

- (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.

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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.

Westman charges that Widdowson and Howard “have provided the intellectual and political cover” for right-wing critiques of Aboriginal policy based on what they believe to be race, reflected in culture, which Westman properly points out is actually racism. Racism is not a biological construct but an ideological judgment about the inferiority of some more or less identifiable group of peoples without reference to their variable characteristics or historical experience. Whether acknowledged or not, such racism cannot help but colour purportedly scientific interpretations.

The work of Widdowson and Howard has not arisen in a vacuum. The contemporary Canadian press is full of similar denials of First Nations capacities to define their own destinies within the same modernity that affects Canadian society as a whole. Widdowson and Howard are particularly dismissive of postmodernism, which they take to be a four-letter word that they proceed to apply without nuance to those they criticize. As Westman properly notes, a scholarly demonstration that Boas was the first postmodernist would be interesting but complex, especially given that the term and the constellation of features to which it refers were not defined during Boas’ lifetime. My own scholarship has argued that Boas’ emphasis on accessing “the native point of view” through texts in Aboriginal languages recorded by their native speakers indeed foreshadowed the standpoint-based positions of contemporary social science; but he was also a scientist who sought empirical generalizations across the variety of cultures and worldviews. Cultural relativism was not a refusal of science but a mantra of tolerance, of understanding things in their own terms before judging them on the basis of universals postulated from one’s own culture of origin. This was then and is still good science.

As for Marxism and evolutionary theory, and even science itself, Widdowson and Howard do nothing to clarify the complexity of these labels. There are all kinds of Marxists and Marxism does not provide a seamless interpretation of the “Aboriginal industry,” if indeed such a thing exists. As for the evolutionists, those cited are not credible in contemporary anthropological theory. Rationalism and science are attributed exclusively to those supporting the authors’ own positions, and there the critique from intellectual history stops in its tracks. In contrast, Westman emphasizes the need for evidence-based research on such topics as race and racism, assimilation and the experience and standpoint of the observer.

One of the primary responsibilities of the scholar, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, is to clarify their relationship to the study. Westman makes much of the undeclared biases of both authors and reviewers. The astute reader will take these into account in reading the book and its critics. Absolute objectivity remains an unobtainable goal and an indispensable aspiration. All anthropologists no more agree than do all Native peoples. The discrediting in the courts of oral history and the traditional knowledge it transmits, for example, are based in self-interest. Undeclared self-interest may be seen as conflict of interest. Our responsibility is to

demonstrate the validity, reliability and policy utility of qualitative research based on long-term fieldwork, and often on collaborative research with particular Native communities and organizations.

What, then, would we really like to come out of the self-examination occasioned by Widdowson and Howard’s book? I believe that anthropologists are well situated to counter their claims because of our commitment to spending time in Native communities and learning about their standpoints. We too aspire to influence policy. Our most important potential contribution may well be to insist that policy requires understanding of and respect for Aboriginal points of view. Social justice requires that ordinary Canadians and politicians alike learn to stand, figuratively at least, in the other guy’s moccasins. Widdowson and Howard do not do this because they assume they already know the answers.

Response

Reviewer: *Krystyna Sieciechowicz*
University of Toronto

It is rather difficult to write a review of a book for which one has little esteem. My first thought on reading it was how did this manuscript ever pass through the rather rigorous review process of an academic press? I have had the privilege of being on the University of Toronto Press editorial board for over ten years and in my experience the external reviewers would have been so critical of this book that it would have made my work rather easy: the manuscript would not have passed. Why? Simply because there are so many errors of fact and history. This alone should have raised red flags for the reviewers for McGill/Queens Press.

It is not an intellectually rigorous book. It purports to talk about Indian affairs objectively but its total lack of objectivity is too apparent in the language and phrasing used, nearly always damning Indigenous peoples. It is from the very start intentionally disrespectful in that any other group of people, let’s say Jews, Chinese or Somalis are conventionally written with a capital first letter; not so Aboriginal or First Nations in this book. One could ask naively why, but of course it is obvious that those labels are in lower case to diminish their value, to insist on their generic quality, and most important of all to deny any legitimacy to any suggestion of autonomy or separateness within the Canadian political landscape. This is, after all, the objective of the 260-odd pages of a rather stultifying text: to denigrate, diminish and ultimately to suggest as ludicrous the idea that Aboriginal peoples in Canada should have social autonomy. One might think this is a peculiar time for this to happen; so many indigenous groups across the world have received recognition, not the least in a charter of the United Nations. Worldwide the advances have been tortuous but critical in the democratic project of nation-making.