

As a part of Canada Weeks 2007 the Department of International Studies and Canadian Studies welcomes:

Nathan D. Carlson
(Faculty of Native Studies—University of Alberta):

***Reviving Windigo: An Ethnohistory of
'Cannibal Monsters' in Northern Alberta,
1878-1910***

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 8TH
SMSU 338



The Windigo (var. Witiko) phenomenon of the northern Algonquian people of Canada is one of the most mysterious, perplexing and controversial topics documented in the anthropological and psychiatric literature on the Native peoples of North America. According to the legends of the Cree and Métis people of northern Alberta, the Witiko is a fearsome cannibalistic predator that stalks the boreal forests in a perpetual hunt for human prey. The term Windigo has also been applied to an alleged condition in which individuals developed a mysterious insanity characterized by cannibalistic hunger; a condition purportedly heralding transformation into the anthropophagous monster of Algonquian legend.

Originally inspired by a childhood story told to him by his Métis grandmother, regarding a man who was executed as a 'Witiko' in 1896, Nathan Carlson gathered a number stories from Cree and Métis elders, and undertook extensive archival research to uncover several enigmatic events attributed to witiko that occurred in the Athabasca district of northern Alberta between the years of 1878-1910. These 'Witiko' cases formed the subject matter of Carlson's thesis for his degree in Native Studies.

Using the stories and the historic evidence he gathered as the basis of his lecture, Mr. Carlson shall address the most controversial questions on this enigmatic phenomenon. Namely, "Did the Windigo condition actually exist? And if it did, what could have caused it to happen?"