



Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers. Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson. Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2011. 362 pp. ISBN 9780887557279.

In *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers*, Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson provide a comprehensive and engaging study of the portrayal of Aboriginal peoples in English-language Canadian newspapers. The authors effectively demonstrate how a set of colonial ideas and assumptions about Aboriginal peoples formed, were quickly naturalized, and have continued to occupy a central place in mainstream Canadian newspapers. Drawing on the work of Antonio Gramsci, the authors refer to this as a form of hegemonic assimilation where “an imperial power attempts to impose its cultural world views upon the Other” (p. 5). The book systematically accounts for the ways in which this colonial ideology, which gave rise to the treaty system and residential schools, has persistently manifested itself within news coverage of Aboriginals in Canada since 1869.

Canada’s printed press has always played an influential role in shaping public opinions and attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples. Shocked by the paucity of scholarship on this topic, Anderson and Robertson examine material from a wide variety of newspapers to convincingly argue that, for more than a century, little has changed in how the Canadian press has represented Aboriginal peoples. The ambitious scope of this empirical undertaking is among the book’s major strengths. It makes a novel contribution to existing research on relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada by examining important historical episodes through the lens of print journalism.

The introduction establishes that, albeit expressed in different ways, three overlapping “essentialisms” have dominated Canadian newspaper framings of Aboriginal peoples: moral depravity, racial inferiority, and the inability to progress (p. 7). The book is then organized chronologically, beginning with the purchase of Rupert’s Land in 1869 (chapter 1) and ending with coverage of the Prairie Centennial in 2005 (chapter 12). Each chapter provides theoretical and historical background on key events and figures before shifting to discursive analysis of news reporting that evidences the press’ continuous fixation with the aforementioned themes.

The first four chapters demonstrate how, in the nineteenth century, negative colonial images and stereotypes were abundant in news reportage on Aboriginal peoples from coast to coast. These stories “cast Aboriginals as vastly inferior to white Canadians in virtually every meaningful way” (p. 23) as a means of justifying cultural assimilation and territorial expansion. During the North-West Rebellion of 1885, this anti-Native coverage increased significantly in dailies from across the country (chapter 3). Anderson and Robertson observe how newspapers, which strongly disagreed on the causes of the conflict, reached the consensus that the Rebellion and its Métis leader must be quickly subdued due to the direct threat they posed to Canada’s colonial vision of progress.

At the turn of the century, the press continued endorsing Canadian colonialism, using the rhetoric of assimilation to rationalize the conquest and exploitation of Aboriginal peoples. This supposedly benevolent nation-building project was

poignantly displayed in news reporting on the deaths of E. Pauline Johnson in 1913 (chapter 5) and Archie Belaney (Grey Owl) in 1938 (chapter 6). Analysis reveals how the mainstream press manufactured identities for Johnson and Belaney that corresponded with Canada's colonial imagination. Although clearly at odds with the realities of Aboriginal peoples, Anderson and Robertson convincingly demonstrate how the press replicated and defended these "imaginary Indians"—the former an "Indian poetess" (p. 115) and the latter a "perfectly authentic colonial stooge" (p. 136)—to provide evidence that colonialism was working.

After a short recess during the Second World War, negative Aboriginal stereotypes quickly resurface in the Canadian press. Chapters 7 through 11 examine the ways in which this colonial language continued unabated in news reporting on key events of the later half of the twentieth century. "Indian Princess/Indian 'Squaw'" (chapter 10) makes an important contribution to this effort. Anderson and Robertson examine press coverage of Bill C-31 (1985) to expose the patriarchal and discriminatory tone that has characterized the portrayal of Aboriginal women in Canada's press. The "Indian Princess" and the "Indian Squaw" are two categories frequently evoked in reporting on Aboriginal women, while other narratives, such as the ongoing struggle by these women to overcome gender-based inequality, have long been ignored.

Chapter 12 and the conclusion attest to the twenty-first century legacy of firmly entrenched colonial essentialisms. Press coverage of the Prairie Centennial in 2005 and Margaret Wente's writings on Aboriginal topics for the *Globe and Mail* show that colonial stereotypes and assumptions have indeed endured in Canadian newspapers.

Anderson and Robertson provide voluminous evidence of the complicity of Canada's English-language press in the hegemonic assimilation of Aboriginal peoples. By limiting focus to mainstream newspapers, *Seeing Red* largely eschews counternarratives that have sought to critique and dismantle these dominant cultural presuppositions. To be fair, the authors do account for several moments where counternarratives have emerged in the mainstream press. They conclude that these "pro-Native or anti-colonial missives were vastly outnumbered" (p. 269) by coverage that "aided and abetted the marginalization of Aboriginals in Canada" (p. 274). What remains uncertain, however, is how, where, and to what extent Aboriginal peoples have responded to this tendency of the mainstream press to consistently replicate the same negative colonial images and stereotypes. This absence calls for future research that examines efforts made, over the course of Canada's history, to counter the mainstream press' penchant for "Seeing Red" by portraying Aboriginal peoples in other ways. Media scholars might begin by comparing and contrasting coverage in Canada's French language, alternative, Aboriginal, and Inuit media, with the findings outlined in this groundbreaking study.

Seeing Red makes a valuable contribution to an underdeveloped area of research on media representations of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Scholars of Journalism, Media History, Canadian, and Aboriginal studies will take great interest in this critical and highly engaging work. The wide scope of the study makes it pertinent to researchers with interest in a specific historical period as well as those with broader interest in the representation of indigenous peoples.