

University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly


Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 2012

Review of *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* by Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson

Timothy P. Foran
University of Ottawa

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Cultural History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Foran, Timothy P., "Review of *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* by Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson" (2012). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 2812.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/2812>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers. By Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011. vii + 361 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$27.95 paper.

In this intensely provocative book, University of Regina professors Anderson and Robertson contend that newspapers have played a central role in the Canadian colonial project through their representation of Aboriginal peoples over the past 140 years. Despite having become less overtly racist in tone and terminology since the late nineteenth century, Canadian newspapers have nevertheless persisted in framing Aboriginal peoples within three essentialist tropes: depravity, innate inferiority, and a stubborn resistance to progress. These tropes have

fed into the mainstream ideology underpinning colonial practices—the treaty system, residential schools, and ongoing assimilationist efforts—while simultaneously providing a foil against which mainstream Canada has produced positive assessments of itself.

Anderson and Robertson trace the continuity of colonial stereotyping through forty-two English-language newspapers published between 1869 and 2009. Their analysis of this material is organized chronologically around twelve events, six of which are particularly relevant to Great Plains history: the sale of Rupert's Land to the Dominion of Canada in 1869; the North-West Rebellion and the subsequent hanging of Louis Riel in 1885; the completion of a federal report on the social and economic status of Aboriginal peoples in 1948; the release of the federal government's 1969 White Paper, proposing sweeping changes to Indian policy in Canada; the passage in 1985 of federal Bill C-31, which addressed sexual inequalities enshrined in the Indian Act; and the provincial centennials of Alberta and Saskatchewan in 2005.

Interpreting newspaper coverage of these events in the light of discourse and hegemony theory, Anderson and Robertson deliver a stinging indictment of the English-Canadian media establishment, past and present. They raise deeply troubling—but potentially salutary—questions about the norms dictating journalistic writing in a country that prides itself on tolerance, equality, and multiculturalism. In so doing, however, Anderson and Robertson tend to neglect the possibility of challenging the colonial imagery that pervades Canada's English-language newspapers. Colonialism, in their view, is woven too tightly into the fabric of English-Canadian culture and society to be resisted in a meaningful and sustainable way. This argument is overly deterministic, discounting as it does the agency of individual journalists and the variability of Canadian reading publics. It privileges structural determinants to the virtual exclusion of individuals and events. Yet it is an important argument to make, and Anderson and Robertson defend it

deftly in this well-researched, well-written, and thought-provoking study.

TIMOTHY P. FORAN
Institute of Canadian Studies
University of Ottawa