luridness (particularly when discussing crime and alcohol), as well as a meandering style, reflexive pieces showing a remarkable lack of reflection and a series of shallow analogies to popular culture.

Potentially important contributions, such as documenting the problem of abuse committed by political leaders, are besmirched as the authors use offensive language and appear to tar all leaders with the same brush. To explore sensitive issues like spousal abuse, sexual assault and environmental devastation, the authors present largely inadequate data mainly from the internet, newspapers or public meetings. Analysis is one-sided, based on their presentation of Aboriginal people's remarks (some elicited by the authors themselves), which are then used as the basis for ad hominem attacks on the speakers. There is no discussion of ethical research practices on the authors' part and no indication that the relevant speech or web chat data was collected under an REB framework or comparable structure. Graphic information about sexual assault is provided in a manner that does not respect survivors or the victims' families. No information is provided about how the identity of such potentially vulnerable persons is being protected by the authors.

The authors misidentify key players in Aboriginal politics such as former Indian Affairs minister, Bill McKnight (not Bill Knight as he is identified on p. 80 and in the book's index). As a more serious example of a factual error at the book's core, the authors state with no documentation that Canada's land claims policy was a gift to Aboriginal leaders to create the Aboriginal industry. A fuller analysis would call the inauguration of land claims a legal-strategic victory won by Aboriginal people (not bestowed by outsiders) after decades of struggle against strong government resistance that still continues in the negotiation and implementation of claims. Many misunderstandings and false conclusions flow out of this distortion in the book's core argument. Indeed, the authors demonstrate

little understanding of the crucial Trudeau Era or more recent developments. There is virtually no new analysis of how the Aboriginal industry began growing in the late 1960s and early 1970s, nor any serious discussion of relevant policies, funding agreements and organizations in existence today. One does not expect ethnographic technicolor from a political scientist and a consultant, but one would like to see policy and organizational data being treated seriously.

Weaknesses at the book's heart are still more apparent in its case studies. Over some 330 pages, the authors take on a bewildering range of issues, weakening the book's cohesion. Anything that pokes a stick in the eye of a "postmodern" academic or "collaborating" Aboriginal leader is fair game it seems. A particularly disappointing chapter is the one on language, in which discredited evolutionary models are used to suggest limitations on Aboriginal knowledge and communication systems based on supposedly inherent linguistic traits. While claiming to be scientific, the authors use a framework developed before scientific linguistic research began in the modern sense. Based on this same discredited schema (Tylor's), China should also be hopelessly barbaric, since the Chinese did not originally have a phonetic script. Are we to assume that English is twice as good as French, because it has more words? I doubt it. Yet the authors present such information without criticism to support their claims that Aboriginal languages are primitive.

Bizarre linguistic experiments flowing out of this model, such as the authors' attempts to have official documents from Dogrib and Inuktitut retranslated into English, are overhyped. In the end, the authors merely expose their lack of knowledge of linguistics, as well as their general inflexibility in considering alternate explanations for data. To wit, identifying a translation problem in a given document, while potentially serious, is not the same as discovering a flaw in a language, which the authors appear to claim to have done. Furthermore, the authors also state that Aboriginal languages do not have numbers and that Cree syllabics is a form of pictograph with limited vocabulary. These erroneous assertions should have been caught by editors and peer reviewers. Such claims have nothing to do with the book's focus, nor with the primary author's doctoral training in political science. These wild, not to say pointless, factual inaccuracies and quaint theoretical models seem representative of the overall quality of the book and its editing.

Chapters on the environment have the potential to become somewhat canonical, if only for their iconoclasm. In sections on traditional knowledge, Widdowson and Howard appear as gadflies, travelling to Environmental Impact Assessment hearings to challenge and heckle Aboriginal leaders and knowledge holders, while asking the questions even industry shills are ashamed to pose. In fact, the authors overstate their case on the environment as much as elsewhere, valuing their own armchair rationalism more than the insights of seasoned fieldworkers and Aboriginal people. The chapters on traditional knowledge refer to that body of research as a creation of the

Canadian Aboriginal industry since the 1970s, without mentioning the decades-old international scholarly literature on traditional knowledge. Such attempts to divorce elements of Canadian Aboriginal politics and scholarship from their global context are among the most misleading features of this book. Moreover, Widdowson and Howard's gratuitous abuse of ethnographic fieldworkers shines a light on the scant primary data presented by the authors themselves in support of their claims about Aboriginal people.

The authors are content to mine internet news groups for data. They also use a meta-approach to data that quickly becomes very dull, documenting their many disputes on northern news chat rooms and York University graduate student listserves. While reading about an argument between university students is enlightening, the relevance to the Aboriginal industry is not clear. During my time as a graduate student at York University, most progressive students would have reacted strongly to the assertion that they were part of an Aboriginal industry or any other industry for that matter. Yet the sometimes insipid remarks of these students are the book's climax! This exposes Widdowson and Howard's slipperiness in not stating who exactly is and is not part of the industry and why. At some points academics and anthropologists are ruled out, at other times their works are attacked as exemplary of the industry. Similarly, every time the authors get a negative comment or bad review from another academic, it becomes data about the industry. This does not make pleasant reading, nor is it an astute or objective critique of either academic peer review processes or the Aboriginal industry. Ultimately, it is not interesting to read why someone thinks that their own proposal, book or article was panned. On the other hand, what *is* interesting to consider is why MQUP accepted this book with so many factual errors and other problems. A critical review of this book can only find fault with the publisher for giving these over-hyped authors, their apologists and their critics a respected scholarly soapbox to stand on, or windmill to tilt at, as the case may be.

In the end, Widdowson and Howard argue that scholarship need not focus on solutions. This stance falls into line with that of right-wing media players, who want people to lose hope for progressive change based on respect for differences. Such an argument can also be compared to that of radicals like Alfred, who vilifies low-level players in an industry or sector disproportionately employing Aboriginal people, rather than looking to this group of workers for solutions or common cause. His approach is as unrealistic, and ultimately as hopeless, as Widdowson and Howard's. The problem is compounded when such writers also adopt Widdowson and Howard's style of personal attacks and sexed-up exposition. In response, a fair but forceful rejection of Widdowson and Howard's ideas, and also those of their disputants, is appropriate.

To turn to solutions then: while it may be true in an ivory tower sense to assert that scholars are not responsible for solutions, those that Widdowson and Howard propose seem dated and unconstructive:

- (1) in the short term, intensive education to remove the cultural gap
- (2) in the long term, "living as a global tribe" once all forms of difference and oppression have been removed.

The first resembles residential schooling; the second is pie in the sky. What the authors are never quite able to make clear in the book is why attacking Aboriginal people's leaders, and demeaning Aboriginal people's languages and environmental knowledge, is the route to justice or sustainability. Perhaps that is because the monochromatic global tribalism at the end of the authors' rainbow resembles a fascist paradise more than a Marxist one.

Acknowledgments

Discussions with many people helped me shape my views on this book and its reviewers. While any errors or distortions are mine, I would like to acknowledge in particular the insights and encouragement of Simon Kiss, J.D. Crookshanks, Christopher Fletcher and Marie-Pierre Bousquet.

References

- Alfred, Taiaiake
 2001 Some Say the FNG Is NFG. *Windspeaker* 19(1):4.
 2009 Redressing Racist Academics, Or, Put Your Clothes Back On, Please! Electronic document, <http://www.taiaiake.com/42>, accessed 10 November 2009.
- Flanagan, Thomas
 2008 *First Nations? Second Thoughts*. 2nd edition. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Foster, Peter
 2009 The Chiefs Have No Clothes. *National Post*, 2 July 2009. Electronic document, www.nationalpost.com, accessed 10 November 2009.
- Kay, Jonathan
 2009 The Left's Aboriginal Blind Spot. *National Post*, 3 February 2009. Electronic document, www.nationalpost.com, accessed 10 November 2009.
- Kulchyski, Peter
 2009 The Emperor's Old Clothes. *Canadian Dimension* 43(2): 46-48.
- Lemelin, Raynald
 2009 Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry. *Arctic* 62(3):356-357.
- Libin, Kevin
 2009 Sentencing Circles for Aboriginals: Good Justice? *National Post*, 27 February 2009. Electronic document, www.nationalpost.com, accessed 10 November 2009.
- Patriquin, Larry
 2004 *Inventing Tax Rage: Misinformation in the National Post*. Halifax: Fernwood.
- Shimo, Alexandra
 2009 Tough Critique or Hate Speech? *Maclean's*, 25 February 2009. Electronic document, <http://www2.macleans.ca>, accessed 10 November 2009.
- Wesley-Esquiaux, Cynthia
 2009 Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry. *Native Studies Review* 18(2):159-160.

On Disrobing Those Who Would Dismantle the Aboriginal Industry

Reviewer: Regna Darnell
University of Western Ontario

Clint Westman's review essay not only raises significant issues of academic freedom and peer review within the academy but also challenges social scientists, perhaps especially anthropologists, to respond to the public use and misuse of social science expertise. Westman's frustration (which I share) oozes from every pore of his commentary. In a profoundly anti-intellectual society, with a political leadership apparently eager to dismiss arguments about the public good and the human costs of neoliberal governance, we who criticize this mishmash of sloppy thinking and unfounded inference are forced into a defensive position. Calling on our expertise is dismissed as whining, despite the irony of Widdowson and Howard's claim to that very kind of expertise for which their critique loses credibility.

McGill-Queens University Press has doubtless made money on this book and may well be prepared to ignore its scholarly merit or lack thereof. The book is getting more attention than most scholarly readers would deem it to deserve. Yet if we ignore it, the erroneous and snidely disparaging portraits of Aboriginal peoples stand without challenge. We need to pull apart this package, to separate the audiences and positions to which critique is directed. Westman suggests that there are at least three audiences: the academic, the Aboriginal and the public. He does not address the variation of responses within the Aboriginal community except insofar as he cites the scathing dismissal by Native academics. Because he focuses on the academic, especially the anthropological, critique, he tends to conflate public opinion, government policy desiderata and media manipulation. I will return to the latter issues, but since I, like Westman, am an academic, I will begin with the academic.

Kudos to Westman for emphasizing that there are rules of engagement in academic discourse. Civility is key and mutual name-calling does not resolve questions of scholarly fact nor its interpretation. Ideally, we aspire to have the same rules for evaluating work with which we agree as for that which we consider ill-advised, inaccurate and prone to misinterpretation. I arrived at the University of Western Ontario in the immediate aftermath of Philippe Rushton's scientific racism. Many wanted him fired because of the implications of his research. Others insisted that the peer review process would, in the longer term, better serve the needs of both the scientific community and the public good. Demonstrating that the work represented bad science overruled its dismissal because the conclusions were unwelcome. Rushton's science has been uniformly critiqued in mainstream journals in a variety of disciplines across the sciences, social sciences and humanities. To be sure, there are still adherents 20 years later, but they are on the defensive because of the critical response.