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# A Bounded Land

Reflections on Settler Colonialism  
in Canada



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## Introduction

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PUBLISHED IN VARIOUS locations and for various audiences over the last fifty years, the writings republished here all deal with settlers and their descendants and with those they substantially displaced – in short, with settler colonialism. They all have analytical edges and are broadly related to one another. But tucked away in various publications and often embedded in more empirical investigations, many of them have been nearly invisible. Nor has it been possible to consider them as a coherent body of thought. Although that thought has evolved over the years, common assumptions run through these various writings. If the more analytical of them are assembled, something of the broad architecture of settler colonialism may appear – the premise that underlies this collection.

By “settler colonialism” I mean, simply, that form of colonialism associated with immigrants who became the dominant population in the territories they occupied and, in so doing, displaced the Indigenous peoples who previously had lived there. The coming of settlers was variously buttressed by military force; commercial and, later, industrial capital; and the administrative apparatus of a state. But in the long run, the durability of settler colonialism rested on the creation of resident, settler populations. Colonies that were based on economic

exploitation, managed by an expatriate elite, and controlled by force of arms reverted to the Indigenous population when the elite and its military supports withdrew, whereas, in settler colonies, recently transplanted populations, now in control of the territories they occupied, survived and often flourished as imperial support declined. Moreover, as connections with former homelands weakened, and as lives and societies were recontextualized in different settings, immigrants and their descendants considered these new settings home.

Settler colonialism has a long history – the Greeks established settler colonies in places around the Mediterranean rim some 2,500 years ago. In this book, however, I deal with the settler colonialism associated over the last several centuries with the European outreach into the non-European world. It was one of the means by which, at the height of its global influence, Europe came to dominate more than three-quarters of the world. More specifically, and with the exception of forays into New England and South Africa, I focus here on Canada. Yet settler colonies have some common shape; to write about settler colonialism in one place is to say something about its character in another.

The writings that follow are situated within the broader pattern of the European coming to northern North America, of which settler colonialism was only one mode. Throughout the sixteenth century and well beyond, commercial capital created a European presence along much of the Atlantic coast. Thousands of fishermen came year after year to seasonal cod fisheries, dried cod ashore, and returned to dozens of ports from southern England to Portugal. Only slowly and unremarkably – as a few men were left as caretakers of fishing properties, as small merchants began to operate in Newfoundland, and as a few women joined them – would small resident populations appear in some fishing harbours. In these scattered and often largely invisible ways, the European settlement of Newfoundland began, but it would be many years before anything like an established settler colony emerged. Late in the sixteenth century, another form of commercial capital, the fur trade, entered the St. Lawrence River where, prompted by the French crown, it too would eventually draw settlers. A trading company was granted a royal monopoly in 1627 and mandated to establish a proprietary colony and bring four thousand colonists in fifteen years but could not meet

these conditions. In 1663, when the French crown revoked the company's charter, barely two thousand transplanted people lived along the lower St. Lawrence. Thereafter, the Crown managed this incipient colony (Canada). In the Bay of Fundy (Acadia), the fur trade also drew settlement, though on a scale even more modest than in Canada.

Yet Canada and Acadia were the first settler colonies in the large North American space that would eventually come to be known as Canada. Acadia, which attracted not many more than three hundred immigrants and was perched between French and British positions in North America, was always a frail creation. Canada, settled over the years by some ten thousand immigrants who left descendants, became a substantial colony. By the end of the seventeenth century, it contained two small towns, a countryside that stretched for many miles along the river, and the basic components of French society: government officials, soldiers, merchants, members of religious orders, tradespeople and workers of many types, seigneurs (holders from the Crown of large land grants that they were expected to subgrant) and, more numerous than all the others, peasants living on land held from the seigneurs. By the middle of the eighteenth century, more than fifty thousand people lived in this French colony.

Almost from their beginning, Canada and Acadia were enmeshed in the protracted struggle between France and Britain for North America, a struggle in which Britain, with far more North American colonists and a larger navy, was in the stronger position. Acadia fell repeatedly to the British, for the last time in 1710. Three years later, the Treaty of Utrecht confirmed its new status as a British possession, along with Newfoundland and Hudson Bay. To the north, south, and east, Canada was hemmed in. In these narrowing circumstances, France built a massive fortress, Louisbourg, on Cape Breton Island, intending it to protect the Gulf of St. Lawrence; it fell to an Anglo-American force in 1745, was returned, and fell again in 1758. The Acadians, their loyalty suspect, were deported. Aided by Indigenous allies, the French fared better in the Interior, but Quebec fell the following summer, Montreal a year later. Canada was now in British hands. Fifteen years later, the British colonies along the Atlantic seaboard revolted; when that war ended, Britain had lost all her former seaboard colonies but, ironically,

held the heart of New France. What the French called the *pays d'Illinois*, the huge, fertile basin of the upper Mississippi Valley, which France claimed but had barely occupied and British diplomacy had not held, passed to the new United States. The southern border of British North America was drawn near, and often beyond, the northern continental limit of agriculture.

In these circumstances, space was available for new settler colonies – New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island in what had been Acadia, and Lower and Upper Canada in the St. Lawrence Valley. Lower Canada already had a sizable settler population; elsewhere, almost all potential farmland was open for settlement. It attracted Loyalists fleeing the United States, American land seekers who happened to fetch up in British North America, and, particularly after the Napoleonic Wars, an enormous outpouring of people from the British Isles, the majority probably Irish (more Protestants than Catholics) but also a great many Scots (particularly from western Scotland) and English (particularly from the Midlands).

In Britain, the source of the majority of these immigrants, industrialization was shifting the locus of work from workshop or farm to factory, from countryside to city. What Marx called independent producers were becoming factory hands. Older ways of life and the economies that underpinned them resisted as they could, but the economies of scale of factory production were inexorable. Returns for handwork were falling; those who had managed a living with a tiny plot of land, a cow, and a hand loom held out as they could but usually capitulated. In the burgeoning cities, they faced the squalid, life-threatening conditions that Engels, Dickens, Gaskell, and many others vividly described. Moreover, the long assault on local, customary-use rights to land, associated with the gradual expansion of the common law and with enclosures dating from Tudor times, had gained much momentum in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Most land was enclosed, the common law was pervasive, market economies were ascendant, and the rights of private property were firmly established. For most people – Scots confined to tiny crofts on the coast after their former villages and fields had been converted into sheep runs, Irish peasants whose labour for a year earned the right to rent (but not to rent) one

acre of arable land – the countryside had become constricted and largely inaccessible space. For many of these people, an alternative to British factories and slums was emigration to a British North American colony.

In many ways, this was a deeply conservative migration. People sought to maintain themselves as independent producers by crossing an ocean, tackling a forest the likes of which they had never seen, and establishing a farm – a gamble at every turn. Many died in the attempt, but overall the forest yielded, at least in patches, and farms were established – niches for several more generations of independent producers. In 1871, when Britain's population was more than half urban, 80 percent of Ontarians (Upper Canadians) were rural, and Toronto, the largest city, only had 3.5 percent of the provincial population. Prince Edward Island was 97 percent rural. Migration had provided the opportunity to acquire land. In some places, the timber trade and the work camps associated with it dominated, but, overall, new countrysides and established farm families were the principal creations of these settler colonies. Although industrial capital had helped push people from Britain, it had not made these countrysides. Rather, they were the work of a great many now largely anonymous people who acquired farm lots, took on a forest, and after years of pioneering, confined it to woodlots on family farms.

By 1871, almost all accessible farmland had been taken up, and many of the young, unable to replicate family farms in British North America, were moving to the United States. In Quebec (Lower Canada), clergy seeking to protect language and religion, and in Ontario, businessmen seeking to expand their markets, sought to staunch this flow by encouraging a northward migration into the fringe of the Canadian Shield. They promoted colonization roads and variously encouraged settlement. For the relative few attracted to these schemes, the almost invariable result was a desperate struggle with intractable land, dire poverty, and, if the parents managed to hold on, the quick departure of the young. The land was simply too hard. It was becoming clear that, agriculturally, British North America was severely bounded space, quite unlike the vast, expanding heartland of the United States.

Beyond these constricted settler colonial spaces, the fur trade extended European influences inland, in so doing creating a sprawl of



trading posts and relying on Indigenous peoples to bring furs, and often provisions, to the posts. Early in the nineteenth century, the trade reached the Pacific; by mid-century, in what French traders called *le petit nord*, north and west of Lake Superior, the fur trade was more than two hundred years old. There and elsewhere, it altered Indigenous ways and local ecologies, but it required Indigenous labour and skills and, unlike settlers, rarely competed with Indigenous peoples for land.

The Canadian Pacific Railway, built in the early to mid-1880s, opened up land for agriculture. Suddenly, there was more space for pioneering and independent producers, but the Prairies were difficult space, not because of a daunting forest but because of the close boundaries of aridity and cold. To quit an industrial town in the English Midlands, settle on the bald prairie well removed from any neighbour, and survive a bitter winter in a sod hut was a precarious undertaking. Thinking sturdy peasants would fare better, the federal minister of the Interior favoured immigrants from eastern Europe. Although its composition differed from any in eastern Canada, another substantial settler colonial space emerged, this one soon tangled in corporate interests associated with railways, grain elevators, brokerage firms, and the like, but also bounded northward, usually by cold.

In British Columbia, where mountainous terrain meant far less space for agricultural pioneering, industrial capital rather than settlers became the most aggressive new user of land. Fish canneries along the coast; logging camps almost wherever there was good, accessible timber; mining camps and mining towns – these were the common forms of new settlement, and most of them, quick to deplete a resource and vulnerable to technological change and fluctuations in commodity prices, were short-lived. Where agricultural settlement occurred, it was usually more enduring, but in British Columbia, as around the southern edge of the Canadian Shield, pioneers pushed into corners of intractable land, struggled, and gave up. Beyond all of this new western development was the larger part of British North America, where the fur trade lingered and other forms of European influence could barely reach.

But in places where newcomers settled, prior ways were being re-contextualized. To live on a long-lot farm in a row of similar farms along

the lower St. Lawrence, or along a concession-line road in Upper Canada, or on a quarter section in Saskatchewan, was to live in circumstances with no close European equivalent. Everything was somewhat altered: the physical environment, the emerging human landscape, the composition of the surrounding population, innumerable details of daily life, and perhaps most basically, the relative value of land and labour. These differences reworked European cultures and social structures – the creative side of settler colonialism. At another scale, and for the purposes of settler colonialism, Canadian space was bounded. Whereas a generous relationship with an ongoing land underlay the United States, Canada was underlain by pinched relationships within bounded patches of land that stretched discontinuously across the continent – a structural difference between the two countries. The circumstances of Indigenous peoples in early Canada depended, in good part, on whether they lived within or beyond the land that settlers could use.

Settler colonialism requires land and takes it from Indigenous peoples, who had usually used it for thousands of years, knew it intimately, and claimed it as their own, a displacement that raises enduring moral issues. In 1839, Herman Merivale, then a professor at Oxford and before long undersecretary at the Colonial Office (where, more than anyone else in the Britain of the day, he managed an empire), concluded, based largely on his knowledge of Australia and the United States, that settler dealings with Indigenous peoples were full of deceit, rapine, and killing. But what to do about it? The problem, he thought, was that the interests of settlers and Indigenous peoples were opposed, that power lay with the former and that they took what they wanted. A solution seemed to be to appoint officials, responsible to the Colonial Office, who would lay out reserves and control settlers. But would this work? Settlers would eventually covet and take reserve land; moreover, they would demand responsible government, it would be granted, and settlers would then control land policy. The only long-term solution, he thought, was what he called amalgamation, the intermarriage of Indigenous peoples and settlers and the creation of a merged society. Towards the end of his life, he doubted that even this would work and feared that there was no solution to what he called the “Native question.”

Merivale's analysis is a fair fit with settler colonial Canada. He was right that the interests of Indigenous peoples and settlers were opposed; right, for the most part, that power lay with settlers and their governments; and right that this imbalance of power facilitated the taking of land. Even treaties were efficient, relatively inexpensive forms of taking. He was right that settlers would covet and take land reserved for Indigenous peoples and right that settlers would acquire responsible government and, with it, the control of land policy – hence in British Columbia Indigenous attempts to bypass this control and reach the executive – the Crown – in Britain. Merivale thought that the alternative to amalgamation was probably the extinction of Indigenous peoples. In this he was wrong, but like others of his day he assumed that a modernizing world would have a single, very European, face.

However, away from the pockets of immigrant settlement, in the great majority of the territory that became Canada, Merivale's analysis does not apply. Population densities were exceedingly low, and in most places there were few, if any, settlers. For the most part, this had been the territory of the fur trade and, when that trade declined, it drew industrial capital in the form of sawmills and mines, missionaries, and, eventually, government officials, but not many settlers. The population, small and dispersed as it was, remained largely Indigenous. Moreover, most people lived where their ancestors had always lived and, until well into the twentieth century, followed many traditional ways. When the outside world impinged, as it did, they were buffeted by the uncertainties and social pathologies associated with primary resource industries; the utopian visions, variously derived from Christian certainties and Enlightenment philosophers, that led to residential schools; and regulations and bureaucratic efficiencies emanating from the settler colonial state. Yet, through all of this, Indigenous peoples remained, and today their populations, no longer checked by the biological yield of the land, are growing rapidly. The large majority of the population of Canada is derived from immigrants and is part of the settler colonial project, but the large majority of the land of Canada has not fit this project. Canada is a country that became possible because of settler colonialism, but settler colonialism in this country has been a bounded project. For all the penetrations of the outside world and the territorial claims of the

Canadian state, the land beyond the boundaries of immigrant settlement has remained substantially Indigenous.

THE FOLLOWING WRITINGS are engaged with these matters. They emerged out of an interest in settler colonialism and its effects that has extended over some sixty years. I cannot say that, at the beginning, I had any clear idea of where I was going. I was interested in early Canada and curious about my own position in the country. What was it to be a Canadian, and where did my life fit in relation to the lives of ancestors who had come from Britain and to a country that, in good part, was French-speaking? That curiosity, I suppose, forms the background of these writings. I had done a combined degree in geography and history at the University of British Columbia and in 1959 went to the University of Wisconsin to study under Andrew H. Clark, then America's pre-eminent historical geographer. Clark took me under his wing, historical geography at Wisconsin was exciting, and I loved being there. Clark, who had written on the human and biological invasion of the South Island of New Zealand and was interested in the comparative study of mid-latitude European settlements overseas, asked me, as his research assistant, to find out what I could about the Acadians, the French settlers in the Bay of Fundy. It was there, tentatively and with no larger sense of direction, that my investigations of settler colonialism began.

Acadia involved me with the French beginnings in North America, and I decided to write a doctoral thesis on early Canada, the French colony based on the lower St. Lawrence River. I planned to write on the evolution of agriculture, but as I got into the archives I found myself confronted by feudal law and custom that I did not understand, and I ended up writing a thesis on the seigneurial system. It had little to do with my thesis proposal – ever since, I have been skeptical about most thesis proposals – and I only slowly realized what I had on my hands: a study of how French law and socioeconomic relations changed when suddenly recontextualized overseas.

There were jobs for historical geographers in those days. When I found myself at the University of Toronto, I began to make inquiries about the early nineteenth-century settlement of Upper Canada. Before long, John Warkentin at York University and I came together to write

a text on the historical geography of pre-Confederation Canada. Beyond it was a much larger challenge of synthesis, the *Historical Atlas of Canada*, a project launched in the cartographic laboratory at the University of Toronto. We proposed a six-volume atlas, which, fortunately, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council rejected. But the council did support a three-volume atlas, and I became editor of the first volume (to 1800), a project that consumed me for almost a decade. I had returned to the University of British Columbia, where, the atlas finally behind me, I turned to the study of settler colonialism when Indigenous issues were increasingly to the fore. I wrote a book of essays on settler society in Indigenous space and another on the working out of the Indian reserve system, the means by which Indigenous peoples were dispossessed of almost all their land. When well retired, I wrote a denser, more nuanced book than its textbook predecessor on pre-Confederation Canada.

Throughout these years, I thought of myself as a historical geographer, although, in studying places and times with which few geographers were familiar, my immediate intellectual dependence was often on historians. To all intents and purposes, I worked at the interface of these disciplines. My debts to historians are large and often personal. I did not know what I was doing when I arrived in Quebec City and plunged into the archives. Historians rescued me. On one occasion, I asked the archivist at the Séminaire de Québec, a distinguished, elderly man, if I could see the account books for the seminary's seigneurie, Beaupré, and was told there were no such books. Jean Hamelin, a young history professor at Laval University, took me back to the seminary to be properly introduced, go through the polite formalities and, eventually, see the account books. Fernand Ouellet, whose book on the social and economic history of Quebec from 1760 to 1850 had opened up the study of those years, was equally helpful. He invited me to his house, where, over a diminishing bottle of Scotch, he explained in no uncertain terms why he had so little use for the bourgeoisie in the Upper Town. Moreover, he had been recently fired as provincial archivist (for engaging in research rather than administration) and seemed sardonically proud of the mode of his going: "Ils m'ont fait rouler. C'était magnifique." Later, I got to know the historian Louise Dechêne; I worked closely with her

on the atlas and considered her among the finest scholars I knew. I admired the meticulousness of her archival research; her deep respect for the ordinary people of early Canada, whose hard lives she so well understood; and the conduct of her university life. She asked for little, worked hard, and published sparingly but well.

And yet, for all my involvement with and dependence on historians, the writings that follow are inflected by the fact that I am a historical geographer. They have more of space and place – of land and environment – about them than most historical writing; are more engaged with social theory than has been characteristic of Canadian historiography; and are probably a little more reckless, a little more inclined to skate on thin ice, than fits the measured caution of most good historians. These inflections have advantages and disadvantages, but if one is interested in settler colonialism, which is about the detachment of some from their land and its repossession by others, and if, particularly, one seeks a comparative grasp of different instances of settler colonialism, then these inflections are exceedingly helpful.

AS I HAVE MENTIONED, my interest in social change in immigrant societies is partly personal. My mother's Scotch-Irish ancestors were in Upper Canada in the 1820s. Much closer at hand, my English paternal grandfather (from Calne, in Wiltshire) and his Scottish wife (from Fyvie, near Aberdeen), both of whom I knew as a boy, established a mountainside farm in the Kootenays of British Columbia in the late 1890s. That farm is still in the family, and the lives lived on it have been British in some ways, not in others. When in Britain, I am well aware of the provenance of some of my ancestors and that I am neither English nor Scottish. But what had changed, and why? That is the question I brought to the Acadians, to the Canadians along the lower St. Lawrence, and eventually to the British Columbian society in which I grew up. It has been my point of departure for the study of settler colonialism, and it has dominated all my early work on the topic.

Having several protracted opportunities to consider the sweep of early Canada, I was increasingly struck by what seemed to me the obvious fact that immigrant lives there were situated in quite different types of settlement: towns, countrysides dominated by family farms,

and work camps associated with the staple trades. Lives were very different in each of these settings, and for each setting it seemed possible to work out their characteristic patterns. Moreover, it seemed to me that most of these containers were situated in closely bounded space – rock and cold to the north, a border with the United States to the south – and that the combination of a few characteristic containers in bounded space had produced a particular pattern of early Canada, one with wide and enduring ramifications. Off and on over the years, I have returned to such musings.

It was after I had Volume 1 of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* behind me that I first seriously considered the means and effects of the settler colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples. I was then back in British Columbia, and the issue of Indigenous title was in the air and the courts, in part because of the constitutional entrenchment of Indigenous rights in 1982. When I was offered a temporary chair in Canadian studies and a light teaching load for two years in return for three public lectures and a book, I turned to a study of the reserve system, the official means by which Indigenous peoples had been detached from almost all of their land. That study drew me into the *modi operandi* of dispossession, at least as they worked in British Columbia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and towards the circumstances of Indigenous life in a settler colonial society. For the first time, I felt the Indigenousness of the province in which I had grown up. The result was a new book and other writings that edged closer to Indigenous worlds than anything I had previously written.

SUCH ARE THE MAIN themes of this collection of writings on settler colonialism. Put most starkly, they address the immigrant experience in early Canada, the organization of immigrant space, and the contraction of Indigenous space. They are organized in five parts.

Part 1 consists of three short pieces that treat what may be thought of as the initial conditions for a subsequent colonialism. The first is an account of an encounter between people previously unknown to each other and situated in vastly different lifeworlds. When the fur trader–explorer Simon Fraser descended the river later named after him, he met the Nlaka’pamux, who thought him Coyote, the Great Transformer who

had made the world and was now returning to remake it. In retrospect, the Nlaka'pamux were right about the change that would ensue, but I use this meeting to represent all the other first encounters between newcomers and those who say they had always been there across the span of what became Canada. The second describes how Europeans began to imagine and conceptualize land that had been outside their experience, in so doing shifting it into a simple register they could grasp and bypassing Indigenous understandings based on intricate, long-accumulated local experiences of land and life. And the third, which deals with the spread of smallpox and other infectious Old World diseases in the southwestern corner of British Columbia, is but an example of the horrific carnage wrought by the viruses and bacteria that accompanied Europeans overseas. Settler colonialism in Canada, as elsewhere in the western hemisphere, was accomplished in the wake of this tragedy and on severely depopulated land.

Part 2 provides three local examples of immigrants or their descendants settling land and putting it to uses derived, broadly, from Europe. In Acadia in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, settlement spread throughout, and eventually beyond, the marshlands around the Bay of Fundy. A few immigrants became, by the middle of the eighteenth century, a population of more than ten thousand living, for the most part, in small houses at the upland edge of their diked farmlands. They were a peasantry, but no French peasants spoke French or lived quite as they did. In a corner of the northwest Atlantic, they had become a distinct people.

In Champlain's day, the Petite-Nation was a small group of Algonquins living well up the Ottawa River, but in the early nineteenth century Petite-Nation was a seigneurie owned by Louis-Joseph Papineau, one of the leaders in Lower Canada of the Rebellion of 1837. Most of the people who settled his seigneurie were *habitants* pushed out of the seigneuries along the lower St. Lawrence by population pressure; a few were merchants from New England. In Petite-Nation, they encountered an edge of the Canadian Shield and commercial capital in the form of the timber trade. The land was harsh, labour was oversupplied, and most of the habitants brought little more than the clothes on their backs – a recipe for struggle, poverty, and, eventually, the departure of most of the young.



Mono Township in Upper Canada was settled in the early to mid-nineteenth century, largely by immigrants from Ulster who, with industrialization, could no longer make a living from a tiny plot of land and a hand loom. They were Protestants of various Calvinist persuasions who took on the unremitting and often killing work of turning a forest into a farm. Eventually, farms were made, the land was overcleared, and beliefs were reinforced.

Part 3 looks more generally at the structure – the architecture – of settler colonialism. The introduction to a talk given at a conference on seventeenth-century New England is included because it sets out what, for me, is the point of departure for any generalized consideration of social change in settler colonies overseas. The chapter on “simplification” is an attempt to deal comparatively with social change in three seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century European colonies: French Canada, English New England, and Dutch South Africa. It posits that major elements of their European background were pared away in these colonial settings and that for a time, until new elements of complexity were introduced, social formations tended to simplify. The chapter on “Creating Place” is the most recent and perhaps the most comprehensive of several of mine on what I call the pattern of early Canada. It is here that I discuss the generic places of early Canada, their arrangement in bounded space, and some of the implications that follow therefrom.

The focus shifts in Part 4 to British Columbia and to the ways that an incoming settler society imposed itself on Indigenous peoples and lands. I deal first with the Lower Mainland – the region centred on the lower Fraser River, including the present city of Vancouver – during its early settler colonial years. There, with the establishment of the Crown colony of British Columbia in 1858, an introduced regime of property spread across the land, and Indigenous peoples, allocated tiny reserves, found their movements monitored by a decentred system of surveillance based on property owners who, backed by the law and the full arsenal of colonial power, watched and excluded. I then discuss the power embedded in systems of transportation and communication to open up land for capital and settlers and to confine Indigenous peoples. Superimposed on land thought empty and without a past, introduced systems

of transportation and communication created the stark economic geography that situated and supported immigrant lives and undermined traditional livelihoods. Moreover, trains, steamboats, and the like, suddenly introduced and experienced, were hugely intrusive cultural artefacts. Finally, I show that the assault on custom in British Columbia (the assault on Indigenous ways of life) had deep antecedents in Britain, where, in the face of long and bitter resistance, the rights of private property and market economies had gradually overturned local customary rights. In Britain, however, this had been a confrontation within a known society; in British Columbia, it was a deeply racialized confrontation between “civilization” and “savagery.”

In Part 5, I put together what are probably my most intricate writings on British Columbia. In an essay that asks the same questions that I asked about Acadia, I tried to establish the main contours of the immigrant society that had come to dominate British Columbia. What had come from afar, what had been left behind, and how was society being recomposed? Early modern British Columbia was far more variegated than Acadia in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and the questions I asked about it can have no definitive answers. In such circumstances, this probe is what I could manage. Set beside it is an article dealing with the means by which an incoming settler colonial society dispossessed Indigenous peoples of almost all the land. I had written a book on the reserve system, felt I had some understanding of the workings and interconnections of various forms of colonial power, and was uneasy with colonial discourse theory, less because I thought it wrong than partial and, because preoccupied with texts, unable to assess its own relative significance. Hence this article, which attempts to set out the array of powers bearing on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and to consider their interconnections and relative weight.

Finally, and with all selections in this book in hand, there seemed another piece to write – about where, now, those who have come relatively recently and those who, judging by their stories, have always been here are with each other. I have no particular wisdom, and no specialized knowledge either of Indigenous societies or of contemporary Canada,

and yet I have felt a need to say something about the matter that, more than any other, gnaws at the heart of a settler colonial society.

EXCEPT FOR THE LAST, none of these writings was undertaken with a collection like this in mind. As originally published, some were heavily noted, others were unnoted and followed by bibliographic essays. Some were written for academic readers, others for an educated public. They were written over a span of years when vocabularies of gender and race have considerably changed. Yet, with the following exceptions, I have republished them here as they were written: large parts of articles or book chapters are often pared away to expose the nub of an argument, footnote numbers are adjusted as necessary, and, very occasionally, I have tweaked the text.

PART 1

*Early Encounters*

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## The Fraser Canyon Encountered

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As Europeans reached into North America, radically different worldviews abruptly encountered each other, a meeting that, the Norse apart, began in the western hemisphere late in the fifteenth century and was repeated over and over again during the next four centuries as the newcomers pushed ever farther into the spaces of those who had always lived there. Little or no evidence survives of most of these encounters, but here and there they can be somewhat reconstructed. The example that follows is of such a meeting in a deep, isolated valley in what is now British Columbia. There, following the crest of the spring flood in 1808, a party of Montreal-based explorers from a fur-trading post far upriver encountered the Nlaka'pamux, the people living along that reach of the river. Neither had seen or, except perhaps vaguely in rumours, heard of the other. Simon Fraser, the leader of

the explorers, described the meeting in his journal, and the Nlaka'pamux told stories about it, one of which, a century later, an ethnographer recorded.

In my book *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, I used these two accounts to introduce a chapter on the Fraser Canyon (the river Fraser descended was named after him) as it lost most of its Nlaka'pamux ways and was absorbed into the world Fraser's coming anticipated. Here, I use them more generally to represent the innumerable first encounters that introduced the achievements and the tragedies of settler colonialism.

ON JUNE 19, 1808, Simon Fraser, explorer-trader for the Montreal-based North West Company, noted in his journal that he and his men had reached the Indigenous village of Nhomin on the west bank of what he thought was the Columbia River, just above its confluence with a large, clear tributary that Fraser named the Thompson.<sup>1</sup> At Nhomin, Fraser met some four hundred people who, he thought, ate well and seemed long-lived. From there, he was taken across the river to a camp where he found “people ... sitting in rows to the number of twelve hundred.” He shook hands with all of them. The “Great Chief” made a “long harangue,” pointing to the sun, the four-quarters of the world, and the explorer. An old, blind man, apparently the Chief's father, was brought to Fraser to touch. Next day, the dash to the sea resumed but had not made many miles when a canoe capsized and broke up. Most of the men got ashore quickly, but one, D'Alaire, was carried three miles downstream, where, exhausted and barely able to speak after dragging himself out of the river and up a cliff, Fraser found him. The precarious descent of one of the rawest rivers in North America by twenty-two experienced employees of the North West

Company and two Indigenous translator-guides had lost only a few hours.

Some Nlaka'pamux, the people along this part of the Fraser River, described these events very differently. Long after Coyote had finished arranging things on earth, he reappeared on the river with Sun, Moon, Morning Star, Diver, Arrow-Armed Person, and Kokwe'la.<sup>2</sup> They came down from the Shuswap country, landed at the junction of the two rivers, and many people saw them. Shortly after they left, Moon, who steered the canoe, disappeared with it under the water. The others came out of the river and sat on a rock. Arrow-Armed Person fired lightning arrows, and Diver dived. Sun sat still and smoked. Coyote and the others danced. "Coyote said, "Moon will never come up again with the canoe"; but Sun said, "Yes, in the evening he will appear." Just after sunset, Moon appeared holding the canoe, and came ashore. All of them embarked, and going down the river were never seen again."<sup>3</sup> This was Coyote's only appearance since the mythological age.

Here are two remarkably different accounts of the same event, both told not very long ago. Time seems telescoped in British Columbia; the place appears to rest on a vast ellipsis. In Europe, the equivalent of Coyote and his band are too far back to have any reality, and so, invented and abstracted, they appear as "noble savages" (Rousseau) or as members of traditional lifeworlds (Habermas). But in this new corner of the Europeans' New World, abstractions become realities, and the long story of emerging modernity, extending back through European millennia, is compressed into a hundred years or so. The ethnographers who, at the end of the nineteenth century, began to study the Indigenous societies of British Columbia, assumed this. Since then, most of our scholarship has become more local; British Columbia tends to be studied for its own sake or in relation to the development of Canada. But to do so, as the best of the ethnographers knew, is to diminish the monumental and relatively accessible encounter – here, not long ago – of European culture with Coyote, Sun, Moon, Morning Star, and the others, an encounter that underlies the world we live in.



## Imagining and Claiming the Land

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As Europeans touched and began to penetrate land that, previously, had been entirely outside their experience, they began to name and map it, and in so doing to reconceptualize it in European terms. They replaced complex, finely worked-out Indigenous understandings of place and land with their own geographical generalizations – powerful simplifications that enabled them to explore, claim, and often colonize land they knew next to nothing about. In North America, the transfer of the un-European into a register Europeans could understand began with the first European comings and would long continue. Its sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century progress is considered here.



**B**EFORE MANY EUROPEANS could operate along the northeastern fringe of North America, the European imagination had to make some sense of it, less, perhaps, to establish “what was there” than to arrange and order the land in terms that Europeans could understand. Otherwise, it was bewildering and profoundly disorienting. The process of ordering New World space, and thereby of making it knowable, continues to the present, but for some time after initial contact, explorers’ reports and maps were the principal means of bringing this space into some preliminary focus. Reports, based on fleeting observation and self-serving promotions, were usually tantalizing exaggerations. The maps that explorers and cartographers produced were egregious abstractions that represented endless complexities by a few lines. Yet these words and lines enabled Europeans to know and think in certain ways – ways embedded in systems of power that allowed them to begin to possess spaces they hardly knew.

Explorers’ reports and the maps they and European cartographers produced were means of translation and simplification. They rendered the myriad voices of new lands in an accessible European language. Once translated into this language, the land could be communicated, and then could be argued and strategized over from afar. Moreover, to the extent that this language enabled Europeans to orient themselves in a space about which they knew little, it allowed them to ignore Indigenous voices situated in intricate but, from a European perspective, essentially alien systems of knowledge. A few lines on a map served to eviscerate the land of its Indigenous knowledge, thus presenting it as empty, untrammelled space available for whatever the European imagination wished to do.

The process of translation and simplification began as soon as Europeans came into regular contact with the northeastern corner of North America. Its modern European discovery began, as far as we know, in July 1497, when the Genoese explorer-merchant John Cabot, sailing with the financial backing of merchants in Bristol and the permission of the English Tudor king Henry VII, reached coastal Newfoundland or Nova Scotia. He found a bleak coast, waters teeming with fish, and some prospect of a sea route to China, for which he received ten pounds

from Henry VII and support from his backers to outfit five ships for a voyage the next year. One of these ships soon returned, storm-damaged, but the other four never did. In 1499, a Portuguese, João Fernandes, reached at least Greenland (which he named Tiera de Lavrador, a name that would migrate west); a year later, another Portuguese, Gaspar Corte-Real, also authorized by King Manuel of Portugal, sailed as far as Greenland. He was back in 1501 and continued to Newfoundland but then was lost at sea, as was his brother Miguel who sailed to look for him. These precarious probes into the northwestern Atlantic had found and reported land, but what land? Cabot, along with his backers, thought he had reached a northeastern peninsula of China, an assumption represented on several early sixteenth-century maps. Fernandes and Gaspar Corte-Real thought they had found an island. The conceptual discovery of North America apparently had not been made, although a remarkable map by the Spaniard Juan de la Cosa and variously dated from 1500 to 1508 suggests that it might have been. La Cosa's map shows a continuous coastline between the Spanish discoveries in the Gulf of Mexico and English discoveries, marked with flags, far to the north. It is the first representation of the east coast of North America. Some hold that La Cosa, who was in the Caribbean in 1499, could have got this information only from John Cabot, who, according to this interpretation, charted the coast and somehow communicated his findings to La Cosa before he and his ships disappeared.

Whatever the case, most European cartographers did not accept anything like the continental outline on the La Cosa map until the late 1520s. By this time, the Florentine Giovanni Verrazano, sailing for France, and the Portuguese Estévan Gomez, sailing for Spain, had charted the east coast of North America between Newfoundland and Florida. With a fairly continuous land mass established, the eastern edge of North America was coming into focus, and exploration turned to other questions: how to get around or through this obstruction on the route to China and whether profit might be derived from it. Verrazano had reported what he took to be open ocean beyond an offshore bar along the coast of the Carolinas. In the north, the Gulf of St. Lawrence was not yet known, nor was Newfoundland again understood as an island.

By the 1530s, bullion from the Spanish conquests of the Aztecs in Mexico, the Maya in Guatemala, and the Inca in Peru was flowing to Spain, and the prospect of finding and looting other empires became as enticing as a short route to China. In this climate of speculative imperialism, Francis I, king of France, commissioned Jacques Cartier, a Breton master mariner from Saint-Malo, to enter a reported strait beyond the Baye des Chasteaulx (the Strait of Belle Isle, between Newfoundland and Labrador). Cartier sailed in April 1534 and before his return in early September had explored most of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, taken possession of the land in the name of the French king, and captured two St. Lawrence Iroquoians, whom he took to the French court. These achievements earned him a second commission, and he was back the next year with three ships and 112 men. Directed by his two captives, Cartier sailed up the St. Lawrence River as far as his larger ships could navigate. From there, he explored west to Montreal Island, where he found a large well-palisaded village (Hochelaga) comprising, he reported, some fifty houses, each about fifty paces long and twelve to fifteen wide. Returning to his ships, he spent a harrowing winter of unanticipated cold, scurvy (a quarter of his men died), and increasing Indigenous hostility before capturing ten villagers, including the local Chief (Donnacona) and getting away to France. But he had found, as he reported to the king, “the largest river that is known to have ever been seen,” flowing through well-inhabited “lands of yours” of great fertility and richness. He also brought reports of a kingdom of the Saguenay, one moon’s journey beyond Hochelaga, where he had been told “there are many towns and ... great store of gold and copper.” Such reports, embellished by Donnacona in France, drew an expedition in 1541 of some five hundred men. Headed by a French nobleman, Jean-François de la Roque, sieur de Roberval, this was intended less to find a route to China (which now seemed unlikely via the St. Lawrence) than to establish a colony and exploit the riches of the Kingdom of Saguenay. Almost everything went wrong. Cartier and Roberval were at odds, diamonds and gold sent back to France turned out to be quartz crystals and iron pyrites, the Kingdom of Saguenay was not found, and scurvy and Indigenous attacks decimated the colonists. Roberval and the last of the survivors left in July 1543. The French would not be back on the St. Lawrence for almost forty years.

Cartier's explorations – and particularly the colonization venture with Roberval – had much in common with those of the Spaniards Coronado (with three hundred men) and De Soto (with six hundred), who at approximately the same time were drawn by tales of kingdoms and treasure into lands far north of the Gulf of Mexico. None of them found what they sought while traversing huge territories that Europeans had never seen before. In fact, Cartier had accomplished a great deal, although his politics had antagonized the St. Lawrence Iroquoians, the principal reason, probably, for the French withdrawal from the river. He had brought the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence Valley into a European field of vision, had taken possession of them in the name of the king of France, and had transformed the cartography of northeastern North America.

Cartier's own maps have not survived, but cartographers in Dieppe drew on his discoveries to produce several magnificent maps. Part of one of them, drafted by Pierre Desceliers in 1550, is reproduced in Figure 1. Newfoundland is shown detached from the mainland, the islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence are approximately in place, and the St. Lawrence River is drawn to and somewhat beyond its confluence with the Ottawa.

Wherever Europeans had been, the map is strewn with names. Along the Atlantic coast, it includes but a few of the many names associated with the inshore fishery. Figure 2 shows more of them: the place names on sixteenth-century maps that can be located precisely on modern maps of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula, a small fraction of the names that, undoubtedly, were then current in the largely oral world of the inshore fishery. Even within R de sam Joham (St. John's Harbour), there must have been dozens of place names in several European languages. Further west on Desceliers' map, the place names are either Gallicized renderings of Amerindian words or French names given by Cartier. All these names, superimposed on older namings in languages Europeans did not know and could not pronounce, served to make the land accessible to Europeans. It was acquiring an outline they could visualize and names they could recognize. Place names were a means of erasure: the name "Terre des Bretons," for example, obscured the Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous peoples who lived there and other European fishers



FIGURE 1

**Eastern North America, 1550.** The map is oriented with south at the top; the peninsula at upper right is Florida. | Cartographer, Pierre Desceliers. For a large colour reproduction, see Derek Hayes, *Historical Atlas of Canada: Canada's History Illustrated with Original Maps* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 2002), 29.

who came there. A few of them suggest a tentative hybridity as some Indigenous words were rendered in European phonologies.

Desceliers' 1550 map, like other small-scale maps of the day, was not for general distribution. He intended it primarily for Henry II, then the king of France, and not simply for the king's pleasure. It showed the territory discovered and claimed for France by a French explorer commissioned by the king, and situated this territory in a continental geography, as then understood. Such maps were statements of possession and geopolitical tools. In effect, they were a means to transfer a few bits of information, real or fanciful, about a distant place to what the French sociologist Bruno Latour calls a centre of calculation where this spare information could be put to work. In this case, it entered the

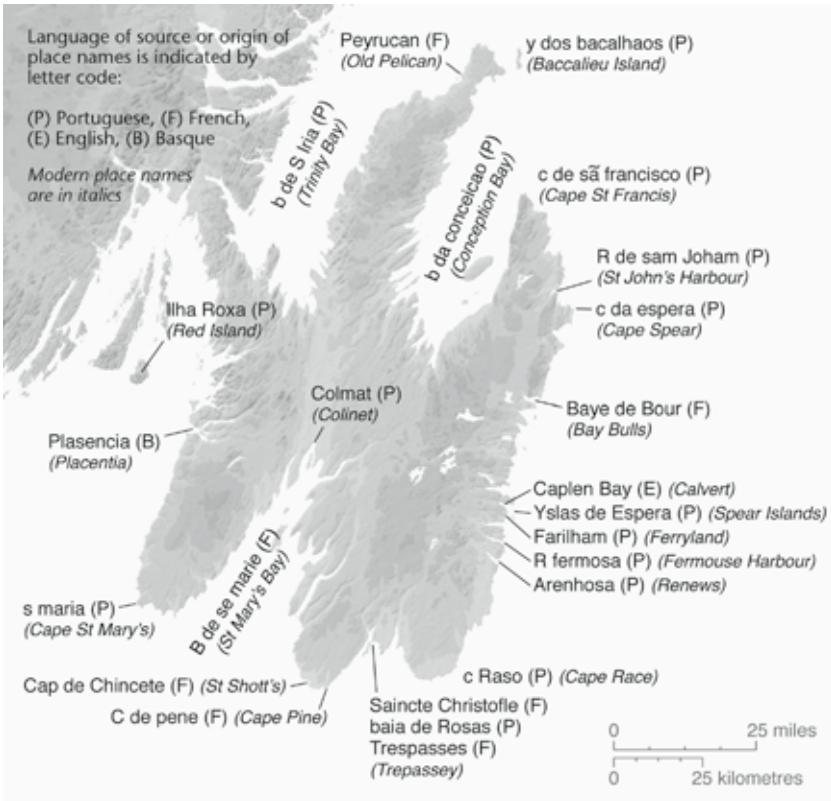


FIGURE 2

**Sixteenth-century European place names, Avalon Peninsula** | After S. Barkham, in R. Cole Harris, ed., Geoffrey J. Matthews, cart., *Historical Atlas of Canada*, vol. 1, *From the Beginning to 1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), plate 22

diplomatic channels of French geopolitics. So recontextualized, bits of information from maps or reports could be transformed into territorial claims that, from the perspective of the peoples inhabiting the territory, seemed to have dropped from the blue. When, in 1569, Gerard Mercator first engraved and printed a map of the world in the projection for which he became famous, he identified the lands on either side of the St. Lawrence River as “Nova Francia.”

The reports and maps generated by Cartier’s voyages and the French claims to the St. Lawrence had the effect of shifting northward the search for a passage to China. Magellan had found a southern passage; surely

God, in his wisdom, had also created a northern one. Most of the effort to find it was English. Beginning in the 1570s with three expeditions led by Martin Frobisher, continuing in the 1580s with John Davis, and ending in 1616 with William Baffin and Robert Bylot, the search between Greenland and Baffin Island reached the extraordinary latitude of 77° 45' N. It produced several ceremonial possession takings of land, fighting with the Inuit, black gold ore mined in Frobisher Bay (it turned out to be highly metamorphosed igneous rock), and harrowing reports of ice – on which Coleridge probably drew for “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” – but no passage. South of Baffin Island, Henry Hudson followed a strait into a huge chamber of the sea that became known as Hudson Bay, where he and his men overwintered in 1610–11. After the ice finally broke up the following June, most of his crew mutinied and abandoned him.

Other explorers followed: William Button in 1612–13; the Dane Jens Munk in 1619–20; Luke Foxe, backed by London merchants, in the early 1630s; and Thomas James, backed by a rival group in Bristol, also in the 1630s. With the technology of the day, the passage they sought did not exist to be found. But these voyages into Hudson Bay as well as those into Davis Strait and Baffin Bay transformed the cartography of far northeastern North America. Luke Foxe’s map, published in 1635 (Figure 3), shows what was accomplished. There were still a few holes in the cartographic coastline that might lead to passages, but after so much negative information, investors were no longer willing to assume the cost of probing them. Although they had no return to show for investments spread over fifty years, the English had acquired experience with Arctic navigation and knowledge of Hudson Bay, and both would be drawn on when an English fur trade began later in the century.

By this time, there had been French settlements on the St. Lawrence for more than two decades, and the fur trade was well in train. In 1632, near the end of his life, Samuel de Champlain, the explorer-trader-cartographer who had established the French on the St. Lawrence, published his final cartographic synthesis of the regions in which he had spent most of his adult years. This remarkable map (Figure 4) shows the Atlantic coast with fair precision, identifies three of the Great Lakes –



FIGURE 3

Luke Foxe, *Part of America, 1635* | Royal BC Museum and Archives, 1-61569

Lac St. Louis (Lake Ontario), Mer Douce (Lake Huron), and Grand Lac (Lake Superior or Lake Michigan) – and suggests Lake Erie. Champlain’s cartography had reached with some accuracy far into the continental interior, well beyond territory that any European had seen.

The map suggests just how far the venture on the St. Lawrence had drawn the French towards the continental interior and into contact with





FIGURE 4  
 Samuel de Champlain, New France, 1632 |  
 Library and Archives Canada, NMC, 51970

Indigenous peoples. To a considerable extent, Champlain had reproduced Indigenous geographical knowledge while, like other European cartographers, simplifying and decontextualizing it. He could not reproduce the intricate textures of Indigenous environmental knowledge, and the edges of that understanding that he did reproduce were detached from their cultural context. The pictorial representations of Indigenous settlements on Champlain's map include elements of Indigenous architecture while resembling European peasant villages. Much of the map simply creates blank space. At the same time, it produced a type of information that, at the scale of northeastern North America, Indigenous knowledge could not match. It had shifted the land into a different category of information, one that Indigenous peoples did not need but that Europeans did, for it allowed them to visualize space and, however approximately, to get their bearings. Ironically, the Indigenous information that Champlain incorporated in his map became a means of enabling Europeans to reconceptualize Indigenous space in European terms. Like Desceliers' before it, Champlain's map enabled the French Crown to claim territory and in so doing to ignore Indigenous possession while asserting its own interests. A rudimentary knowledge of the land, made available in Europe, became a considerable source of European power – a cartographic equation of power and knowledge that would be repeated across the continent.

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