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Globe and Mail columnist stepped over the line

by Ben Powless

The Dominion - <http://www.dominionpaper.ca>

Not normally known for pulling punches, the controversial columnist Margaret Wenté today provided an apology and justification for Olympic Committee member Dick Pound's assertions that "Canada was a country of savages" a few hundred years ago.

In her article, titled What Dick Pound said was really dumb – and also true, Wenté goes on the offensive against all those who were offended by Pound's comments, and makes the case that Natives were indeed savages, and that's why Canada should continue its plans to erase their "neolithic culture".

"North American native peoples had a neolithic culture [sic] based on subsistence living and small kinship groups... They had not developed broader laws or institutions ..., evidence based science ..., or advanced technologies... Until about 30 years ago, the anthropological term for this developmental stage was 'savagery'," she writes.

Until about 30 years ago, the technical term for this would be ignorance. Today, it is just plain racism to argue cultural inferiority and pretend that all Native peoples are the same. Apparently Aboriginal problems today can be explained by the fact that we have a "relatively simple neolithic kinship-based culture" trying to make it in a world too complex for us. Broken treaties, residential schools, police discrimination? Not a problem!

Wenté attempts to de-romanticize Indigenous cultures. She argues that modern drugs have no relation to Native medicines. Maybe Wenté should take an aspirin, a medicine derived from willow bark, a traditional medicine. This is beyond the point. She could do her homework, but she has other motives.

Wenté feels it is wrong for Canadian society to feel collective guilt, since Native peoples had "absurd" spiritual beliefs, weren't ecologically sensitive, and basically were good-for-nothing. And this guilt is what's pushing us to try and protect Aboriginal cultures – effectively dooming them.

"[A] neolithic culture cannot possibly give them a future. And it's time for us to face that." She's a brave one, concerned for poor little Indians, calling for us to accept racist policies like the ones that resulted in residential schools and Native leaders in jail. No, Margaret Wenté's town isn't big enough for more than one culture, unless it's based on White values.

This kind of thinking and writing is unacceptable today. Dick Pound may have made some unsavoury remarks that he regretted, but this is just appalling. Within one day, a Facebook group was created. It already has over one hundred members, calling for Ms. Wenté to be fired.

Margaret Wenté should not be allowed to keep her position at the Globe and Mail, publishing such virulent lies, while Mr. Pound should resign his Olympic Committee

position and McGill Chancellorship. The newspaper should distance itself from her remarks and work instead to build understanding of different cultures.

I am urging people everywhere to write letters to the editors, to Wente, and to her boss, letting them know you're not buying the paper.

We have to stop allowing such racism to go unchallenged in our society. We must demand respect and understanding for all.

---- Ben Powless is Mohawk from Six Nations. He is currently studying Human Rights, Indigenous and Environmental Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa.