

## **James Daschuk's *Clearing the Plains*: A Panel Discussion** **Introduction**

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## James Daschuk's *Clearing the Plains*: A Panel Discussion

### Introduction

As the 2016 volume of the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* goes to press, we see that the newly elected federal government (Liberal) has launched a nation inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous girls and women; Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has appointed the chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Justice Murray Sinclair (Anishinaabe), as a senator; and the Supreme Court of Canada is deciding on whether to uphold lower court rulings that Métis and non-status First Nations people be recognized as “Indians” under section 91 (24) of the Canadian constitution.

Is Canada finally recognizing the dark stain on its history and recognizing its accountability? The three articles assembled here ask this question as they reflect on the winner of the Canadian Historical Association's 2014 John A. MacDonald Prize for the Best Book in Canadian history: James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (University of Regina Press, 2013). *Clearing the Plains* chronicles the heart-breaking tale of human devastation wrought by government policy, disease, and environmental change suffered by Plains Indigenous peoples from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Using the language of ethnic cleansing, Daschuk paves the way for putting genocide at the centre of our national historical narrative. Mary Ellen Kelm explains the significance of Daschuk's work to the rich historiography of Indigenous-settler relationships. Susan Neylan looks at how the book can change the teaching of Canadian history in university classrooms. Ian Mosby examines the book's public profile and how Daschuk has been able to reach so many Canadians. It with rich irony that Daschuk's book, which illuminates the crimes perpetrated in part by Canada's first prime minister, is awarded a prize in MacDonald's name. I hope that Canada is turning a

corner to come full circle, and if so, we can thank Daschuk for helping Canada along this journey.

Carolyn Podruchny