

Inventing the Thrifty Gene: The Science of Settler Colonialism by Travis Hay

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increased demands on the medical system. A series of contributions consider engagements with government commissions and conferences by people and communities who believed that new approaches were needed on questions of economic nationalism (Stephen Azzi), women (Jane Arcott), multiculturalism (Michael Temelini) and Indigenous peoples (Andrew Gemmell). These chapters speak to the quieter, but nonetheless deeply transformational shifts which were underway regarding the role of the state and identity politics in this period. A couple of chapters by literary scholars (Laura K. Davis and Will Smith) speak to issues of Canadian publishing and literature.

A trio of chapters consider international relations and their role in Canada's 1968, although they are really more about the foreign policy of the 1960s and '70s writ large. Gendron and Tabachnick's chapter on the Libreville conference highlights its importance in the ongoing federal-provincial debates over whether provinces could play a role in international relations. Andrea Chandler's piece on Canada's response to the Czechoslovakian crisis does an excellent job of considering how the Prague Spring and ensuing Soviet crack-

down impacted Canada's intake of refugees, how it contributed to an increased degree of engagement by eastern and central European-origin Canadians on foreign policy questions, and how this incident forced a partial rethinking of the Trudeau government's NATO policy. Christopher Kirkey's chapter about Canada's responses to American proposals for transporting oil discovered at Prudhoe Bay in 1968, is really more of a story about 1969-73 and a thoughtful examination of its ramifications for Arctic sovereignty, environmental, and energy policies.

Taken as a whole, the collection is unlikely to inspire the creation of stand-alone university courses on 1968 in Canada. As with most edited collections, the chapters are uneven in their strengths and the degree to which they speak to the core themes of the book. But *1968 in Canada* contains a number of strong chapters that will fit well with courses on post-Second World War Canada, the 1960s, Quebec, Canadian political history, or international relations, and will be useful to scholars working in those fields.

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Inventing the Thrifty Gene
The Science of Settler Colonialism

By Travis Hay

Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2021. 196 pages.
\$27.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-88755-934-1. (uofmpress.ca)

Travis Hay's new book, *Inventing the Thrifty Gene: The Science of Settler Colonialism*, explores the relationship between science and settler colonialism. Hay opens his book with a definition of his term "the science of settler colonialism,"

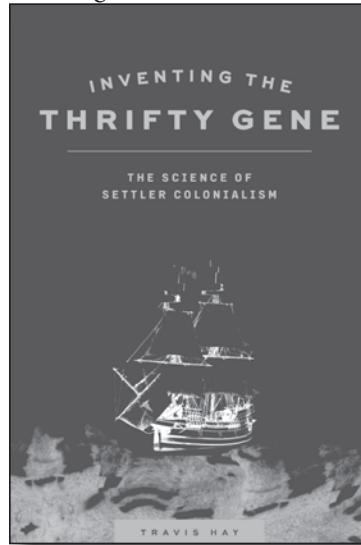
and describes the enduring practice of Canadian scientists who enter Indigenous communities to perform invasive research and produce scientific knowledge which ultimately ignores the violence of federal policies on Indigenous communities and

peoples. Hay's main example of this process throughout his book is the thrifty gene hypothesis. It "proposed that Indigenous bodies were genetically predisposed to diabetes, obesity, and other metabolic syndromes because of the foodways of their ancestors." (1) To avoid any confusion, Hay clarifies: "As I hope readers are aware, there is no such thing as a thrifty gene." (3)

While Hay explains that the thrifty gene hypothesis was fabricated in 1960s, he explores historic colonial scientific research in the first few chapters of his book. These chapters address infamous nineteenth and twentieth century research projects that took place across the globe and within Canada. Hay discusses Charles Darwin's observations of Indigenous peoples he encountered on his travels, as well as Sir Francis Bond Head's experimentation with Indigenous people's agricultural practices. These early colonial researchers conducted experiments on Indigenous people to determine whether they could be assimilated into western society. Here, Hay points out that these sentiments were expressed in the 1876 Indian Act. Hay then provides background on American geneticist James V. Neel's invention of the thrifty gene in 1962. Importantly, Hay establishes that Neel conducted violent and invasive research, and did not find evidence to support the thrifty gene hypothesis.

Hay ties his book back to southwestern Ontario and post-Second World War research projects, when he introduces his readers to the 1969 University of Toronto's Sioux Lookout Project (UTSLP)—the

first of many research projects involving the Sandy Lake community. The project was established to increase healthcare coverage in Sioux Lookout after an influenza outbreak in the community. However, it quickly descended into an experiment on nutrition and Indigenous bodies. In 1973, Chief Jacob Fiddler of Sandy Lake, one of the book's main figures in subverting colonial research, rejected a research proposal and instead proposed that the funds be used for fitness resources in his community. Chief Fiddler's counterproposal was denied, and a dangerous research projects ensued his



in community instead. Hay then introduces Chief Josias Fiddler, Chief Jacob Fiddler's son, who the book is dedicated to, and who, in 1988, executed a hunger strike with four community members at a hospital in Sioux Lookout to draw attention to the segregated healthcare system for Indigenous peoples. The hunger strike put pressure on the healthcare system to respond to the emergence of type 2 diabetes in Sandy Lake in the 1980s.

Hay positions the UTSLP as a textbook example of the government prioritizing research over meaningfully funding and providing resources to Indigenous communities. However, Hay tells the story of Sandy Lake's resistance to government funded research to demonstrate that the Sandy Lake community was not being passively tricked by researchers. Rather, as Hay writes "it demonstrates that the community and leadership of Sandy Lake First Nation understood very well the dynamics of settler colonial science as well as the role of federal government in the historical and

chronic malnourishment of Indigenous peoples in Canada.” (108)

The following chapter re-introduces the thrifty gene to the story. In 1999, a research team comprised of scientists from the University of Toronto and the University of Western Ontario, announced at a press conference in London, Ontario that they had confirmed the discovery of the thrifty gene. The conclusion was a result of the 1991 Sandy Lake Health and Diabetes Project, which was a response to the emergence of type 2 diabetes in the 1980s. The “discovery” of the thrifty gene in Sandy Lake sparked government interest and funding for research on the hypothesis. Here, Hay drives the point that despite the attention and funding that the research brought to the Sandy Lake community, this story highlights “the inability of Canadians to support First Nations communities except through the science of settler colonialism.” (148) Moreover, Hay emphasizes that the focus on the thrifty gene perpetuates the idea that diabetes in Indigenous people is genetic and erases the impacts of the lack of healthcare, clean wa-

ter, and basic living needs in many Indigenous communities.

Hay’s book is a critique of the scientific settler colonial research conducted in Indigenous communities. He effectively uses the thrifty gene as an example of how toxic colonial research can be for Indigenous communities. The paratext surrounding Hay’s book includes a quote from Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punishment*, which encourages readers to consider the whole text as a reflection on the troublesome power dynamics in research projects involving Indigenous communities. Hay’s book incites productive outrage towards the unjust practices in Canada’s federal and provincial healthcare systems. Hay, an academic and researcher himself, asks fellow researchers and readers to reflect on their own positions and work with Indigenous communities. Hay’s book invites his readers to consider who benefits, and who is harmed, when settlers conduct extractive research within Indigenous communities.

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Partisan Odysseys *Canada’s Political Parties*

By Nelson Wiseman

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020. 240 pages. \$75.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper, ISBN 978-1-48750778-7 (cloth), 978-1-4875-2539-2 (paper). (www.utorontopress.com)

Nelson Wiseman’s study of the history of the country’s political parties, *Partisan Odysseys: Canada’s Political Parties*, arrives in an era of declining party loyalty, increasing voter disillusionment with Canada’s federal political parties, and a sharp increase in the power of party leaders and non-elected officials to dictate everything

from policy agendas to local nominations.

Wiseman’s book is aimed at non-specialist students of Canadian politics and general readers who have some knowledge or are somewhat innocent of Canadian history, academic specialists, politically engaged citizens, journalists, and “anyone else who wants to know more about the