SETTLER

Identity and Colonialism

2ND EDITION

WRITTEN BY

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Preface to the Second Edition

CANADIAN SETTLER COLONIALISM HAS NOT ENDED. Indigenous People and Nations continue to challenge genocide, deprivation, and disregard of Indigenous rights. Why? Because settlers continue to colonize, governments continue to ignore or actively oppose Indigenous struggles for decolonization, and corporations continue to assault Indigenous lands. This situation remains unchanged since the publication of *Settler* in 2015.

But some things have changed in the past decade. We see hope in the ways people are using the calls to action in the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada to push positive change in workplaces and spaces of learning. We see hope in the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) Inquiry's admission that Canada is founded on historic and ongoing genocide because it makes the historic and ongoing realities of Canadian colonialism clear at home and internationally. We see hope in Indigenous communities reclaiming lands from 1492 Landback Lane to the Wet'suwet'en gateway camps, and that there are some Settler Canadians supporting these efforts. We see hope in changes to the way these issues are discussed by people in classrooms, in the media, and in social discourses in Canada.

We, Settler Canadians, need to do more of this work and, to do it, we need to understand ourselves. As authors, *Settler* is part of our contribution. In this book, we seek to communicate and amplify what we have learned from Indigenous scholars and experts through teaching, deep critical reflection, and personal experience and growth. Our goal is to provide effective and accessible ways for other Settler Canadians to build their capacities for understanding and action.

We are energized by people taking up these challenges. We've heard from folks who have used *Settler* in book clubs, classrooms, professional training, faith groups, podcasts, living rooms, and more, and we appreciate hearing that it has been serving its purpose: helping people change the conversation and the scope for action.

We have updated this book to support its usefulness as a tool and learning resource, and we hope the changes help more people see themselves in these issues and their solutions. We also hope we have clarified how important it is for Settler Canadians to take up the reciprocal work of creating opportunities for truly just Indigenous–Settler relations, and how we can develop capacity to do so. There is no single path to meaningful settler decolonization; similarly, there are a multitude of excellent resources — books, articles, videos, poetry, research — available today to support this effort. This book contains tools, stories, and calls to action that we hope you will read in connection with your wider experience and learning.

Where we are insufficient in this book, we ask others to go further. Because that's the point. We need to support each other to progress in decolonization with courage and compassion. And to progress, we need to use the tools we have and build new tools to take on challenges that arise as we work. We need to do this together, with compassion, criticality, and strength.

In this new edition, in addition to streamlining the text, we have made changes in three main areas:

- We updated some stories and illustrative examples in light of events since the first publication. We kept stories or examples that had particular significance (historical, political, social, etc.) or that were meaningfully connected with our experience and learning journey.
- We have updated references to expert work in light of developments since first publication, including new works by Indigenous scholars such as Leanne Simpson, advocates like Cindy Blackstock, and reporters like Jorge Barrera, among others. We have kept references that speak to how we came to engage with concepts or ideas. Work in connected areas has expanded significantly over the past decade — a positive development — and we hope readers will seek out and engage widely with these excellent resources.

- We have nuanced our attention to regional and other differences in how settler colonialism is perceived and practiced, signposting specific resources in these areas including discussions of French Canada and Québécois nationalism, settlers abroad, and Black and People of Colour in Canada.

The original version of *Settler* was born out of a decade of work and discussions and our desire to share what we learned. The national conversation about settler colonialism in Canada has advanced significantly since that time. However, a decade later, the need for a book like this remains. We would like to thank and signal the importance of Fernwood Publishing and our editor, Fazeela Jiwa, in pursuing this updated edition. They, like us, recognize that progress has been made. They, like us, know that progress is not nearly enough. We are still confronting many of the same issues and problems, and most importantly, the same underlying inequalities and violences of settler colonization at the core of Canadian identity, politics, and society. We know things can change, but only if — or when — people from all ages, classes, cultures, and other markers of difference join in the struggle.

Forever

by January Rogers

as long as the sun shines upon the earth
as long as the water still flows
as long as the grass grows at a certain time each year
Forever
as long as Mother Earth is still in motion
still in motion, still in motion

It's hard work to maintain the middle row
one line makes I separating sides
they navigate a boat down a similar river
we paddle a canoe packing values
never touching, forever separate
maintaining the course
step by step laws of RESPECT
intended to protect sacred relationships

Words from good minds
Guswenta, Two Row Wampum
not treaty like it was told but a non-apology
canoe and Boat Ever Flowing Large Water River
buoyancy beyond democracy
boundaries not borders
the law was not authored in an angry house
of disputes but rather inspired from witness
to cause and effect of free will resulting in greed
and corruption and un-lawful things

Protection of our relationship to our mother
not better than the other but something necessary
to exercise caution
Careful!
Steady!
Carry on….
Your side
Our side
Maintaining the middle
is most difficult

I is for Indian Affairs
I is for Indigenous
I is for Imperialism
I is for Identity
I is for Iroquois/Haudenosaunee
I is for Incident
I is for Initiation

A league of nations
corresponding by beads on a belt
and anyone thinking beads to be insignificant
should try getting them back from a museum
Crime Minister/Prime Minister
simultaneous colonization and decolonization
relational trade quasi-kin two sides kept equal
This is Women's work

Those mountains didn't build themselves

Forever
As long as the sun shines upon the earth
As long as the water still flows
As long as the grass grows at a certain time each year
Forever
as long as Mother Earth is still in motion
still in motion, still in motion

It's about balance and focus
it's about commitment and loyalty
hard things, put in place
speaking the language of agreement
being included from a distance
peace and respect and prosperity

Do NOT Cross that Line
we said
DO NOT CROSS THAT LINE

Disruption results in consequences
remember Kanenhstaton Caladonia
remember Gustafen Lake
remember Ipperwash
remember Oka
remember Alcatraz and Eagle Bay
remember Wounded Knee
everyday is remembrance day
everyday

Ongwehonwe Original
a national fabric forming
blessing and protecting
something spiritual
not material but a difficult journey
staying the course better or worse
leaving nothing to debate
constitutional consensus overflowing with intelligence
Peacemaker would be proud

Forever
As long as the sun shines upon the earth
as long as the water still flows
as long as the grass grows at a certain time each year
Forever
as long as Mother Earth is still in motion
still in motion, still in motion
Forever

— From *Peace in Duress*, 2014. Reprinted here with permission.

January Marie Rogers

January is a Mohawk/Tuscarora poet, media producer, and performance and sound artist. She lives on her home territory of Six Nations of the Grand River where she operates Ojistoh Publishing and Productions. She has seven published poetry titles and wrote and produced a comedy web series, *NDNs on the Airwaves* (2022) and a play published as *Blood Sport* (Turtle's Back Publishing 2023).

January combines her literary talents with her passion for media making to produce audio and video poetry. Her video poem "Ego of a Nation" won Best Music Video at the American Indian Film Festival in 2020 and her sound piece "The Battle Within" won the Best Experimental Sound prize at the imagineNATIVE Film and Media Festival in 2021. She was Western University's Writer in Residence (2022/23) and is one of Audible Indigenous Writers Circle mentors for 2022, 2023, and 2024. January is also lead mentor with the Indigenous Story Sharing Residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts 2024.

Why Say Settler?

THE WORDS WE USE TO NAME OURSELVES ARE IMPORTANT. How we conceive of ourselves collectively is a part of wider, more complicated discussions about who is included and who is excluded from our society. In Canada, we like to think of ourselves as having a fairly inclusive society; we pride ourselves on being open and accepting of difference. We talk about being polite and respectful and peace loving. And we lie by omission, because we do not talk about our country being built on the attempted destruction of many other nations — or if we do, we discuss it in terms of past wrongs, not present-day realities. We do not talk about the questionable legal and political basis of our country or our history of profiting from invasion and dispossession. "Canadian" — a notoriously hard-to-pin-down concept — may not have a clear definition, but for some it refers to an invasive people, a nation that violently displaces others for its own wants and desires, a state that breaks treaties and uses police and starvation to clear the land. We need a name that can help us see ourselves for who we are, not just who we claim to be. For that, we need a term that shifts the frame of reference away from popular ideas of the Canadian nation and its geography and on to our relationships with systems of power, land, and the peoples on whose territory our country exists.

In recent decades, something has begun to shift. Alongside the 2008 official apology to Indigenous People from the federal government for the residential school era, Indigenous activism forced a deep reckoning to begin within Canadian society. The sweeping nationwide and globe-spanning protests under the banner of Idle No More in 2012–2013 pushed contemporary

issues to the forefront of national news. The release of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2015 on residential schools and its finding of cultural genocide had ripple effects throughout Canadian government, business, and education. The ongoing and increasingly high-profile occupations of territory in resistance to development by the Unist'ot'en of the Wet'suwet'en and others in the Interior of British Columbia have laid bare ongoing violence against Indigenous Peoples and lands. All these events have contributed to major shifts in social discourse. That is to say, the terms people used to describe Canada and its relationships to Indigenous People have changed. We heard more and more people using the term "settler" to refer to non-Indigenous Peoples, communities, states, and governments. Some were Indigenous People, referring to "settler states" or "would-be settler allies"; others were Canadians claiming the term as an identifier, baggage and all. The term is often challenged; some claim the term is racist. Others reject it as divisive. Some argue about whether "settler" is the "right" word and turn to dictionary definitions for confirmation or clarification. However, this debated and debatable term — all but unknown and unused in Canada outside of a small circle of academics and activists prior to 2005 — stuck.

Settler. This word voices relationships to structures and processes in Canada today, to the histories of our peoples on this land, to Indigenous Peoples, and to our own day-to-day choices and actions. Settler. This word turns us toward uncomfortable realizations, difficult subjects, and potential complicity in systems of dispossession and violence. Settler. This word represents a tool, a way of understanding and an acknowledgement that we can choose to act differently. It is a tool we can use to confront the fundamental problems and injustices in Canada today. Settler. It is analytical, personal, and uncomfortable. It can be an identity that we claim or deny but that we inevitably live and embody. It is who we are, as a people, on these lands.

We are Settler Canadians. And this is a book about us.

Understanding and Avoidance

This book is an examination of the Settler identity in Canada, an identity that is shared by growing numbers but is still unclear to many. This Settler Canadian identity is entangled both historically and in the present with the process of settler colonization, the means through which our state and nation have wrested their land base and legitimacy from Indigenous Peoples. In this book, our construction of "Settler" as an identity mirrors

the construction of "Indigenous" in contemporary terms: a broad collective of peoples with commonalities through particular connections to land and place. Settler is an analytic, that is, a tool that describes particular sets of relationships to land and place and to those identified as "like us" versus "Other," rooted in histories of the colonization of the lands we now call Canada. For Settler people, however, those connections are forged through violence, displacement, and assimilation of Indigenous communities and nations. In this book, we examine what it means to be a Settler person in Canada, how we constitute our national narratives and social structures, why Settler Canadians react in certain ways to Indigenous communities in resistance, and how we can each work toward finding more ethical, just ways of being together on the lands we call home.

Part of the reason that there has been an increase in attention to and use of the term "settler" is because of a curious double vision in Canada today. There is at least some willingness to admit that colonization happened, that it had devastating impacts on Indigenous Nations and communities, and that a colonial legacy persists into the present in the form of socioeconomic inequality, racism and discrimination, and political marginalization of Indigenous People and communities. There are nods to Indigenous histories in the territory acknowledgements of city councils and university conferences. While it took court battles waged over decades, governments have begun to engage in forms of "reconciliation" that speak to prior harms. However, colonialism continues. Today, Indigenous Nations are still losing their land bases to "development" or industrial pollution, facing infringement from resource extraction and mining companies, property developers, and the pressures of urbanization. Many government commissions, from the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal People to the 2015 final report of the TRC, have made clear and unambiguous recommendations for what Canada and Canadians should do to address Indigenous Peoples' concerns, but there has been precious little action to implement these, especially by governments. Do territory acknowledgements mean anything if what follows is business as usual? What has truly been "reconciled" with Indigenous Nations? These nations struggle for self-determination against governments seemingly bound to the notion that Indigenous Peoples should be constantly monitored and managed. And Indigenous Peoples face constant racism and violence: from the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) to discrimination by social services, to incidents of brutality at the hands of police, Indigenous People confront the reality

every single day that colonialism is far from a legacy. Attempting to make Canadian governments take these issues seriously has required constant pressure from Indigenous communities. Until recently, the vast majority of investigation and research into MMIWG has been led by family members of victims and community activists. A tremendous amount of work has been done to uncover systemic violence against Indigenous women, girls, and femme people for decades but only gained popular political purchase with the creation of the 2016–2019 National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The final report of the Inquiry states:

> The violence the National Inquiry heard amounts to a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This genocide has been empowered by colonial structures evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death, and suicide in Indigenous populations.[1]

Sadly, none of this is really news to most Canadians. The knowledge of what has been done and is being done to Indigenous Peoples already exists, and there is no reasonable justification for Canadians to claim ignorance.

A high-profile public example is that of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which, in 1996, clearly identified ways that Canadian society remains colonial — dishonouring treaties, systemically discriminating against Indigenous Peoples, maintaining reserves as economically marginalized and politically disempowered, and not doing nearly enough to address the present-day effects of historical warfare, murder, and policies of assimilation. The final report of the TRC echoed these findings. These research-intensive, investigative and analytical undertakings demonstrate not only the problems, but also how little effort Canada and Canadians have made to address the causes and our own complicity in ongoing colonialism. The problems affecting Indigenous communities are not unknown; their causes are in fact well understood through decades of research including that funded by the federal government itself. These results have been publicly available, summarized into easily readable formats, and presented in a myriad of forms and formats freely accessible online. Yet most Canadians refuse to engage with these sources or believe the arguments that they support, regardless of the evidence to the contrary.[2]

The refusal to see colonization as occurring in the present is connected to being unable and/or unwilling to perceive how the colonial state makes use of Canadians to target Indigenous Peoples. Colonialism is commonly understood as an attempt to control territory or resources beyond the official boundaries of a state or empire. Colonies are founded in unsecured territories as a foothold for trade, military excursions, diplomatic contact, and to otherwise serve as an extension of the central power. However, in twenty-first-century Canada there are no distant footholds because it is the country's land base itself that has been and continues to be the target of colonial power. Canada, as a nation and a state, is dependent on the land taken from Indigenous Nations, land that those nations still contest, and colonialism is about the need to secure those lands and justify the legitimacy of those claims at all costs. This positions Canada and Canadians directly at odds with Indigenous Peoples, who have not just prior, but competing claims to the land. Canada essentially has no legal grounds for its own sovereignty, which is to say, no reason in law as to why Canadian territory should be Canada's to govern.[3] It should be no wonder why Indigenous claims to land — especially when asserted with confidence — cause great concern for political leaders and many other Canadians: Indigenous enactment of land responsibilities and stewardship, protest against incursion and forms of disruption, community- and land-based teach-ins must all be understood as acts of resistance against the ongoing efforts of Settler Canada, as a collective entity, to eliminate Indigenous Peoples' claims to the land and permanently end any question about Canada's legitimacy.

The colonial history and the ways the legacies of colonial institutions and practices continue to disadvantage Indigenous People are not uncontested or unknown. The TRC may have tabled its final report in 2015, but new and horrific information about Canada's Indian Residential School system continues to be unearthed.[4] In a literal sense, since the discovery of dozens of children's graves around the Kamloops residential school in 2021, First Nations across Canada have begun deploying ground-penetrating radar to identify further unmarked graves around former residential schools.[5] More than that, extensive research shows that Indigenous People continue to face prejudice and racism from police, media, and public servants.[6] Yet, some Canadians continue to argue that the harms experienced by Indigenous children in the schools or by Indigenous People experiencing police brutality were the fault of "a few bad apples," not a systemic and accepted part of a system created and supported by Canadians. Or they contend that the

intent of systems like the residential schools — meaning, in some sense, education — was good even if, in reality, it failed. But intent does not displace impact, and government systems and services across the country demonstrate that the supposed "bad" apples far outnumber the good. Consider the striking poverty and lack of infrastructure in Indigenous communities, specifically the reserve communities situated on tiny fractions of their traditional homelands. It is this that has led to economic devastation, with some families waiting nearly a decade for on-reserve housing. In 2023 alone, the federal government contributed only $4 billion of the estimated $44 billion it would take to adequately provide on-reserve housing. This level of systemic denial of a fundamental necessity of life is not, and cannot be, accidental. But Canadians often insist on seeing these crises as the fault of negligent band governments or inadequate economic development.

Finally, even when Indigenous Peoples' concerns are acknowledged as legitimate, there is very little public impetus to act. When Québec Liberal Member of Parliament (MP) Marc Miller spoke Mohawk in Parliament in 2017, many applauded — but the performance of concern for Indigenous languages seems insignificant when the same government condoned the use of heavily armed Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to arrest and displace Indigenous People protecting disputed lands, as they did in Wet'suwet'en territory in British Columbia in 2019. And there is very little chance of limiting or preventing these harms through established methods of political engagement, like voting. Establishment politics in Canada may seem built on intractable conflict between progressive and conservative positions — especially after the polarizing effects of the COVID19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns and counter-protests — but in reality, on the key issue of Indigenous Peoples' rights, there is a significant consensus at the core of Canadian politics. Broadly, Canadian discourses on Indigenous Peoples, rights, and concerns tend to fall into two camps that align roughly with Canadian politics: the conservative and the liberal.

Popular works by scholar and political advisor Tom Flanagan and media mogul Conrad Black have been formative to the conservative discourse on Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Flanagan's work, in particular *First Nations? Second Thoughts*, while dated, still holds a powerful sway over the conservative imagination. His ideas are predicated on the assertion that Indigenous cultures and societies before the arrival of Europeans were primitive, undeveloped, and lacking significant culture. According to Flanagan, colonization was essentially inevitable: Indigenous Peoples

formed small, backward tribes occupying vast spaces; they were bound to be replaced by more advanced, organized, and numerous migrants. Black's re-telling of the story of Canada's past, *Rise to Greatness*, does not focus on Indigenous Peoples at all. Rather, it reinforces Flanagan's story by repeating old refrains of European explorers, pioneers, and fortune-seekers as "great men" hacking a new, civilized country out of a hostile and largely empty wilderness. Perhaps the most well-known and demonstrative example of this occurred in 2009, when Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper, at a meeting of the G20 in Pittsburgh, declared that Canada has "no history of colonialism." A few years later, Governor General David Johnston's Speech from the Throne that opened Parliament in October 2013 lauded the history of pioneers bravely venturing into empty wilderness and the enduring spirit of adventure and hard work that this has instilled in Canadian society. All of this reinforces a belief that colonization was an inevitable process, tied to the march of progress and civilization; that settlers and colonizers were doing unquestionably good things by reshaping the land; and that even if colonial crimes were committed, they were both inevitable and in the past, and so do not merit redress. Furthermore, in the time since Harper and the Conservatives lost federal power, these attitudes have spread and hardened among the far right. Prior to his election as the current Conservative Party leader, Pierre Poilievre had already established a history of making anti-Indigenous assertions that have only solidified his popularity among right-wing populists. His assertions date back to 2008 when he was forced to apologize for stating that residential school survivors needed "a stronger work ethic." Showing how little he has learned, in 2024, Poilievre was "sharply criticized" by many First Nations chiefs after he spoke to the Assembly of First Nations annual general assembly. He "failed to mention missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, inherent Indigenous rights, the climate crisis, residential school survivors and whether he would support a proposed $47.8 billion child welfare settlement."[7] Among the so-called Freedom Convoy that descended on Ottawa in 2022, and which was actively supported by Poilievre, racist and white supremacist attitudes were prevalent from the outset.[8] Later, Convoy leaders began appropriating Indigenous symbols, both traditional ceremonial objects like peace pipes, and also more contemporary symbols like the Orange Shirt Day originally organized to commemorate Indigenous children who lost their lives in residential schools.[9] As Dene author Amy Ede wrote in *The Tyee*:

> A frightening element of the convoy's appropriation of Indigenous ceremony, activism, protest and acts of resistance is its alignment with a desire to feel oppressed and victimized … I believe this desire to be seen as oppressed comes from a racist misconception that Indigenous communities and other marginalized communities are playing the victim, and that our hard-won and insufficient rights are in fact privileges.[10]

But this is not a partisan critique — it is simply a description of how settler colonialism manifests at one end of the political spectrum. Toward the centre and moderate left, it appears in different forms.

The liberal discourse tends to acknowledge Canada's colonial past, portrays Indigenous Peoples as possessing sophisticated, vibrant societies and cultures, and recognizes that early settlers and Canadian society in general could not have become established without the aid of Indigenous Peoples. Books like John Ralston Saul's *A Fair Country* tend to focus on the technological achievement and cultural complexity of Indigenous Peoples, applauding the "contributions" that Indigenous People(s) have made to Canadian society. Saul calls Canada a "Métis nation," not formed of conquest like the United States and not a distillation of European traditions, but rather a mix of Indigenous, European, and more recently, global cultures. Former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson's book, *Belonging: The Paradox of Citizenship*, is an examination of the struggles of diverse communities to find belonging in Canada — linked to legal recognition of status — especially for new immigrant communities that frequently experience racism, inequality, or face loss of identity and culture in joining a new society. Clarkson, an immigrant born in Hong Kong, whose family fled the Japanese invasion in 1942, speaks from experience, which is important because her views are widely held among many immigrant communities, both recent and well-established. Paralleling Black's book, Clarkson's subject is a Canadian society that focuses less on Indigenous Peoples and more on the project of imagining a unified narrative of what it means — or could mean — to be Canadian. In this case, Clarkson identifies the negotiation of immigrant roots and Canadian "belonging" as a common experience that can bind Canadians together. Clarkson constructs this social inclusion as following from Indigenous ideas of welcoming newcomers, one of the many "gifts" of Indigenous Peoples to Canadians. Such popular ideas are backed by work by well-known liberal academics like Will Kymlicka,