

ARTICLES

Violence That Dispossesses: Continuity on the Settler Colonial Timeline

PAIGE RAIBMON

University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada



Abstract: *This article considers what role and responsibility historians may have when faced with settler society's tendency to be freshly shocked each time it learns (again) about a colonial horror from its past that was, in fact, already long well known by many. Following an introduction, my argument unfolds in five sections. First, I engage a mostly Indigenous scholarship to suggest replotting British Columbia's timeline as a continuum, or continuous process, of ongoing violence that illuminates connections across myriad forms of violence. Second, I reflect on an earlier, mostly non-Indigenous historiography about physical force and violence in British Columbia. Third, with this scholarship as context, I use an experimental format to present a catalogue of dispossession drawn from transcripts of the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia (1913–1916). These accounts demonstrate that settlers relied on physical violence during the foundational pre-emption and Crown granting processes to an extent that warrants greater attention. Fourth, I suggest that some important implications follow from this for understandings of British Columbia's past and present. Fifth, I argue that taking the long view of settler-on-Indigenous violence as a continuum helps clarify connections among forms of violence, particularly in relation to the materiality of forced physical dispossession, and, in so doing, moves us closer to telling histories that are not just for the winners.*

Keywords: Indigenous people, settler colonialism, violence, British Columbia, dispossession

Résumé : *Le présent article évalue le rôle et l'éventuelle responsabilité des historiens devant la tendance de la société coloniale à être fraîchement scandalisée lorsqu'elle (re)découvre les horreurs coloniales du passé, alors que l'on connaît depuis longtemps. Après une introduction, je présente mon argumentaire en cinq parties. Premièrement, j'utilise une littérature majoritairement autochtone pour proposer de refaire la ligne du temps de la Colombie-Britannique dans un continuum (ou processus continu) de violence persistante qui fait ressortir les liens entre de multiples formes*

de violence. Deuxièmement, je réfléchis à une historiographie plus ancienne, d'origine majoritairement non autochtone, sur la force physique et la violence en Colombie-Britannique. Troisièmement, grâce à la contextualisation offerte par ces études, j'utilise un cadre expérimental pour présenter un catalogue des dépossessions tiré des exposés de la Commission sur les terres et les affaires indiennes dans la province de la Colombie-Britannique (1913–1916). Ces comptes rendus démontrent que les colons recouraient à la violence physique pendant la période fondatrice de préemption et les processus d'octroi par la Couronne, dans une proportion qui mérite davantage d'analyse. Quatrièmement, je suggère qu'en découlent certaines implications pour la compréhension de l'implication du passé et du présent de la Colombie-Britannique. Cinquièmement, je fais valoir qu'adoptant une vision à long terme de la violence des colons envers les Autochtones en tant que continuum aide à éclaircir les liens entre les formes de violence, notamment à l'égard de la matérialité de la dépossession physique forcée et, ce faisant, de se rapprocher d'histoires qui ne s'adressent pas seulement aux vainqueurs.

Mots clés : colonialisme de peuplement, Colombie-Britannique, dépossession, peuples autochtones, violence

“People find it very difficult to act on what they know.”

— James Baldwin¹

STARTING POINTS

This piece emerges from two instances of mental dissonance I experienced and my sense that they might speak to each other and to historians. The first relates to an archive of testimonies by Indigenous individuals to a royal commission on reserve lands from 1913 to 1916 that have been freely available online for over twenty years. The second instance relates to settler media and non-Indigenous public responses to a press release about ground-penetrating radar results on the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School (IRS) in 2021. My effort to connect the two follows.

THE FIRST INSTANCE

I was a graduate student when the historian Jean Barman first handed me transcripts from the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia (also known as the McKenna McBride Commission) in 1998. (In truth, it was a microfilm call number.) A few years later, she told me (I was now an assistant professor) to come photocopy the shelf of binders she had filled with photocopies of the testimony. “You need these,” she said. Though I was never her student, Jean was a mentor to me, and I did as she advised. I hardly

1 Quoted in Kevin Bruyneel, *Settler Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 3.

knew what to make of the overwhelming archive of reported speech. The commission's mandate was to finalize reserve boundaries and to resolve a jurisdictional dispute between Ottawa and British Columbia.² This mandate denied more fundamental jurisdictional, legal, and ethical contests between Indigenous Peoples and the state. And the Indigenous witnesses who spoke across thousands of pages of typescript refused its terms. They asserted hereditary rights and title and reported the impacts from when settlers – often in violation of settler law, always in violation of Indigenous law – displaced them from their homes, lands, and waters. In the early 2000s, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs put this archive online with a path-breaking digitization project that they titled to emphasize the suffering it documented: “Our Homes Are Bleeding.” I have reflected on these documents many times. Witnesses’ assertions of rights flowing from their ethical-legal orders and descriptions of settler violence were indelible. Accounts of settlers burning Indigenous dwellings were especially stark. I grew up in BC, yet not in a place that understood itself as having been forged through this kind of terror.

THE SECOND INSTANCE

I heard about the Tkemlúps te Secwépemc press release that confirmed the location of children’s remains from my neighbour on a sunny May morning while we walked our dogs.³ “Have you heard?” He was shocked and assumed I was too. But something else surprised me as we chatted and, later, when I read the news at home. I was surprised at the shock that framed the non-Indigenous media and public discussion.⁴ My surprise turned to astonishment when this shock propelled long-inert settler bureaucracies into action: over the weekend, my local school board composed an email to every family in the district expressing its shock and grief; within a month, the federal government established National Truth and Reconciliation Day, fulfilling the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) Call to Action no. 80 seven years after its

2 See “Background to the McKenna McBride Commission,” *Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC)*, accessed 4 January 2025, <https://collections.ubcic.bc.ca/s/ourhomesarebleeding/page/background>; “Impacts of the McKenna McBride Commission,” *UBCIC*, accessed 4 January 2025, <https://collections.ubcic.bc.ca/s/ourhomesarebleeding/page/impacts>; Cole Harris, *Making Native Space* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 228–9; Patricia E. Roy, “McBride of McKenna McBride,” *BC Studies* 172 (2011–12): 35–76.

3 Tkemlúps te Secwépemc, “Remains of Children of Kamloops Residential School Discovered,” 27 May 2021, <https://tkemlups.ca/remains-of-children-of-kamloops-residential-school-discovered/>. Stories of similar findings at other Indian Residential School sites followed. Helly Honderich, “Why Canada Is Mourning the Deaths of Hundreds of Children,” *BBC*, 15 July 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57325653>; Mike Hager, “Williams Lake First Nation Identifies 93 Potential Burial Sites at Former Residential School,” *Globe and Mail*, 25 January 2022, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-williams-lake-first-nation-identifies-93-potential-burial-sites-at>.

4 Joseph Weiss, “Settler Shock: Colonial Fetishism and the Disavowal of Violence in Contemporary Canada,” *Public Culture* 36, no. 1 (2024): 76.

release.⁵ As the Gwichyà Gwich'in historian Crystal Fraser and the Métis historian Allyson Stevenson note, "Indigenous communities and families have been pointing towards the violent nature of colonialism, and students' deaths, in particular, for decades."⁶ Accounts have proliferated since the 1990s – journalism, first-person narratives, films, oral history interviews, TRC hearings.⁷ Survivors of the Kamloops IRS have a term to refer to their knowledge of what children experienced at the institution: "the Knowing."⁸ As the Kwakwaka'wakw politician and writer Jody Wilson-Raybould writes, "while the reports were indeed horrific for Indigenous Peoples, they were not shocking."⁹

Why is violence – known by IRS survivors, reported in the McKenna McBride Commission's testimonies – not more fully integrated into scholarly and public understandings of BC history?¹⁰ How is settler society freshly shocked each time it learns (again) about a colonial horror from its past?¹¹ I navigate these questions in what follows as a white, Jewish scholar whose learning about Indigenous Peoples and colonialism began with an undergraduate honour's seminar taught by Arthur Ray in 1993. My interests then lay with the nineteenth- and twentieth-century histories of anti-Semitism in central and eastern Europe that shaped my family history. That seminar transformed my intellectual interests and, as things turned out, my life.

My argument unfolds in five sections. First, I engage a rich, mostly Indigenous, scholarship to suggest replotting British Columbia's timeline as a continuum, or continuous process, of violence that extends back and continues to dispossess Indigenous people and Peoples. Second, I reflect on important earlier, mostly non-Indigenous, historiography about physical force in British Columbia and its implications. Third, with this scholarship as context, I consider events from the twentieth century's first decade and a half, a transformative period in

5 Michelle Ghoussoub, "Why Canada Is Marking the 1st National Day for Truth and Reconciliation This Year," *CBC News*, 28 September 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/first-national-truth-reconciliation-day-1.6188540>.

6 Crystal Gail Fraser and Allyson Stevenson, "Reflecting on the Foundations of Our Discipline Inspired by the TRC: A Duty to Respond during This Age of Reconciliation," *Canadian Historical Review* 103, no. 1 (2022): 2.

7 Survivor testimonials from Kamloops Indian Residential School, first published in 1988, were republished in 2022. Celia Haig-Brown et al., *Tsqelmucwiltc* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2022). Other early testimonials include Shirley Sterling, *My Name Is Seepeetza* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1992); Isabelle Knockwood, *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia* (Lockeport, NS: Roseway, 1992); and Elizabeth Furniss, *Victims of Benevolence: The Dark Legacy of the Williams Lake Residential School* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995). John S. Milloy, *A National Crime* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999) details abuse in the Indian Residential School system.

8 Tanya Talaga, *The Knowing* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2024), 15.

9 Jody Wilson-Raybould, *True Reconciliation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2022), 49. See also Talaga, *The Knowing*, 12, 21.

10 Scholarship on the McKenna McBride Commission (MMC) includes Ronald Ignace, "Kamloops Agency and the Indian Reserve Commission of 1912–1916" (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1979); Harris, *Making Native Space*, 228–48; Wendy Wickwire, *At the Bridge* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019), ch. 8.

11 Joseph Weiss engages this question through Freud in Weiss, "Settler Shock."

British Columbia's settler colonial project. I catalogue selections of McKenna McBride testimony that detail forced dispossession of Indigenous families by settlers. These accounts demonstrate that settlers relied on physical violence during the pre-emption and Crown-granting processes to an extent that warrants greater attention.¹² Fourth, I suggest that important implications follow for understandings of British Columbia's past and present. Fifth, I suggest that taking the long view of settler-on-Indigenous violence as a continuum that spans Canada's history helps clarify connections among forms of violence, particularly in relation to foundational acts of physical dispossession.

VIOLENCE AS OPEN SECRET

The widespread settler shock – individual and institutional – following the Tkemlúps te Secwépmc press release reiterated a time-worn pattern in which settlers discover something (or someplace) that Indigenous people already know well. Often, that “something” has long been available for settlers to know too. Such shock functions like the “moves to innocence” discussed by the scholars Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang.¹³ The discipline of history is complicit in this move because, as Fraser and Stevenson note, it has been used to craft national narratives that deny Indigenous sovereignty and justify settler colonialism while “feigning a lack of awareness of Indigenous suffering.”¹⁴ Historians participate in what the Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson calls “the innocence of the story that Canada likes to tell about itself, that ... it ... somehow escapes the ugliness of history.”¹⁵ Denialists subscribe explicitly to this innocence, but so too, if less obviously, do individuals who regret colonial harms yet adhere uncritically to the “liberal order” that was colonialism's engine.¹⁶ The Canadian liberal order, the historian Ian McKay wrote twenty-five years ago, undertook “the replacement, often with a kind of revolutionary symbolic or actual violence ... traditions and forms that had functioned for centuries and even millennia.”¹⁷ “Violence was inherent to liberalism,” writes the historian

12 See Bruce (Stadfeld) McIvor, “Manifestations of Violence: Native Resistance to the Resettlement of British Columbia,” in *Beyond the City Limits*, ed. R.W. Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 33.

13 Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 3, 9–10.

14 Fraser and Stevenson, “Reflecting,” 8.

15 Audra Simpson, “The State Is a Man,” *Theory and Event* 19, no. 4 (2016): n.p., <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633280>; see also Shawn Singh and Brandon Trask, “Faded by Design: Manufacturing Agnosis of Settler-Colonialism in an Era of Indigenous Truth and Reconciliation in Canada,” in *Justice in the Age of Agnosis*, ed. James Gacek and Richard Jochelson (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 149–71.

16 Audra Simpson, “Whither Settler Colonialism,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 6, no. 4 (2016): 439; Caroline Elkins, *Legacy of Violence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2022), 13–16.

17 Ian McKay, “The Liberal Order Framework,” *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (2000): 630.

Caroline Elkins.¹⁸ Imperialists mastered what the historian Lauren Benton describes as “violence at the threshold of war and peace,” resulting in “a global regime of armed peace” that authorized force against existing inhabitants.¹⁹ Such violence was often an open secret, variously denied, justified, or actively forgotten by members of colonial society.²⁰ Shutting out the suffering of people around them can be a “cultural habit” within democratic societies, writes the sociologist Stanley Cohen.²¹ Denying readers the comfort of such habit, the Anishinaabe journalist Tanya Talaga precludes expressions of shock and honours the IRS survivors with whom she spoke by titling her new book simply *The Knowing*.²²

Facing these open secrets shifts our enquiry from what we know to the context in which we know. This amounts to a call to action for Fraser and Stevenson: “We must immediately stop framing the history of Canada in nation-building narratives and acknowledge that there are no ‘dark chapters’ in our histories; this country was built on the destruction of sovereign Indigenous Nations and the genocide of Indigenous Peoples. Colonialism is the plot of the story, not a chapter.”²³ These nation-building narratives disregard the “intellectual sovereignty” of Indigenous communities, as the Dakelh historian Allan Downey shows.²⁴ And they confine historians to ruts in a well-worn road that already always leads to sunny destinations of peace, order, and good government. Authors and/or audiences on this road divert stories that are incommensurate with a just nation onto a proliferation of dead-end detours. These detours or “dark chapters” become atomized exceptions that fuel the cycles of sorrow and disavowal that characterize what scholars dub “settler memory.”²⁵ Histories in this register prejudice the nation’s innocence and, consequently, place the burden of proof on Indigenous individuals and Peoples to demonstrate case-by-case suffering. Posited as ruptures, these dark chapters obscure the lived experiences of those for whom settler colonial violence is continuous.

In order to change the plot, I move to reposition (or replot) the conceptualization of violence on the historical timeline using the example of British Columbia. Timelines are a (hi)story-telling technology, the one most familiar to white settler society. Creation of a timeline begins with value-laden considerations about which constitutive parts of potential events interrelate and

18 Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, 16.

19 Lauren Benton, *They Called It Peace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024), xiv, 150. Benton critiques Elkins in Lauren Benton, “Evil Empires? The Long Shadow of British Colonialism,” *Foreign Affairs* 101, no. 4 (2022): 190–2, 194.

20 Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, 46.

21 Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing About Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2001), 5.

22 Talaga, *The Knowing*.

23 Fraser and Stevenson, “Reflecting,” 26.

24 Allan Downey, “To Know the Indigenous Other: A Century of Indians in Canadian History,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 33, no. 1 (2023): 165–66.

25 See Simpson, “State Is a Man”; Bruyneel, *Settler Memory*; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Jeffrey Ostler, *Surviving Genocide* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020); Weiss, “Settler Shock,” 84–7.

how. Timelines, then, like reconciliation efforts, are about relationships. Settler society cannot forge new relationships with Indigenous Peoples while it remains located – or “siloe” – on the self-referential timeline of settler innocence.²⁶

The absence of shock among so many non-Indigenous people in the summer of 2021 betrays the gulf that Wilson-Raybould discusses between the predominant settler and Indigenous stories about Canada; we lack a “shared history.”²⁷ And, as James Baldwin famously advised, “if one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country one goes to the unprotected . . . and listens to their testimony.”²⁸ What then emerges when we do so is a timeline that restores continuities hidden by settler disavowal and renders settler violence as unsurprising, expected, and multiform, one that renders Canada’s past and present seamless.²⁹ This timeline challenges the tendency of event-centred histories to emphasize change over continuity.³⁰ Indeed, this timeline less resembles a line than a cycle or ongoing process. The Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson stresses this continuity, referring to “the past four hundred years of violence” and the “ongoing daily violence of being Indigenous in Canada.”³¹ She writes: “I understand settler colonialism’s present structure as one that is formed and maintained by a series of *processes* for the purposes of dispossessing, that create a scaffolding within which my relationship to the state is contained. I certainly do not experience it as a historical incident that has unfortunate consequences for the present.”³² Simpson shifts the burden of proof; her framing requires the state to demonstrate that it did not/does not violate Indigenous personhood or Peoplehood with its assertion of sovereignty over Peoples who neither ceded jurisdiction nor consented to be governed.³³ Not only is there no “dark chapter” to bracket off, but the past is here in the present moment. In other words, while the series of processes that Simpson describes *has* a history, it cannot be written off *as* history.

Simpson’s phrase “processes for the purposes of dispossessing” captures the conception of violence that I engage. I conceive of violence not just as discrete acts but also as a broad, contextual, multi-modal support of settler colonial structure. My definition is inclusive of the many forms that violence to dispossess takes,

26 Wilson-Raybould, *True Reconciliation*, 44–51; see also Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

27 Wilson-Raybould, *True Reconciliation*, 50, 51.

28 James Baldwin, *No Name in the Street* (1972; reprinted New York: Vintage, 2000), 149.

29 See Fraser and Stevenson, “Reflecting,” 10–19; Bruyneel, *Settler Memory*.

30 See Bathsbeba Demuth, “On Agency: Agency of Environmental History,” *Journal of Social History* 57, no. 3 (2024): 401.

31 Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 9, 43.

32 *Ibid.*, 45 (emphasis in original).

33 See Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*, 16. Relatedly, see Kate Gunn and Nico McKay, “Reconciliation and Aboriginal Title,” *First Peoples Law Blog*, 27 July 2023. <https://www.firstpeopleslaw.com/public-education/blog/reconciliation-and-aboriginal-title-case-comment-on-the-nuchatlaht-v-british-columbia>.

including epistemic, structural, corporeal, symbolic, psychological, and intimate. I situate myself alongside scholars who illuminate interconnections across these forms over time, referring variously to “nodes,” “chains,” and, most evocatively for me, “continuums” of violence.³⁴ As a settler colonial project, violence to dispossess is executed by a range of actors – including individuals, groups, institutions, and states – across a range of scales. Instances and forms of violence to dispossess are interconnected; one often amplifies or enables another. For example, violence by “frontier rabble” justifies the state’s advance, and pillars of settler order such as private property rely upon abstractions of legal violence, such as the survey or map, which are, in turn, enacted on the ground by and upon individuals under threat or use of force. Taken as a whole in its range of forms, violence to dispossess is uninterrupted across settler colonial history.³⁵

Dispossession of Indigenous Peoples cannot but be violent. To argue otherwise entails the uptake – implicit or explicit – of the vestigial logic of *terra nullius* or other epistemic violence that dehumanizes Indigenous people. Settlers have instrumentalized such racialized doctrines for too long.³⁶ Respect rather than denial of what the Dene critical theorist Glen Coulthard terms the “grounded normativity” of Indigenous Peoples – the “ethical framework provided by . . . place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge” – renders settler-on-Indigenous violence unsurprising.³⁷ Settlers sought but did not find *terra nullius*. Indigenous polities and relationships covered the spaces that settlers needed to build a new society; Indigenous bodies were on the land that settlers claimed. When Indigenous Peoples refused the subjection and subjecthood that were on offer, agents of empire, colony, and nation relied on eliminatory forms of violence.³⁸

- 34 Sarah Hunt, “Witnessing the Colonialscape: Lighting the Intimate Fires of Indigenous Legal Pluralism” (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2014), 20–2; Sarah de Leeuw, “Tender Grounds: Intimate Visceral Violence and British Columbia’s Colonial Geographies,” *Political Geography* 52 (2016): 14–23; Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, “Introduction: Making Sense of Violence,” in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 1–27; Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim, “General Introduction: Theorizing Violence in the Twenty-first Century,” in *On Violence: A Reader*, ed. Bruce B. Lawrence and Aisha Karim (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 11–14.
- 35 Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409; Nicholas Blomley, “Law, Property, and the Geography of Violence: The Frontier, the Survey, and the Grid,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91, no. 1 (2003): 121–41; Sean Carleton, *Lessons in Legitimacy: Colonialism, Capitalism, and the Rise of State Schooling in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2022), 10.
- 36 Stuart Banner, *Possessing the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), ch. 6; Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), ch. 1.
- 37 Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 60; see also Simpson, *As We Have*, 24–5.
- 38 Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 388; Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94, no. 1 (2004): 173–4.

GUNBOAT FRONTIER

Not the only form of violence that dispossesses, physical force or the threat thereof undergirds the others.³⁹ Historians of British Columbia have long attended to settler-on-Indigenous harm but have reckoned less with the extent and implications of physical violence than one might expect from adding the sum of the historiography's parts. Foundational scholarship bifurcates BC history into periods of "contact" and "conflict," emphasizing Indigenous agency before the 1850s and forced cultural change afterwards.⁴⁰ But physical violence runs across these periods: from the 1780s, ship captains kidnapped Indigenous individuals for furs and engaged in disproportionate, often devastating, retaliation against acts of Indigenous hostility, both real and perceived.⁴¹ Between 1846 and 1890, British gunships destroyed more than a dozen coastal villages.⁴²

Although maritime fur traders did not "come to stay,"⁴³ they razed and burned houses and villages, prefiguring subsequent dispossessionary violence. In 1792, an American captain destroyed Opitsaht, a Tla-o-qui-aht village of more than two hundred houses, the largest on the west coast of Vancouver Island, and killed or wounded more than fifty Chinook, Ehattasht, Mowachaht, and Kwakwaka'wakw individuals in four other attacks.⁴⁴ This was a single year in the career of a single brutal, but not unique, player. During the subsequent early decades of settler colonialism on the coast, the British Royal Navy destroyed homes within dozens of Indigenous polities, including the Hul'qumi'num, Lək'wəŋən, W̱SÁNEĆ, Nuu-chah-nulth, Kwakwaka'wakw, Wuikinuxv, Heiltsuk, Nuxalk, Tsimshian, Gitksan, Nisga'a, and Haida. In many additional instances, the ships threatened destruction through the ostentatious preparation of the cannon. Across an expanse larger than the United Kingdom, "gunboat diplomacy" underwrote British authority, settlement, industrial capitalism, and Christianity. Cannon fire backed the initial European settlements in the colony of Vancouver Island at Fort Victoria and Fort Rupert and in the Cowichan Valley; it enforced British claims to the west coast of Vancouver Island, around the Salish Sea, and northward.⁴⁵ All absent the declaration of war, this is Benton's "small violence" of imperial peacetime.⁴⁶

39 Harris, "How Did Colonialism," 174, 179. For Max Weber, this defines the modern state. Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber*, trans. and ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 78.

40 Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 2nd ed. (1977; reprinted Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), xxiv.

41 James R. Gibson, *Otter Skins, Boston Ships, and China Goods* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 195–211. Imperialism also generated "displaced violence" among Indigenous Peoples, who acted from positions of significant strength in this period. Joshua Reid, *The Sea Is My Country* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 70, ch. 2.

42 Barry Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and the Northwest Coast Indians, 1846–1890* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1984).

43 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 388.

44 Gibson, *Otter Skins*, 197; Daniel Clayton, *Islands of Truth* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 132.

45 Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 213.

46 Benton, *They Called It Peace*, ch. 5; Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 19.

The psychological impact of gunboat attacks reached beyond the extent of physical devastation.⁴⁷ The British used gunboats as object lessons to broadcast terror and deter resistance. Indigenous networks of knowledge keeping and history telling spread news widely. Nearly every coastal Nation experienced gunboat destruction and its aftermath: caring for, grieving with, and housing, feeding, and clothing displaced relatives. Cannon fired at a village reverberated for decades after the gunship weighed anchor; destruction of a single village had wide-ranging social, political, psychological, and economic effects.

New arrivals besides the navy likewise employed violent object lessons. Outnumbered by Indigenous people, nineteenth-century newcomers were boots on the ground for the Crown's paper claims. Fur traders, gold miners, and members of the Royal Engineers alike employed a double-barrelled strategy to destroy on a limited scale while instilling fear on a broader one.⁴⁸ Physical violence was an essential punctuating feature of nineteenth-century British Columbia. This strategy was consequential. Monographs in BC history published since the 1990s that centre on force, while few in number and divergent in viewpoint, apply the term "war." One study considers conflicts between Nlaka'pamux and American gold miners in 1858; another between Hwlitsum warriors and the Royal Navy in 1863.⁴⁹ And a controversial series of self-published books argues that newcomers committed genocide through biological warfare.⁵⁰ Regardless of whether settlers actually deployed smallpox, they certainly threatened to do so.⁵¹ Taken together, these studies conclude that settler force was historically decisive to settler colonialism's success across diverse corners of British Columbia.

Yet scholars have not much traced the impact of these nineteenth-century object lessons into the twentieth century. This reflects an implicit consensus perhaps that, one way or another, object lessons in force had served their purpose by 1900. Some earlier historiography, while in disagreement on many points, concurs that settlers largely had the means to impose their will by 1890,

47 Robin Fisher questions the impact in Robin Fisher, "Review of Gunboat Frontier," *BC Studies* 65 (1985): 77; Fisher, *Contact*, xv, 17.

48 Cole Harris, "How Did Colonialism," 169; see also Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996), ch. 2; Harris, *Making Native Space*, xvii.

49 Chris Arnett, *The Terror of the Coast* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1999); Daniel Marshall, *Claiming the Land* (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 2018); see also Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 140–7; Harris, *Resettlement*, 110.

50 See Tom Swanky, *The True Story of Canada's "War" of Extermination on the Pacific plus The Tsilhq'ot'in and Other First Nations Resistance* (n.p.: Dragonheart, 2012); Tom Swanky, *A Missing Genocide and the Demonization of Its Heroes* (n.p.: Dragonheart, 2014); Tom Swanky, *The Smallpox War in Nuxalk Territory* (n.p. Dragonheart, 2016); Tom Swanky, *The Smallpox War against the Haida* (n.p.: Dragonheart, 2022). On smallpox historiography, see Susan Neylan, "Colonialism and Resettling British Columbia: Canadian Aboriginal Historiography, 1992–2012," *History Compass* 11, no. 10 (2013): 834.

51 John Sutton Lutz and Keith Thor Carlson, "The Smallpox Chiefs: Bioterrorism and the Exercise of Power in the Pacific Northwest," *Western Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2024): 87–104.

while subsequent work posits a more uneven process through which disciplinary means superseded physical force in the late nineteenth century.⁵² Over time, the settler state relied increasingly on disciplinary strategies of management such as maps, numbers, and the common law whose power derived from acts and/or threats of force.⁵³ The late Secwepemc leader George Manuel conveys this latter point with crystal clarity when he describes his childhood anticipation of strawberry picking with his grandparents in 1928. That year's trip was marred by their discovery that a settler had erected a barbed wire fence and locked gate across his grandparents' trail. On the day in question, Manuel's grandmother refused to let barbed wire or a threatening rancher keep her from her berries. But, Manuel writes, "her victory was short-lived," and, subsequently, "my grandparents had a heavy sadness about them I had never seen before."⁵⁴ As the settler population surpassed the Indigenous one around 1900, disciplinary strategies acquired increased potential as a means to settlers' desired ends of replacing Indigenous people on the land.

The mountains of records that the settler state generated (and archived!) in the name of maps, numbers, and the law (think the Department of Indian Affairs) became irresistible primary sources for a generation of non-Indigenous historians (myself included). Such sources lent themselves well to efforts from the 1990s onwards to highlight Indigenous agency over victimhood and to refute narratives of colonialism as a total institution.⁵⁵ The resulting body of literature enriches understandings of colonialism in multiple dimensions, yet it attends little to the underlying materiality of forcing families from their homes and has been critiqued as victim blaming.⁵⁶ There is no antinomy between Indigenous agency and settler force, yet they rarely go together in non-Indigenous historical scholarship on British Columbia.

Not so in works by, or in collaboration with, Indigenous scholars and narrators. Writing in 1974, Manuel keeps settler force and his grandparents' agency in bifocal view. So too do the survivors of the Kamloops IRS who first published their stories under the title *Resistance and Renewal*.⁵⁷ As Manuel's strawberry-picking story shows, disciplinary markers of legalized violence like fences did

52 Fisher, *Contact*, xi, xvii, xxi, xxviii–xxix; Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 210–11; Harris, "How Did Colonialism," 174.

53 Harris, "How Did Colonialism," 174–5, 179; see also Blomley, "Law, Property," 121–41.

54 George Manuel and Michael Polsuns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (1974; reprinted Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 48–50. Relatedly, see Sarah Hunt/Tłaliłiła'ogwa, "Looking for Lucy Homiskanis, Confronting Emily Carr," *BC Studies* 217 (2023): 10–12.

55 See Neylan, "Colonialism," 833–44.

56 Fraser and Stevenson, "Reflections," 8; Robin Brownlie and Mary-Ellen Kelm, "Desperately Seeking Absolution: Native Agency as Colonialist Alibi?," *Canadian Historical Review* 74, no. 5 (1994): 543–56. On agency as a category of historical analysis, see the symposium on Walter Johnson's "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 57, no. 3 (2024): 379–453.

57 Haig-Brown et al, *Tsqelmuwíc*, 39; Celia Haig-Brown, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1988). On earlier Indigenous historiography, see Neylan, "Unsettling British Columbia," 845–58.

not produce immediate compliance. Regardless of survey lines, pre-emption boundaries, or compulsion to attend school, Indigenous people remained on their lands and waters, when and wherever feasible, practising their lifeways and legal orders. Physical confrontations with settlers ensued that co-occurred with, and legitimated, legalized violence.

FROM MILITARISTIC TO VIGILANTE VIOLENCE: EVICTIONS
BY FIRE AND FORCE

The written archive of early twentieth-century British Columbia overflows with settler-on-Indigenous threats, intimidation, and violence. These conflicts were conditioned by the particularities of place. Indigenous Peoples practised their autogenous politico-legal orders long before and after the Crown's 1846 sovereignty claim in the Oregon Boundary Treaty. That claim had neither the Indigenous consent nor the political-diplomatic follow-up needed to make it real on the ground. In lieu of a land title policy, the BC government used reserve allocation. Unlike many other parts of Canada, settlers to British Columbia often arrived before a surveyor, let alone a treaty commissioner.⁵⁸ These vanguard settlers – or “citizen deputies,” in one scholar's terms – did the de facto work to materialize the state's de jure claims.⁵⁹ In so doing, settlers found the specific places that they needed always already occupied, used, and owned. Although British Columbia is a big place, its physical geography limits habitable land to about three per cent. On this fraction, countless generations of Indigenous families had crafted and stewarded fisheries, fields, meadows, and forest floors in complex geographies of human/other-than-human relationships.⁶⁰ Altogether, these circumstances overdetermined face-to-face conflict.

I turn now to examples of the conflicts that ensued drawn from the McKenna McBride Commission's transcripts. In an encapsulation of colonialism's epistemic violence, the commissioners assumed that the entire province, except reserves, was settler space. Indigenous witnesses met this premise with a “generative refusal” of the state's recognition politics and with assertions of unextinguished relationships to their homelands and waters.⁶¹ They spoke as collective rights holders, but their audience heard only racialized individuals – “status Indians” – whom they deemed fortunate beneficiaries of rights under dominion law.⁶²

58 McIvor, “Manifestations,” 37.

59 Bruyneel, *Settler Memory*, 17; Simpson, “State Is a Man.”

60 Roy, “McBride,” 36; Swanky, *True Story*, 27; Earl Maquinna George, *Living on the Edge* (Winlaw, BC: Sono Nis Press, 2003), 73–4; Chelsey Geralda Armstrong et al., “Historical Ecology of Forest Garden Management in Laxyubm Ts'msyen and Beyond,” *Ecosystems and People* 19, no. 1 (2023): 1–13; Jenny L. McCune, Marlow G. Pellatt, and Mark Vellend, “Multidisciplinary Synthesis of Long-term Human-Ecosystem Interactions: A Perspective from the Garry Oak Ecosystem of British Columbia,” *Biological Conversation* 166 (2013): 293–400.

61 Simpson, *As We Have*, 177–8; see also Coulthard, *Red Skin*; Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

62 McKay, “Liberal Order,” 623–6; Babine Agency, “Testimony to the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs for the Province of British Columbia, 1913–1916,” 73; online

Commission records under-report the extent of violence that dispossessed on a range of counts. It took enormous courage to lodge complaints about settler violence with official representatives of the settler political-legal order. Knowledge of prior militarized violence was a clear disincentive. Some Nations boycotted out of principle; others out of concern that doing so might prejudice their title.⁶³ Those willing to testify faced logistical barriers: lengthy travel, sometimes hundreds of miles return; the need to appear within their assigned Indian Agency, regardless of that assignment's accuracy; and language barriers that necessitated reliance on translators.⁶⁴

I interpret the accounts below as Indigenous reports of settler theft. Rather than reading for what settlers said (and wrote) about Indigenous people, I read for what Indigenous eyewitnesses said about settlers.⁶⁵ This inverts a scholarly convention to what I hope is a useful effect. Yet these accounts present a paradox. As "open secrets" of the sort I discuss above, these accounts attract both my attention and give me pause. As the Kwakwaka'wakw geographer Sarah Hunt demonstrates, efforts to publicize violence against Indigenous people often rely upon and reproduce dehumanizing colonial categories and do little, if anything, to make Indigenous lives safer.⁶⁶ This poses a problem for anyone who aspires, in the geographer Sarah de Leeuw's formulation, to "write" to help "right."⁶⁷ My response here is inspired by other efforts to disrupt settler expectations of history telling, particularly de Leeuw's uptake of creative forms and the writer Sheila Peters' play on a "script" in her response to the Delgamuukw decision. The format below is adjacent to Wilson-Raybould's invitation for readers to witness the "oral history" she compiled of primary documents and in the spirit of response to the Plains Cree historian Rob Innes' call to start counting genocide's victims.⁶⁸

at *Our Homes Are Bleeding Digital Collection*, Union of BC Indian Chiefs, accessed 23 July 2025, <https://collections.ubcic.bc.ca/s/ourhomesarebleeding/item-set/12449> (hereafter, the testimony is cited by agency and page number alone).

63 See, for example, Bella Coola Agency, 118.

64 See, for example, Babine Agency, 170, 173.

65 The important work of reconstructing the Indigenous histories behind each instance is best undertaken through engagement with descendants and is not my aim here.

66 Hunt, "Witnessing," chs. 4–6; Cindy Holmes, Sarah Hunt, and Amy Piedalue, "Violence, Colonialism, and Space: Towards a Decolonizing Dialogue," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, no. 2 (2015): 543, 549; Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009): 413–14; Paige Raibmon, "Obvious but Invisible," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 60, no. 2 (2018): 241–73.

67 Sarah de Leeuw, "Writing as Righting," *Canadian Geographer* 61, no. 3 (2017): 306–18.

68 De Leeuw, "Writing"; Sheila Peters, *Canyon Creek: A Script* (Smithers, BC: Creekstone Press, 1998); Wilson-Raybould, *True Reconciliation*, 54–5; Robert Innes, "Historians and Indigenous Genocide in Saskatchewan," *Shekon Neechie: An Indigenous History Site*, 21 June 2018, <https://shekonneechee.ca/2018/06/21/historians-and-indigenous-genocide-in-saskatchewan>. See also appendices in Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300230697/an-american-genocide/>.

In what follows, settlers dispossessed Indigenous families from places that sustained them intergenerationally. Dispossession was violent – in multiple senses – in every instance. Settlers often employed or threatened arson; they tore down fences and structures; they occupied buildings or land while Indigenous owners were absent. In all cases, the physicality of these actions was twinned with the epistemic, structural violence (omnipresent under settler colonialism) that denies Indigenous politico-legal orders and humanity alike. I arrange extracts from testimony as a catalogue of dispossession. I set spoken words in courier to underscore their archival nature and distinction from my voice. Occasionally, I include the words of an Indian agent, missionary, or commissioner. Where known, I include individuals' names, as spelled in the transcript, to highlight settler responsibility and Indigenous agency; often the record reads simply "white man." The entries are spare and collectively repetitive. I aim for neither an exhaustive record nor to exhaust the reader's empathy. This format represents my effort to thread the needle of representing violence without doing violence. I omit graphic details and plaintive appeals to avoid invoking the kind of shock I write against. I omit details about Indigenous practices in relation to the specific lands, waters, and other-than-human life because the commissioners elicited this information in their effort to reduce Indigenous Peoples to bare subsistence. The commissioners' lines of questioning betrayed their racialized notions of property and their scepticism about Indigenous "land use." I refuse to reimpose this dehumanizing burden of proof on these witnesses.

These testimonies encompass dozens of Indigenous territories at a particular moment. They document dispossessions that followed prior ones and that conditioned those that followed. I begin in the tmicw of the St'át'imc People in the southern interior of British Columbia and proceed roughly southwest and clockwise. The number in parentheses after each entry corresponds to the accompanying map.

CHIEF CHARLIE LUSS: This here railway destroyed me, and one white man came right above me here and took my place away. ... I am afraid of that whiteman up on the hill. ... This whiteman has come up there and he has destroyed our dam. He put his house right on the place.⁶⁹ (1)

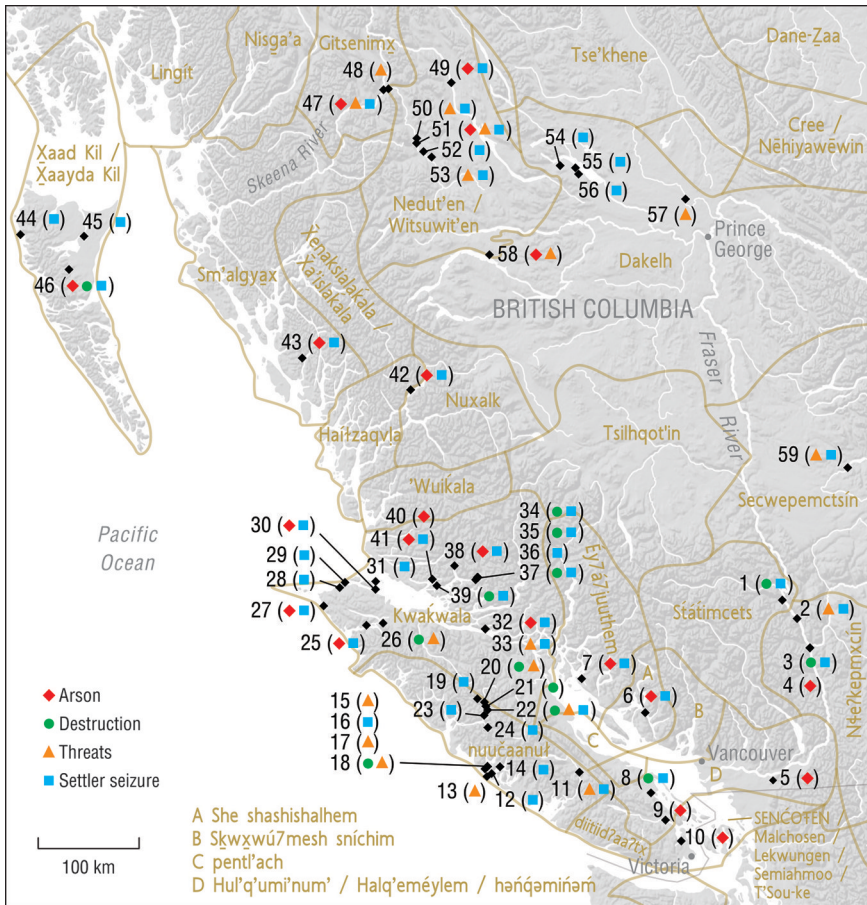
SUB-CHIEF WALLACE: The Indians used to cultivate that land, and this white man came along and chased us away from there.⁷⁰ (2)

JOE TATLUM: A white man has come in and taken up a part of our land that we had fenced there. ... This man built himself a house there last fall and then our fence was torn down and he has built his house where the fence was.⁷¹ (3)

⁶⁹ Lytton Agency, 49–51.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 189–90.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 172.



MAP 1 This map locates the settler dispossessions of Indigenous families enumerated on pages 388–397. Indigenous languages are shown to underscore that these events occurred across a socio-political expanse as well as a geographical one. Many of the linguistic regions are home to multiple Indigenous Peoples. This map thus represents violence done to individuals and families belonging to dozens of distinct Peoples.

Sources: Map by Eric Leinberger, 2025; Indigenous languages adapted from First Peoples' Cultural Council, "First Peoples' Map of BC-Languages," <https://maps.fpcc.ca>.

TOM CURNEAU: A few months ago a white man burned our fences and I want to know if we are to be compensated for the loss.⁷² (4)

CHIEF SELESMLTON: [The late Old York] had land cleared and he had a house there – the house was burned down by tramps.⁷³ (5)

⁷² Ibid., 175.

⁷³ New Westminster Agency, 162.

CHIEF CHARLIE ROBERTS: Jeffrey went in there and plants everything behind the houses. . . . Jeffrey set a fire there and burned some fruit trees and also some vegetables which they had in their gardens.⁷⁴ (6)

CAPTAIN TIMOTHY: [Dominic Tom] has a house and a little shed there . . . last year it burned down and all the orchard trees were burned down. . . . That white man just came in to that place . . . the name of the white man is Nelson. . . . This white man had his house about 100 feet from Dominic's house - this white man's house it was not burned down, only Dominic's place was burned down.

DOMINIC TOM: No one knows who burned them down.⁷⁵ (7)

MATHILDA KAKALSENAAT: After my father's death, the white men moved the old fence and took part of our land. [My brother] Samson himself cleared the land sowed it in.⁷⁶ (8)

SAMSON PIERRE: I had my place fenced and one year a big picnic party came from Ladysmith and set fire to my fence. . . . They probably used it for fire to cook their food by. . . . And could not put it out and it caught the rest of the fence.⁷⁷ (9)

TOMMIE PAUL: The whitemen set fire to that [graveyard], and the bones were all burned out.⁷⁸ (10)

CHIEF LOUIS: There used to be Indian houses there and then there is a [reserve boundary] post there. . . . After the whitemen came there they chased the Indians away.⁷⁹ (11)

CHIEF BILLY: One of my men who had a house over there and lived over there. He left there for a while, and when he went back he found a whiteman living in his house. . . . The House was there before Hopkins came along.⁸⁰ (12)

CHIEF KIETLER: Is this man [J.C. Donald] that made the application going to go and pull down the houses? Because I don't want the houses to be taken down by this man, and we are not going to pull these houses down. . . . There are five different places on the Island where there are houses."⁸¹ (13)

74 Ibid., 440, 446; see also *ibid.*, 667. "Jeffrey" refers to Alfred Jeffries.

75 Ibid., 285, 297; see also *ibid.*, 298.

76 Mathilda Kakalsenaat to the Royal Indian Commissioners, n.d., exhibit C20, file 737a, volume 11023, RG10, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/occihm.lac_reel_t3961/128.

77 Cowichan Agency, 111, 113.

78 Ibid., 235.

79 West Coast Agency, 26.

80 Ibid., 107-8.

81 Ibid., 111, 118; see also *ibid.*, 110, 119.

CHIEF KIETLER: My father spoke to Mr. Gilloid, the Indian Agent long ago. ... And Mr. Gilloid said all right I am going to give you this land. Well not long ago after my father spoke about it a white man came along and he is living there now.⁸² (14)

JOE DIDIAN SR: The whitemen ... used to tell us that they were going to burn down our houses. The whitemen and sometimes the Indian Agent would come along and tell us that the whitemen are coming to burn my father's house.⁸³ (15)

JOSEPHUS: My house is over there. ... I am not living there this year because a whiteman came over there and he is living in my house which I built. ... [Frank Perrotta] came along and planted some things in the gardens which was cleared and fenced by the Indians.⁸⁴ (16)

CHIEF CHARLIE JOHNNIE: We had a ranch right outside here - we had houses there, and we used to live there all the time. ... Mr. Grice told us that we would have to take down all the houses which we had there, because if you don't the white people will burn them down. I wrote to Mr. Neil ... the Indian Agent. ... He said that white people had come on that place, and we would have to take our houses down, and said if we didn't Abraham would burn all the houses down.⁸⁵ (17)

GEORGE SYE: I got a paper from [the Indian Agent] Mr. Neil saying I had to take my house down. ... I went to see the place and my house was still there, and [John Grice] was taking down a big tree. I said to him you had better not take down that tree until I have moved my house. But that same day he felled the tree, smashing my house all to pieces. And I did not get a thing for it.⁸⁶ (18)

CHIEF JOSEPH: I want to get the lake back, because the white people took it. ... There are houses there. ... [The Indians] have always lived there.⁸⁷ (19)

MUCHALAHT PETER: I used to be living there a long time ago. I had a house up there, but I was afraid to rebuild it because the white people would take it away from me. ... There were surveyors up there and they told me not to build it because it belonged to the white settlers.⁸⁸ (20)

⁸² Ibid., 111. "Gilloid" refers to the Indian Agent Harry Guillod.

⁸³ Ibid., 112; see also *ibid.*, 113.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 116; see also *ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 97; see also *ibid.*, 98.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 98; see also *ibid.*, 97. John Grice was a fisheries official. David Lynch, "'Claiming Refuge': A Settler's Unsettling History of Hot Springs Cove" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2019), 187, 201.

⁸⁷ West Coast Agency, 160, 165.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 161.

CHIEF JOSEPH: Some of the white people always spoil the houses up there. They take them down – away up the Gold River. . . . It was my house. . . . Last year, they destroyed two houses and some of the white people destroyed the Indian traps for animals too. . . . Every time the white men find them they destroy them.⁸⁹ (21)

HARRY: The white people told me to take it away – the people who are building the railway. . . . It is ten years since I built that house. . . . I had lots of things there. . . . The white people are using them all the time.⁹⁰ (22)

CHIEF JOSEPH: White people have taken that and we want that back again. . . . There used to be houses there and the posts are there yet.⁹¹ (23)

CHIEF JOSEPH: That has been taken by white men and we want that back. . . . There used to be lots of houses there; the Indians used to be living there sometimes.⁹² (24)

CHIEF PHILIP: It was burned down by whitemen. . . . The whiteman asked us to move the house to the other side of the river but before we could do so he burned it down.⁹³ (25)

CHIEF PHILIP: There was a house there but the whiteman destroyed it. . . . [Lord Varney] has taken it already; and he told us to take the house away, but before we could do so he destroyed it.⁹⁴ (26)

CHIEF KALEET: I was driven away by the whiteman. . . . I had just fixed [the house] up and it was in good repair.

Q: Do I understand that the house was burned when you went back?

A: Yes.⁹⁵ (27)

CHIEF KALEET: This was at one time our former village, and a whiteman is living there now.⁹⁶ (28)

CHIEF KALEET: There is also a whiteman there who wants to take it away from us. . . . And just alongside of our place [Harry Wilson] lives.⁹⁷ (29)

89 Ibid., 159–60.

90 Ibid., 162; see also *ibid.*, 163.

91 Ibid., 159, 165.

92 Ibid., 159, 165.

93 Kwawkwalth Agency, 10; see also Robert Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements, 1775–1920* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 369.

94 Kwawkwalth Agency, 5; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 373.

95 Kwawkwalth Agency, 45, 53; see also *ibid.*, 46, 52; Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 288.

96 Kwawkwalth Agency, 52; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 287.

97 Kwawkwalth Agency, 47–8; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 298–9.

CHIEF KALEET: The whiteman is burning the trees on the Reserve and clearing the land. . . . The whiteman's fires are burning behind our houses there and destroying our trees.⁹⁸ (30)

CHIEF KALEET: I ask that this whiteman be removed from there.⁹⁹ (31)

HAMSEETAKUND: One [house] was destroyed there by a whiteman camping there, and then he used the house for firewood.¹⁰⁰ (32)

HAMSEETAKUND: [Luci Seaweed] was ordered out of her own house by a whiteman and even threatened to be shot if she did not move out of there.¹⁰¹ (33)

CHIEF CESAHOIS: A man by the name of McKay came to build his house on that place as well as the other whitemen who also came and built their houses there. This McKay took for himself the land where our forefathers always got their food. We know this place where the women used to take the roots out of the ground . . . we know it to this day they used to have a mark on it; individual marks for each one of them. They put-down stakes the [sic] mark the boundary lines for each one, and to our surprise this whiteman came and just took the place and never asked us anything about it and our women were surprised to be ordered away from that place and they don't know why they were ordered away when they go there to get food, and in order to find out why they were told to go away by this whiteman when ever they came there to get food, they persisted to go to that place to get the food. Each woman had a wooden spade and a basket. . . . And these were taken from them and thrown away by this whiteman, and this whiteman he immediately put a fence around the place enclosing the place where our women used to get the food.¹⁰² (34)

CHIEF CESAHOIS: Where the crab apples grow - whiteman came and cut all that down. . . . These two foods that I have described are now destroyed entirely by the whitemen. . . . Then other whitemen have come and built houses all around these places that I have named.¹⁰³ (35)

CHIEF CESAHOIS: Another whiteman came by the name of Taylor and commenced cutting the trees down which we thought belonged to us and took them out in logs and never asked any of us about these trees that he cut down.¹⁰⁴ (36)

98 Kwawkwalth Agency, 49; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 295.

99 Kwawkwalth Agency, 52; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 300.

100 Kwawkwalth Agency, 177; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 174.

101 Kwawkwalth Agency, 177; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 174.

102 Kwawkwalth Agency, 207. "Food" here refers to edible roots such as springbank clover and Pacific silverweed.

103 Ibid., 208. "Two foods" refers to the edible roots above and to crab apples.

104 Ibid.

CHIEF CESAHLIS: The whitemen logging there and have their locomotive there. . . . They came and made their camp right on our burying place though they saw the graves there. . . . There were a lot of trees where we used to put the dead on the limbs of those trees. . . . They commenced to clear that land by cutting those trees down where the dead were.¹⁰⁵ (37)

CHIEF WAGLEED: We have our different houses at the different places. . . . When we come back again we find that they are all broken – the whiteman have broken in and used some of the boards of the houses for firewood. . . . I found one man by the name of Joe Bousen who had two of my traps. . . . And one time I lost very much at a house standing at the mouth of a river at Alalco.¹⁰⁶ (38)

IATHKIN: There were houses there, but they were destroyed by the whiteman.¹⁰⁷ (39)

CHIEF TLAGEGLASS: When the whitemen come to my places, they come and break into my houses and burn the boards up. The house of my son was burned down by whitemen.¹⁰⁸ (40)

NOTE. Lot 485 – apparently coveted [sic] by a pulp lease.

Q. Are there any houses there?

IATHKIN: Yes. . . . Five.

Q. Any Indians live there?

A. Yes.

Q. Is there the house was burned down?

A. Yes.¹⁰⁹ (41)

INDIAN AGENT FOUIGNER: They had a house there but there is no house there at present. . . . It burned up from a fire which started in the logging camp.¹¹⁰ (42)

INDIAN AGENT FOUIGNER: I found where the houses had been and the Indians explained that the house was knocked down by a tree and afterwards burned; he said a white man burned the remnants.¹¹¹ (43)

INDIAN AGENT DEASY: There is an "Oil Boring Plant" . . . the people working there have been using the houses of the Indians.¹¹² (44)

105 Ibid., 209.

106 Kwawkwalth Agency, 221; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 112.

107 Kwawkwalth Agency, 235; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 104.

108 Kwawkwalth Agency, 228.

109 Kwawkwalth Agency, 232; see also Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 102–3.

110 Bella Coola Agency, 186.

111 Ibid., 169.

112 Indian Agent Deasy to Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, 23 November 1911, file 627b, volume 11024, RG10, LAC, https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/ocihm.lac_reel_t3961/619.

INDIAN AGENT DEASY: An Indian of the Massett Band, named Edward Thompson . . . informed me that Messrs. George McQuaker and Charles Adams entered a building owned by Edward Thompson . . . they broke out the side of the building and placed a Gasoline Launch in the building.¹¹³ (45)

INDIAN AGENT DEASY: [The Indians] have complained of people stopping in their houses, and also destroying the houses by pulling them down and using them for firewood.¹¹⁴ (46)

PETER MICHEL: A white man burned [my house] where Charlie Chapman is now. . . . It was Poavine Harvey of Old Hazelton [who ordered me off the land] . . . I want to get a piece of land where my house was burnt.¹¹⁵ (47)

FELIX GEORGE: And as soon as we go outside the line we are chased off by the whites men.¹¹⁶ (48)

CHIEF WILLIAM OF THE FORT BABINE TRIBE: After a while lots of white men came in there and they began hunting on our place and burned up everything, and the miners came and shot everything.¹¹⁷ (49)

JOHN BAPTISTE: William has been there for 7 years. He had no house there before seven years ago but he had been cutting hay there before that. . . . Carr Bros. they always want to send him away.¹¹⁸ (50)

ISAAC: The white man is living on the land that I claim. . . . Billy Clark. . . . That man is all the time making trouble. He is always trying to drive me off the land. . . . The white man has taken up all the good land around that lake. The telegraph lineman . . . Billy Clark . . . had said that if Isaac did not get out he would be sent to prison . . . when he was out hunting . . . the white man had burned down his place with everything in it. His wife had had hard work to save the children.¹¹⁹ (51)

FATHER GODFREY: Seven eight or nine cases where certain [Indian] families have taken possession of certain pieces of land conveniently located near a beautiful lake, which land naturally offered

113 Indian Agent to Charles Harrison, Stipendiary Magistrate, 8 December 1911, file 627b, volume 11024, RG10, LAC, https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_t3961/615.

114 Queen Charlotte Agency, 43. This reference is to multiple unspecified locations/instances.

115 Babine Agency, 69–70; see also *ibid.*, 57.

116 *Ibid.*, 36.

117 *Ibid.*, 78.

118 *Ibid.*, 67. This refers to William Le'u. Peters, *Canyon Creek*, 12; Tyler McCreary, *Shared Histories* (Smithers, BC: Creekstone Press, 2018), 39–41.

119 Babine Agency, 172–3. The transcriber uses the third person for part of Isaac's oral testimony.

facilities for cutting hay. ... Some of these pieces of land have now been alienated by the Government and have come into the possession of some white settlers. I daresay that one of those cases is the case of ... Tye Lake David, John Baptiste and Big Pierre. Another instance ... is ... Canyon Creek Thomas's widow. ... Another ... is ... Patrick Kuldow. ... Another ... is ... Adam Michel and his brother Nazere and young Denis and Joseph Gokaha. One more case is that of Moose Skin Johnnie and August Peter.¹²⁰ (52)

ROUND LAKE TOMMY: I cleared 6 acres of heavy timber land and put up a barn 40 feet long about 20 feet wide, and also a house. ... We were kicked off in 1912. ... John Bekki. He wanted to send me away. [Indian Agent] Mr. Loring sent me a letter to get off that land and we moved off right away.¹²¹ (53)

COMMISSIONER CARMICHAEL: Application ... by Six Mile Mary. ... I notice that Six Mile Mary has died? ... But there was living with her ... a niece? ...

INDIAN AGENT McALLAN: Yes, there was improvements there and a little bit of land in which they grew some potatoes and vegetables.

CARMICHAEL: There is an application to purchase in the name of Eliza Deacon. ... What is your opinion?

McALLAN: I don't think it is necessary [for the niece].¹²² (54)

EXAMINATION OF INDIAN ISAAC, FRANCOIS LAKE: There were at that place two Indian cabins; witness owned one of these and the Indian Morris the other. ... Witness desired to return to that place where he was born and which had been his father's home. He himself had no other land or home. ... Note: Apparently covered by pre-emption application of one Thos. Salem.¹²³ (55)

COMMISSIONER CARMICHAEL: That is apparently covered by Lot 2562 – the south half of which is Crown granted, the north half covered by an application to purchase in good standing. Do you know whether that land was used by these Indians or not?

INDIAN AGENT W.J. McALLAN: Yes, it was used by Long Charley's family for a hay meadow. ... There is fencing there and a general clearing up of the meadow.¹²⁴ (56)

120 Ibid., 55–6; see also *ibid.*, 62, 64–5, 69; Peters, *Canyon Creek*, 12; McCreary, *Shared Histories*, 38–44.

121 Babine Agency, 68; see also McCreary, *Shared Histories*, 39; James Hickling, “Legislative Amendment Exposes and Removes Historic Barrier,” *BC Studies* 223 (2024): 82, n. 8.

122 Stuart Lake Agency, 154–5; see also Paige Raibmon, “Posing the Past,” in *Nanitch* (n.p.: Presentation House Gallery, 2016), 50–1.

123 Stuart Lake Agency, 61–2.

124 *Ibid.*, 240.

SUB-CHIEF JOSEPH: The site on the Salmon river at its mouth was only wanted during the fishing season. If the Indians went there now they were chased away.¹²⁵ (57)

SKIN TYEE (SWORN) DEPOSED. Witness had also a small piece of land on Ootsa lake, where he had a house and stable. There was also some fencing there. ... He had made a small garden there some time ago but had been told by white men that it was not his place, and so had abandoned the garden patch. The fence at that place had also been burned. ... And there was also one grave there, that of witness' son, who had been drowned.¹²⁶ (58)

INDIAN AGENT OGDEN: Application by Christopher for meadowland which he has been cutting for years. Captain Watson put the Indians off and preempted the land, but afterwards the pre-emption was cancelled and the land pre-empted by one Minty. ... Indians have made good wagon road to the place."¹²⁷ (59)

A NEW TIMELINE

Collectively, these testimonies expose wide-ranging violence that enabled the pre-emption and Crown granting processes in British Columbia and that enables settler colonialism there today. More than wrong notes marring an upbeat march, these dispossessions are the national anthem's throughline. Commissioners, however, heard something different. At the apogee of the British Empire, they listened with a faith in a national project of benevolent values and institutions that drowned out witnesses' messages. I am less interested in whether the commissioners could have heard differently in their own time than in whether non-Indigenous listeners will do so now. Nobody today needs to be bound by the commissioners' terms of reference or their imperial worldview. Nobody needs to resign themselves to the "tin ear" that BC Chief Justice Allan McEachern infamously owned during the *Delgamuukw* trial.¹²⁸ So-called "historical might-have-beens" aside,¹²⁹ opportunity exists in the present moment to hear how Indigenous witnesses described settler colonialism and its impact on their lifeways and livelihoods. To that end, I offer reflections on how these Indigenous reports of settler theft might affect understandings of British Columbia. These accounts tell us that British Columbia is a place...

¹²⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 63–4.

¹²⁷ Isaac Ogden, Memorandum for the Royal Commission on Indian Affairs," n.d., 7, Exhibit K11, Williams Lake Agency, file 512d, volume 11020, RG10, LAC, https://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_t3956/1092.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Dara Culhane, *The Pleasure of the Crown* (Burnaby, BC: Talonbooks, 1998), 123; *Delgamuukw v British Columbia*, [1997] 3 SCR 1010.

¹²⁹ Pierre Trudeau used this phrase in defence of his infamous White Paper. "1969 White Paper," accessed 26 July 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=1969_White_Paper&oldid=1135364414.

... FORGED THROUGH VIOLENCE

Witnesses demonstrate that settlers in the early twentieth century used physical force to take up Crown grants and pre-emptions. Violence continued from the eighteenth century through the twentieth century, often in new forms, sometimes with the same cast.¹³⁰ The initial decade and a half of the twentieth century was the “apex of the liberal project” in Canada and foundational to settler British Columbia.¹³¹ Settlers first outnumbered Indigenous people around 1900; within a decade, British immigrants doubled that settler population. These immigrants generated a capitalist boom characterized by boosterism, speculation, infrastructure construction, logging, and mining. The sale of unceded land fueled this boom, providing nearly twenty-five per cent of provincial revenue in 1909–10. The premier and settlers viewed reserve land as “unused” and sought to make it available on the market.¹³² The dispossessions that witnesses described were constitutive of this critical juncture, acts of state making that made this place.

... WHERE FEAR WAS LOGICAL AND ENDEMIC

The violence that witnesses described generated fear that spanned space, time, and community. Fear was logical for parents who knew settlers might threaten their family with arson in the night. Such fear became translocal when extended kin heard that particular places were now unsafe. Settlers did not need to raze an entire village to displace all its inhabitants: dispossessing one family by fire surely kept others away. And occasions when villages were flattened by gunboats became intergenerational memories in the minds of descendants who suffered violence. Witnesses recounted violence done to T'łat'łasikwala, Ahousaht, and Nuxalk families at sites very close to where gunships obliterated villages between 1791 and 1864.¹³³ How could prior violence on this scale not bear on the experiences of the descendants who were forced from their own homes just two or three generations later?

We can do better than infer fear; we can listen to Indigenous reports of it. A Muchalaht man named Peter testified: “I had a house up there, but I was afraid to

130 For example, George Blenkinsop, who was involved in a conflict that led to torching a T'łat'łasikwala village in 1850, became the Department of Indian Affairs census taker in the 1870s and Indian Agent for the T'łat'łasikwala in 1881. Gilbert Sproat, who threatened gunboat violence in 1860 to evict Nuu-chah-nulth families from the village he had pre-empted, became reserve commissioner in the 1870s. Richard Mackie, “George Blenkinsop,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/blenkinsop_george_13E.html; Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 45; Harris, *Making Native Space*, xv, chs. 5–6.

131 McKay, “Liberal Order,” 640.

132 Laura Ishiguro, *Nothing to Write Home About* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019), 15–17; Robert A.J. McDonald, *A Long Way to Paradise* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2021), 65–80; Patricia E. Roy, *Boundless Optimism* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 1–6; Roy, *Boundless Optimism*, 1–6; Roy, “McKenna,” 35–41; Ignace, “Kamloops Agency,” 2.

133 See Galois, *Kwakwaka'wakw Settlements*, 298–300, 423–6; Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 41–8, ch. 8, 201–4; Gibson, *Otter Skins*, 197; and the examples of dispossession numbered 11, 12, 15, 29, and 42 above.

rebuild it.”¹³⁴ Sekw’el’was Chief Charlie Luss: “I am afraid of that whiteman up on the hill.”¹³⁵ Hagwilget man Felix George: “And as soon as we go outside the line we are chased off by the white men.”¹³⁶ These accounts dovetail with recent work that shows Indigenous families had good reason to fear settler violence.¹³⁷

... OF “BECAUSE-I-SAID-SO” COLONIALISM

Settlers who breached the Land Act to acquire land retained their tenure, causing intergenerational loss for Indigenous families. The Land Act of 1874 prohibited pre-emption of village and burial sites. By this measure, many dispossessions that witnesses described were illegal. But the Crown treated paper promises to settlers – pre-emption records, Crown grants, timber licenses – as indefeasible, a one-directional threshold.¹³⁸ Commissioner Carmichael, after a settler burned a Nakomgilisala house: “If the land has been granted by the Government to a whiteman we cannot remove him.”¹³⁹ Commissioner Shaw, after loggers destroyed Dzawada’enuxw fisheries and gravesites: “These men have these timber limits, and we cannot stop them cutting the timber.”¹⁴⁰ Commissioner McKenna, after a settler occupied Nlaka’pamux fields: “Even if the Indians did have some improvements there long ago. . . . That was given by the Crown to Copeland, and that is it.”¹⁴¹ And the Indian Agent for Williams Lake Agency, ruling on a Tsq̓eṣceñ man’s application for hay fields pre-empted by a settler named Minty: “Recommend if Minty has abandoned.”¹⁴² Transformation of Indigenous territory into property (regardless the means) prefigured the transformation of Indigenous Peoples into trespassers in their own homes.¹⁴³ The Crown’s logic held property rights bestowed by imported law above those conveyed by extant legal orders. Ends did not justify the means as much as rewrite them.

Property’s priority emboldened settlers to act first and explain later, a “legalized lawlessness” not unique to British Columbia.¹⁴⁴ When the commissioners asked Alfred Jeffries why he swore a false affidavit that his pre-emption comprising shíshálh houses, contained “no Indian improvements,” Jeffries shrugged and said he had misheard.¹⁴⁵ The settler state shrouded

134 West Coast Agency, 161.

135 Lytton Agency, 50–1.

136 Babine Agency, 36.

137 Lutz and Carlson, “Smallpox Chiefs”; Nicholas Blomley, *Territory: New Trajectories in Law* (London: Routledge, 2022), ch. 4. On the United States, see Ostler, *Surviving Genocide*, 7.

138 See McKay, “Liberal Order,” 624, 627; Hickling, “Legislative Amendment,” 82.

139 Kwawkwalth Agency, 52; Galois, *Kwakwaka’wakw Settlements*, 288.

140 Kwawkwalth Agency, 210–11.

141 Lytton Agency, 190.

142 Ogden, “Memorandum.”

143 Robert Nichols, *Theft is Property! Dispossession and Critical Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020); McCreary, *Shared Histories*, 38, Harris, *Making Native Space*, 271; Weiss, “Settler Shock,” 87–90.

144 Elkins, *Legacy of Violence*, 15.

145 New Westminster Agency, 280.

property in a cloak of inviolability such that it became too late to remedy breaches of Crown property law from the moment they occurred. The curtain principle then “drew a curtain” across contracts preceding the current title holder and enabled subsequent generations of settlers to profit from the equity and resale of the ill-gotten property.

... WHERE THE SETTLER STATE'S EFFORTS AT REDRESS FURTHER ABROGATED
INDIGENOUS LEGAL ORDERS

Holding settler claims inviolable led the commissioners to suggest forms of redress that further violated Indigenous law. They asked witnesses whose “improved land” had been wrongly occupied or pre-empted to select a substitute. This was a sorry alternative. Peter Michel: “the only place I want is where I was staying before.”¹⁴⁶ Notions of *terra nullius* aside, there was no empty land or open commons. Indigenous legal orders sutured physical geographies to hereditary rights and responsibilities. The dispossessed could not swap a harbour, village, field, or fishing site for another because those were covered by the hereditary rights of others. The commissioners failed to understand: “Q: Have you not got the power Chief to locate an Indian on that piece of land?; Chief Selesmlton (Ned): No I have no right to put an Indian on a piece of land that belongs to another.”¹⁴⁷ Indigenous legal orders were incommensurate with settler commodification. Ahousaht Chief Billy: “the whitemen comes around here and buys a piece of land and puts up a house on it, and after living in it for 4 or 5 years, he sells it and makes more money than what he paid for it. The Indians don’t do that – they want to keep the land where their houses are.”¹⁴⁸ Where settlers speculated on property, the Ahousaht lived from their hahulthi. Each place was unique unto itself and uniquely situated within an Indigenous geography.¹⁴⁹

... WHERE SETTLER POLICY AND PRACTICE SYSTEMATICALLY PRODUCED
INDIGENOUS POVERTY

Practices of Indigenous dispossession and settler property imposed poverty upon Indigenous Peoples.¹⁵⁰ We do not need hindsight to see this. Indigenous people experienced and explained in real time how dispossession led to poverty, hunger, even death. Chief William (Fort Babine), Chief Charlie Johnnie (Kelsomaht), Peter (Muchalaht), Chief Cesaholis (Dzawada’enuxw) were among those who testified to poverty and food scarcity after “white men” dispossessed their families.¹⁵¹ Chief

146 Babine Agency, 70.

147 New Westminster Agency, 161–3.

148 West Coast Agency, 107.

149 In *R. v. Van de Peet*, [1996] 2 SCR 507, the Supreme Court of Canada instrumentalized this uniqueness to limit constitutionally protected Aboriginal rights. Appreciation to Bruce McIvor for drawing this connection.

150 See also “Cash Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper,” *Yellowhead Institute*, May 2021, <https://cashback.yellowheadinstitute.org/>; Carleton, *Lessons in Legitimacy*, 10; Harris, “How Did Colonialism,” 172.

151 Babine Agency, 78; West Coast Agency, 98, 162; Kwakweth Agency, 208.

Charles (Hagwilget) described the impact of losing access to the land and being confined on reserve in the starkest terms: “The first thing just people dead. It is just the same thin [*sic*] as tying them up and letting them die.”¹⁵²

Indigenous witnesses detailed the systematic siphoning of vast wealth away from their families to settler families. Chief Billy’s comments on speculation point to this.¹⁵³ So too, Tommie Paul (W̱SÁNEĆ), after witnessing the settler Frank Verdier flip 160 acres of W̱SÁNEĆ land: “If I had 160 acres I think it would be better, because I seen a Whiteman who has 160 acres.”¹⁵⁴ These voices warrant our attention. As recently as 1991, the BC Supreme Court justice with the tin ear riffed on “Thomas Hobbs” [*sic*] to mischaracterize Indigenous life before colonization as “nasty brutish and short.”¹⁵⁵ To my ear, a profound refutation of that Hobbesean myth emerges from settlers’ need to resort to extra-legal, often illegal, always violent means to wrest Indigenous Peoples from the complex human and other-than-human interdependencies that were their hereditary livelihoods and means of prosperity. Tuning into these voices, the necessity and extent of settler violence becomes evidence of the tenacity of Indigenous will and the richness of Indigenous lifeways.

THE LONG VIEW

The intentional production of Indigenous poverty through policy is itself violence that conditioned (and conditions) further proliferations of violence. Take the IRS system. Indigenous parents’ de facto response to residential schools was refusal; those interested in colonial schooling generally preferred day schools. A witness from Nuwitti: “If there was a schoolhouse come to this place we would send our children to it but we don’t want to send our children to other places. ... Because when they go to these distant places we would not know how they were getting on – they might get sick and die and we would not know anything about it.”¹⁵⁶ Powerful as the parental desire to keep a child safe by keeping them close can be, fear of that child going hungry can be stronger still. Witset “sub-chief” David Francis on whether parents would send children to a potential residential school: “If they got some grub there they would stay there all the time.”¹⁵⁷ Francis spoke for a community in which sixteen of twenty families were “destitute,” according to the local priest.¹⁵⁸ Dispossession caused material deprivation that could force parents to relinquish children to residential school. This was true both before and after the Indian Act compelled attendance in 1920; apparent compliance was often coerced.¹⁵⁹

152 Babine Agency, 34.

153 West Coast Agency, 107.

154 Cowichan Agency, 233.

155 Quoted in Culhane, *Pleasure of the Crown*, 236.

156 Kwawkwalth Agency, 50–1; see also Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, vol. 1, *Canada’s Residential Schools: The History, Part I, Origins to 1939* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), 274–6. Day schools likewise bred disease. Carleton, *Lessons in Legitimacy*, 185.

157 Babine Agency, 61.

158 *Ibid.*, 59.

159 TRC, *Final Report*, vol. 1, 281.

These continuities of violence experienced by Indigenous families are illuminated when we take the long view on BC history. Agents of church or state who displaced Indigenous children from their homes to residential schools reiterated dispossessions performed by British naval officers, fur traders, American gold miners, and pre-emptors. Residential schools, in turn, overlapped with and prefigured further instantiations of dispossessory violence. The IRS system is one piece of the larger structure of settler colonial processes that dispossess. Historical and ongoing violence done through public school, medical, police, justice, and child welfare systems, and the violence committed by latter day “citizen deputies” – perpetrators of violence against missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and gender diverse people, for example – is all violence that dispossesses.¹⁶⁰ The relationship between these acts and to the longer continuum of violence warrants being drawn out in further studies, as does the mutual constitution of violence across scale from the micro level of individual bodies to the macro level of the body politic.¹⁶¹ Ongoing settler violence against Indigenous Peoples, families, and individuals today is no “accident”; it is rooted in violent dispossession.¹⁶²

Intergenerational memories passed among Indigenous families and networks stitch the repetitive violence of these displacements onto a continuum, a cyclical timeline. Settler scholars have too long followed the lead of our disciplinary forebears (and the sources they produced) in parsing iterations of violence from each other. We miss the connective threads between them and reduce hyper-visible colonial violence to a near “non-event.”¹⁶³ These conditions produce the white noise of disavowal, of settler surprise at unsurprising events; a dual erasure of those who experience violence and their knowledge of it. This erasure forecloses conversations about which events matter, when, why, and to whom, let alone about decolonization.¹⁶⁴ Absent these conversations, historians

160 TRC, *Final Report*; “In Plain Sight: Addressing Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination in BC Health Care,” November 2020; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, “Reclaiming Power and Place,” 2019; Mary-Ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998); Hunt, “Witnessing”; Karen Stote, *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2015); Maureen Lux, *Separate Beds: A History of Indian Hospitals in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Cindy Blackstock, “The Complainant: The Canadian Human Rights Case on First Nations Child Welfare,” *McGill Law Journal* 62, no. 2 (2016): 289; Mary Jane McCallum and Adele Perry, *Structures of Indifference: An Indigenous Life and Death in a Canadian City* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2019); Allyson D. Stevenson, *Intimate Integration: A History of the Sixties Scoop and the Colonization of Indigenous Kinship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020); Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt, *Storying Violence: Unravelling Colonial Narrative in the Stanley Trial* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2020).

161 De Leeuw, “Tender.”

162 Simpson, *As We Have*, 12.

163 Raymond Fogelson, “The Ethnohistory of Events and Nonevents,” *Ethnohistory* 36, no. 2 (1989): 133–47.

164 See “Land Back: A Yellowhead Institute Red Paper,” *Yellowhead Institute*, 2019, <https://redpaper.yellowheadinstitute.org>.

remain grounded in self-justificatory values of settler colonialism. While we occupy this terrain, we continue (regardless of our cast of characters or intentions) to tell the same old stories that reproduce the same old structures of injustice. “Canadian” histories that are not just for the winners must be credible to audiences beyond the beneficiaries of this violence; they must orient around a timeline that may seem new to some but that has been there all along. Neither revelation nor exception, the heart-breaking results of ground-penetrating radar are material testament to a moment on this continuum.

The above catalogue of disposessions enumerates dozens of such moments. Though lengthy, it barely scratches the surface, overflowing its own boundaries of a single source base. When I dipped into the ancillary commission files, additional examples quickly surfaced, and those, in turn, are drops in the bucket of the overall documentary and oral history record of the province. There is John Douglas’ 1872 pre-emption that encompassed a Sylix village and grew into Canada’s largest cattle ranch;¹⁶⁵ the province’s scandalous coerced 1913 surrender – followed by the city of Vancouver’s torching – of the village of Seńákŵ;¹⁶⁶ and the 1967 burning of Louie Joseph’s house, which consummated the municipality of Smithers’ decades-long attempt to eliminate “Indiantown” through combined means of exclusion, regulation, and planning.¹⁶⁷ The manifold intergenerational benefits to settler families of such disposessions produced and maintain the nation we have today.

I contribute this partial sketch of the continuum of violence to an accumulating body of work by historians who, likewise “taking the long view,” agree that Canada committed genocide against Indigenous Peoples.¹⁶⁸ This long view is a scholarly moral imperative because it attends to a major historical continuity that so many Indigenous people know through lived experience. By illuminating patterns across time and place, it replaces assignment of blame to select villains with shared responsibility across settler society’s diverse beneficiaries. It presents opportunities for thinking and acting with the “recurring, or regenerative, or perhaps even reparative” temporal logics recently invoked by one environmental historian.¹⁶⁹ And maybe it can foster some of the sense of “intergenerational responsibility” called for by the Stó:lō/Skwah scholar Dylan

165 Colin Osmond, “Review of Douglas Lake Ranch: Empire of Grass,” *BC Studies* 244 (2024–5): 179–82.

166 Squamish Nation, *tiná7 cht ti temíxw* (n.p.: Page Two, 2023), 199–202; Mayana Slobodian, “The Kitsilano Scandal,” *BC Studies* 222 (2024): 71–99.

167 McCreary, *Shared Histories*, chs. 4, 9, 10.

168 “Canada Day Statement,” 1 July 2021, <https://cha-shc.ca/canada-day-statement/>; Shekon Neechie Board, “Open Letter to the Council of the Canadian Historical Association and the Canadian Public,” *Shekon Neechie: An Indigenous History Site*, <https://shekonneechee.ca/2021/08/13/open-letter-to-the-council-of-the-canadian-historical-association-and-the-canadian-public/>. See also National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, “A Legal Analysis of Genocide,” 2019, <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>; Tamara Starblanket, *Suffer the Little Children* (Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2018); and Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Hinton, eds., *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

169 Demuth, “On Agency,” 401.

Robinson.¹⁷⁰ Those who aspire to help terminate the continuum of violence, rather than remain enlisted in its reproduction, will need finally to release forgone conclusions about what kind of place Canada is and listen to what Indigenous voices – past and present – have to tell us about the nature of this settler colonial place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am particularly appreciative of several lengthy conversations with Sarah Hunt that influenced my approach in this article enormously. I am also grateful to my wonderful graduate students who constantly teach me new things; to fellow members of the Decommission Research Collective (Brenna Bhandar, Marianne Nicolson, Mayana Slobodian, and Nicholas Blomley) for the generative conversations and feedback; to everyone who commented on earlier versions, including Harmony Johnson, Bruce McIvor, the University of British Columbia's Canadian history cluster, and other department colleagues; to the undergraduate and graduate student research assistants who worked with me on the McKenna McBride Commission's materials; to Asha Raibmon and Nicole Yakashiro for reference checking; and to the *Canadian Historical Review's* editors and peer reviewers for their extremely helpful feedback.

PAIGE RAIBMON is a professor of history at the University of British Columbia; the editor of *BC Studies: The British Columbia Quarterly*; and associate at the L.R. Wilson Institute for Canadian History at McMaster University. She is the author of *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter on the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Duke University Press, 2005); co-author (with Elsie Paul and Harmony Johnson) of *Written As I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms taʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder* (UBC Press, 2015); and co-author (with Elsie Paul, Davis McKenzie, and Harmony Johnson) of *As I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms taʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder* (UBC Press-Ravensong, 2019), which won the American Council of Learned Societies prize for the best multi-modal, open access book published between 2019 and 2024. Correspondence can be addressed to paige.raibmon@ubc.ca.

PAIGE RAIBMON est professeure d'histoire à l'Université de la Colombie-Britannique, rédactrice en chef de *BC Studies: The British Columbia Quarterly* et associée à l'Institut L.R. Wilson pour l'histoire du Canada à l'Université McMaster. Elle est l'auteur de *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter on the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Duke University Press, 2005), coautrice avec Elsie Paul et Harmony Johnson de *Written As I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms taʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder* (UBC Press, 2015), et coautrice avec Elsie Paul, Davis McKenzie et Harmony Johnson de *As I Remember It: Teachings (ʔəms taʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder* (UBC Press-Ravensong, 2019), ouvrage ayant remporté le prix de l'American Council of Learned Societies pour le meilleur livre multimodal en libre accès publié entre 2019 et 2024. On peut la joindre à l'adresse suivante : paige.raibmon@ubc.ca.

170 Dylan Robinson, "Intergenerational Sense, Intergenerational Responsibility," in *Arts of Engagement*, ed. Keavy Martin, Dylan Robinson, and David Garneau (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2016), 47, 58–64.