

Colonial Narratives in the Trial of Gerald Stanley: Is Justice Possible for Indigenous People? | Text Transcript

This is a text transcript for the recorded lecture “Colonial Narratives in the Trial of Gerald Stanley: Is Justice Possible for Indigenous People?” This was the first event in the Indigenous Scholars Lecture Series 2020-21, a student-led initiative within the Department of Political Science in support of the University of Guelph's commitment to action on equity, diversity, and inclusion. The lecture was recorded on November 27, 2020, and was moderated by Prof. David MacDonald. The guest speakers were Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt.

Transcript:

Joanne Moores:

...And she's an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Calgary. Gina is Cree and Saulteaux and a member of the Star Blanket Cree Nation in Treaty 4 territory. She's the principal investigator of The Prairie Indigenous Relationality Network and her research takes up questions of treaty implementation, prairie Indigenous life, gender, and Indigenous feminism. Welcome Gina. Dallas Hunt is an assistant professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of British Columbia.

He is Cree and a member of the Wapsewsiipi or Swan River First Nation in Treaty 8 territory in northern Alberta. He has had creative and critical work published in *The Malahat Review*, *Arc Poetry*, *Canadian Literature*, and the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*. His first children's book *Awâsis and the World-Famous Bannock* was published through Highwater Press in 2018 and was nominated for the Elizabeth Mrazik-Cleaver Canadian Picture Book Award. His next book *CREELAND* will be available through Nightwood Editions in March 2021. Welcome Dallas.

And finally, we have our own University of Guelph professor David Macdonald who is a mixed-race Indo-Trinidadian and Scottish political science professor at the University of Guelph and is from Treaty 4 lands in Saskatchewan. His research focuses on comparative Indigenous politics, genocide studies, and settler colonialism. He has a SSHRC Insight Grant “Complex Sovereignities” with co-researcher Sheryl Lightfoot on Indigenous practices of self-determination in comparative perspective.

His recent publications include *The Sleeping Giant Awakens: Genocide and Indian Residential Schools and the Challenge of Conciliation* published by University of Toronto Press, and “Settler silencing and the killing of Colten Boushie: naturalizing colonialism in the trial of Gerald Stanley” in *Settler Colonial Studies*. So welcome again David and thank you for moderating today's discussion. So, we've asked today's panelists to discuss their recent book *Storying Violence: Unravelling Colonial Narratives in the Stanley Trial* published earlier this year by ARP Books, and

you'll find a link in the chat if you'd like more information about the book. So once again welcome everybody, welcome to our speakers and over to you, David.

David MacDonald:

Okay, thanks Joanne and thanks so much Gina and Dallas for joining us today. This is the book and I hope all of you will have a chance to buy it and read it and there's lots to learn from it. I understand too that the proceeds of the book are going to Colten's family which also is another good reason to buy the book as well. So, it's just great to see a good-sized audience and also to see Gina and Dallas again.

A lot of people from Ontario followed some aspects of the trial, in there was a big vigil or gathering to stand with Colten in front of City Hall in Guelph here but in a general sense I don't know how much most people in the room will know a lot of about the trial, and also the killing of Colten Boushie so I was just wondering if you could perhaps outline some of the context of the book and maybe what inspired you to write because I think that would be useful maybe a useful way to get started today.

Gina Starblanket:

Sure so we wrote this book after having published an article—just an op-ed, very short op-ed—in the Globe and Mail, which we put together during the trial, literally as we were listening to some of the narratives that were circulating in the trial and so Dallas and I were both really interested in this sort of question of which, which facts are seen as important in a trial which are seen as relevant and which will resonate for an all-white jury.

And I guess conversely what—uh which parts of the encounter between Colten Boushie and Gerald Stanley that day were not seen as important by the courts, were not seen as relevant and you know certainly wouldn't resonate for that jury but I think something— one thing that we were really interested in was how all of that which was being bracketed off right; questions of race, alternate versions of events, alternate histories that sort of backdrop of settler colonialism that Indigenous people feel and experience every day in their lives in the prairies, how none of that really factored into the trial.

And so what we wanted to do you know both with the op-ed and then later with the book which was sort of an extension of that was we wanted to illuminate some of those histories and feelings and stories that Indigenous— for Indigenous people in the prairies you know that's very real, that's part of your everyday life, but then you're continuously told by settler institutions that those are irrelevant, that they had no part in what transpired that day, right, and that they can't even really be accounted for when Indigenous people are trying to seek justice through these systems when an Indigenous person has literally been killed and no one's denying you know that Stanley shot him—shot Colten.

But, there's all these, I think, various ways in which Indigenous lives or Indigenous life in the prairies was very much not factored into that case and the narratives that were at play in that

case and so what we were trying to do was bring those to light while also problematizing the sort of settler narratives and the story of you know what Gerald Stanley was doing that day, and what his you know what his family life constituted we were trying to problematize those as well and you know why are these sort of really problematic narratives of this knight protecting his castle, etc., etc. You know, what are the histories and lineages of those stories of settler life in the prairies and how we can sort of trouble or deconstruct those tropes.

Dallas Hunt:

Yeah and so I think Gina just spoke really well to the content of the book and sort of the impetus behind it I think in a very pragmatic like the sort of practicality the sort of logistics of producing a text like this was that we wrote the op-ed and we got a good response to it generally and then a few presses sort of reached out to us and as that was happening there was another book that was in production that we didn't know about which was the Kent Roach book, and so there was a point at which I was still at the University of Manitoba teaching in the Native studies department, and Jade Tootoosis; Colten's sister, sent me a message on Facebook and said "do you know about this book because there's a talk at the University of Manitoba about a book that is about my brother and about this entire thing and like what do you know about it?"

And so it was a very sort of jarring experience because then I looked up the event and I looked at the book and I had no idea that this book had been in production or that another press and academic press elsewhere had been working with Kent Roach, and again this isn't a—I'm not giving—this isn't a smackdown on Kent Roach, but rather is more just to say that there are particular ways of working with Indigenous communities and Indigenous families in particular and especially when they have deep investments in particular events, this one being pretty obvious as to why that would be the case and it just seemed to be that no consultation with the family had occurred, none of these very important things that I think we as Indigenous peoples hold very close to us which is you know talking, visiting, just making sure that we're actually getting on with one another and processing things of this nature, none of that had occurred with that text.

So, I'm not going to say that's the impetus for the book, we had a wide array of reasons why we would write a book like this but it certainly it sort of motivated us a little bit to make sure that the family's voice was out there and that's why Jade is in the introduction and Debbie's voice, right, Colten's mom, is in the book as well. So yeah those are part of the sort of logistical components of the text.

David MacDonald:

Yeah, because I mean that to me I think part of the most powerful aspect of the book is the way that you've worked with Debbie, with Jade, with their lawyer Eleanor Sunchild.

So I was wondering if you could perhaps talk a little bit about that like how- like did the family approach you, did you approach them, did you know them beforehand how is it to work with a family who's undergone such tremendous structural violence and such devastating loss and then to produce a publication out of that, I just I'm just curious as to just how it worked with the family, like did you talk to them on a regular basis, did they look at different things you were you're writing, and like how does that process work because it's absolutely fascinating to think about that.

Dallas Hunt:

So, I, I just very briefly I knew members of the family sort of tangentially, so I knew one of them, Milan Tootoosis was somebody that I was close with, and if you watch Tasha Hubbard's film on the who also writes the preface, he gives a very rousing sort of speech in the film about all those things.

So, I knew Milan and through Milan I knew, I knew Jade Tootoosis, and so when it was all sort of happening yeah it was a very, it, it just was something that I immediately felt plugged in by. Gina has done terrific work in terms of working with Jade and others in terms of developing resources for other families that have gone through this experience.

Gina Starblanket:

I think with a project like this we were approached, as Dallas mentioned, by numerous publishers following that op-ed, and we from the get-go you know we didn't see this as a project that we would take on unless it was something that the family thought was important, and so we had no investments other than you know we obviously felt it was an important project, but we weren't wedded to the idea if it was something that they didn't see as valuable and so we connected early on, we sort of you know had initial conversations around what we were; what our strengths were, I'm a political scientist, Dallas is a literature scholar and so he thinks a lot about narrative, about the stories we tell things like that, and especially the political implications of what it is we're talking about, and why it's important or why the way in which we talk about Indigenous people is important and is in itself political, right?

And so these were some of the things that we told them we can bring to this book, we're not legal scholars so it's not going to be a legal analysis, but we wanted to make sure that that was in line with the sorts of messaging and advocacy, because of course they were doing you know advocacy work everywhere from very local kind of grassroots levels to international realms and so this this is something that that we kept going that conversation as the book was in development you know we shared outlines we shared the different themes and things that we would take up and again just really kept that that conversation with Debbie, who's Colten's mom, and Jade, Colten's sister, we just tried to keep those lines of communication as open as possible while also recognizing that we couldn't connect with them about every single decision right, because it would just overburden them as well, and so you know there was a number I think some interesting sort of methodological choices like whether we would have you know

the title of the book have Colten's name in it or Stanley's name in it, and ultimately decided not to instrumentalize you know Colten's name in that way because when it comes down to it, neither of us knew Colten and the book isn't about him and his life as much as Tasha's film is, let's say.

You know she really integrates a lot of footage and interviews with the family who really do that work of humanizing him and of showing you know who he was as a person. Ours was sort of- we sort of approached it as a compliment to the to the film I think in some ways, and really focused instead on problematizing a lot of those narratives that did have so much traction in the courts, and so you know those sorts of choices we, we tried to be very conscious of you know why it is we're doing this work and whether that's going to be consistent with the sorts of the work that the family is doing.

Oh yeah, throughout we were also doing other projects with the family so we developed a number of resources, they were they're incredibly generous with their own experience and wanting to share that experience in ways that can improve the experience of other Indigenous people who might find themselves in similar situations, and so we created a series of resources for Indigenous survivors of violence and their families because there is you know one thing that they found was that there was an absolute lack of resources when this took place, so it's sort of like a toolkit. It's still just in the final stages of production but really building on those experiences that they had.

Dallas Hunt:

Yeah, and I think in terms of the book being a sort of compliment to Tasha Hubbard's film is- Tasha was very generous in that she shared us, she shared with us very early cuts of we will send up which is it if you haven't watched it it's an incredible and heartbreaking sort of documentary but it's it really delves into the minutiae at times of this case, or of the trial of all of it right and not only of what's going on in terms of peremptory challenges and stuff like that which is a thing that comes up obviously, but also into the family itself right and so this is something that we as we watched the film we also had, it was very much in our in the forefront I think of our minds as we wrote the book as well.

Gina Starblanket:

So I think if I can just add one more thing there's so many- In recent years, I think in the past decade, one thing that I've noticed is there's just been such a rapid increase in the amount of writings that take up Indigenous people as victims of violence, and so I think we were both conscious of that sort of tendency and wanting to ensure that if we did this project we weren't just kind of you know approaching Colten's death as this object of study right, that we're removed from we didn't want to just relay the horrific nature of colonial violence, which of course it is horrific right but we wanted to do something more than that, and do something that might prompt settlers, and invite settlers to you know think through their own relations to the

issues that we're talking about and to that encounter that took place on the Stanley farm that day.

So part of that was thinking, thinking through that violence in ways that illuminate some of those kind of taken for granted structures and institutions and how they serve to uphold and legitimate those experience that Indigenous people feel every day, so again yeah I think that was we were both kind of like okay if we're going to write a book that takes up colonial violence we have to make sure to do it in a really good way, right, in a way that's not just kind of acting as a news reporter on that violence, right.

David MacDonald:

Yeah, now that that makes a lot of sense, which leads into my question about storying because I'm just kind of curious about the methodology of storying is this is this something that say Indigenous folks have been doing for a long time, is it, is it something that like settler people could do as well as a methodology like, how— maybe you could just tell us a bit about what the methodology of storying is if it is a methodology and then what how you undertook that process and you know how common it is basically, because it's really, really interesting, it's to me it looks very innovative, but it may be that I'm you know not reading the right stuff all the time so.

Dallas Hunt:

Yeah so I think what we're doing is we're taking or the what we're attempting to do in the text is we're taking these large capacious concepts such as you know settler colonial violence, or just settler colonialism generally, Canadian jurisprudence all these things that sort of congregate at this particular moment and produce this sort of, well, produce the acquittal Gerald Stanley right so it's, so essentially what we're doing is we're taking all of these different threads to all of these different sort of large events and processes that are ongoing and structures and we're and we're just trying to provide a particular narrative to those structures right to actually say well this is how we get to something like the acquittal of Gerald Stanley, somebody who admitted to killing Colten Boushie.

This is not under contestation, it's one of the first things he said in his interaction with the police, so what we're doing is we're actually as storying as a methodology is we're just sort of trying to give a sort of narrative thrust to events that can seem at times confusing, complex, all over the place.

It involves histories, politics, you know the sort of social relations, all of these things especially in the prairies which are quite fraught and we're just giving them a sort of narrative sort of voice, and so that's the thrust I think of at times the notion of storying in the text as a sort of methodology, you asked briefly about settlers and so one thing I think that's important is that many times what I like to say about the book, or what I like when I'm teaching a course, well I don't like it particularly, but it's something I have to do which is to say that there's a sort of

inherited and shared history here and we need to sort of discuss what that actually looks like, and at times what that can actually look like is narrating a sort of a history like this, it's at times very fraught or hard for settlers to actually think about how they came to inhabit or inherit a space, right, and in many cases that involved incredible, terrible violence, and I think there's a sort of a reluctance on the part of settlers to really think about well how did you come to live in a particular area might that have involved a sort of narrative of violence and I find there is a, I find that reluctance of settlers to sort of narrate how they come to inhabit spaces actually quite interesting and at times quite telling, right, yeah I think I think settlers need to know their own stories too, basically.

Gina Starblanket:

Yeah, in Saskatchewan and sort of white rural Saskatchewan in particular there's many tropes about you know the righteousness of settler legal and political institutions, the goodness of the people and the industriousness of the people who reside there, and that's not to say that they're all false, but we also have to think about how those narratives get constructed and upheld and seen as true, and what other figures, right, the figure of the criminal Indian the murderable Indian or whatever the case, how those figures are necessary for the figure of this sort of industrious, you know, self uh...

Dallas Hunt:

Self-made...

Gina Starblanket:

...Self-made but also self-sort of protecting farmer, right, because they can't rely on the police, they can't rely on the RCMP, so, there's a sort of vigilantism and sense of independence and autonomy that I think is really a part of those tropes as well right, and part of that requires you know the figure, a particular construction of Indigenous people in those spaces as well, and so we were also trying to illuminate that right, that sort of interplay between those two figures, and how narrative actually produces a sense of those, those figures as being true, and how that materializes in settler institutions like the courts, right?

And then how—I guess just as Dallas was mentioning how we get to a place where Gerald Stanley could admit to shooting Colten, but then also be acquitted for his death right, or for his murder, even at the level of manslaughter which of course you know this is something that we sort of see this trajectory at first when they're you know, when they're laying the charges, many people are upset that it's not first degree murder, that's not second degree murder in and of its own, but that they have the two they also have the lesser charge of manslaughter there.

Many legal scholars have talked about you know this sort of encounter. Normally, Stanley would have been charged with the whole litany of crimes, right: irresponsible use of a gun, all these sorts of assault, of various other crimes as well, but he had those two charges of second-

degree murder, manslaughter, and then slowly we start to see the courts building possible pathways out of a guilty charge right, and so yeah really I think a part of storying too that that's at play here is us showing like here's how you get to the point where you know you can actually admit to shooting an Indigenous person in these spaces, and then be found not guilty for that act.

David MacDonald:

Yeah, no that makes a lot of sense, another aspect of the storying that I think you both do might be in relation to Treaty 6 because it seems like you're storying violence, but then you're also offering throughout a story of Treaty 6 and maybe some alternative narratives of, of how we could better understand what was going on through, through treaty eyes.

I'm just wondering if you could perhaps talk a little bit about the role of Treaty 6, how your book maybe presents a story of Treaty 6, or multiple stories of Treaty 6 that would help us better understand what relations could and maybe should look like in Saskatchewan.

Gina Starblanket:

Mhm, yeah, I think treaties, when you look at Indigenous understandings of treaties in these spaces and the spirit and intent of treaties, it helps, sort of, confront and collapse a lot of the, sort of, taken for granted ideas that circulate in the trial right, and so ideas of trespass or jurisdiction, or you know, how to live together in a space that sort of— there's a number of assumptions that circulate in the trial, and what we do is we sort of we sort of pause that representation or kind of intervene in that representation and say let's back up here and talk about what justice might look like, or you know even what race relations might look like, if we think through another normative frame, and that's the normative frame of treaty, which of course informs Indigenous people's understanding of what law and governance should look like in those spaces.

They're really their relationship frameworks, they're supposed to govern how we interact in those spaces, treaties don't get mentioned once in the trial, right, but for Indigenous people these are crucial parts of you know what, what is supposed to govern this relationship with the people that we allowed to share this place. But then we also do something a bit different and maybe Dallas can speak to that, you know we also kind of trouble this turn to treaty, or this desire to invoke treaty as this sort of harmonious seamless alternative because of course we know that there are many, many barriers that stand in the way of you know that alternative becoming something even close to reality right.

Dallas Hunt:

Yeah I think where we sort of towards the end of the book, where we sort of arrive is this idea of we wanted to problematize this sort of easy turn to treaties, right, that that we both want to invoke treaties and say that you know Colten Boushie was in his ancestral homelands, and

these are part of the of treaties and we need to actually be attentive to these histories and all these things, but we're also not looking for a sort of superficial engagement with treaty, we actually want to think through it as an actual, actual relation, right, not just something that we superficially invoke.

I mean I'm very glad we did the land acknowledgement at the beginning because this is something that a lot of Indigenous Peoples worked very long and hard for to have be a thing, but we also want to actually take something like a land acknowledgement or just the actual relations that treaties sort of gesture to seriously, so towards the end of the text what we actually talk about is what would it actually look like to inhabit and just live something like treaty, something we we've all inherited, right, and at times that it appears as though we cannot actually do that as the machinations of something like settler colonialism is at its full sort of operation, right?

How can you be in a treaty relationship when, as Gina was saying, Gerald Stanley will admit to killing a particular Indigenous youth will be acquitted for it, and there seems to be a sort of wider, broader, public sort of support of this from people in that general treaty area right?

So, these two things are sort of in conflict, right? How do we exist in relation but also well maybe they're not in conflict actually, maybe how do we exist in relation, and maybe we're not if particular institutions are allowing the sort of indiscriminate and so to of impunitive death of particular Indigenous youth, right, we need to think about how institutions facilitate particular things, and if those things don't adhere to the ways that we were relating before then we might actually have to rethink those institutions.

David MacDonald:

That makes a lot of sense. I was just thinking too and we chatted a little bit before the presentation began on the question of genocide and cultural genocide because the TRC made a conclusion of cultural genocide which the government accepted, the Trudeau government accepted that, then we have the inquiry and missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls which talks about ongoing genocide and more or less the Trudeau government seems to have accepted that as well.

If we look at issues of ongoing genocide how does, how does the murder of Colten fit into that process and presumably there are lots of Indigenous peoples who are suffering from the same problems of structural violence in the sense that this is, this is a nationwide problem that we're seeing and is it, so does a genocide framework does that, does that help the analysis or does it just complicate it do you think?

Gina Starblanket:

I mean I think it can help in seeing elimination, and the drive to eliminate Indigenous people not just as a historic past, but as something that's ongoing and you know it can help us become

more attuned to the ways in which elimination occurs in the present day, right because of course it looks much different than at earliest contacts with Indigenous people, right?

This isn't good, these processes are ongoing but they're also shape-shifting, they look different as you know there's increased recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights, you know nationally, as our standards surrounding Indigenous rights to land, to life increase and become more heavily recognized at an international level and that's supposed to kind of bleed down to the domestic level.

So, we start to see different standards around how states can engage with Indigenous people, the level of rights that they have to recognize, and the level of rights that they need to accommodate and tolerate you know to use some of the language of Canadian political science and over time what happens then is we see these institutions kind of shifting in that they have to provide that recognition and some sort of political offering to Indigenous people, you know to facilitate movements out of the Indian act and other incredibly paternalistic and colonial mechanisms and frameworks.

But elimination that always comes with a caveat, right it always comes there's never a full and true acknowledgement of Indigenous jurisdiction over our own territories, over our own people that doesn't come without a caveat right and so this is how pointing to the ways in which these institutions continue to operate again to sort of find a way for that violence to become legitimate, or to be seen as legitimate, these are some of the lineages that we're tracing.

This might look a little bit differently but it's still very consistent with some of the early ways in which colonial violence transpires, now we just we have to be a bit more settler institutions have to be a bit more creative about how you know they're continuing those processes and continuing to perpetuate the status quo, even while trying to provide some sort of rhetorical acknowledgement of Indigenous rights, or treaty rights or you know reconciliation, rhetorical commitment to reconciliation in the face of this ongoing violence.

Dallas Hunt:

Yeah I think when I teach about in in my courses, when I talk about—whether it's residential schools, or some of the things, just the whole history of colonial violence that has occurred against Indigenous peoples— I'm actually not a big fan, just to be kind of candid, of the term “cultural genocide.”

I mean it's material, bodily genocide that has happened to Indigenous peoples throughout the process of colonization right, and if you take even any specific example of any residential school or any yeah there's multiple instances wherein we sort of are confronted with the fact that this wasn't a cultural genocide, it not only was a genocide proper as it was sort of you know ongoing historically or happening in the past, but it's also ongoing genocide, right?

I think we need to take facts like that seriously and it's we can look at any there have been so many cases since Colten Boushie that have been the death of Indigenous youth, children, Tina

Fontaine, Barbara Kentner wasn't a youth but is now something that's in the courts at this particular moment wherein we're actually seeing destructive, violent, bodily damage happening to Indigenous peoples, that's cultural in a sense but it's also very material, it's happening to people so I think sometimes these labels, as Gina was saying, can kind of rhetorically sort of add a little.

I understand that this isn't a critique of something like the TRC assessment or something like that I understand why they need to frame it as something like cultural genocide, and we know with murdered, missing, Indigenous women, and girls and two-spirited peoples that you know once the word genocide was evoked it actually created a bit of a bit of a kerfuffle so I think Indigenous Peoples in particular know that we need to be strategic in how we evoke these particular terms, but we also think or not we also think, I think in particular as an Indigenous person that we need to actually if we're going to use these terms that have been decreased to us through particular institutions, I think we should actually take them at their full weight because sometimes it's genocide.

Gina Starblanket:

And really the lens of culture is one of the only ways in which Indigenous people are palatable to the state, and its institutions, and it's and it's many of its people, right many settler populations so if we have something like this label of cultural genocide okay people are able to acknowledge the sort of damage wrought onto Indigenous cultures through colonialism, but they're not what that does is it situates Indigenous people only as cultural beings, not as political actors, it you know it blinds us to in many ways to our own legal and political resources.

If we're not actively using those right, if we're if those are aspects of life that aren't seen as important to Indigenous people and here I'm talking about the courts, right, how have they interpreted Aboriginal and treaty rights all through the lens of culture, cultural distinctiveness that's the sort of imperative for Section 35, that's the purpose of Section 35, or how Section 35 of the constitution has been interpreted in the courts is through reference to the lens of culture, but what about Indigenous political subordination, right?

That gets bracketed off from the picture, from the purpose of Section 35 or you know efforts to address Indigenous political subordination as an ongoing part of colonialism so we only then ever see the damage that's, that's taken place on Indigenous cultural life and then our responses to that, as the sort of biggest dimension of settler colonialism that we have to respond to right, responses to that then only focus on the revitalization or future protection of those cultural practices, which of course are incredibly important but there's a whole other part of the picture of settler colonialism that we need to address too, and so I think yeah we really try and steer away from that language, or I think both of us you know that's not really- we share I think a broader commitment to thinking through violence beyond how it occurs at the level of cultural culture and cultural practice.

David MacDonald:

Yeah that makes a lot of sense and I know Murray Sinclair has said as well that they only said cultural genocide because that was all they could do in their mandate, which you know and he, he's, he's gone on to say he thinks it's genocide, not cultural genocide but the full, the full UN convention applies. So, this funny slippage I think with the way that the TRC wanted to do certain things and wasn't able to do it in some ways.

So, I guess you've got a few minutes before we take some questions from people, but I think it's incredibly important what both of you said about Indigenous peoples as political actors with, with, with political rights and does in the book so do you, do you tease out and address some of those political questions as well?

I think maybe through the lens of treaty you do that to a certain extent, but I don't know if you want to just kind of highlight some aspects of the book maybe that like so, some of my students are very interested in, in political rights in Indigenous nations for example so I don't know if there's some areas there that you could you could highlight from the book that might be of interest to students and politics in that way.

Gina Starblanket:

Yeah I think throughout we sort of, there's a sort of juxtaposition between you know what Canada, Canada is offering in the form of justice to Indigenous people through the, through its institutions right, and of course you know these liberal institutions like to think that they're making appropriate space for Indigenous political engagement, but what we do is sort of juxtapose Indigenous understandings of what political life of the justice might look like, and show that they those in fact very much exceed those liberal offerings, or liberal desires to kind of tolerate and accommodate Indigenous difference within its institutions.

How we invoke Indigenous stories Indigenous visions of what life on the prairies should have been we do that in such a way that shows that not only are these institutions just dramatically failing Indigenous people, but that they're actually set up and structured in such a way so as to not, so as to never provide a means for Indigenous people to flourish in these spaces right.

So I think at one point, we were kind of toying with the idea of okay well you know if treaties had been implemented we might never have gotten to a place where Colten had lost his life that day right, race relations might be substantially different in these spaces, but beyond that it's not even a matter- I mean it is a matter of life and death but, beyond that we started talking about how you know it wasn't-it wouldn't have just been that Colten had lived, perhaps he was leading a- he would have been leading an incredibly different form of life right, he would have he and his family may have been flourishing in a much different way if treaties had been implemented, and so again we sort of consistently kind of reject that minimalist understanding of treaty and what treaty could be and we kind of tried to engage with treaty as that, you know

the most that it could be rather than that sort of basic minimum of just providing for Indigenous survival in these spaces right.

Dallas Hunt:

Yeah, I mean, I think generally our orientation in the text or in the book was to sort of, just to frame it through the lens of treaties, we understand the basic need for survival especially in the prairies, because it's very hard to be an Indigenous person in the prairies. That said I think we also want to- we want to think through how that isn't, that isn't the horizon for Indigenous peoples or communities generally and that's often what's offered to us as our horizons right.

It's just basic survival and rather I think what we want to do is we want to think through these aspects of actually flourishing in these sorts of in many cases in our ancestral homelands because why wouldn't we?

It's a sort of question that seems so basic, but why would we not do so well in the lands that we've known for centuries, or millennia you know and so that is one of the, sort of one of the ways in which we sort of engage with sort of politics we also sort of, we try to present Indigenous peoples as not passive victims, but actually as political actors throughout, right?

I think one way you see this in a very concrete way is through the Baptiste and Tootosis family, like you actually see Jade, so if you watch Tasha's film you see Jade become a political actor incredibly quickly and in a way that she's going to speak to the UN like she's going to be at the UN she's going to be just- so I think inherent to us is this notion of politics and just to sort of dovetail it with the last question is, sometimes what the just distinction of cultural does is it sort of diminishes that kind of work that we're not that Jade Tootosis isn't speaking at the UN at an international body about the death of her brother right, that historically we've been political actors, and in the present were political actors and all of the women in the Tootosis and Baptiste family have really shown that yeah we'll continue to act politically in spite of what the state and other organizations will do.

David MacDonald:

Thank you very much! So there is an invitation from Joanne to send questions to her, so nothing much has come through yet, so I might just ask another question while we're waiting which is because you touched on the family talking at the at the UN at the permanent forum they met with, with the attorney general, with the prime minister so on and so forth, has any of that produced any tangible results in a positive sense for the family? Like do they feel it was worthwhile engaging in that process?

Yeah I guess I might just leave it there just to get a sense of what they might- I know you can't really talk for the family but maybe just your impressions of whether that, whether that process of consulting with the prime minister, whether that was Trudeau 'window dressing' and trying to look nice or whether there's actual commitment you think maybe on the part of the federal government. I'm guessing probably not so much in the part of the 'MO' premiership but you

know to actually get to address some of these concerns, like has anything positive happened after this after this debacle that we should know about?

Dallas Hunt:

I think yeah so my only thing with that is that I would say that less of, if there hasn't been any movement, less of that falls on the family and Jade Tootoosis and them and actually falls more on actually the political institutions that are constantly failing Indigenous peoples, and there is no way that you could say that the family has not done, a family that was thrown into a situation right that they had no, no actual, no experience with losing a family member and having to navigate not only national bodies, but actually international bodies right, to that, they have done the utmost to ensure something like justice or you know.

And knowing full well that these systems rarely produce something like justice right, but that they've, that they've worked, they've done the utmost that they can within systems that cause a lot of harm to Indigenous peoples and if those, those processes fail that's less on the family and more on the systems that actually can't deliver that, those forms justice.

Gina Starblanket:

My sense is that the work that they've done, you know that they're, my sense is that they're proud of those various processes that they've taken part in to raise awareness, because that seems to be a constant imperative for them, is to bring the both the injustice to light, but then also you know that advocacy work where they're calling for change and calling for transformation within these processes you know that they always seem to be trying to find new venues and ways to raise awareness surrounding the need for justice here, and so you know it's really difficult- yeah again to speak for them as to whether they see that as a success or not I know that definitely through our conversations they've learned a lot in engaging with the media, and strategies for it, for engaging with the media in a good way where they're protecting themselves.

But I think yeah definitely I know that they've you know, they've continued to take part in that political work, but again I can't really speak to whether there's any- yeah what they see as you know the most rewarding or successful part of that experience.

Dallas Hunt:

I think one intervention they had was with peremptory challenges and trying to sort of navigate that as and it's something you see in Tasha Hubbard's film about the just an all-white jury sort of adjudicating, or sort of-

Gina Starblanket:

And my sense is there have been changes but that they're under appeal, or people are questioning those changes—

Dallas Hunt:

Yeah, they're shifting.

Gina Starblanket:

Yeah with some kind of countering, that in some other instances peremptory challenges might actually protect Indigenous people right, and so we sort of, at the very least we're seeing these sort of debates and conversations transpiring very much because of that work right, and their efforts to draw attention to the injustices and I think that they're important conversations.

David MacDonald:

Now we do have a question from an audience member who I think I know personally but I'm not sure if that's the person because they only have an initial as their last name; but the question is do you anticipate anything substantive to come from the report coming soon from the RCMP? So I don't know much about this report at all so maybe you do or don't I don't know but—

Gina Starblanket:

No, I think that following the death of Colten, and the RCMP's just terrible treatment of Debbie Baptiste when they went to inform her of her son's death, their terrible treatment of the other Indigenous youth that were in the car that day, one of which was a minor.

They did hold an internal—I think—an internal investigation and found that that nothing had transpired that shouldn't have, or that they had done everything properly, and so I personally have very little faith in these sorts of inquiries, I can't speak for the family or anything like that but I know that even from the outset they were petitioning to take this out of province right for that very reason that these are institutions that are, you know, very much invested in their own continuity and so again a lot of these reports and inquiries while they might identify the need for you know indigenization or cultural sensitivity training or things like that they're much less likely to identify ongoing patterns of abuse or injustice that are taking place.

Dallas Hunt:

Yeah it's hard to see an institution that conducts a report on itself, or it's very, it would be very difficult to see particular forms of or particular institutions to implicate themselves in acts that were wildly- or in things that I guess what I would say generally is that just even in the gathering

of evidence in terms of this case, and how things transpired in that way, a lot I would say sort of, there were particular things that may have went wrong or didn't go well and it would seem that an institution like that would not want to implicate itself in a way that was unflattering. So, I too share Gina's cynicism or what I would call my cynicism in that yeah I don't really see much coming out of that particular report.

David MacDonald:

That makes a lot of sense, I could definitely see that. Oh! Yeah so there's another question here; is there training that you would recommend to help non-Indigenous people have a better understanding of Indigenous cultures, but I think we should talk you know maybe Indigenous peoples as political actors as well because I think we sort of dealt with the issue that culture is just not going to be enough in terms of anything. Yeah, I guess it's a question about training from a member of the audience if that makes sense.

Gina Starblanket:

Yeah I mean well there's a whole host of resources out there and I really just encourage people to inform themselves both you know, yeah about the histories of Indigenous people and Indigenous contributions to these spaces and relationships with these spaces. But also conversely you know settler histories in these spaces as well right. So again I think it's about, it's about learning about the interplay between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people if we're going to understand the roots of many of these questions and issues. Not just about learning about either population on its own right.

Dallas Hunt:

Yeah and I think we can't invest too heavily in this notion of training, and it sort of remedies, it being the remedy for all of these sorts of issues. I think that what's at stake in many of these things is a sort of very material, certain material and political investments and I think sometimes what fails to happen is that we think that just and this is something that I relate to my students even as somebody who is an educator is that it like education isn't going to solve everything here right.

Because in many ways there are a particular aspect of investments in particular structures, like settler colonialism or its institutions right and so what we need to sort of try to cultivate is, you know, I wouldn't be surprised if some of the RCMP officers that were involved did have some sort of cultural training right, but if that then fails then why do we keep appealing to that as the answer to all of these things.

So I just think we need to be attentive to how we're effectively invested in particular structures, and then how do we divest I guess, or how do we sort of deconstruct those ineffective investments in ways that don't facilitate the death of Indigenous youth.

David MacDonald:

That's great, thank you very much! I see Joanne's smiling head which I think indicates that we may be running out of time. But I'll let her provide the details.

Joanne Moores:

Yeah, thanks David. I think we're rapidly coming to the end of our session today. So before we close that I did just want to take the opportunity to let everyone know that this event has been the first in a series of events we'll be organizing over the next several months, more webinars in our Indigenous scholars lecture series and I just want to let you know that the Department of Political Science has supported this series, as well as the university's equity diversity and inclusion enhancement fund so we are grateful for that.

So, I just want to offer thanks again to our speakers for taking the time to come and share your work with us today, I've seen a number of comments and we really appreciate the insights you've shared with us and thank you so much for doing that and thank you David for moderating and thank you to everyone who took the time out of their schedules to come and take part in this today. So thanks everyone!

[End of transcript]