

THE QUESTION OF CENSORSHIP AND RACIST  
INFORMATION IN PRINT AND NON-PRINT  
MEDIA: a research paper

prepared for:

GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE

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"Neither I nor anyone else can impose a value system on you. I can only ask each of you to examine your actions constantly; to judge them in relation to the values of human life and social responsibility, and hope that you would retain only those actions which help make this world a more humanly decent place to live for every human being."

James M. Jones

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## INTRODUCTION

Ours is a multi-faceted society. With the advancement of technology we are inundated with media reports about other cultures. Some issues currently being focused are apartheid, anti-Semitism, racism, and poverty. Print and non-print materials have in the past and are currently viewing these and other cultural issues using North American values and standards. Just as North Americans strive for better lifestyles, so are all humans searching for security, economic independence, education, and control of their futures. As North Americans, we allow Eurocentric domination of our educational materials and other media.

Libraries as collectors of the world's knowledge need to become "culturally aware" of all societies. Mis-information and unauthentic materials currently found in the libraries of the world are fuel for racist remarks, prejudice and discrimination. Cries of censorship arise when librarians remove materials because they are inaccurate and outdated. Other people demand that materials be removed because of biased viewpoints. "Changes must and will occur, however as media services attempt to face the challenge of today's society and to provide a collection that is "rich in breadth and depth of content", and that "meets the requirements of all curriculum areas."

Stereotypes are dangerous as they reinforce prejudice. These powerful weapons are in many segments of today's society.

Movies, music, jokes, toys and literature are a few of the areas where stereotypes exist. "Books are one of the most powerful mediums of perpetuating bias and prejudice amongst our children." Many children become the victims of these negative images and concepts.

This paper looks at censorship and cultural viewpoints about print and non-print materials. Questions such as: what is censorship?; when does it occur?; why does it occur?; and how does a library deal with controversial material? are dealt with. Why then is it important to deal with racist materials?; should materials be removed or withdrawn from a collection if they contain racial bias?; what guidelines should be established to assist in building and maintaining a quality collection? are other issues librarians must focus on.

## **CENSORSHIP**

### What is it?

Censorship is a form by which suppression of information is applied to print and non-print materials. Information which an individual or group of individuals tries to suppress can deal with a variety of topics. Topics such as sex, four-letter words, and ethnic/racial issues, are some that could face the censorship challenge.

"The question of censorship is brought to the fore when attempts are made to remove material because of bias." Webster's Dictionary defines bias as a prejudice, a prepossession that sways the mind. Bias does not include inaccurate and distorted information that is found in racist

materials. This type of information has been used to define and/or caricaturize various cultural groups as having the same physical, mental and emotional characteristics. People and their cultural structures are complex. Biased materials tend to oversimplify the various political, economical and social structures of a society.

When and why does it occur?

Debates about censorship issues have been occurring since the beginning of written history. Libraries over a century ago decided to be guardians of public morals and help improve the public's reading taste. The cultural revolution of the 1960's changed this, as more people began to question public and moral issues.

When the economic climate causes stress, people tend to become reactionary. Since the tension of "tight" money causes people to worry about federal /provincial economic situations over which the public feel they have little control, local issues such as book banning may come to the forefront. People know that they have more control in a local issue simply because they can go directly to the source of the problem and complain.

People become involved in censorship issues because of their need to raise children with the "right set of values." Library users fear that the library may be substituting other values with which they do not agree, through material that is purchased and housed in the collection. In schools, textbooks

were the first to be examined and censored because of content. Resource centre material has also come under fire. One librarian stated, "...it seems that schools are the major target right now but it's only a matter of time before the public library becomes the focus of complaint."

Moralistic values, obscenity, and profanity issues are the reasons most often stated for censoring materials, according to the American Civil Liberties Union. A study done by Lee Burress identifies that 75% of all objections are related to language and sexual explicitness in materials. Dr. David Jenkinson conducted a censorship survey in Manitoba between September 1, 1982 and August 31, 1984. His results showed that there were no challenges to racist material in the public library system. School libraries had seven challenges to racist materials over the two year period. Beatrice Culleton's book about a Native child caught in the endless ropes of the social service system was challenged. In Search of April Raintree was challenged not because of its portrayal of Native lifestyle, but because of the sexual and violent material it contained.

#### How does a librarian deal with censorship?

In order to handle the sensitive issues that may be encountered in the area of censorship, a librarian must develop the ability to understand the background of the issues involved. Issues that must be looked at are the racist statements, illustrations and other negative aspects of material that is currently housed in library collections as

well as new material being purchased for use within the system. Materials chosen should be the best that are available. Librarians must acquire the knowledge needed to select these materials. They need to be aware of the various learning and teaching styles of cultural groups, and to understand contemporary as well as historical issues. Dyer states that these reflect the attitudes, aspirations and lifestyles of a culture. Value systems are an essential component in all societies.

Pre-censorship occurs when the librarian chooses books and other materials for the borrower's use. A librarian is open to the influence of the community's values. Professionals believe that materials should be selected because of their strength in supporting school and other community programs. "All students shall be provided access to a current, balanced collection of books, basic reference materials, texts, periodicals, and audiovisual materials, which depicts in an accurate and unbiased way the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of [North] American society." The librarian strives to purchase and house an unbiased collection.

#### Why is it important to deal with censorship issues?

Our society believes that books have power. Books are perceived to influence feelings and behavior, and to enlighten, enhance, or corrupt. "Racial symbols are also a part of our society from which a child learns to evaluate groups of people. For example, tomahawk is much more quickly identified (sic) with Indian than is corn." Children begin to think of Indian

People as fictional or dead. Language, customs, and lifestyles become targets of racism in print and non-print resources. These biased materials only "fuel the fire", affecting the provision of balanced and equal education for all people.

Books are assumed to tell the truth. Zuckerman says children know the difference between fiction and truth in books. If this is true why are so many schools currently focusing on building the self esteem of their students? One's self-concept is directly affected by the daily environment in which one functions. The school environment has many negative concepts and images that are viewed daily by children through the use of print and non-print materials. Students should not be using materials which are demeaning to any cultural group without first being taught critical thinking skills needed to identify fallacies and inaccurate information.

"It is easy to lose sight of the most important people of all- the students in the district. What lessons are they learning?" The school must develop a positive cross-cultural climate to enhance students' "cultural awareness." It is imperative that students acquire awareness of other cultures' values and lifestyles.

## **A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

### **Society**

Culture defines us as people. It gives each individual a sense of identity, and helps one to understand his/her role in society. Customs and values of culture are destroyed and lost

by institutional racism.

The dominating aspects of colonization have a direct relationship on how two cultures perceive one another. When the majority group does not understand different customs, such customs are viewed as ridiculous, primitive and useless. Cultural supremacy affects minority groups to the extent that some people have changed their names, some have had plastic surgery to change their appearance and some deny their cultural identity.

Canadian society has its past firmly rooted in the Eurocentric culture with its customs and value systems. Institutional racism exists in publishing, justice, real estate, education and other segments of our society. The very structure of our society has deemed institutional racism to be legitimate by allowing its existence. Canada's laws and social customs "systematically reflect and produce racial inequalities."

Businesses involved in marketing children's material must become "culturally aware." Bestsellers and parental favourites from the past have been republished. Some of this material continues to be distributed despite inaccurate and stereotypical information contained within the pages. Editors need to be cognizant of correct historical information as well as stereotypical phrases that are aspects of poor research and writing by biased authors. Positive images, historical, and current information must be factual to counteract issues raised about censorship.

### Educational Inequalities

People have been denied their right to vote, their right to live where they choose, and their right to an education, in Canada during the twentieth century. Generally these are considered basic rights, and the majority group would be outraged if denied them. The federal government only accepted full financial responsibility for Indian education in 1948, according to Hull's research. In 1945, when the Family Allowance or Baby Bonus Act passed, the government began to "build" schools for Indigenous Peoples. Families had to have their children in schools in order to collect Family Allowance.

Historically, the education system in Canada has ignored the inequalities of its system with regard to Indigenous Peoples and other ethnic groups. Education in Canada has been withheld or severely restricted to the Inuit, Blacks and Indigenous Peoples, through various legislated acts. Education in the past was used as a tool to destroy Indigenous cultures in Canada. During the 1950s and 1960s assimilation destroyed languages, social customs, and the cultural heritages of many Indigenous nations.

Society as a whole suffers when the educational system does not meet the needs of all students. Inferior education concerns all Canadians because of socio-economic problems such as illiteracy, drop outs, and high rates of violence and incarceration. Institutional racism only hinders any solutions

society might find for these growing concerns.

Eurocentric beliefs and values are firmly entrenched in the Canadian public school systems. When looking at the education system one can see that the bulk of administrators, teachers and other personnel are Caucasian. Schools, their environment, and the materials used, play an important part in how students perceive themselves. Acquiring life long learning skills will not occur in an oppressive atmosphere. Institutional racism existing in the current structure undermines many students' self esteem and leads to their failure.

In educating Canadian children, how can the system and society justify the use of, and teaching with material that discusses other cultures as "primitive", "lazy", or "superstitious"? By neglecting to teach or supply accurate information about other cultures' contributions in areas such as agriculture, economics, government, and language, the education system and Canadian society are guilty of cultural racism. By omitting or "miseducating white children about their own racist heritage" other cultural groups, and especially the children, must deal with racism at an extremely young age. "Prejudice and racial abuse, however are not only demeaning for those who receive it but also for those, generally white, children who offer it."

School children from the Osnabruck Germany area were surveyed about their knowledge of Native Americans. They were asked:

"Where did you learn about Indians?"

<u>Information</u> <u>obtained from</u>	<u>Number of</u> <u>students</u>
Reading/books	163
Newspapers/magazines	11
Comics/booklets	20
TV/films	166
Records/cassettes	14

The results of this study show just how influential the printed word is in forming children's concepts of Indian People.

Educators must critically analyze the authenticity of the materials they use, and teach their students to do the same. Once critical thinking skills have been taught, they must be nurtured and encouraged to grow. Teachers must play a leading role in changing some of attitudes that society has towards other cultural groups.

Resources can be utilized to keep an already unbalanced system off centre, or they can be used to change the existing structure to create a more pluralistic view of our society. Maintaining and purchasing quality resources is necessary to establish support for educators, and for programs. Providing positive materials and expectations helps motivate people to learn about other cultures, and become "culturally aware". Everyone in a positive climate can grow towards cross-cultural awareness, and understanding.

## GABRIEL DUMONT INSTITUTE

The Institute's mandate is to serve and meet the needs of Metis and Non-Status Peoples. Part of that service has been a library system composed largely of Native Studies materials. The new mandate draft suggests an interim strategy that would develop pilot schools for K-12. These schools must connect with the Institute's library network.

Gabriel Dumont Institute's core library and satellite centres have in the past and are today, playing a special role in Native communities and in the provincial education system. Initially, resource centres were established to supplement courses being offered by the Institute. SUNTEP (Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program) students and staff are among the main borrowers of resource material. This teacher training education program has 151 future teachers and administrators enrolled at present. Qualified professionals have graduated from SUNTEP and use Institute resources in Saskatchewan classrooms. Other teachers without cross-cultural training are utilizing Institute resources to supplement their lessons on Indigenous Peoples.

Borrowing privileges state that materials can be loaned to students, staff, and other personnel who work at the Institute. Materials can also be borrowed by the general public and through the Saskatchewan Provincial Library's interlibrary loan system.

Borrowers using the resources from the Institute's

collection assume that a place concerned about Metis and Indigenous cultures houses a resource collection that is bias-free. Materials borrowed are viewed by the borrower as being historically and factually accurate. Because of this, previewing of materials before use does not always occur. If previewing does take place distorted information can still be passed on to students if the borrower does not have the necessary skills to critically analyze the borrowed resources.

Inevitably, within the core library's collection are materials that have racist and stereotypical biases (see Appendix A). Materials mentioned in Appendix A are a random selection picked from the juvenile collection in the core library. The resources in this Appendix were selected for their potential to be included in a Native Studies bibliography of materials for grades K-12. Other material housed in the collection also contains historically inaccurate and biased information.

Resources purchased are usually selected from the same publishing companies that have been marketing racist and stereotypical print and non-print materials for years. Information from the library's collection is an essential part of the courses at the Institute. Increased "cultural awareness" between the community at large and the Institute depends partly on the resources in the library system. Working towards a bias-free collection can begin to establish the library as a quality resource base that can be used as a model for schools and other educational institutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the information presented in this report, these recommendations are suggested for implementation.

### 1. PURCHASE SELECTION POLICY

New materials coming into the system that contain Native Studies information need to be previewed and evaluated. More expensive materials should be ordered only if they can be returned when the contents mis-represent or distort the facts. A copy of the evaluation, along with any unsuitable item should be returned to the publisher. All evaluations and publishers' responses should be kept on file to refer to when selecting and previewing future orders.

### 2. WEEDING POLICY

Developing and implementing this policy will allow for continual pulling and discarding of "poor quality" print and non-print materials. Calgary's, Board of Education, has an excellent policy which specifically focuses on inaccurate and condescending information.

### 3. CENSORSHIP POLICY

This policy will be a frame of reference to assist in handling and solving any censorship challenges. Guidelines and complaint forms developed can defuse "sensitive" issues.

### 4. TRAINING PROGRAM

Library staff should be well trained in recognizing various forms of fallacies, stereotypes and other racist information. Reference staff must be prepared to effectively handle materials they come across as well as handle items that

patrons bring to their attention.

#### 5. "TRUNK"

Develop small travelling "trunks" of quality materials. SUNTEP students could use this during internship sessions (Practicum). The collection could be used for display purposes at conventions and seminars.

#### 6. MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

Materials need to be developed that teach students to critically analyze resources for stereotypes and other racist information. Such material should be developed for all grades, particularly, to teach young children "cultural awareness".

#### 7. COMMUNICATION

Opening lines of communication with other organizations, schools, libraries, and publishing houses is important. Find out how they handle objectional materials and how they select quality resources. Gabriel Dumont Institute may need to establish a leadership role in this area.

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6. Linda Goulet. The Need for Multicultural Anti-racist Education in Northern Saskatchewan emphasizing Indigenous Cultures (Prince Albert: Northern Lights School Division #113, 1987), p.52
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APPENDIX A

Examples of resource material circulating that contain racist and stereotypical biases. This material can be located in the juvenile section of the Institute's core library.

Johnston, Patronella

Tales of Nokomis (Juv 398.2097131 J56T15)

-braves, warriors, papooses

Mobley, Jane

The Star Husband (E MOB)

-warrior, tribe, brave warrior

Rockwood, Jovce

To Spoil the Sun (Juv 810.3 R54T57)

-warriors, screaming death, scalped,  
whooping, wild paint, yelling

Wolfson, Evelyn

Growing up Indian (Juv 306 W52G67)

-papooses, tribe, rebellious, Eskimo,  
illustration: bare-chested girls,  
rounded up by the settlers

Yue, David

The Tipi: a center of Native American life  
(Juv 728 Y72T36)

-tribe, papoose board, squaw cooler,  
lords of the plains, warriors, scalp

"For as one comes to understand people who live by institutions and values different from one's own, at the same time one comes to see that these people are nevertheless, at bottom quite like one's own people. The alien culture at first appears to us a mask, enigmatic or repugnant. On closer acquaintance we see it as a garment for the spirit; we understand its harmonies and appreciate them. Finally, as acquaintance goes deeper still, we do not see, or for a time forget, the culture, but look only to the common humanity of the men and women beneath."

- Robert Redfield