

## REVIEWS



**Aboriginal™: The Culture and Economic Politics of Recognition.** By Jennifer Adese. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2022. 272 pages. \$27.95 paper; \$25.00 e-book.

It has been ten years since Glen Coulthard's groundbreaking *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014) was published, bringing antirecognition and proresurgence discourse to the forefront of Indigenous and colonial studies scholarship in North America. In time for us to return to reevaluate *Red Skins, White Masks* ten years on, Jennifer Adese, an Otipemisiwak (Métis) scholar, has written *Aboriginal™: The Cultural and Economic Politics of Recognition*, a critical analysis of the Canadian state's use of the term *Aboriginal* in its initial nation-building marketing and rhetoric, and then in its marketing of itself as a distinct nation in the neoliberal globalism of the 1980s and today. Adese focuses on the 1982 Canadian Constitution as a pivot point for the term *Aboriginal* and for the relationships between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples. *Aboriginal™* is a thorough history of Canadian multiculturalism as it has sought to both include and exclude Indigenous peoples as assimilated Canadian citizens, acting as an effective guide to the many strategies the state has taken to solve what it has seen as its "Indian problem." Adese's writing makes the book accessible to a wide range of audiences, but it is likely to be particularly useful to two groups: (1) scholars and students of Indigenous studies, Métis studies, colonial studies, cultural studies, visual psychology, critical race theory, economics, and public policy; and (2) Indigenous relations practitioners or those active in cross-cultural training, negotiation, or engagement. This is also a book to recommend to those continuing to ask the age-old settler question, "Why do 'they' want to be called \_\_\_\_\_, when 'they' used to want to be called \_\_\_\_\_?" Adese is the Canada Research Chair in Métis Women, Politics, and Identity, and has previously coedited two volumes: *A People and A Nation: New Directions in Contemporary Métis Studies* (with Chris Andersen, University of Manitoba Press, 2021) and *Indigenous Celebrity: Entanglements with Fame* (with Robert Alexander Innes, University of Manitoba Press, 2021).

Adese's exploration of Canada's attempts to encapsulate Indigenous lives, culture, and experience into a multicultural national brand unfolds over four well-structured and clearly defined chapters. These chapters are complemented with an excellent introduction, explaining much-needed social, political, and rhetorical context, and a thorough conclusion. Chapters are subdivided into clearly marked sections, making it easy to imagine this as a valuable resource for course instructors or for those tasked with preparing backgrounders and briefing notes for organizations, negotiators, or policymakers.

*Aboriginal™*'s thesis is argued in layers, using case studies that build on each other but can also act as standalone analyses. The first chapter examines the meaning,

history, adoption, and entrenchment of the term *Aboriginal* in scientific, political, and social life, primarily through an examination of the negotiations for, drafting, and ratification of the 1982 Canadian Constitution. Adese examines the notes of relevant meetings, committees, politicians, and organizations, as well as their publications and the press to piece together a coherent picture of both the constitution-specific and wider discussions occurring at the time. Chapter two addresses the national messaging and branding strategies chosen by the committees that organized the 1976, 1988, and 2010 Olympics, and their efforts to choose—and construct—the stories that would position Indigenous peoples as a uniquely Canadian “product” in a global marketplace. In a logical segue, the third chapter focuses on the use of Indigenous stories, culture, lives, and survival to promote Canada as a unique tourist destination—with “the Aboriginal” again positioned as part of a harmonious, multicultural, distinctly *Canadian* brand. Finally, the fourth chapter extends this sequence of case studies to the redesign of the Vancouver International Airport in the lead-up to the 2010 Vancouver Olympics and the way that Indigenous art and culture were used to define the identity of place there. At the same time, those that the state (or Olympics organizers) felt were “bad” Indigenous peoples (specifically those affected by substance use, homelessness, and poverty) were displaced to areas beyond the international public eye. Together, these chapters come together to effectively support Adese’s argument.

Adese’s book seamlessly combines personal reflection, archival research, and political theory and she presents it in a way that’s digestible to a broad audience, in a similar vein to other Indigenous authors such as Shalene Wuttunee Jobin, John Borrows, Minogizhigokwe (Kathleen Absolon), Audra Simpson, and others. *Aboriginal™* is permeated with personal and relational narrative, helping to make more conceptually challenging sections easier to read. Her description of Foucault’s ideas around the “regime of truth,” for example, was one of the easiest to comprehend that I’ve encountered, integrated in a way that did not feel out of place with the tone of the rest of the writing. The author is also gifted at weaving specific events into a broader narrative, contextualizing decisions and activities in a way that enhances rather than detracts from the flow. With each case study, Adese explores the roles of the Canadian government and corporations (or for-profit organizations) in creating and “promot[ing] market solutions for colonial problems” (13), a task that would be impossible without her ability to contextualize those activities.

The book may have benefitted from more examples of Indigenous representation and economies in opposition to neoliberal globalization, which would have helped to emphasize that there is attentive discourse and activity around countering the issues of representation and recognition highlighted in the book. As an alternative, incorporating the key neoliberal business concept of the “Unique Selling Point” (or USP) as a framework through which to view Canada’s national multicultural branding could have provided a clearer visualization of the string that unites the themes of the case studies. A USP is the thing that one brand is uniquely positioned to provide, as compared to the brand’s competition. It is the point of intersection among what the brand believes its target demographic wants, what the competition is unable to provide, and what the brand feels it does well. Following Adese’s argument, Indigenous peoples are what

Canadian policymakers believe are the country's USP—as evidenced by the rhetoric of the Canadian Constitution, the three Canadian-hosted Olympic Games, the Indigenous tourism economy, and the redesign of the Vancouver International Airport.

Ultimately, *Aboriginal™* is a book that I will be looking for on colleagues' bookshelves, and recommending when it is not there. Jennifer Adese has succeeded in taking a challenging, complicated issue and whittling it down to something that is easy to follow and applicable to a wider range of readers than I would have thought possible.

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