

Blair Stonechild. *The New Buffalo: The Struggle for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2006. ix + 190 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-88755-693-7.



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Taking Aboriginal Education History to the Next Level

Blair Stonechild's *The New Buffalo* is the first book-length study of the history of Aboriginal post-secondary schooling in Canada. A study of this topic was overdue, not least because of the important ongoing jurisdictional and educational challenges at this level. Higher education has been relatively absent in the recent body of historical literature about Aboriginal schooling, and Stonechild's book describes a broad range of past developments, perspectives, studies, agreements, and initiatives.

Stonechild is well poised for a knowledgeable look at the past and present conditions of Aboriginal post-secondary education, though he is not—nor does he claim to be—a dispassionate observer. He appears himself as an historical subject of the book, as a former president of the Canadian Indigenous/Native Studies Association (CINSA), at the time of the organization's 1988 strategic funding application to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC/CRSH) (p. 69). A member of the Muscowpetung First Nation in Saskatchewan, Stonechild is a former assistant director at Manitou College in Quebec, and a current and long-time faculty mem-

ber at First Nations University of Canada in Regina.

As with his earlier works, *Saskatchewan Indians and the Resistance of 1885: Two Case Studies* (1986) and the Governor General's Award-winning *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (with Bill Waiser, 1997), Stonechild ensures that Aboriginal voices and perspectives are well represented in *The New Buffalo*. From his very process of source selection, Stonechild has included both government records and Aboriginal sources. His study employs documents created by the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, and many other Aboriginal organizations and institutions, plus Aboriginal newspapers, personal interviews and communications, and his own personal papers. From government records-creators, he has researched Indian Affairs files, personal papers, government publications, and gray literature.

The New Buffalo began as Stonechild's doctoral thesis, *Pursuing the New Buffalo: First Nations Post-Secondary Policy in Canada* (2004). It addresses a tremendous amount of subject matter, tackling a chronological scope

from Confederation through to the year of publication in 2006. In addition to documenting specific instances in the history of Aboriginal post-secondary education, such as early twentieth-century examples of Aboriginal students who petitioned for government support and the more recent Indian Studies Support Program, Stonechild maintains many threads of important context throughout the book. He frequently returns to the negotiation and ongoing understanding of the Numbered Treaties; changing approaches to Indian policy under succeeding prime ministers and governments; developments in Aboriginal political organization; major government and Aboriginal organization studies and position papers; and evolving demographic evidence of Aboriginal educational attainment. The scope and pace of the book, in many places, feels too overwhelming for its 138 pages of substantive text. It is a welcome change when the book slows down for detailed descriptions of three important events during the 1970s and 1980s: the founding and then closure of Manitou College (pp. 54-62); the "funding cap" controversy regarding the Post Secondary Student Support Program that began in 1987 (pp. 71-89); and the establishment of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (pp. 89-95). These are the book's nuggets. In these pages especially, the study offers new sources of research, detailed analysis, and insight from Stonechild's own experiences and observations.

The book could have been improved with better editing and organization. The almost verbatim replication of the same paragraph in two different chapters (pp. 110, 119) is indicative of a certain repetitiveness in the presentation of evidence and conclusions. The book also jumps distractingly between eras and topics. One is left to wonder, for example, why the establishment of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College is described so long after its many mentions in the book, and also so long after its contemporary developments such as the founding of Manitou College. Stonechild's organizational choice may have been deliberate, but it is not transparent, nor does it always provide a particularly easy read.

In sum, Blair Stonechild's *The New Buffalo* is a groundbreaking study. In a field of historical literature on Aboriginal education that is dominated by studies of elementary and secondary schooling, Stonechild's book offers a valuable perspective on lifelong education in relation to treaty rights, cultural empowerment, jurisdictional difficulties, institutional developments, and individual experiences. Stonechild's book probes instances of this history in fascinating detail, and offers an overall context that will be a rich basis for further studies of Aboriginal post-secondary education in Canada.

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