

*Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*

Marie Battiste, Editor

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**K**WEYASK PIMOHTEWAK. Individually and in concert the contributors to this seminal collection of essays demonstrate the abundant spiritual, intellectual, and social harvest that is to be gleaned when indigenous voices and visions are revitalized and asserted. In this book, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal thinkers draw upon a broad range of disciplines and personal experiences to examine the roots of colonialism and to invite both oppressed and oppressor to envision a decolonized world. It is rare that readers are able to consult one text that will guide them through the deconstruction of colonialism as well as provide concrete strategies for resistance and transformative praxis. This book can aptly be described as a foundational text for the continued development of postcolonial indigenous thought.

A full appreciation of the writings in this book requires that the reader recognize the existence of Aboriginal knowledge. We currently live in a world where many people and institutions continue to argue that "there is no such thing as an Indigenous perspective" (xx). Challenging this assertion, Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaw educator and editor of this volume, draws an important distinction between "postcolonial theory in literature" and "postcolonial Indigenous thought." She explains that although both bodies of thought share similar goals,

postcolonial indigenous thought "is based on our pain and our experiences, and it refuses to allow others to appropriate this pain and these experiences" (xix). Battiste also clarifies that the contributors to this text are fully aware that colonial thought and structures continue to exist. Therefore, in this book, the term "postcolonial" is used to conceptualize a future where Aboriginal knowledge, languages, and cultures are legitimized and thriving.

The presentation of this collection of essays is, in itself, an affirmation of the existence and power of Aboriginal knowledge. The writings are organized according to the four directions of the Medicine Wheel. Starting with the Western Door and moving on to the Northern, Eastern, and Southern doors, the reader is encouraged to appreciate the interconnectedness of the stories and teachings offered by the contributors. The illuminating power of the Medicine Wheel can be appreciated by examining the essays of Chickasaw philosopher Sákéj Henderson. One of his papers appears at each of the four Sacred Directions. By themselves, Henderson's writings provide an insightful analysis of colonialism as well as an inspiring framework for the reclamation of Aboriginal worldviews. However, by situating his work within the realms of the Sacred Circle Wheel, Henderson ensures that his ideas are supported and thereby strengthened by the reflections of other contributors.

Reciprocally, Henderson's words honour and illuminate the ideas presented by his colleagues. Through its deliberate and respectful use of the teachings of the Medicine Wheel this book stands as a vibrant example of how Aboriginal knowledge may be restored and affirmed.

In considering the potential significance of this volume it is clear that the liberation of indigenous thought is vital to the future of indigenous peoples. However, as L.M. Findlay asks, why should the "cultural restoration of Aboriginal peoples" matter to non-Aboriginal peoples? (x). This particular question can be heard in various forms in courtrooms, coffee shops, and watering holes all across Canada. In British Columbia many of the debates surrounding the Nisga'a Treaty were fuelled by a fear of Aboriginal worldviews. By valuing collective over individual rights, Aboriginal peoples were interrogating the Eurocentric notion of universality. One of the key contributions of this book is the assurance that the restoration of indigenous languages, knowledge, and cultures will enrich the lives of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Marie Battiste explains that the restoration of indigenous voices and visions "will allow humanity to rebuild society based on diversity rather than on an ancient quest for singularity" (xviii).

Several of the essays in this collection provide descriptions of how individuals, institutions, and communities have found ways to revitalize indigenous knowledge. At the Southern Door people such as Gregory Cajete, Linda Tuhiwai Te Rina Smith, and Marie Battiste demonstrate that throughout the world indigenous peoples are successfully reconnecting with their languages and heritage. The teachings of the Southern Door challenge each of us to consider how we might personally go about contributing to the restoration process.

I opened this book review with the Cree expression "kweyask pimohtewak." This phrase is used to describe individuals who are walking through life "in a good manner." In her 1992 article in the *Canadian Journal of Native Education* (19, 2: 209), Linda Akan learns from Elder Alvin Manitopeyes that "it is not enough for us to merely walk on the Earth, we must be mindful of how we are walking." Sákéj Henderson also explains that "Aboriginal law is the law of being in a sacred space: speaking softly, walking humbly, and acting compassionately" (273). The contributors to this book have persuasively and elegantly argued that active participation in the restoration of indigenous worldviews is a necessary component of walking through life "in a good manner."