

# Disrobing the Aboriginal Stalinists on a Canadian Campus



- By Bruce Gilley

- December 29, 2021

<https://www.mindingthecampus.org/2021/12/29/disrobing-the-aboriginal-stalinists-on-a-canadian-campus/>

- 26 comments

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Five days before Christmas, one of Canada's most courageous scholars was fired by her university because she had consistently dissented from its rigid ideology on indigenous issues. I wish there were more to say about the shameful expulsion of Professor Frances Widdowson by administrative heavies at Mount Royal University (MRU) in Calgary. Alas, the story of her ouster will be so familiar to readers that only the details provide any interest. One wonders, however, if this will be the Stalinist purge that finally alerts citizens in Western countries to the mortal danger posed to their societies by out-of-control Woke movements in contemporary institutions of higher education. For Canada, the Widdowson liquidation could not be more germane to the drift of that once great country into guilt-wracked paralysis.

Widdowson is a political scientist who has spent her career investigating the politics and ideologies of Indian affairs in Canada. Her 2008 book with Albert Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception Behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation*, took a critical look at the well-organized industry of indigenous activists and their lawyers whose efforts do such monumental harm to young Indians who might otherwise enjoy successful lives as part of Canadian society.

Her follow-up 2019 book, *Separate But Unequal: How Parallelist Ideology Conceals Indigenous Dependency*, centered on the intentional segregation and ghettoization of Indians in the name of "justice" that was anything but just.

Both books were published by university presses in Canada that have been doing penance ever since indigenous activists and their academic enablers marked them for roasting. In 2020, MRU's first "Coordinator of Indigenization," Liam Haggarty, promoted a social media post by a Ryerson University professor, Ian Mosby, that declared: "As academics we can make it clear to...whoever is going to publish her next book that they are making a choice: publish this racist nonsense again and we'll stop publishing with or doing peer reviews for you."

To these two books, Professor Widdowson added two important edited volumes—*Approaches to Aboriginal Education in Canada: Searching for Solutions* (2013) and *Indigenizing the University: Diverse Perspectives* (2021)—that documented the sorry depths to which indigenous activism has plunged education and research in Canada.

Given the deadening intellectual monoculture that pervades establishment thinking on native issues in Canada (as in the United States), one would think that

a university would celebrate having a “critical theorist” who dissents from the dominant paradigm and “unmasks” the structure of knowledge production that empowers the oppression of marginalized groups. Of course, we all know that “critical theory” is only considered valuable when it targets unWoke ideologies.

I need not summarize what establishment scholars have said about Professor Widdowson. Perhaps just one quotation from a review of *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry* written by a self-described indigenous scholar and writer Leanne Simpson (who has since renamed herself “Leanne Betasamosake Simpson”) will suffice: “It is simply stunning that a prominent so-called academic press...(which has lost all credibility as a result), would publish this book...The book is part of a racist colonial machine that still manages to find room to operate in Canada.”

Simpson’s clear declaration that her disagreement with this fellow scholar implied that the latter should not have “room to operate” and that her publisher had “lost all credibility” with the nabobs of academic gatekeeping in Canada speaks volumes about the very problems that Professor Widdowson sought to diagnose. Imagine if scholars who disagreed on the chemical composition of the sun or on the authorship theories of Shakespeare acted in such a censorious fashion.

Like all totalitarian movements that have haunted Western civilization, the aboriginal or indigenous movements in former British colonies are in constant rebellion against liberal society, which they disparage as weakening their ethno-nationalist spirit and providing free rein to ideas that challenge their myths, even as they fuel their hatreds using its fruits. Democratic societies deceive themselves if they think that accommodating these indigeno-fascist movements will satiate their demands. So-called “First Nations” activists in Canada are explicit in their desires to tear down liberal society and remake Canada into little more than a rentier state where people who have succeeded in the grubby jostling to be categorized as “natives” live off the fees paid by the majority of hard working Canadians. The self-identification of the movement as composed of permanent and ineluctable victims of the modern Canadian state turns it into a farce of self-absorption and irresponsibility.

Widdowson’s collision course with her spiraling university was foreseen in 2016 when it abandoned the Enlightenment for a plan to “indigenize” learning. A new Office of Academic Indigenization would enforce ideological plans to “embrace Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, to integrate Indigenous teachings and practices.” In early 2021, the university armed the thought police by hiring an Associate Vice-President of Indigenization and Decolonization named Linda

ManyGuns. One of her first acts was to deck the halls with Cultural Revolution-style [posters](#) that accused any student who disagreed with indigenous knowledge claims of having a “colonized mind.”

What an actually “indigenized” university would look like is anyone’s guess beyond the erection of virtue-signaling totem poles and summer tipis on the quad, although most contemporary anthropology departments provide a preview. In a [paper](#) on indigenous knowledge in the sciences, two university of Alaska professors assert that “[n]ative elders have long been able to predict weather based upon observations of subtle signs that presage what subsequent conditions are likely to be.” In addition to the lack of evidence for the claim, and the fact that it is probably true of anyone who spends a lot of time outdoors, this claim is perfectly consistent with science (which after all is based on observation) and, more to the point, almost certainly inferior to it because of its lack of appeal to general explanatory and predictive tools.

Mount Royal University was serious in training its many guns on any dissenters. In July of this year, as Canada was succumbing to a mass mania over the discovery of unmarked graves of children at a former Catholic school for Indian children in Kamloops in the interior of British Columbia, Widdowson convened an online [panel](#) that countered the hysteria with facts and data. The experts debunked the claim of “mass graves” pointing out that child mortality for all children in Canada at the time was high and that pauper cemeteries were the norm for those without family members to claim them. That earned Widdowson charges of being a “genocide denier,” the highest accolade for a serious scholar who refuses to be stampeded into historical nonsense.

Professor Widdowson’s unmasking of the Kamloops hysteria did not stop there. At the time of her expulsion, Widdowson was working on a lengthy essay that will show that the claims of unmarked graves at the Kamloops school are unsubstantiated (to put it politely). For a country whose Woke government has put all federal flags at half-mast since the claims were made, this is explosive stuff, perhaps enough to bring down the Trudeau government next time it is foolish enough to approach Canadian voters (who voted for Conservatives more than any other party in the last election). The Canadian Woke establishment, especially the Liberal government and the state-run broadcaster CBC, will have some explaining to do once the research is released. Ryerson University announced in August that it would rename itself after Kamloopsified mobs toppled and beheaded a statue of its namesake, Egerton Ryerson, one of the architects of the integrative residential schools.

Powerful forces of Woke ideology across Canada's left-liberal establishment were apoplectic about Professor Widdowson's truth-seeking scholarship. For all these deeply entrenched groups in the Canadian mainstream, it is far better for Widdowson to be purged, all in the interests of the Party.

By purging her over the holiday, Mount Royal University hoped to keep things quiet. She will be engaged in arbitration, so neither she nor the university is talking. The university sent a private email to all chairs on the day of her firing, as if to reassure them that this inconvenient dissenter from the "indigenization" diktat had been sent to the gulag for thought reform. The University of Manitoba native studies professor Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair crowed on social media that her firing "is the holiday present that gives and gives and gives and gives."

Native activists like Sinclair have cited the firing as "evidence" that she was engaged in misconduct (the Party is always right). Sinclair has called on the province of Ontario's state-run broadcaster TVO to apologize for featuring her on one of its programs. Others like the local activist Terrill Tailfeathers and the former MRU professor Renae Watchman, who left for McMaster University earlier in 2021 citing her unpaid "emotional labour to combat aggressive anti-Indigenous sentiments," want the university to issue a statement absolving of all blame the faculty radicals who drove her out. "There are already Indigenous faculty put in danger by Widdowson's words, actions and misinformation. This is unacceptable," fluttered Tailfeathers about the university's silence.

Shortly after Widdowson was fired, I tweeted news of the termination and attributed it to the well-documented harassment and bullying that Widdowson has faced from indigenous studies professors and university administrators. In response to my tweet, the chair of humanities, Scott Murray, emailed me demanding I provide evidence for this explanation of Widdowson's firing, "which directly impugns the reputations of several of my very well respected, hard-working department colleagues, as well as that of MRU as a whole."

I am too familiar with the totalitarian tactics of contemporary universities to take that bait. What Murray would like me to do is confess that Widdowson has violated university confidentiality policies on personnel issues by sharing details with me. Sorry, Comrade, you'll have to find another dunce to help you exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Yet the boilerplate below his email signature (and pronouns) provides all you need to know. "Mount Royal University is located on or adjacent to the hereditary

territories of the Niitsitapi (the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani), the Îyârhe Nakoda, and the Tsuut'ina nations. This land has become home to non-Indigenous peoples and institutions through the negotiation of agreements like Treaty 7, the terms of which have not been honoured amidst the ongoing violence of settler colonialism and white supremacy." This historically ignorant and anti-intellectual statement speaks volumes about the hostile intellectual environment in which Professor Widdowson operated. Every aspect of her research challenged every word of that catechism.

Universities today will reply that these mandatory ideologies are mere "values" in order to vindicate them from charges of censorship and thought control. This is how totalitarian systems infect liberal polities. How could Mount Royal University claim in any good faith that it protected, much less supported, Widdowson's academic freedom against such an aggressive malignancy?

What the Widdowson affair makes plain is that any university that embraces "indigenization" or "decolonization" or "racial justice" as part of its mission statement is by definition a university that has given up on science, debate, and truth-seeking. It cannot escape notice that the very things these activists charge the residential schools with—fostering and perpetrating an abusive environment, forced indoctrination and assimilation into intolerant norms, hostile and violent responses to dissenters—are exactly what these universities have done. I would suggest a renaming of MRU to Mount Royal Residential School, although that would be an insult to the actual histories of residential schools in Canada.

I grew up in Calgary and frequently found myself at Mount Royal College, as it was then called. It was for me a place of thrill, seeing all the lecture halls, students, and flyers of events. How sad that today, having attempted to elevate itself as a "university," it has crumbled into a fanatical cult that is so unable to think and act clearly in the face of the inevitable disagreements inherent in a liberal society that its only response is fear and anger.

Every single person at Mount Royal who has been a party to this disgraceful purge should be hauled up on academic misconduct charges. The provincial government should assume direct control and fire ManyGuns to start. Perhaps as a symbolic move, it should go back to calling itself Mount Royal College, indicative of a time when it still held fast to the expectations of a democratic society.

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**Editor's Note:** The original version of this article incorrectly stated that Liam Haggarty is the Chair of the Indigenous Studies program. It has been corrected to remove this error.

*Image: Mount Royal University, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain*

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## **Bruce Gilley**

Bruce Gilley is Professor of Political Science and Director of the Ph.D. Program in Public Affairs and Policy at the Mark O. Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University, and President of the Oregon Association of Scholars. His research centers on comparative and international politics and public policy. His work covers issues as diverse as democracy, climate change, political legitimacy, and international conflict. He is a specialist on the politics of China and Asia.

## **26 thoughts on “Disrobing the Aboriginal Stalinists on a Canadian Campus”**

1.  Deserttrek says:

[January 5, 2022 at 9:14 pm](#)

The movement is destroying much of Canadian history. The Royal BC Museum in Victoria is destroying exhibits with no plan for replacement or sane reasons. Decolonization is a dangerous fad

[Reply](#)

2.  **Mariya** says:

[January 5, 2022 at 6:20 am](#)

I agree with Francis, so do many others; Government and it's endless enabling of victims.

Must we all find a cause to extort funds and thus absolve ourselves of personal responsibility and the realities of life on planet earth.

If we look hard enough we can all find something, then compete with each other as ultimate victim...

[Reply](#)

3.  **Daniel Ream** says:

[January 3, 2022 at 2:44 am](#)

*a mass mania over the discovery of unmarked graves of children at a former Catholic school for Indian children in Kamloops*

Why has everyone fallen for this grift? No graves have been found anywhere by anyone. All that has been done is preliminary ground-penetrating radar surveys, which are completely incapable of detecting anything other than soil discontinuity. They have terrible resolution and are not very accurate. They're useful only in determining where to start digging. Absent any exhumations – and no exhumations have ever been performed – the statement “discovery of unmarked graves” is a bald-faced, malicious lie. And the Aboriginal-Stalinists know it; they originally claimed that follow-up surveys and exhumations would be performed to confirm the initial results, but then abandoned that when it became obvious that Canada was willing to swallow their lies hook, line and sinker.

[Reply](#)

1.  **Alison Malis** says:

[January 4, 2022 at 10:51 am](#)



Rumour has it that only “certain” people will be involved in any grave investigation, so any results will of course be either not publicized (depending on what is found), or publicized in such a way that makes sure no questions are ever asked and the “truth” (whatever that means), is whatever it is said to be, if you get what I mean.

[Reply](#)

4.  **Andreas Marabini** says:

[January 1, 2022 at 9:57 pm](#)

I agree on everything except for one thing: you cannot use the same tactics as the wokes by demanding the firing of ManyGuns. This add a bit of unnecessary partisanship to your essay. We should advocate for the reintegration of Frances Widdowson and for starting the conversation on Indigenous issues beyond the Indigenous/Colonization narrative/

[Reply](#)

5.  **BlakeM** says:

[January 1, 2022 at 3:03 pm](#)

Some of the minimizations of the truly awful facts of Canada’s history in this article made me squirm, just as I cringe when I hear them uttered by angry indigenous activists and their virtue signaling allies. It is said that the first casualty of war is truth, and truth, above all else is what we must all fight to discover, preserve and build upon. ‘Truth’ first, and reconciliation will follow. Every time truth is bullied into silence rather than being thoughtfully debated we delay reconciliation. We need not fear truth, especially that which illuminates our common, flawed humanity.

The full rage of the underdog is being felt by the accused ‘privileged class’ in Canada, and the demand seems to be, that abuses of power and distortions and fabrications of truth are justified, again, because this is war, and all is fair. Of course that assertion is false, dangerous, and must not be permitted to stand. For that reason I applaud Widdowson’s courage, and that of the many others who are taking careful measure through critical lenses, and offering their views within the

academic and journalistic think spaces. The wars swirling around BLM and critical race theory abuses are adjacent, but no less deserving of criticism.

I am grateful for those thoughtful voices who endeavour with a sincere honesty to bring their points forward to the line, without hyperbole, and in spite of the risk of socially violent backlash. I am equally grateful for those who engage honesty to counter, debate with the intension of ceding or gaining ground.

We need more polemicists, and fewer stone throwers. Articles like this one, detract from and do a disservice to constructive contributions by indulging in toxic rhetoric...in stone throwing. The read was not without value of course, but the common desire to repair deserves a more mature response.

[Reply](#)

6.  **Philip Carl Salzman** says:

[December 31, 2021 at 2:20 pm](#)

There are really only two, mutually exclusive options: You can have a university the goal of which is to seek truth using the methodology of free investigation, collection of evidence, debate, and argumentation. Or you can have a political cult, in which an official ideology allegedly advances the imagined political goals of some segment of the population and some abstract political ideal, and contrary or even questioning views are forbidden, and “heretics” are “cancelled.” You cannot have both.

“Indigenization” and “anticolonialism,” like “antiracism,” “diversity,” “equity,” etc. are substantive political goals which destroy the inquiring nature of the university and replace it with ideological orthodoxy. Authoritarian and totalitarian societies, such as the German National Socialists, the Soviet Union, and the Communist parties of China, North Korea, the Khmer Rouge, adhere to this political cult model. It is a great misfortune for Canada and the United States to be aspiring to the same model.

[Reply](#)

7.  **Peter BEST** says:

[December 31, 2021 at 2:19 pm](#)

Residential schools, however flawed in execution, were a humane response to the tragic collapse of the old Indian way of life. They were necessary.

(thereisnodifference.ca) This article is an excellent and true polemic. Where are the politicians protesting this unjust firing? Where are Frances Widdowson's colleagues across the country? Where are the tribunes of free speech in the mainstream media? Cravenly silent all. We live in an age of unprecedented moral cowardice. Our elites have left the building, leaving it occupied by mediocre, (at best) lean and hungry careerists.

[Reply](#)

8.  **MacMic** says:

[December 31, 2021 at 2:09 pm](#)

Wokism is an opportunistic grift, which is why its practitioners are so sensitive to humor and criticism. Education students get at MRC and similar establishments is essentially worthless.

[Reply](#)

9.  **Wilf Popoff** says:

[December 31, 2021 at 12:33 am](#)

This is a perfect critique of the woke hysteria that's taken over many universities in the Western world.

I have read all of Widdowson's books and articles and found them to be far more credible than the nonsense advanced by pro-indigenous "scholars."

[Reply](#)

10.  **[Frances Widdowson](#)** says:

[December 30, 2021 at 4:09 pm](#)

Although I have some political and philosophical disagreements with Dr. Gilley's piece (I don't think, for example, that wokeism/reified postmodernism is "left-

wing”), there is one factual error that should be corrected – Liam Haggarty is not the Chair of the Indigenous Studies program.

[Reply](#)

11.  **washingtongriz** says:

[December 30, 2021 at 3:13 pm](#)

I spent a little time in Alberta some years ago. One of the big political things going was the issue of “repatriation”. This is the idea that native kids who were adopted by white families needed to be “repatriated” back to the reservation to some caretaker there. So reportedly they were taking kids who had been adopted before the age of two from the only homes and families they’d known and removing them to (likely) bad circumstances. I was amazed that this kind of thing could go on. I see that the trajectory has been maintained.

[Reply](#)

12.  **Robin Collins** says:

[December 30, 2021 at 1:36 pm](#)

Excellent piece.

[Reply](#)

13.  **Anne Flynn** says:

[December 30, 2021 at 1:10 pm](#)

Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception Behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation,  
That is the best book I have read re Canada.  
I spent a few years teaching in the far North. Not too many people woke woke have done that. Eye opener.

[Reply](#)

14.  Hymie Rubenstein says:

[December 30, 2021 at 12:54 pm](#)

Every assertion you make about the Indian Residential Schools is false.

Even the Truth and Reconciliation Commission refused to use the term “genocide” to describe the intent or consequences of mainly voluntary IRS attendance while its use of the term “cultural genocide” has been roundly debunked as being an inflammatory way to describe the ordinary learning that all Western schools give to people from non-Western cultural backgrounds, a process called “enculturation.”

For a critique of your other groundless assertions about the IRS system please read the following:

2021. Digging for the truth about Canada’s Residential School Graves. Part 1. C2C Journal. August 7.

2021. Digging for the truth about Canada’s Residential School Graves. Part 2. C2C Journal. August 25.

2021. “Indigenous Exceptionalism and the TRC,” in Rodney A. Clifton and Mark DeWolf, eds., From Truth Comes Reconciliation: An Assessment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, Frontier Centre for Public Policy, Winnipeg, MB.

2015. Cultural Genocide and the Indian Residential Schools. C2C Journal. November 9.

2015. Truth and Reconciliation report tells a ‘skewed and partial story’ of residential schools. National Post. June 22.

2015. Debunking the half-truths and exaggerations in the Truth and Reconciliation Report. June 4.

[Reply](#)

1.  Hymie Rubenstein says:

[December 30, 2021 at 6:48 pm](#)

This comment was not meant for Bruce Gilley whose observations are unimpeachable but to “A so-called ‘Aboriginal-Stalinist,’ ” whose cowardly use of a pseudonym and self-identifiable with Joseph Stalin who murdered at least 20

million people and who would have murdered all the Aboriginal people of Canada if he had had the chance.

[Reply](#)

15.  **Dr. Ed** says:

[December 30, 2021 at 12:11 pm](#)

If this could actually bring down the government, it would perhaps end some of this stuff.

[Reply](#)

16.  **George Burger** says:

[December 30, 2021 at 12:14 am](#)

Extraordinary account, thank you. I am the director of The Honour Sir John Project ([www.thehonoursirjohnproject.ca](http://www.thehonoursirjohnproject.ca)) and respect your views and courage in expressing them. The movement is a fraud and like all movements on the left since the advent of Marxist-Leninism, harms most those it purports to help, while enriching its proponents.

[Reply](#)

17.  **A so-called "Aboriginal-Stalinist"** says:

[December 30, 2021 at 12:12 am](#)

That both you and Widdowson are incapable of understanding why the Residential School deaths were a completely failure, a stain, and a part of a genocide, as evidenced by the work of Raphael Lemkin himself, shows that you refuse to examine the actual context and details of events and prefer to dial them back to simply "accidental deaths", rather than children who were forcibly kidnapped, stripped of their cultural practices and language, detained in a school where they were disciplined with brutal corporal punishment, and then, upon dying, were thrown into the ground, never to inform their families of their deaths. The state takes culpability for this, and no amount of hand-wringing about



“indigeno-fascists” will remove the fact that the state was attempting to coercively eradicate an entire culture and breaks its line.

You are no more intellectually rigorous than those you decry cheaply as woke, because you are simply parroting the same anti-intellectual nonsense as those who seek to shut down avenues of investigation into historical atrocities, and labelling them Stalinist for criticising the lack of intellectual rigour in a cheap work shows that.

By the way, the fact that neither yourself, nor your chosen subject for piggybacking, can understand the reason that you are advocating intellectual responsibility when you display none is some of the keenest irony possible. Good work, Brett.

[Reply](#)

1.  **Hymie Rubenstein** says:

[December 30, 2021 at 6:40 pm](#)

Mr. so-called “Aboriginal-Stalinist,” as you ironically call yourself, please note that every assertion you make about the Indian Residential Schools is false.

Even the Truth and Reconciliation Commission refused to use the term “genocide” to describe the intent or consequences of mainly voluntary IRS attendance while its use of the term “cultural genocide” has been roundly debunked as being an inflammatory way to describe the ordinary learning that all Western schools give to people from non-Western cultural backgrounds, a process called “enculturation.”

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2015. Truth and Reconciliation report tells a 'skewed and partial story' of residential schools. National Post. June 22.

2015. Debunking the half-truths and exaggerations in the Truth and Reconciliation Report. June 4.

[Reply](#)

2.  An "Aboriginal Maoist" says:

[December 31, 2021 at 9:50 pm](#)

That's a lot of words to say little more than "no, you".

No, you!

[Reply](#)

3.  Dr. Ed says:

[January 1, 2022 at 7:17 pm](#)

Perhaps you might care to reflect on how poor WASP children were treated at the time?

No, that doesn't fit your narrative...

But answer this: If the goal was genocide, wouldn't it have been easier — and far cheaper — to simply murder the children in situ?

If the goal was what you suggest, that's what would have been done.

[Reply](#)

1.  Dr. Ed says:

[January 3, 2022 at 1:43 pm](#)

Lest one consider me overly cynical, it may be helpful to reflect on how the Uyghurs are being treated in China, the Coptic Christians are being treated in Egypt, etc.

4.  **Don** says:

[January 2, 2022 at 9:43 am](#)

What he just said (the so-called Aboriginal-Stalinist) is spot on. Hide your head in shame and think before venturing to speak again.

[Reply](#)

1.  **Just Askin....** says:

[January 3, 2022 at 2:05 pm](#)

And we're supposed to rationally debate people like Don?!?

2.  **Alison Malis** says:

[January 4, 2022 at 11:24 am](#)

Well, no, he isn't. I might have bought some of his "argument" until he dragged Lemkin into it. I suggest you try and do some impartial research — drop your apparent bias, if that's possible. Quit indulging in presentism, get rid of the self-flagellation, and find out the facts. They're there for sure. You and the Stalinist fellow just choose to ignore them on the one hand and cherry pick them on the other.