

Book Review: *And Grandma Said . . . Iroquois Teachings as Passed Down through the Oral Tradition*

Book Author Tom Sakokweniónkwás Porter

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I feel deeply honoured and humbled in being asked to review Tom Porter's book, "And Grandma Said... Iroquois Teachings as passed down through the oral tradition". At a time when there is great interest being shown in the development of a more astute cultural framework around the historical and contemporary experiences of Indigenous Peoples, Porter's book is socially and politically well-timed and informative.

The book presents a detailed and comprehensive insight into the spiritual beliefs and culture of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) First Nations Peoples of the USA and the historic and contemporary impact that colonisation has had on their cultural, social and economic way of life. Tom Porter courageously utilizes his own journey to provide the reader with an analysis of issues that have impacted severely upon the engagement of the Haudenosaunee people within society following the aftermath of colonization.

From the outset, Porter fills the reader with a sense of enquiry as he skilfully utilizes the teachings of his Elders to explore an ideological and theoretical overview of the cultural and social experiences of his people. Through his poignant and articulate insight into the cultural foundations of the Haudenosaunee Peoples, he leads the reader on an emotional journey that articulates the historical and contemporary manifestations of colonization. He provides an analysis of the deep seated colonial influences on the Iroquois people, with his words resonating the experiences of Indigenous peoples around the world.

Porter in his 'matter of fact style' addresses the legacy of colonisation from his own personal perspective and speaks of the influence that his Grandma's teachings have had on overcoming the effects of this imposition on his own wellbeing. At a time when the spiritual, social, economic and political wellbeing of Indigenous peoples continues to present a worldwide concern this ethnographical analysis is not only timely, but inspiring and encouraging on many levels. The use of his own experiences to provide an analysis of the oral teachings of the Haudenosaunee Peoples offers a critical teaching tool for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers.

The author provides an articulation of issues that will enable Indigenous people from other Nations to review their own familial and community legacies of colonisation and examine the impact of their own cultural teachings as a medium to address the colonial influences in their lives. For Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers interested in developing a more intense understanding of the integral role of oral history for the Haudenosaunee Peoples, this book provides an intrinsic understanding of the teachings of the Elders and its effects on the articulation and of colonisation on Indigenous wellbeing.

Porter makes no attempt to profile himself as a scholar, teacher or advocate, although he would be able to make claim to such titles. Rather he humbly presents the knowledge his Grandma taught him and examines it within the context of his own life's journey whilst respecting and honouring his cultural heritage, ancestors, and his Iroquois spiritual beliefs and experiences.

Tom Porter, a respected Elder of the Mohawk people, has become one of the most respected cultural teachers among the Iroquois, a spiritual leader welcome across the continent for his sincerity, wit and knowledge. He summarizes the ancient customs and traditions of the Mohawk people using his distinctive teaching style which blends together charm, humour and a remarkable command of aboriginal [Iroquois] culture. In giving life to the origins of the book, Porter shares with the reader his dream where his Grandma beckoned him to write down all of her teachings as a means of protecting and securing the traditional values and cultural heritage for future generations of the Iroquois people.

When reading the book, one becomes mesmerized by the poetry of the words utilized by Porter as he leaves one with a sense of engaging in an individual conversation where both the author and the reader explore and analyse a raft of issues pertinent to colonization and the teachings and experiences of the Haudenosaunee People. The book provides an easy to read articulation of issues and experiences of Indigenous people and the impact of colonization. Much of what is written is socially and culturally transportable as it could resonate the awe in which a child of any culture may view the teaching of his/her Elders. An example of this is demonstrated in the following passage

So I always listened to my grandmother and the Chiefs and the old people like Grandpa Bero; I always listened 'cause he was my Grandpa. But I didn't really take it as if it was *really* true because I had learned [through colonisation schooling] not to believe it. It was no use hearing it. It was useless until the 1960s when we had the White Roots of Peace. (p. 33)

The use of photographs and diagrams compliment the textual richness and quality of the book. The glossary of Mohawk words and their meaning utilized by Porter enhances the scholarship and social astuteness of the publication. Although Porter's intention was to have his Grandma's teachings recorded for future Iroquois generations, the content will have far broader

significance. The book will prove to be an invaluable educational resource for anyone interested in the impact of colonisation on the cultural, social and spiritual traditions and values of Indigenous people.

Throughout the book, the author cleverly interweaves western social discourse with his own cultural teachings, creating a new theoretical space where neither is dominant or subservient. The author cleverly provides a cultural framework that is easy for the reader to digest, enabling them to query their own preconceived suppositions and ideas. Tom Porter's writing provides a knowledge framework that will enable non Indigenous professionals to be better equipped to interact and engage with the people of Indigenous nations. For Indigenous people the book speaks to the level of resilience, strength and pride maintained by Elders in their battle to protect the cultural heritage and values of their children.

When reading "*And Grandma Said*" a new insight into my own understanding of history and culture became apparent. By reading Porter's book, I have realised that colonisation does not only harm and deprive the colonised but it also deprives the colonisers of access to the wealth that is embedded in Indigenous knowledge (Aboriginal Elder, 2015). Tom Porter takes the reader on a personal and intellectual journey of confrontation, cultural ignorance and reform, providing a unique challenge to stereotypic meanderings often expressed about Indigenous people suffering the impositions of colonisation.

Even today the ideology of colonisation is alive and well. Colonisation is more than the physical act of building colonies and dispossession/invasion; it incorporates an internalised process of colonisation of the coloniser's culture and the denigration of the colonised culture. (Muller, 2014, p. 16)

"*And Grandma Said*" is a story of cultural survival, resilience and the significant role that the oral traditions of Indigenous peoples have had on their ability to overcome the impact of colonization. Porter's book is an important reminder to Indigenous peoples that they have the ability to overcome the effects of colonization through the foundations established by their Elders. Porters book will help transcend social and cultural boundaries by providing the non-Indigenous reader with an insight into the plight of Indigenous people in their struggle to overcome the traumas of colonial influences. Porter's account of his own experiences will enlighten the minds of many as his words will help them to challenge and crystallize misunderstandings and perceptions regarding of the Haudanasian people.

Porter bravely explores and exposes the unique and interconnectedness of western theoretical discourse with his own cultural analysis which emanated from the cultural teachings of his grandma and other Elders throughout his life. Porters' writing will contribute to the development of a new theoretical dialogue where western and cultural knowledge is seen to be

neither dominant nor subservient to each other, but highly relevant when living in a multicultural society. Tom Porter skilfully profiles the specificities, the intersections and similarities between the two theoretical frameworks, treating the reader to an intricate analysis of bicultural theoretical discourse.

Porter also provides non-Indigenous readers with a look at colonisation through an Indigenous lens, affording them an insightful understanding of how the aftermaths of historical events continues to effect Indigenous people today. For Indigenous readers he has provided a framework that will help them work through the psychosocial and colonial manifestations affecting their families and communities.

The historical and social prominence of this book will be evidenced by its impact as an important educational tool for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike, profiling the awareness of the unique scholarship of First Nations knowledge systems, theoretical frameworks and world views. Whether the reader is a professional or layperson, scholar, student, community member or Government representative, “And Grandmother Said” will prove to be a cathartic and inspirational read.

References

Aboriginal Elder, (2015). Interview.

Muller, L. A. (2014). *Theory for Indigenous Australian Health and Human Service Work: Connecting Indigenous Knowledge and Practice*. Sydney, Australia: Unwin and Allen Press.