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Three books that left a lasting impression

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To the Editor,

Martin Luther King Jr. once observed that, ?Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity,? and Canada is showing its willingness to behave in this dangerous way as it applies to Truth and Reconciliation regarding Indigenous populations and the current crisis on Wet'suwet'en territory. I once was sincerely ignorant and conscientiously stupid, our neglect of history in our education system makes this an almost certainty if one does not do their own research, but there is no reason to remain so. What we need if we are to find a path forward together with Indigenous people's is compassion fueled by knowledge and understanding of how the past informs the present. We as Canadian's need to understand the context in which the current blockades are taking place and we need to understand it from the Indigenous perspective, not simply from a narrow economic perspective. Most importantly we need to understand how our own personal attitudes and beliefs have contributed to the ongoing crisis.

I lived In Shannonville in 2006 when Mohawks blockaded the rail lines in Marysville to show support for Six Nations protesters over the construction of houses in Caledonia. I was 29-years-old at the time and did not know or understand what was happening, but I was curious. So, I went down to the public library on the Mohawk reserve and walked up to the librarian and said, ?I'm white and I'm ignorant can you help me understand what's happening?? The librarian's reply surprised me when she said, ?You're not the first white person to make such a request.? She then recommended three books that she called ?the good, the bad and the ugly.'

The good, was a book by Jack Weatherford called Indian Givers: How Native Americans Transformed the World (1988). This book explores how, in the words of the Los Angeles Times, ?we have underrated and ignored the contribution of American Indians [sic] to world's economy and culture.? The bad, was a book by Ronald Wright called Stolen Continents: The ?new world? through Indian [sic] Eyes (1992). It was described by Canadian author Farley Mowat as, ?The most gut-wrenching account of man's inhumanity to man I have ever read.? The ugly, was a book by Geoffrey York called, The Dispossessed: Life and Death in Native Canada (1989). It is described as a book, ?that will change our sense of Canada as a benign and compassionate nation.? These books changed my entire understanding of why the blockade was happening, in fact I went down to the blockade in April of 2006 to show my support.

Given the rash of comments in the media and on Facebook calling for the government to end the blockade by force, it's time that we took a step back to understand our own history and observe how the past continues to inform our current attitudes towards Indigenous people. These three books scratch the surface concerning the history of Indigenous struggles in Canada, but for those who dare to know, they will give you a basis for empathy and understanding and who knows, maybe you too will find yourself observing things from a very different perspective. The government of Justin Trudeau promised to take reconciliation seriously, but if he will not then it's up to us as Canadians and it starts with each of us shedding our sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity regarding our historical relationship to Indigenous people. It starts with each of us examining the good, the bad, and the ugly of our own country, and then doing something about it.

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