

Volume 28 Issue 1

cjsae

the canadian journal for the study of adult education

la revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

rcééa

CJSAE Book Review

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*
Editor-in-Chief: *Donovan Plumb*
www.cjsae-rceea.ca

28,1 February/février 2016
ISSN 1925-993X (online)

© Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education/
L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes
www.casae-aceea.ca

RED SKIN, WHITE MASKS: REJECTING THE COLONIAL POLITICS OF RECOGNITION

Glen Sean Coulthard. Foreword by Taiaiake Alfred. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2014, 229 pages.

In *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Glen Sean Coulthard provides an in-depth analysis that serves to challenge the idea that recognition can adequately rectify the relationship between the Canadian state and Canada's Indigenous peoples. Coulthard successfully engages in a historical materialist methodology to divest numerous events that have taken place across Canada affecting Indigenous rights. Through an analysis of these events, exemplified by Stephen Harper's 2008 apology in regard to the residential schooling system, or by Dene reactions to the Mackenzie Gas Project, Coulthard shows that achievements in proclaimed recognition or reconciliation from the state to Indigenous groups only furthered the reproduction of colonial, racist, and patriarchal state power.

Within his analysis of each event, Coulthard impressively incorporates numerous literary depictions from the field of Marxism or anti-colonialism, including works by Marx himself, Louis Althusser, Charles Taylor, and especially Frantz Fanon. Notably, throughout Chapters 2, 3, and 4, the author analyzes events while consistently drawing on Fanon's critiques of recognition. While deliberating relevant cultural theorists, Coulthard often induces a critique of the intellectual reproduction of colonial relations. The author underlines the persistent discrepancy between intellectual and state goals, in that pertinent literary discussions tend to focus on institutional forms of acceptance of Indigenous peoples through recognition, whereas in practice, Indigenous groups strive for freedom of autonomy within a diverse state. Further, in the wake of an increasing push from academic circles for accommodation and recognition, Coulthard portrays how the blatant goals of colonialism borne by state-based assimilation have shifted into more subtle realms of reconciliation and recognition, where they are more likely to be accepted as progress by the masses.

Red Skin, White Masks carries forth an important discussion of powerful themes that have run across numerous issues, events, and shifts affecting Indigenous peoples' relationship to the Canadian state. Beyond the book's foremost deliberation of recognition, readers who are attuned to an anti-colonial lens will find interest in the recurring themes of hegemony, dispossession, and resistance. Hegemony plays an imperative role in Coulthard's examination of the politics of recognition, in that Indigenous peoples adopt the dominant, non-Indigenous values of the state as their own. The author uses numerous phenomena to exemplify this shift in values, such as the subdivision of reserves for First Nations, representing the replacement of Indigenous community values with individualistic,

*The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education/
La revue canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes*
28,1 February/février 2016
ISSN1925-993X (online)

© Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education/
L'Association canadienne pour l'étude de l'éducation des adultes

capitalist values. Taiaiake Alfred, who authors the foreword of *Red Skin, White Masks*, discusses similar issues of hegemony between the dominant state and non-dominant Indigenous groups in his book *Peace, Power, Righteousness* (2009). Similar to Coulthard, for Alfred (2009), recognition represents a wielding of power, as only those who are members of the hegemonic class have the power to administer recognition, which is to be accepted by the non-dominant classes.

In *Red Skin, White Masks*, Coulthard furthers the theme of hegemony as it intersects with recognition through Fanon's work, in that recognition allows for the reproduction of power relations, since it is the hegemonic class that outlines the terms and conditions of recognition. Coulthard continuously highlights that the hegemonic acceptance of recognition creates a space for Indigenous groups to believe they are liberated, allowing for the government to subsist in action that seeks to repair relationships. The result is the maintenance of colonial, hierarchical, state-Indigenous relations. To Coulthard, this maintenance of state power is a horizontal shift from former means of assimilation to a new exchange of recognition and its acceptance via hegemony. Yet, similar to assimilation, the tangible result of recognition for Canada's Indigenous peoples is continued dispossession.

In relation to *Red Skin, White Masks'* theme of hegemony, dispossession is brought to the forefront of Coulthard's analysis of the politics of recognition. The author describes dispossession as a dominant factor shaping current and historical relations between Canada and its Indigenous groups. For Indigenous peoples, land is a significant component of overall well-being. To dispossess Indigenous peoples of their land is therefore to diminish a source of their well-being and is a serious form of oppression. Coulthard's book sheds light on these processes of hegemony and dispossession as they interact with recognition to weaken modes of resistance for Canada's Indigenous peoples.

While the book's overarching premise is that the acceptance of recognition has served to reproduce colonial relations, Coulthard devotes Chapter 5, the final chapter, to outlining the importance of resisting these relations to strengthen and unite in Indigenous identity. Here, the author calls on Indigenous resistance as a means to affirm identity as a source of strength, and therefore resistance to the state's subjections of Indigenous identity as Other. Drawing on frameworks of Simpson (2011) and Alfred (2009), Coulthard supports the resurgence of traditional values and adds dimensions of gender equality to these frameworks. By incorporating theses and case studies, such as on the Idle No More movement, Coulthard offers readers a positive outlook and refreshing practicality for moving forward within the realm of Canadian and Indigenous politics.

Adult educators will benefit from reading *Red Skin, White Masks* because it serves as a powerful critique, strongly advocating a shift away from the widespread acceptance of recognition and the reproduction of hierarchical state-Indigenous relations. In terms of praxis, the book encourages readers to promote resistance to current power dynamics and forms of dispossession. For adult educators, this means incorporating Indigenous values into curricula and lesson plans to diverge from the naturalized assumption of non-Indigenous, state values as dominant. The book offers an intricate and significant historical analysis of debates and events surrounding the politics of recognition within Canada's state-Indigenous relations, while promoting movement forward in Indigenous resistance, a movement that can also inform the field of adult education and beyond.

References

- Alfred, T. (2009). *Peace, power, righteousness: An Indigenous manifesto* (2nd ed.). Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Simpson, L. (2011). *Dancing on our turtle's back: Stories of Nishnaabeg re-creation, resurgence and a new emergence*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Pub.
- Danielle Tessaro,
Adult Education and Community Development Program, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at The University of Toronto