

UPDATED: Brock to vote on stripping ex-prof of title after racist tweets

Tweets on account of retired professor Garth Stevenson attacked Indigenous people

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Tweet posted to the account of retired Brock University professor Garth Stevenson - LaFleche, Grant

Brock University is distancing itself from a retired political science professor whose social media accounts shared racist and derogatory messages aimed at Indigenous people this week.

In a Friday statement the university said it was moving to strip retired professor Garth Stevenson — formerly the head of Brock's political science department — of his status as a professor emeritus after posts on Stevenson's Facebook and Twitter accounts attacked Indigenous Canadians as "snivelling," and ignorant pagans who were making Canada "unfit for civilized people."

The posts expressed skepticism that Indigenous nations lived in Canada before the arrival of European settlers, that he would never speak to an Indigenous person again and told another Twitter user to die a painful death.

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In an emailed statement late Friday evening, Stevenson defended his social media posts and called the issue a "tempest in a tea pot."

"I am sure many aboriginals are fine people and at one time I knew and got along with several of them," he wrote. "But I have been driven over the edge by the systematic campaign over the last few years to blacken the reputation of our first and best prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, a campaign in which prominent aboriginals and some of their white 'liberal' fan club have played the predominant part."

In his email, sent to The Standard and the CBC, Stevenson said he is outraged by what he perceives as attacks on MacDonald's reputation and the removal of his statue from city hall in Victoria, B.C.

The city is removing the statue from city hall because of MacDonald's role in the mistreatment of Indigenous people and the establishment of residential schools. The city plans to place the statue somewhere else in the city. Stevenson regards this as "highly offensive" and that he

"almost exploded" when Ontario teachers suggested removing MacDonald's from the names from public schools last summer.

"I also note that some kind of pagan ceremony of 'cleansing' and 'healing' will be held in front of the Victoria city hall after Macdonald is removed. The notion that such a ceremony is necessary in the circumstances is one that I find highly offensive," he wrote. "I should also mention that if a Christian or Muslim religious ceremony were to be held on public property, the same people who are obsessed with the aboriginals would probably say that this was an improper violation of the separation of church and state."

In his email, Stevenson said those who claim that Canadian leaders of MacDonald's era were engaged in the genocide of Indigenous people is untrue, pointing to the Holocaust as evidence.

"The use of the term "genocide" to describe Canada's policies towards its aboriginals, policies that were more humane than those of either the Americans or the Australians towards their aboriginals, is unacceptable. It is also highly offensive to groups that have been the victims of real genocide, such as the Jews."

Stevenson wrote that "any intelligent person" would know that he was not speaking on behalf of the university in his posts because he is retired.

Posts from Stevenson's accounts drew quick and harsh criticism Thursday morning following a diatribe posted to his Facebook page Wednesday about a play at the Shaw Festival.

"Before it began I had to endure one of the actors standing on the stage and reciting a tribute to the aboriginal people who supposedly lived in Niagara-on-the-Lake before settlers arrived. He actually praised them for their 'stewardship of the land', as though they had any notion of such an idea," reads the post. "Frankly I am getting sick and tired of the kowtowing to so-called 'First Nations' or 'Indigenous' or whatever they call themselves. This is OUR country, not theirs, and

we don't need to apologize for being here. I don't give a rat's ass who lived in it before Europeans arrived or what happened to them."

Later posts from Stevenson's Twitter account attacked Indigenous people and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in response to news that the City of Victoria was removing a status of Sir. John A. MacDonald from city hall because of the role he played in violence against Indigenous people.

"F*** you Justin and f*** your Indigenous friends, who never even developed written languages or invented the wheel but are now acting as if they own this country," one post says.

Another post, in response to another Twitter user critical of the racist messages, said "You son of a bitch I hope you die painfully. Who the hell do you think you are?"

By mid-day Friday, Brock University condemned the messages.

Brock president Gervan Fearon said the university is "appalled, and shares the pain and frustration felt by many members of the campus community, and in particular members of the Indigenous community."

Fearon's statement said the posts emphasize why it is important that Canadians continue to advance the recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "as well as equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives."

Local Indigenous activist and dancer Sean Vanderklis, host of the One Dish, One Mic podcast, wrote a letter to Fearon Friday, saying Stevenson's status as an honoured retiree enhanced the problematic nature of the posts and called on Brock to denounce them.

"In order to have reconciliation with Indigenous people, we must first acknowledge the truth. While Residential Schools were officially closed in 1996, Mr. Stevenson's public views are aligned with their intent," Vanderklis wrote. "The truth aspect requires all of us to acknowledge that racism is alive and well."

Vanderklis finds the posts "highly offensive and bigoted. It is my sincerest hope that your institution does not hold the same views of Indigenous people."

Brock spokesman Dan Dakin said the university's senate will meet next week to discuss removing Stevenson's emeritus status, which was deleted from Brock's website Friday. He did not say if the university had verified the posts were made by Stevenson.

The language used in the incendiary posts reflects other online content attributed to Stevenson. A Facebook post in January refers to "so-called First Nations." Stevenson was also the author of a 2015 column in the online magazine Inroads that criticized the romanticizing of "Aboriginal folklore and traditions" by young Canadians and argued for more, not less, assimilation of Indigenous Canadians.



by [Grant LaFleche](#)

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