

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

---

Winter 2007

**Review of *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture, Volume I* Edited by David R. Newhouse, Cora J. Voyageur, and Dan Beavon**

Robin Brownlie  
*University of Manitoba*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

---

Brownlie, Robin, "Review of *Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture, Volume I* Edited by David R. Newhouse, Cora J. Voyageur, and Dan Beavon" (2007). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1511.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1511>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

*Hidden in Plain Sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian Identity and Culture, Volume 1.* Edited by David R. Newhouse, Cora J. Voyageur, and Dan Beavon. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. xxiv + 458 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography. \$70.00 cloth, \$37.95 paper.

*Hidden in Plain Sight* is a book with an unusual agenda: to discuss and publicize the many constructive, meaningful contributions that Aboriginal peoples have made to Canadian society. Aimed primarily at the general public, students, and Aboriginal people themselves, the book contains essays from treaty researchers, civil servants, lawyers, teachers, curators, artists, writers, undergraduate students, and academics. The book's impetus arose from its editors' frustration over the constant equation of Aboriginal people with pain, problems, and struggle. Widely absent from public discourse and academic writing, they felt, was attention to the strengths and capacity of Aboriginal peoples, their achievements in many fields of endeavor, and the signs of positive developments in recent years. As David Newhouse explains in his preface, the editors hoped to "add a new dimension to the picture of Aboriginal peoples, one that shows them to be industrious, meritorious, and accomplished," and by so doing to "help create a place of respect and dignity for Aboriginal peoples in Canada."

The body of the book is divided into seven sections of varying lengths: "Treaties," "Arts

and Media," "Literature," "Justice," "Culture and Identity," "Sports," and "Military." With three of the largest sections concentrating on arts and culture, this area receives by far the greatest attention, constituting over half of the volume's forty-seven items. Scattered throughout the book are twenty-four short biographical profiles, most of them produced by the undergraduate students in editor Cora Voyageur's sociology class. While these are not always elegant pieces of writing, they are an interesting element and directly showcase Aboriginal talent, creativity, and industry.

In tone, content, style, and overall quality, this collection is, predictably, mixed. The articles also vary in their overall intent: some are clearly designed to provide overviews of an issue for the general public; others appear to be aimed more at an academic audience. There is little content specifically on the Great Plains; rather, most articles attempt to cover most or all of Canada. Some individuals from the Great Plains are profiled, including academic and activist Harold Cardinal, artist Allen Sapp, linguist Freda Ahenakew, and architect Douglas Cardinal.

The volume has considerable success overall in celebrating Aboriginal people's merits and accomplishments. It maintains a determinedly upbeat tone throughout most of the pieces, sometimes glossing over real problems, but more often recognizing challenges while focusing firmly on the positive. Voyageur and J. Rick Ponting's important closing article does a fine job of acknowledging problems while citing a wide range of indications that demonstrate real gains and hope for greater improvements.

Some of the other articles are less successful. The section on treaties, for instance, is disappointing: despite the obvious scope for highlighting Aboriginal agency here, both substantive articles give more agency to government, particularly Jean-Pierre Morin's paper. Although the two articles address the harms of colonization, they also present First Nations people as victims more than actors, and sometimes even as simple recipients of government policy. This approach neglects a number of significant academic and Aboriginal-produced studies that reveal how much First Nations people did to initiate treaty processes, enforce treaty provisions, and advance the recognition of Aboriginal rights.

That said, many of the articles here provide a wealth of information and make an important contribution to public debate, precisely through their

attention to Aboriginal attainments, influence, and energy. The book is a timely addition to the field of Native/Indigenous studies and will doubtless find its place on many course outlines.

ROBIN JARVIS BROWNLIE  
Department of History  
University of Manitoba