

# A letter to the editor in reply to Racist Canadian Editor

Dear Editors,

I am writing with regards to the article that was printed on Sunday, April 15 2007 entitled "THE HUMAN RACE: Reparation repercussions" by Bob Verdun. I am a Barbadian student at York University in Toronto doing my PhD and I would like to point out first and foremost that no Canadian newspaper would ever print this article due to the glaring inaccuracies and outright racism with regard to Canada's indigenous community. Mr. Verdun speaks about the entire Indigenous population as though it were one homogeneous group and this more than anything illustrates his ignorance about a subject he presents to the Barbadian public. In regards to his statement that "They came from Asia! Many of them still look Chinese, and they have too little body hair to be able to claim they evolved in the very cold climate of North America" my only guess is that he is speaking about the Inuit who live in the Northernmost parts of North America close to the Arctic. This does not consider the multitudes of people that also span the continent and look nothing like the Inuit and this argument carries with it the same logic as arguing that "all Black people look the same". The Inuit of the north, the Sioux nation of the midwest and the Apache of the south cannot be expected to all look the same any more than the people of the Sudan look exactly the same as the people of Nigeria.

With respect to his argument that "most "natives" had been doing a poor job of stewarding the continent" and that "Tribes regularly made war on each other, often capturing and enslaving each other" perhaps he is unaware of the Western European monarchies that made war on each other for hundred's of years and yet he does not challenge the Hapsburg Dynasty for their poor stewardship of Western Europe. He also fails to include the fact that it is Indigenous knowledge that is at the forefront of North American Environmental conservation efforts so I am at a loss to explain why the Canadian government would choose to implement strategies for conservation from people who are such "poor stewards". Additionally, many of the "settlers" who first came to Canada would never have survived were it not through the aid and hospitality of the people who were "killing wildlife and gathering wild nuts and berries" to help feed them and to teach them what plants were useful as medicine and which ones were poisonous.

Mr Verdun also fails to educate the Barbadian public about the centuries of oppression that were visited on Native Canadians precisely because of their race. The residential school system, for example, was an effort to remove Indigenous children from their parents and take the "Indian" from them by forbidding them to speak their languages, practice their faith or participate in their culture within their communities. Sexual, physical and mental abuse was so common that people turned to alcohol as a means to cope with a nightmare that was visited upon them by their own governments. Perhaps people are not aware of this, but the South African Government modeled apartheid on Canada's treatment of its Indigenous peoples. To say that Canada has "mistreated" its Indigenous populations in the past is like saying that "Europe" was "naughty" to Africans during slavery.

In my own opinion, Artwork can only be judged "simple" by a man who lacks the aesthetic training to understand the subtle beauty in its symbolism. Are the soup cans of Andy Warhol any more complex or sophisticated in their depiction of American consumerism? His belief that "No amount of land, no amount of money, and no special privileges will ever satisfy people who are not motivated to advance themselves using their own ambition and ability..." ignores the hundred's of contributions that Native people have made and continue to make within Canadian society despite 5 centuries of oppression. American democratic ideals were predicated on the political ideals of the Iroquois Federation if a specific example of "contribution" is required to make my point clear.

Finally, if Mr. Verdun did not know his young colleague was "native" how can this be a surprise given his obvious distaste toward Canadian native peoples and his ignorance about them. Perhaps if the young man had come to work in a "buckskin" with feathers in his hair then Mr. Verdun would have been satisfied that he looked "Native enough" to be allowed to count as native by non-native standards. The Indigenous population does not denounce "all other Canadians" as racist, they denounce uninformed, uneducated, bigots like the one who wrote this disinformation and rightfully so. As a Barbadian I am embarrassed that a national newspaper of my country would print the type of racist ignorance that they would never dare print about a person of African descent. I invite anyone to research the history of indigenous people in Canada in some detail and I am quite sure that it will become extremely clear quite quickly that what Mr. Verdun has said about Native Canadians would require him to find a newspaper as far away from people educated in the subject as possible to print it, which is essentially what he did.

Sincerely:

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