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RACISM IN CANADIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES TEXTBOOKS

Abstract:

Do Manitoba elementary schools' history and social studies textbooks contain racist knowledge towards Indigenous peoples in Canada? Data is collected from a range of textbooks that are published between 1960 and 2013; all were found in schools' libraries and classrooms within the past year. Youth are using even the dated books for research, and therefore consider them legitimate academic sources. The more recent publications are listed on the Manitoba Textbook Bureau, a government agency that designates acceptable books for teachers to use in the province. Surveying these textbooks illuminates various problematic ways that race and Indigenous peoples are taught and portrayed. Older textbooks rely on overtly racist rhetoric, such as labelling Indigenous peoples "barbarians," "Noble Savages," or suggesting that white settlers were the first people to live in Canada. More recent textbooks move away from this open racism towards a new subtle racism that blurs the lines between learned cultural traits and biological characteristics, essentializing social features. The notion that skin colour provides any deep genetic meaning has long been scientifically disproven. A result of this new, covert racism found in schools' textbooks, combined with the accessibility of old overtly racist ones, is that racialized thinking becomes normalized amongst youth early on.

Keywords:

Racism; Indigenous peoples; Canada; textbooks

JEL Classification: F54, I21, Y90