

Unit 11: Video 2 Transcript

Q7 What was the central thesis of your book *Colonial Leviathan*? If you published it today, would you change anything?

A: Ian Radforth and I published a collection entitled *Colonial Leviathan* that came out of a conference we held in Toronto. And our idea was to bring together scholars who seemed at that time to be kind of pursuing convergent and related themes, roughly in the middle of the 19th century and having to do with—state formation was the word that—the phrase that was coming up at that time in various places. So we had, you know, Bruce Curtis working on education and school systems in early Ontario. We had Jean-Marie Fecteau who worked on treatment of the poor in—and of criminals in early 19th century Lower Canada. The list goes on. There were several other people that were involved talking about, for example, the building of railroads and so on. It seemed to us that the time had come to—it's, again, a sort of a matter of bringing together so-called political history and so-called social history to give some depth to political developments, to try to understand them not only at the level of politician “A” said this, newspaper “B” criticized it in the following terms, and politician “C” said this and the legislature passed legislation accordingly. We wanted to treat the state as being part of society and vice versa rather than simply an isolated forum where only a few elite men had a voice. So we brought together these people and had a wonderful conversation, the sort of that, you know, just happened to be asking the right people the right questions at the right time. And so I think the book had an impact.

If someone were to redo it today, I think they would do it quite differently. The thing that's obviously missing is Indigenous people. And even at the time we were aware of that and we thought, you know, there should be something on Indigenous people. Now, who are we going to ask to do that? And we couldn't come up with an answer to that question. That's not an excuse, but it's maybe a reflection of the historiographic times. But I think if someone were to do it now it would not be simply a matter of, okay, you know, Native people get displaced and marginalized while the Canadian state is being made. I mean, that point could be made certainly, but I think

there's a lot more to be said about than that.

One of the important historical developments over the course of the 19th century is the creation of reserves. We're familiar with reserves. We tend to think of them, I think, maybe as historical. I think they deserve historical treatment. A whole lot of spaces that Indigenous people occupied get homogenized over the course of the 19th century. And subjected to what becomes a federal government bureaucratic treatment of people and places. That is a story that portions of it have been told but I don't think has ever been properly integrated. So that would be one obvious place.