

“What’s in a Residential School’s Name?” – The Talk that the University of Winnipeg Club Didn’t Want Their Members to Hear

Dr. Rodney Clifton was deplatformed by fellow academics for questioning the residential schools narrative

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On Oct 23, the University of Winnipeg Club, a dining and social club, with membership open to all university employees, cancelled an Oct 25 talk scheduled as one of its [“Hot Lunch Speakers Series”](#).

The deplatformed speaker is University of Manitoba Sociology of Education professor and Fraser Institute associate [Rodney Clifton](#). The topic was: “What’s in a School’s Name? The Names Given to Residential Schools.”

Faculty complicit in deplatforming fellow academic

In a statement sent to members, Club president Jane Lothian said the unanimous decision of the Board had been taken under the University’s Respectful Work and Learning Environment policy, which aims for “respectful and evidence based discussions.” According to one source, mass cancellations of club memberships by faculty in Indigenous Governance, English and History were threatened if the event went forward, jeopardizing the club’s existence.

One can see the dilemma here for the club’s board.

Still, appeasement is appeasement, and – however common it has now become – deplatforming a highly-credentialed mainstream scholar, even on a politically sensitive subject, is not something that should be undertaken simply on the basis of special-interest sensibilities.

Clifton has the experience and evidence to back up his work

I was particularly interested in this case because I have a lot of time to hear whatever Rodney Clifton has to say about anything. He is a pillar of common sense, as I discovered when I read and reviewed a terrific primer he and some colleagues wrote for parents on the [value of “direct instruction”](#) for school children. Clifton’s writing is cogent and evidence-based, his tone persuasive but non-confrontational, his values rooted in the classic liberalism of our common formative era.

It is true that Clifton does not always toe a politically correct line on residential-school history, but he has the “lived experience” and the research chops to state his views with confidence. In [an article he wrote for C2C Journal](#), Clifton says:

In 1966-67 I spent a year as a supervisor in an Anglican residential school, Stringer Hall, in Inuvik, North West Territories, and I kept extensive notes about the residence, the students, and my experiences. Before that, I spent four months living at Old Sun School (named after a famous Chief), an Anglican residential school, on the Blackfoot (Siksika) Reserve in Southern Alberta. Earlier, my wife (a Siksika) spent 10 years at Old Sun (full disclosure: now worth \$37,000 in compensation), and even earlier, her parents attended the same school for 8 years. In addition, I completed part of my own high school education in a United Church residential school.

No objective reading of this article would find any ill will toward aboriginals or anything but respect for the sufferings of those who were abused in the schools, a fact Clifton neither marginalizes nor minimizes.

Not all students at residential schools had bad experiences

Clifton's thought crimes seem to be that he resists the sacred belief that the schools were intended to be a form of "cultural genocide." In a real genocide, there are no exceptions to the rule of – at best – unrelieved misery and generalized terror. It is therefore often considered a form of heresy for any commentator on the residential schools to note the well-documented fact that a considerable number of children that passed through them had a positive experience and appreciated the education they received – some, like Clifton's wife, even retaining lifelong friendships with former teachers.

In any truly open university environment, the combination of Clifton's impeccable academic credentials and his intimate knowledge of his subject would make him an ideal speaker before a group of peers allegedly interested in learning for its own sake. It is shameful that he was deplatformed.

But don't take my word for it. Professor Clifton has kindly given me permission to publish his notes for the talk. Judge for yourself whether exposure to this talk would have contravened any reasonable interpretation of "respectful and evidence-based discussions."

[Rodney Clifton Notes](#)