



Crystal Brown

Crystal Brown is a fourth year Indigenous Studies major at the University of Winnipeg where she is also a member of the University of Winnipeg Aboriginal Student Council. She has an interest in Aboriginal law, particularly land claims and issues and plans to pursue a law degree. She worked as a research assistant for the Cultural Studies Research Group (CSRG) in connection with the *Museum Openings* workshop.

The University of Winnipeg Cultural Studies Research Group held a Museum Openings Workshop, “Caring for Difficult Knowledge Within and Beyond the Canadian Museum for Human Rights,” this past September and as a student Research Assistant, I had the opportunity to participate in the workshop learning and listening to presenters from across Canada and around the world. As a First Nations woman and Indigenous Studies major there were many topics that were of interest and I came away from the workshop with a renewed sense of motivation in my studies as I was surrounded by academics and scholars many of whom were experts in their fields.

I had the opportunity to present to the ‘Introduction to Indigenous Studies’ class at Red River College, an adult cohort stream, regarding the workshop, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) and my experience as a student research assistant. I focused on several topics and discussed the diversity of presenters that participated in the workshop including those who resonated with me and my studies such as Angela Failler, Kathryn Ball, Monica Patterson and Karen Sharma.

I discussed the idea of difficult knowledge along with lovely knowledge as they were new concepts that I had learned from the workshop and was met with similar interests from the students, which lead into some great discussions amongst the class. Many of them had a general idea but had not thought about how difficult knowledge and the potential it has to bring about positive change and how the CMHR can bring about such change through tackling difficult concepts for the general public. I posed several questions to the class such as: How is the CMHR handling difficult knowledge for the general public? Are they presenting it in a safe and lovely manner or are the exhibits challenging the complicated knowledge head-on in hopes of generating “innovative approaches for learning from histories of violence and conflict within and beyond the museum,” (Failler 2014).

Another concept discussed at length was the location of the CMHR and how it sits atop land that holds a considerable amount of historical and sacred artifacts. There were several questions of concern and many of whom were not aware of the controversy surrounding the first few months of building the CMHR. As the only national museum that sits outside of the national centre, and being located in an area with the largest Aboriginal populations within Canada I also questioned the class about the voice of the CMHR and who controls that narrative.

The topic quickly turned to genocide, one of the main discussions surrounding the CMHR and their lack of recognition of the genocide of Indigenous peoples which was the same stance taken by the federal government. This created quite a lengthy discussion about why genocide, whether it be cultural or factual, was not getting recognized as such. However, many

students ultimately stated the CMHR is a step in the right direction in that there is now an institution recognizing human rights abuses and that this could lead to an eventual admission, in due time, by the federal government.

While my presentation was expected to last no longer than 30 minutes, it in fact, went much longer, closer to two hours. I was fortunate to present to a group of students who had great interest in the CMHR and its discourse and their engagement was evident in their questions and discussions. It was also a great experience to carry the discussion forward from the workshop continuing to plant the seeds of interest and knowledge surrounding difficult knowledge and the potentiality it has to bring about change.

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