

# STORYTELLING OF A DIFFERENT KIND: BOOK

## REVIEW OF THOMAS KING'S

### *THE TRUTH ABOUT STORIES: A NATIVE PERSPECTIVE*

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#### **Story Telling should not be overlooked.**

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Storytelling is an interesting part of culture, having been influenced by both history and myths from various peoples. Those who are no strangers to this are the Indigenous people of Canada and the United States, where stories and storytellers hold an important place culturally. This is particularly important when talking about a specific storyteller, known as Thomas King, author of the book *The Truth About Stories: A Native Perspective*. Inside his book, he goes over various stories he's told and been told over time. Given the mixture of his own experiences as a mixed-race person of Indigenous descent and his storytelling, it would make sense to compare his experiences with racism to the experiences of those who survived the dark times of the residential school system and other injustices of colonization.

While this book is an older one, given the age of King, and that he was born American, not Canadian, his experiences are still relevant

considering he himself is part native by birth. Within the pages of his book, he talks of the various struggles of his life associated with being mixed race, including how people perceived him. As a result of his background, he has a wealth of knowledge in terms of the treatment of Indigenous peoples.

On this note, he uses his own experience as a way to try and bridge the gap left by the lack of native voices. This gives a degree of authenticity to his book. His experience with racism is profound, with him being labelled as looking too Native at some events, or not Native enough at others, depending on how he dressed. His description of what an 'authentic' native is, at least according to those of European descent, is also telling, with him being very disparaging of those same people who made that image.

Another thing that comes up quite frequently is the challenges which the Natives face. King does a good job of focusing on the big issues

that various Native bands have throughout both the United States and Canada, such as policies created by the colonial governments, trauma created by attempted genocide, and residential schools. His focus on those problems makes it clear that his perspective on these historic issues is quite important given his background.

King explains how colonial governments attempted to get rid of the Natives, first by violence, and then by legislation (King, 138-149). In Canada's context, he goes through the Indian Act, and then the disastrous attempt to apologize for that which came with Bill C-31, which led to a whole court case (King, 149-160). Bill C-31 was an act introduced to amend the Indian Act, attempting to end more than a century's worth of attempted genocide.

King also addresses residential schools. While he may not have experienced it, he mentions people who had been through the horrors of those schools. In the section where he mentions residential schools, he talks about a friend who was able to survive, however briefly. What he describes in that section of the book, however short, tracks with the various abuses suffered by survivors who are speaking out today.

King's talk about residential school survivor and fellow writer, Robert Alexie, adds another level of authenticity to the case his book makes. Through a short purview of Alexie's

book, King provides various details that are consistent with those of whom have or are descended from those who have survived physical and sexual abuses, that were attempts to assimilate them (King, 126-127).

Of course, it would be unfair to give the book high praise without giving it some criticism. In the case of King's book, there is a side of which one learns *too* much about him, as the accounts get very personal. Not just that, while his style of writing is very easy to understand, it also contains a lot of dated language which might be considered offensive currently.

Furthermore, the stories he tells within that are not personal accounts are few and far between, though he does a very good job of connecting them to what he talks about in his personal life and from the native perspective.

This book is an engaging read, despite its few flaws. King does a very good job of describing the Native experience to those who are not privy to such information. He brings a good perspective into the mix, as again, he himself is of mixed race, thus giving what he says within the pages a great deal of authenticity. Furthermore, his knowledge of what happened provides good accounts of the trauma that Native people have experienced during colonization. At the same time, while this plays a large part of his book, it also speaks to the power of native stories, and knowledge, as well as their ability to survive the harsh treatment of colonialism.

REFERENCES

King, T. (2010) *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative*. House of Anansi Press Inc.