



Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition

Glen Sean Coulthard

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Over the past forty years, recognition has become the dominant mode of negotiation and decolonization between the nation-state and Indigenous nations in North America. The term “recognition” shapes debates over Indigenous cultural distinctiveness, Indigenous rights to land and self-government, and Indigenous peoples’ right to benefit from the development of their lands and resources.

In a work of critically engaged political theory, Glen Sean Coulthard challenges recognition as a method of organizing difference and identity in liberal politics, questioning the assumption that contemporary difference and past histories of destructive colonialism between the state and Indigenous peoples can be reconciled through a process of acknowledgment. Beyond this, Coulthard examines an alternative politics—one that seeks to revalue, reconstruct, and redeploy Indigenous cultural practices based on self-recognition rather than on seeking appreciation from the very agents of colonialism.

Coulthard demonstrates how a “place-based” modification of Karl Marx’s theory of “primitive accumulation” throws light on Indigenous–state relations in settler-colonial contexts and how Frantz Fanon’s critique of colonial recognition shows that this relationship reproduces itself over time. This framework strengthens his exploration of the ways that the politics of recognition has come to serve the interests of settler-colonial power.

In addressing the core tenets of Indigenous resistance movements, like Red Power and Idle No More, Coulthard offers fresh insights into the politics of active decolonization.

Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition Details

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From Reader Review Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition for online ebook

Justin Podur says

I thought that this book was so insightful that I had to seek the author out, take a class by him, and host a podcast interviewing him. The book is a very careful reading of Fanon, Marx, and a few other revolutionary thinkers in the context of Canada's colonialism against indigenous people. On the latter, the author is incredibly well-informed. The result is a very deep, concisely argued, and brilliant book. There are several extremely important indigenous intellectuals coming up, more all the time, and Coulthard is one of them. I am working my way through others that he references in this book.

Reginald Simms says

The author applied the rejection of the politics of recognition to the indigenous struggle providing three examples of the very tricky and liberal way the colonial state re affirms its authority over indigenous authority and rights. The author makes a point by taking a case study of indigenous struggle and explaining why it and specifically the agreement to land settlement reaffirmed the settler states hegemony. The author analyzes the potential of resentment. Resentment has the potential to stay as internalized objectification or become subjective and potentially useful as a way to reaffirm culture and cultural practices. Indigenous cultures are encouraged to use cultural practice as a means of not falling under the gaze of the colonizer in a reactive way as liberation itself becoming stuck in past cultural practices but as a way of direct action and transition towards liberation.

Leanne Simpson says

This is one of the most important and ground-breaking books on Indigenous politics I have ever read, and it's one of handful of books I'll read over and over. Red Skin, White Masks interrogates the state's continued structural commitment to Indigenous dispossession and self-determination by critiquing recognition-based approaches to reconciliation. But Coulthard doesn't stop there. By bringing forth new interventions to the works of Marx and Fanon rooted in Indigenous understandings, Red Skin, White Masks shatters the core assumptions of mainstream Aboriginal politics and the politics of recognition. Through his brilliant multi-faceted analysis, Coulthard charts a clear course towards just relations between Canada and Indigenous nations outside the political strategies of the past. More importantly Red Skin, White Masks resonates with me as an Indigenous woman. It is challenging, illuminating and filled with the same hope that comes with every great book of revolutionary politics. This book will change the way you think about colonialism, decolonization and resurgence, and the world will be better place for it.

Clivemichael says

Compelling arguments and examples to transform the reality.

“...those struggling against colonialism must ‘turn away’ from the colonial state and society and instead find

in their own decolonial praxis the source of their liberation.”

our cultural practices have much to offer regarding the establishment of relationships within and between peoples and the natural world built on principles of reciprocity and respectful coexistence...the ethic of reciprocity and sharing underlying Dene understandings of their relationship with land...this relational conception of identity was nonnegotiable...it also demanded that we conduct ourselves in accordance with certain ethico-political norms(:) sharing, egalitarianism, respect...obligations...

“the reason the Crown agreed to get into the land-claims business in the first place was to ‘extinguish the broad and undefined rights and title claims of First Nations

Any visit to the North will unequivocally demonstrate the degree to which state and industry have been able to coopt the discourse of ‘sustainable’ to push their shared vision of economic development.”

...a sign of our critical consciousness, of our sense of justice and injustice, and of our awareness and unwillingness to reconcile ourselves with a structural and symbolic violence that is still very much present in our lives.”

“because colonialism tends to solidify its gains by normalizing the injustices it has perpetrated against the colonized population through a direct attack on the integrity of precontact history and culture, it follows that strategies that attempt to break the stranglehold of this subjection through practices of cultural self-affirmation can play an important role in anticolonial struggle as long as they remain grounded and oriented toward a change in the social structure of colonialism itself.”

“the practices are directly undertaken by the subjects of colonial oppression themselves and seek to produce an immediate power effect: second they are undertaken in a way that indicates a loosening of internalized colonialism, which is itself a precondition for any meaningful change; and third, they are prefigurative in the sense that they build the skills and social relationships(including those with the land) that are required... society, including indigenous society and particularly Indigenous men, stop collectively conducting ourselves in a manner that denigrates, degrades, and devalues the lives and worth of Indigenous women in such a way that epidemic levels of violence are the norm in too many of their lives.

...a resurgent politics of recognition that seeks to practice decolonial, gender-emancipatory, and economically nonexploitative alternative structures of law and sovereign authority grounded on a critical refashioning of the best of Indigenous legal and political traditions.

Janine Gertz says

Read this book if you want a contemporary application of Marxist and Fanonian theories within an Indigenous-State, Settler-Colonial context. It will give you a powerful critique of 'the politics of recognition' and a very relevant theoretical framework for any works that are decolonising in its efforts.

Roger Green says

Through a recovered analysis of Marx's Primitive Accumulation and Frantz Fanon, Coulthard argues against the liberal framing that continues to rhetorically colonize First Nations in Canada.

Bruce Mackenzie says

This was a long read for me. Apart from the number of sidetrips it sent me on, the small type combined with my own failing eyesight left me unable to get through more than a few pages at a time. I still find it difficult

to accept a framework for indigenous decolonization based so heavily on the economic and political theories of a white, upper middle-class European male, but it does work after a fashion. Frankly, the most enjoyable part of this book for me was the final chapter, when Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon gave way to indigenous thinkers like Taiaiake Alfred and Leanne Simpson.

Nathaniel says

“For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it.”

Michelle says

This is a ridiculously rich (and theoretically dense) book and I struggled through it for the past month in anticipation of reading group. For me, the discussion of resentment v ressentiment was so helpful and I look forward to breaking the text down into smaller pieces and reading them slowly again over the next few months.

ralowe says

this sovereignty conversation is unfinished and there is no real way to be polite about it. i don't think anyone is trying to be hobbes, they're just trying to be legible, trying to live with the environment and the ancestors and every creature in a story that's way too big to tell and must be told somehow. sometimes its clear, sometimes its borderlands. the only available terms are hobbes' body of every man against every man, and i'm not trying to sound flip. a white man named david lloyd suggests that representation (and i'm guessing identity and nomination) is always tied to the state. and every state is rogue. there's problem no way to not sound like an asshole trying to hold performance and essence...

Amber says

Coulthard successfully challenges a (mostly liberal) focus on recognition and reconciliation as means of addressing settler colonialism, first by acknowledging that settler colonialism is not *past* and *history* but a present condition of existence for indigenous people; second, by illustrating the many ways that policies of recognition have supported, rather than transformed, the settler colonial structure, through continuous dispossession toward capitalist advancement. Coulthard illustrates the ways that politics of recognition maintain the dominance of the settler nation, and attempt to reconcile the existence of First Nations *within* the political and economic structure of the settler nation. In his final chapter, Coulthard challenges the applicability of both Marx and Fanon (whose work he bases much of his own), as they constitute the culture of the colonized as a similar constitution to class (i.e. "a transitional category to be transcended"). He argues instead that a substantive means of decolonization is a dynamic resurgence of and reinvestment in indigenous ways, without the "sanction, permission, or engagement of the state". Coulthard beautifully concludes with an examination of modern movements, importantly describing "legitimate" (typically negotiations within the legal system of the colonizer) and "illegitimate" (extra-legal) actions by indigenous movements, illustrating

the ways that the dominant society suppresses *proven successful* tactics against the colonial state by alienating the activists putting their bodies on the line.

Leif says

Among the heavy and detestable slur of those onerous voices advocating "recognition, recognition; history is getting better" (as if Hegelian progress were a matter of the state's inevitable good graces), Coulthard's intervention is a sharp, refreshing call. What do liberal recognition and toleration mean if not accompanied by redistribution? Why make recourse to the increasingly-expert indigenous legislative appeal when, historically, they make little material difference?

Spurred on by the Idle No More movement, Coulthard asks: why not decide on non-capitalist change, direct action, and gendered justice? Music to my ears. He traces a genealogy of thought from Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Frantz Fanon to Nancy Fraser and Leanne Simpson; the aim here is straightforward: free for action the principles of indigenous action. Whether returning to the importance of land, distinguishing resentment from *ressentiment*, or tracing out the relationship between gendered discrimination and indigenous/colonial structures, Coulthard is always worth reading.

Ai Miller says

I really want this to be a 4.5 stars, and the reason it's not five probably has to do more with my own inability to understand Marx and Fanon than the book itself. This was a really great and oddly smooth read, especially once I got out of the introduction where Coulthard lays out the heavy theoretical work and really gets into the meat of the book. Each chapter is laid out really neatly, which I appreciate a lot as a graduate student, and though Coulthard's argument is pretty heavy in both marxist and psychoanalytic theory, I did not ever feel frustrated with what the book was saying. This is a really key book to read for thinking about Indigenous politics and relationships to settler states, and manages to feel super grounded at all times. I really recommend this for anyone thinking about other modes of interactions!

Javier says

I admit that the first chapter was a drag for me and felt quite theoretical. I feel like without some background knowledge this book could be difficult to grasp. That said it was a very interesting and smooth read after that. The author really goes into details to explain and support his views without being repetitive. What I liked the most was that it offered a "different" view and challenged the current state of affairs. I also quite enjoyed the fact that the book drew knowledge from other indigenous writers, philosophers and intellectuals. Definitely would recommend!

Brooks says

Another book read with the English Department Theory Group. Not a hard book to get a handle on. I appreciate the defense of a very (small c) conservative worldview that flies in the face of capitalism and

progress at all costs.

Coulthard's central argument that recognition and reconciliation are just more colonialism dressed up in a slightly more palatable package gave me lots to think about, but I find myself unconvinced that a return to a static, traditional culture is the solution (leaving aside whether such a return is feasible).

Very interesting.
