

Brock University condemns former professor's racist tweets

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Brock University announced Friday that it is considering stripping retired professor Garth Stevenson of his honorary professor emeritus title after a series of racist tweets. (Facebook)

Brock University is distancing itself from a retired professor after he unleashed a racist tirade in a series of tweets linked to the removal of a statue of John A. Macdonald from the front steps of city hall in Victoria, B.C.

In a series of tweets posted Thursday, retired political science professor Garth Stevenson said Victoria is removing the statue of Canada's first prime minister to "appease some sniveling aboriginals."

Tweets from Stevenson's account made several other disparaging remarks about Indigenous people, and attacked other Twitter users, in one instance telling another person to "go directly to hell."

He also lashed out at the prime minister in a profanity-laced tweet that states Indigenous people are "acting as if they own this country."

- **Victoria councillors pass motion to remove John A. Macdonald statue**

Stevenson, the one-time chair of Brock's political science department, retired in 2012. The Grimsby resident has written eight books, the most recent being *Building Nations from Diversity: Canadian and American Experience Compared*, in 2014.

In a news release, the St. Catharines-based university said it condemns the "inflammatory" statements posted to Stevenson's account.

Tom Dunk, the University's provost and vice president academic, said in a statement that Stevenson is no longer employed by Brock, and any comments he makes on social media are "solely his own."

"Brock has no connection whatsoever with his views, and abhors comments that have been posted on his social media sites," Dunk said.

University spokesperson Dan Dakin told CBC News that the school is discussing stripping Stevenson of his honorary "professor emeritus" title.

The title does not involve active participation on campus, and is routinely conferred upon full professors at their retirement, the school said in a statement.

Stevenson defended his tweets Friday evening, telling CBC News they had nothing to do with Brock University.

"Any comments I make on social media or elsewhere are solely my own," he said in an email. "That should be obvious to any intelligent person, and it is pathetic that some people do not understand it."

Stevenson said he's been "driven over the edge" by a "systematic campaign over the last few years to blacken the reputation of our first and best prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald."

Other namesakes of schools and monuments have been considered offensive over the years, he said, but only Macdonald seems to be targeted.

'Meaningless' title

As for Brock removing the professor emeritus title, Stevenson wasn't concerned.

"If the university wants to deprive me of the meaningless title of professor emeritus, that is their business," he said. "Although it might deprive me of the right to borrow books from their library, I am sure I can live without that."

Sean Vanderklis, an Indigenous activist who hosts the Niagara podcast *One Dish, One Mic*, said the tweets matter, particularly because of Stevenson's influence. He wrote a letter to the university urging it to strip Stevenson of his title.

The tweets are "highly offensive and bigoted," he wrote. So "any official designation awarded to Mr. Stevenson is completely unacceptable."

Stevenson has helped shape the minds of future leaders, Vanderklis told CBC News. He wonders what Stevenson taught his students.

'What he says matters'

"Anybody who's running for election within the Niagara Region could have been shaped by his words," he said.

Even retired, "he's in a position of authority, and what he says matters."

The City of Victoria announced that it will remove the statue of John A. Macdonald from the front steps of city hall because of what it says is his role as "a leader of violence against Indigenous peoples."

Macdonald supported the creation of government-funded residential schools.

A plaque will replace the statue, saying: "We will keep the public informed as the Witness Reconciliation Program unfolds, and as we find a way to recontextualize Macdonald in an appropriate way."

The city has said the statue will return in some form, but no timeline has been set.

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