



# 'Last of the buffalo': bison extermination, early conservation, and visual records of settler colonization in the North American west

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## ABSTRACT

Following their rapid extermination from North America in the nineteenth century, bison became an icon of the early conservation movement. The acquisition of the last free-ranging bison herd by the Canadian government in 1907 was celebrated as a critical measure in preventing extinction. This article examines a photographic souvenir booklet that documents the round up, 'Last of the Buffalo'. The booklet's celebratory narrative of early-twentieth century conservation is also a visual record of settler colonization. Beginning with a history of Canada's acquisition of the Pablo herd, this article examines how the round up of these animals converged with processes of enclosure, dispossession, and the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty. Turning to a visual analysis of the 'Last of the Buffalo', this paper then identifies settler logics and framing at work in the material and symbolic transformation of bison into objects of consumption. As an instance of settler colonial ways of seeing, the photographs establish a visual account of conservation that naturalizes the dispossession of Indigenous land and life. Finally, the article turns to the work of Tasha Hubbard (nêhiyaw), Zoe Todd (Métis), and Leroy Little Bear (Kainai), to indicate possible counter-readings of the photographs, as documents of a radical shift in a world of shared human-buffalo relations.

## KEYWORDS

Settler colonialism; conservation; photography; decolonization; human-animal relations; visual studies; Canada; Montana

## Introduction

This article draws its title – 'Last of the Buffalo' – from a souvenir book of photographs taken by Norman K. Luxton of the 1907 round up of the last free-ranging bison herd in North America.<sup>1</sup> I was first introduced to Luxton's collection of photographs during the 2016 American Bison Society meeting in Banff, Alberta. At the conference dinner, participants found copies of *The Last of the Buffalo: Return to the Wild* offered on each of the round banquet tables, alongside bottles of wine sponsored by a company with a bison-themed vintage and information about the next day's field visits.<sup>2</sup> The book contains a series of essays collected to commemorate the role of Banff National Park in early-twentieth century bison conservation and to contextualize the then-anticipated transfer of bison from Elk Island National Park to a remote valley of the Banff backcountry.<sup>3</sup>

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Offered to the conference participants in celebration of the return of wild bison to the park after more than a century of absence and as a souvenir of the meeting, the volume's essays tell of historians' attempts to explain the collapse of the bison herds, narrate efforts taken by state agents and private actors to preserve a species at the brink of extinction, and introduce Indigenous-led efforts to restore free-ranging bison to prairie grasslands. Over dinner, the conversation at my table turned to matters of bison genetics and breeding and as a media theorist interested in the cultural representation of bison, there was little for me to contribute. I turned to the hardbound book and as I flipped through its glossy pages, I was pleased to find a reproduction of Luxton's original souvenir booklet slipped into a plastic sleeve attached to the inside back cover of the edited volume. Amidst my colleagues' discussions of genes, this photo collection and its celebratory narrative of early-twentieth century conservation highlighted for me a broader political-historical frame in which bison restoration has unfolded. And yet these images of conservation are also visual records of settler colonization.

In a series of 28 photos panoramic photos with editorializing captions and two brief contextual essays, Luxton's souvenir book documents the round up of a herd of bison owned by Michel Pablo.<sup>4</sup> The Canadian government had purchased 716 of the animals and arranged for their transport from the Flathead Reservation in western Montana to newly established national parks in Alberta. Before they could be delivered to Canadian parks, the animals that had roamed freely in the Flathead Valley grasslands had to be captured. Luxton's 'Last of the Buffalo' provides a visual narrative of this rounding up, which early conservation activists celebrated as the 'most important act in the interest of conservation of the noblest of our quadrupeds'.<sup>5</sup>

But conservation work is also political work and a core element of political work on the early twentieth century prairie was the work of settlement. Animals and other-than-human beings have always been implicated agents in settler colonial processes. In North America, settler economies and politics have been entangled with animals from the beginning and continue to play out through their manipulation, cultivation, domestication, co-optation, weaponization, and exploitation.<sup>6</sup> Human-animal relations have been similarly torqued by the imposition of settler colonial modes of relation and the disavowal of Indigenous knowledge of and responsibilities to nonhuman life.

In this vein, this article analyses Luxton's photo booklet – an instance of both the Western and the landscape genres of cultural representation – as a document of settlement in process. Beyond transporting the continent's remaining wild bison to Canadian state parks, the round up of the Pablo herd was a site of convergence for settler colonial policies of dispossessing Indigenous lands, imposing private property regimes, and confining Indigenous peoples to reserves and reservations. The panoramic landscapes, chased herds, and cowboy portraits included in 'Last of the Buffalo' were originally conceived of as a booklet and postcard set that would interest visitors to Banff and a broader audience intrigued by the 'old West'. These landscapes depict a simplified version of the places now called Montana and Alberta, naturalizing both settler claims to presence and Indigenous erasure. Complex histories of Indigenous resistance, colonial legal machinations, and the radical loss of species and multispecies relations due to extermination are left out of Luxton's frame. What comes into view instead is a celebratory narrative of man versus beast – wherein agents of a settler state capture, remove, confine, and domesticate the wild beast in order to preserve its endangered wildness.

Analyzing 'Last of the Buffalo' for how it documents techniques of settlement demonstrates how early bison conservation was entwined with colonial politics. In showcasing conservation, how do these photographs also display processes of settlement, the naturalization of settler colonial displacement, and Indigenous erasure? What do these photographs document about the material processes of making land available for settlement? How do material relations of colonization and Indigenous resistance play out before the camera, and which relations does the camera obscure? The round up Luxton photographed was and continues to be positioned as a crucial moment in conservation history. But it also transformed the surviving plains bison, their relationship to land, and human-bison relations. This transformation is one instance of settler colonial ordering of land and life in relation to Euro-Western notions of possession, property, and distinctions between the 'nature' and 'civilization'.<sup>7</sup> The frames at work in Luxton's photographs reflect his perspective as a white entrepreneur in the region, but also illustrate the broader 'settler colonial ways of seeing' that structure how the lives of Indigenous peoples, as well as non-human animals, plants, and even land itself become perceptible to state and other settler agents.<sup>8</sup> In addition to reading Luxton's images as an instance of settler colonial ways of seeing, I draw on the work of nêhiyaw scholar Tasha Hubbard to examine how the transformations illustrated in the photographs also document this radical shift in a world of shared human-buffalo relations. However, critical interventions by Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd and Kainai political theorist Leroy Little Bear offer resources for denaturalizing these frames, and for insisting on other frames for apprehending human-bison relations and their restoration.

As a citizen and resident of a settler society (Canada) engaged in research particular to one region (the North American prairie), I situate my writing in conversation with, on the one hand, Anglo-European political theory, and on the other hand, and the critical responses and resistances of Indigenous scholars to the political conditions of settler colonization in Canada (and to a lesser extent, the United States). This work requires centering Indigenous scholarship, as well as humility in the face of multiple ontologies. From my position as a settler researcher who has lived in primarily urban settings, I do not claim to fully understand how buffalo are experienced and known as relations to Indigenous peoples on the prairie. My understandings of land and life have been shaped in powerful ways by Euro-Western conceptual frameworks and critiques circulating within such frames. This limitation is an effect of white settler privilege. The failure to grasp that another community – with a different intellectual history, values, political and social structure, and knowledge system – could experience a different mode of knowing and relating to the world and its nonhuman beings is not just a failure of imagination, but also a pillar of settler colonial thought. This article's analysis of one visual field of conservation and settler politics reflects an attempt to theorize the effects of settlement on human-animal relations, and aims to do so in ways that are attentive to multiple conceptions of such relations and to the harm that their erasure can inflict.

### Colonization, extermination, conservation

The round up of the Pablo herd Luxton documented in 1907, which then formed 'Last of the Buffalo', was the result of sale of the herd to the Canadian government. However, the sale and round up were tied to broader processes of settler colonization, which radically transformed the North American prairie. The acquisition and sale of what was the last

free-ranging bison herd of significant size in North America, as well as the broader crisis of extermination, are instances of the re-ordering of land and life via the imposition of what Unangax theorist Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe as ‘the colonial apparatus that is assembled to order the relationships between particular peoples, lands, the “natural world”, and “civilization”’.<sup>9</sup> The structure of settler colonization and its logics of elimination and replacement are uneven, ongoing, and local.<sup>10</sup> Even in the case of bison extermination, there were variations in the policies, processes, and timeframes that affected different bison habitats, such as east of the Mississippi, the southern and northern plains of the United States, and the Canadian prairie.<sup>11</sup> The genesis and sale of the Pablo herd provides a view of one local form that the structure and logics of settler colonization took on the North American prairie at the turn of the twentieth century.

The Pablo herd refers to the bison cared for by Michel Pablo on the Flathead Reservation in Montana. Pablo was the son of Otter Woman – a Southern Pikani Blackfoot woman, from the Flathead Reservation – and Michel Pablo – a settler of Mexican descent.<sup>12</sup> Pablo spent his early childhood between the white settlement of Fort Benton and the Colville Reservation in eastern Montana, but after the deaths of his parents, he returned to the Flathead Reservation at age 13 and was formally adopted and enrolled as a member in 1864, when he was in his early 20s.<sup>13</sup> After working as an interpreter and a decade of cattle ranching, Pablo and Charles Allard – also of mixed Blackfoot and settler heritage – acquired 13 bison that came to form the last free-ranging herd on the continent.

The bison Pablo and Allard purchased were originally brought to Salish territories by Atatitsa and his son Latatitsa – both Pend d’Orielle men – in the early-1870s.<sup>14</sup> Having observed the radical decline in bison herds during annual hunting trips to the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains, Atatitsa had a dream vision of bringing bison west of the mountains for protection. After the careful consideration of a move that would shift the relationship between the Salish peoples and bison from one centered on hunting to one of protection, the nation’s leaders supported Atatitsa’s plan and Latatitsa brought several young calves over the mountains and into Salish territory in 1873 or 1874.<sup>15</sup> Later, after the death of his father, Latatitsa’s stepfather, Samuel Walking Coyote sold the small herd – then 13 animals – to Pablo and Allard in 1884.<sup>16</sup>

Atatitsa and the Salish peoples had observed a rapid decline in bison by the 1870s. The declining population in Salish hunting territory was symptomatic of a continent-wide herd collapse, where a conservative estimate of 30 million bison at the beginning of the century had been radically reduced to only a few thousand animals.<sup>17</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, new human and non-human arrivants to the plains – contract hide hunters, frontier armies, displaced Indigenous nations from other regions, as well as horses and domesticated European livestock – each brought interlocking pressures to bear on bison herds. The import of new technologies such as higher capacity firearms, trains, and steamships to the region further hastened a slaughter that had already been amplified by demand from the expanding fur trade for preserved bison meat provisions and European demand for imported bison hides and tongues.<sup>18</sup> American frontier militias also adopted bison slaughter as a tactic to weaken Indigenous tribes through starvation.<sup>19</sup> The logics and processes of elimination that undergirded the rapid slaughter were also entangled with those of replacement. Though bison were seen as an impediment to the development of settler infrastructures, agriculture, and communities, the herds were appropriated as a resource

to sustain railway workers, homesteaders, and other arrivants to the West throughout the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, settler world-building in this region exterminated a keystone species, radically disrupted Indigenous livelihoods, and fractured the world of human-bison relations. In the face of these violent effects of settlement, the decision of Atatitsa and his community to move bison calves west of the Rockies protected the animals that the Salish knew to be their relations, tending to responsibilities borne of reciprocity and kinship.

Pablo and Allard's acquisition of the small herd responded to this shift in relations between Indigenous peoples and buffalo, moving from generations of hunting relationships to one of protection. According to Salish oral history, when purchasing the bison from Walking Coyote, Pablo described the Flathead Valley as territory where the bison could flourish and would be protected.<sup>21</sup> Management of the herd involved hiring riders to ensure that the animals did not leave the greater Flathead Valley, but there are no records of bison escaping the region.<sup>22</sup> Pablo and Allard expanded their herd by purchasing 26 bison from Charles 'Buffalo' Jones in 1893.<sup>23</sup> While the goal of growing the Flathead herd appears to have been motivated by a desire to protect, the purchase from a private owner also illustrates emergent ideas of animals as property. However, *nêhiyaw* scholar and filmmaker Tasha Hubbard interprets the caretaking of Pablo, Allard, and the reservation community as indicative of a desire to safeguard the bison's wildness – the herd freely ranged on 1.3 million acres – and wellbeing. As Hubbard observes, 'Indigenous peoples become protectors, and the people of the Flathead Nation collectively ensured the survival of the plains buffalo'.<sup>24</sup>

After Allard's death in 1896, the herd was divided between Pablo and Allard's heirs. Pablo's herd continued to flourish in the expansive meadows of the Flathead territory and the protection of surrounding mountain ranges. However, such access to range was disrupted in 1904 by the Flathead Allotment Act. Extending from the General Allotment Act of 1887, the 1904 legislation broke up communally held lands and forced tribal members to take small, individually owned parcels before selling the remaining land to settlers.<sup>25</sup> The federal government's seizure of Flathead territory was an act of privatization, enclosure, and settler encroachment characteristic of what Goenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson diagnoses as the possessive function of whiteness. White possessiveness, Moreton-Robinson argues, is a system in which white supremacist racial hierarchies are anchored in the dispossession of Indigenous lands, as well as the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignties and subjective relationships to ontologies that 'exist outside of the logic of capital'.<sup>26</sup> This assertion of white possession radically diminished the collective Flathead land base – allotting individual families parcels of only 160 acres – and the undermining of Flathead sovereignty.<sup>27</sup> The material losses of territory and the inscription of private property forced the re-ordering of relations in the valley, in alignment with a broader colonial apparatus that distinguished between the appropriate uses and inhabitants of land. As Harvey Locke observes, allotment meant that 'the grasslands would be broken and fences would be erected'.<sup>28</sup> The parceling out of the valley into private homesteads made way for an influx of settlers and the increased importation of cattle and other domesticated livestock. In addition to the great losses endured by the Flathead peoples, allotment meant Pablo's growing bison herd would no longer have access to the open valley where they had been protected for two decades.

By the time allotment legislation had established the groundwork for the enclosure of the Flathead Reservation, a conservation movement had begun to grow in the United States and Canada.<sup>29</sup> With the publication of the William Temple Hornaday's *Extirpation of the American bison* in 1889, the nearly extinct bison became a central symbol of this emerging movement. Under Hornaday's leadership, the New York-based American Bison Society formed in 1905 with the objective of 'the permanent preservation and increase of the American bison'.<sup>30</sup> The Society petitioned the Canadian and United States governments to take action to prevent the total extinction of the species and advocated for the public acquisition and protection of remaining bison herds and were particularly interested in the Pablo herd, given its size and genetic diversity.<sup>31</sup> Inflected with nostalgia, the Society's organizing also tended to articulate bison as of the past and species preservation as a path for maintaining the memory of the continent's 'wild' past.

Based in New York City and with a membership of mostly wealthy east coast elites that included honorary president Theodore Roosevelt, the American Bison Society was representative of early settler-driven conservation projects. When such efforts began to emerge in the late 1800s, they were driven by upper-class hunters' concerns over depleted stocks of economically and aesthetically valuable 'game' animals such as deer and bison.<sup>32</sup> With these constituents in mind, conservation policies in North America have normatively framed the 'wise use' of wild animals as non-consumptive sport hunting.<sup>33</sup> Two key methods of this conservation practice have been the creation of state parks, and the regulation of hunting wild animals. To become the 'natural', pristine spaces marked out as parks and idealized by settler nostalgia, the existing human inhabitants of these spaces needed to be removed.<sup>34</sup> Bolstering this re-ordering of preserved pristine space, policies such as licensing procedures, bag limits, and restricted hunting seasons served to marginalize Indigenous hunters, foreclosing both a key means of subsistence and one of the few entry points to networks of settler capital.<sup>35</sup> The spatial and political processes of carving up and designating particular spaces as 'wilderness' while dispossessing Indigenous inhabitants and their claims to ownership created emptied spaces that were characteristic of the emergent nationalisms and availability of land in Anglophone settler colonial states at the turn of the twentieth century. From the United States and Canada to New South Wales, Australia, and New Zealand, Tracey Banivanua Mar (Moalan) has argued that the creation of national parks in each of these settler states mobilized the rhetoric of 'preserving national scenery and resources for the benefit of, and as a monument to, the settler nation'.<sup>36</sup>

When Pablo went looking for a home for his herd of an estimated 300–400 animals, he eventually found a buyer in the Dominion of Canada federal government. News of the herd's availability traveled to the Superintendent of Immigration, by way of Alexander Ayotte, Canadian land agent stationed in Montana.<sup>37</sup> Ayotte had also contacted Howard Douglas, the superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park (now Banff National Park), who advocated for the purchase, boasting that with the acquisition of the Pablo herd combined with the wood bison the north, 'Canada would own 8/10 of bison living'.<sup>38</sup> In March 1907, following a trip by Douglas to inspect Pablo's herd the previous summer, the Canadian government signed a contract to purchase 360 bison.<sup>39</sup> The round up and movement of the herd to Canada began in the summer of 1907 and the Canadian government closed their contract with Pablo in 1912. Over this five-year

period, it became apparent that Pablo's herd was much larger than estimated and the Canadian government purchased more than 700 animals.

The will to purchase all of Pablo's animals – a number that exceeded what would be needed to preserve the species in Canada – reflected a spirit of nationalist rivalry.<sup>40</sup> Once convinced by Douglas of the herd's value as a tourist attraction as well as an opportunity for conservation, the Canadian government committed to purchasing every single animal Pablo had available. News of the American Bison Society's plan to make a bid for purchase in January 1907 steeled the resolve of the Department of Interior bureaucrats involved in securing the herd for Canada.<sup>41</sup> Colonial nostalgia for the loss of the frontier further fueled the competitive fervor to acquire the Pablo herd. As a synecdoche of the very idea of the West, bison took center stage in representations of the frontier within broader settler colonial imaginaries. The material and symbolic landscapes of the frontier, Pauline Wakeham argues, are spaces 'upon which colonialism's primal scene was mapped'.<sup>42</sup> The extermination of plains bison across the prairies can be read as an instance of this primal scene, where colonial infrastructure, property, and foodways clashed with and radically disrupted the lives and futures of the region's original inhabitants – human and nonhuman. However, affective circuits of colonial nostalgia accompany these violent reorderings of land and life in frontier zones, rendering the effects of colonial brutality instead as natural or inevitable processes. As Wakeham observes, 'it is only in its loss that frontier wilderness can be sentimentally remembered, it is only in its absence that the once-threatening idea of untamed alterity can be revisited as an alluring landscape for colonial romance'.<sup>43</sup> At the time of Canada's agreement to purchase Pablo's herd, free-ranging bison had been exterminated from prairie territories, along with their capacity to sustain Indigenous resistance and disrupt colonial processes of mapping, enclosing, and settling. In the absence of free-ranging animals, the acquisition of the Pablo herd and their resettlement in Canada's emerging national parks reflect settler colonial logics of elimination and replacement: the elimination of original species and their replacement with state-owned animals that serve as irretrievable referents of a lost frontier past.

The interwoven affects of rivalry and sentimentality that motivated Canada's purchase of the Pablo herd actively occluded material histories of violence central to securing imperial control over the West while contributing to settler imaginaries of Canada as a beneficent caretaker of superabundant wild spaces.<sup>44</sup> Further, the acquisition and transfer of the Pablo herd to new national parks contributed to a nationalist fantasy of Canada as a peaceful sanctuary, somehow distinguished from the chaos and violence of life south of the 49th parallel. Canada's purchase of the Pablo herd was a critical measure in the survival of the species. However, the sale forced by allotment policy meant the loss of the protective relationship Pablo and the other members of the Flathead community had entered into with the buffalo. Further, the transfer of the animals to Canadian state ownership appropriated this protective relationship for the purposes of settler state-building via park-building and tourism.

### Mr Banff goes to Montana

The sale and roundup of the Pablo herd attracted a variety of political, conservation, and media attention. Norman Luxton's photographs of the fall 1907 phase of the round up, which were published as the 'Last of the Buffalo' souvenir booklet, are one of the



primary records of the purchase and continue to be circulated in conservation discourse. Prior to traveling to Montana to observe the round up, Luxton had also been involved in lobbying the Canadian federal government for the herd's acquisition. Luxton was an adventurer, taxidermist, and well-connected businessman living in Banff, Alberta at the time and was enlisted by Douglas and Ayotte in their efforts to secure the herd for Canada's national parks.<sup>45</sup> Once the purchase was finalized, Luxton and Douglas made the trip to join Ayotte in Montana and to observe the round up first hand. The complete round up and transport of the Pablo herd took three years and Luxton's images document the second shipment of bison, in September and October of 1907.<sup>46</sup>

Luxton's personal business interests and leadership in the Banff community shaped his perspective on the round up and the booklet's production. Known as 'Mr Banff', Luxton owned multiple businesses in Banff, managed tourist events such as Banff Indian Days, and several celebratory biographies credit him with tagging the park as the 'playground of the Rockies'.<sup>47</sup> Selling Banff and promoting the economic development of the Rockies and Western Canada motivated Luxton's interests in conservation and frontier adventure-seeking.<sup>48</sup> In drafts of an unpublished memoir, Luxton describes his expansive business interests in the park: 'There was little in Banff that was taking place that I did not get a finger in'.<sup>49</sup> Originally named Rocky Mountains Park, Banff was established as Canada's first national park in 1885 and expanded in 1887. Banff was developed with tourism in mind. When railway workers 'discovered' natural hot springs in the Bow Valley, the federal government established the park to claim the potential to develop and profit from the springs.<sup>50</sup> Coinciding with the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the creation of the park brought Luxton and other settlers into the valley to capitalize on the economic opportunities presented by rail travel and tourism.

The recognition of the Bow Valley and the hot springs in terms of capital and as an economic stake to be claimed is an instance of settler colonial ways of seeing. Ways of seeing involve the assertion and reproduction of frames through which land and life become visible. In her 2007 article, 'On Ethnographic Refusal', Haudenosaunee anthropologist Audra Simpson argues that colonial framing and its concepts have shaped the 'terms of even being seen' for Indigenous peoples and nations.<sup>51</sup> Settler colonial ways of seeing, I suggest, is a politics that frames these terms. Through administrative techniques of representation attuned to imperial logics, settler colonial ways of seeing structure conditions of visibility and invisibility in relation to power and political desires.<sup>52</sup> Specifically, settler colonial was of seeing make visible Indigenous lives to state agents in order to target them for assimilation and erasure. As James Scott has argued, state practices of 'seeing' aim to be transformative, to remake complex worlds into objects of governance vis-à-vis abstract, simplified, and abridged methods of representation.<sup>53</sup> In the case of Banff, settler colonial ways of seeing structured the visibility of the mountain landscape and the plant and animal life that inhabited it as inert property to be owned and exploited. Further, this structure of visibility renders the park boundaries semi-permeable, where Indigenous peoples and appropriated Indigenous objects could be packaged for consumption but Indigenous claims to land or its use were excluded.<sup>54</sup>

Just as settler colonial logics are asserted and naturalized through the narratives and actions of settlers who are not directly involved in statecraft, the framing work of settler colonial ways of seeing is present in representations produced by private citizens as well as state agents. Though Luxton was not an official agent of the Canadian government,



his documentation of the round up frames bison life in economic terms that map onto a broader colonial apparatus. From the early days of his trip to Montana, Luxton had envisioned his photographs as a commercial product that would be stocked in his own Sign of the Goat Curio Shop, with the goal of stoking tourist interest in Banff as an access point to frontier nostalgia.<sup>55</sup> Such enthusiasm for the purchase of the Pablo herd and confidence in the commercial potential of his souvenir booklet flowed from Luxton's experiences with animals, and bison in particular, as valuable tourist commodities. Banff was already host to a small bison herd, which had been established through several donations from private owners in 1897 and 1898, and was popular with tourists visiting the park.<sup>56</sup> Reported by Luxton in a 1907 editorial in his *Crag and Canyon* newspaper, 'many thousands have visited the corral to view the remnants of the once mighty host'.<sup>57</sup> Park superintendent Howard Douglas also recognized the bison, living captive in a paddock near the townsite, as a key factor in the growth of tourism. In his annual reports, Douglas took care to draw attention 'to the increasing wildlife numbers within the park, particularly the buffalo [...] and to emphasize their growing importance as a tourist attraction'.<sup>58</sup> Through his role in lobbying for and arranging the logistics for the Pablo herd purchase, Douglas was able to secure 27 bison for Banff.<sup>59</sup> The vast majority of the animals were shipped north to Buffalo National Park – established in 1909 to house the herd.<sup>60</sup> The appeal of these charismatic megafauna as a vestigial link to a distanced past and the economic boon that accompanied tourist interest informed Luxton's visual framing of the Pablo herd roundup.

Not only reproduced in the sleek edition I received as a conference participant, Luxton's photographs of the round up continue to circulate in several of Banff's contemporary tourist sites. At the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Luxton's round up images illustrate a display about bison and extermination. An original edition of 'Last of the Buffalo' sits in one of the display cases, alongside bison hide clothing, skulls, and guns.<sup>61</sup> The 2016 reproduction of Luxton's booklet is also prominently displayed in the reading room of the Banff National Park Museum. More than a century after they were first published, Luxton's photographs of the Pablo herd round up continue to narrate the histories of bison on the prairie and in Banff National Park. Tapping into nostalgic discourses of the West as frontier, the photographs and essays included in 'Last of the Buffalo' contribute to a discourse of openness, emptiness, and availability active in the Canadian government's own attempts to drive tourist and settlement interest to the Banff area, as well as Luxton's own newspaper and Banff-based business interests. As a primary visual document of the round up – a critical moment in both conservation and colonization – Luxton's booklet is a key text for examining settlement in action.

## Settlement politics in souvenir landscapes

While Luxton's social and economic motives and the broader discursive context of Western boosterism and emergent conservation policies provide important context for the interpretation of these photographs, my analytical interest is in the view they offer of settlement in process. In watching the round up scenes captured by Luxton and multiply circulated in the original and reprinted editions of the 'Last of the Buffalo' booklet, material tactics and framing practices of elimination and replacement also come into view. My analysis of the collection takes a lead from Gabrielle Moser, who suggests that

such archival photographs can be read as material relations of colonization and Indigenous resistance playing out before the camera.<sup>62</sup> I take further critical and methodological inspiration from Beenash Jafri's of analysis of how narrative and visual elements in the Western film genre represent settlement as process, which naturalizes both colonial claims and Indigenous erasure. While settlement is an ongoing, unfolding, and unfinished process marked by contesting claims, sovereignties, and resistances, the Western presents settlement through tropes that naturalize the emergence of settler communities and the disappearance of Indigenous nations. Tropes such as journeys across wild frontier landscapes, battles with 'Indians' over land acquisition, the transformation of land into property through cultivation, Jafri demonstrates, have the narrative and visual effects of making settlement appear as natural, everyday practices undertaken by individual adventurers.<sup>63</sup> Luxton's account of the round up, I argue, is an instance of settler colonial ways of seeing. The visual and narrative elements of his booklet align with possessive logics applied to land and animals, which play out through the simplifying tropes of the Western. The ways of seeing at work in Luxton's booklet delimit possibilities for apprehending bison outside of the framework of property ownership or the round up as consistent with a broader political context of dispossession.

The opening photograph in 'Last of the Buffalo' is a landscape of rolling hills covered in grasses and low bushes (Figure 1).<sup>64</sup> A placid river with stands of coniferous trees along its banks curves through the middle of the frame and disappears into the horizon, from which distant mountains emerge. Overlooking the valley from a hilltop in the photograph's foreground is a single man on a horse, pointing into the distance. Luxton's caption introduces him: 'Michel Pablo sees a buffalo in the distance and directs his men to position in order to surround the herd'. Neither Pablo's men nor the buffalo are visible in this first frame, but both appear in the next several photographs. In the pages that follow, hillsides and rivers are dotted with bison gathered tightly together in traveling herds and encircled in different formations of men on horseback. The middle of the book features three images of a solitary bull standing in a river, photographed from different angles, and a fourth image of a single bull with an erect tail prepared to charge across the empty prairie that fills the photo frame. Luxton's captions describe the bulls as defiant and refusing to leave the lakes and rivers, where they have sought refuge from their would-be captors.<sup>65</sup> Seemingly staring back at the defiant bulls are two photographs of Michel Pablo, Charles Allard Jr, and their companies of hired cowboys. In each of these group



**Figure 1.** *Man on horse overlooking river valley, 1907, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Luxton family fonds (LUX/I/d2/4/1).*

photos, the mounted cowboys and their horses form a line that fills the frame, creating a human-equine wall between the foreground and the horizon.<sup>66</sup>

Comprising the first half of the booklet, these photographs reflect features of both the Western and the landscape genres of cultural representation. The shifting mountain- and water-scapes create a sense of movement through space and of a journey across a frontier. Cowboys and bison stand in tension, with the bison frequently surrounded but the mounted men keeping some distance. Even in the images of the solo bulls, the cowboy is present in the form of the onlooking photographer's perspective. None of the photographs are taken at close range and often from angles that distort the horizon, suggesting Luxton has taken a crouched position or cover in bushes. Such distance in the frame emphasizes the danger posed by the bison and the risk inherent in attempting to encircle, drive, and contain the herds. However, the danger of the encounter with wildness is the thrill that enlivens the cross-frontier journey – a central trope of the Western genre.

The thrill and the journey unfold along mountainsides, across prairie meadows, and near rivers and ponds. Pristine and expansive, the landscape of open meadows carved through by glacial rivers and raising into mountain slopes form the backdrop for the action of the roundup. Landscape images are neither neutral nor natural transmissions of land, but are the pictorial inverse of imperial maps drawn to manage the naming, claiming, and extracting of territories. As WJT Mitchell argues, the landscape tradition is encoded with cultural meanings and values, offering the picturesque as a space that is inexhaustible resource, yet knowable and conquerable terrain.<sup>67</sup> Luxton's camera is constitutively out of view, erasing the traces of his framing work and establishing both his invisible presence and the scenes of the round up as natural to the landscape. As a collection of images created for the consumption of settler tourists, the naturalism of Luxton's landscapes invites the viewer to project herself into the prairie scene, approaching and yet safely distant from the wildness of the bison and the dangerous labor of the cowboys. Working in tandem with other techniques of settler colonial ways of seeing, like maps, deeds, and registers, the landscapes operate as visual land surveys that present Flathead territory as open and available – while simultaneously closing in on the bison to be removed.

The photographed journey ends in a series of corral photographs. Heavy, slatted fences and narrow chutes connecting muddy pens to waiting railcars replace the open expanses of rolling hills and serpentine rivers. The herds that appeared as dark spots on the horizon in Luxton's first images are now photographed at close range and overhead angles in increasingly confined spaces (Figure 2). While one caption mentions that the fences



**Figure 2.** *Buffalo at rest early in the morning in the corrals at Ravalli, 1907, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Luxton family fonds (LUX/I/d2/4/15).*

were often 'broken to pieces by enraged bulls', the framing of these images in the latter half of the book suggest a greater sense of confidence as Luxton and the cowboys that observe the bison from the other side of the corrals. The fences, chutes, and surrounding platforms afford both protection and proximity, allowing the photographer (and his imagined viewers) to come out of hiding and into a position of overseeing the captured animals. The literal elevation of the photographer's vantage point is made possible by the enclosing of the herd and the enclosure of their world of relations within the structures of colonial logics of possession. A 26-mile fence and a series of corrals adjacent to the rail station in Ravalli, both built of heavy timber enabled the removal of the herd, but as Luxton notes in an essay introducing his photographs, 'To-day [*sic*], and for many days to come, the corrals [...] will remind the people of that state of the wonderful days of the buffalo round-up'.<sup>68</sup> Remaining long after the completion of the round up, this accretion of settler infrastructure is a material trace of encroachment and part of a broader process of fencing as settler state-building.<sup>69</sup>

Luxton's photographs and the short essays that introduce them do not directly depict battles with 'Indians' over territory or struggles with a wild and hostile frontier. Due to the allotment policies that forced Pablo to sell his herd, the land in Luxton's photographs has already been acquired and the 'Indians' already dispossessed. In an unpublished essay narrating the round up, Luxton identifies all of Pablo's hired hands as 'of mixed-blood' and lauds them for their orderliness and discipline.<sup>70</sup> However, in essays and image captions that were included in the published booklet, these men are presented as anonymous group of cowboys hired to assist in the round up labor and without reference to ancestry or race, enrollment in any of the nations of the Flathead Reservation, or possible relationships with bison beyond the round up context. This absenting of the question of indigeneity shifts the locus of 'wildness' or danger that drives the plot of the Western away from Indigenous bodies or communities. The nostalgic trope of the 'vanishing Indian' is itself all but disappeared from these pages: only three figures in two of the collection's photographs are identified as 'Indians'. In the near total absence of 'Indian' subjects, the disappearing bison appear as the remnant or vestige of a vanishing Indigenous world. This erasure of Indigenous bodies forecloses the resistance of Indigenous nations to the removal of the bison, as well as to the broader processes of settlement in which bison removal is entwined. Such framing has the effect of simplifying the political conflict of settlement to a naturalized contest of man versus beast.

In the absence of the battles with 'Indians' common to Westerns, the conflict that drives 'Last of the Buffalo' is with bison. The Pablo heard is the locus of wildness in the photographs and the force that must be overcome and contained. As the visual narrative of the booklet tracks from the open ranges of the Flathead Valley to enclosed corrals, the bison shift from wild sources of danger to contained animals held in conditions much like cattle. This passage from wildness to domestication also unfolds in Luxton's written accounts of the round up, where bison described as becoming cattle. For example, in an unpublished essay, Luxton describes being rescued by two cowboys from an aggressive bull that he had been photographing: 'They drove the bull out of the river, roped him from both head and hind heels and in a jiffy my lovely model was turned into a steer'.<sup>71</sup> In the same essay, Luxton also describes the Pablo's and his helpers' technique as mirroring what 'it would have been if the buffalo had been cattle'.<sup>72</sup> The references to bison becoming cattle foreshadow the herd's future as residents of the fully fenced

Banff paddock and Buffalo National Park, which has been characterized as 'a well-run ranch'.<sup>73</sup> Luxton's visual and textual documentation of the round up makes visible logics of elimination that circulate through the domesticating project of settler colonialism.<sup>74</sup> In the case of the round up, the population being managed through transfer is bison. Such transformations of bison into cattle symbolically prepare the landscape of the Flathead territory for the accelerated arrival of cattle and other settler agricultural practices. As a document that claims to depict the removal of the last of the bison from Flathead territory, Luxton's project is an instance of what Jean O'Brien (White Earth Ojibwe) describes as 'lasting' – a settler discursive practice that narrates Indigenous extinction in order to create spaces for non-Indigenous claims to indigeneity.<sup>75</sup> Displacing the 'lasting' narrative onto animals, Luxton's booklet discursively contributes to opening space for – and naturalizing the claims of – settler and cattle arrivants. An instance of what John Weaver describes as transforming 'frontiers into assets',<sup>76</sup> the physical removal of the herds from the land was a critical step in colonizing the prairie. Crucially, the loss of Pablo herd further disrupted the foodways of the peoples of the Flathead and neighboring Blackfeet reservations, which was followed by the imposition of cattle economies and slaughterhouses in service of direct assimilation policies.<sup>77</sup>

The conservation work that Luxton traveled to witness and document was entangled with assertions of settler sovereignty and the transformation of Indigenous lands into parceled out private property. Absent from these images or their accompanying essays are any references to the Flathead Allotment Act of 1904. While the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and settler encroachment are what prompted of the removal of the bison, these processes are left fully outside of Luxton's frame. As a result, the landscapes in 'Last of the Buffalo' are depoliticized and rendered as neutral backdrops for the struggle of man versus beast. Dramatized by the sweeping vistas captured by the panoramic framing and the narrative captions, this struggle is framed as one being conducted in the name of conservation rather than settler colonization. Bison are presented as the final vestige of wildness, the animate form of the frontier to be subdued, and the remainder of a disappearing past. Politically, they are rendered as an externality of the allotment process.

The final images of 'Last of the Buffalo' depict some members of the Pablo herd corralled and on display in Banff National Park.<sup>78</sup> Presented as the completion of the round-up's task, these photographs celebrate the successful conservation mission. But this process that aimed to preserve wildness in its final form does so through capture and containment. The members of the Pablo herd who were sent to the Banff paddock lived as objects of consumption in conditions Wakeham describes as those designed for 'the reproduction of *liveness* as a tourist attraction that dramatized colonial mastery over the wild frontier'.<sup>79</sup> Surrounded, corralled, and carted away, the bison in the latter half of Luxton's book appear not unlike a herd of the cattle that would soon replace them. As Nahua Mestiza political theorist Kelly Aguirre observes, domestication has long been a tactic deployed in the subsumption of Indigenous claims to life and land to settler law.<sup>80</sup> With Indigenous presence already absented from Luxton's narration of his images, the buffalo are the final population to be domesticated. Conservation-as-domestication presumes the preceding domestication (by way of forced assimilation) of Indigenous peoples, of Indigenous land and life.

## Conservation as loss of relations

Once fenced and contained, the bison herd's interactions with their worlds of relation were radically diminished. They no longer moved along their migration routes, foraged and wallowed among the prairie grasses, or interacted with a world of plant, animal, insect, or bird relations. Human-bison relations were similarly circumscribed: once rounded up and transported to Alberta by rail, the bison were minded, fed straw, confined to corrals where they were displayed in Banff and other state parks. This distancing and confinement radically altered the relations between plains Indigenous and the buffalo.

Beyond a primary means of subsistence, relations with buffalo are central to political, social, and spiritual life for plains Indigenous peoples. Buffalo hunts provided the means for feeding, clothing, and sheltering plains communities, but as *nêhiyaw* scholar and filmmaker Tasha Hubbard emphasizes, buffalo also had 'other important roles as guide, teacher, and relative'.<sup>81</sup> Invoking the teachings of Wilton Goodstriker (Blackfoot) and Joseph Medicine Crow (Crow), Hubbard explains that kin- and alliance-making processes in many plains Indigenous nations are modeled on buffalo herd organization.<sup>82</sup> In this relationship, buffalo are looked to as older brothers to humans. In research drawn from interviews with Blackfoot elders, *nêhiyaw* political theorist Kiera Ladner also reflects on how Blackfoot governance is modeled on lessons drawn from the non-coercive collectivity of buffalo herds. Held together by relations of mutual responsibility rather than domination and with a sense of balance between the male and female animals, buffalo life has long been a model of collaborative leadership and collective decision-making in Blackfoot communities.<sup>83</sup> Métis theorist Adam Gaudry also identifies principles of Métis governance as embodied in relations with buffalo and originating from political practices of self-ownership, interrelation, and consent that structured annual buffalo hunts. 'The buffalo hunt', Gaudry argues, 'is the Métis constitution, and that all subsequent Métis political formations are derived from this model of governance'.<sup>84</sup>

In these ways and many others, Indigenous nations were in intimate, reciprocal relationship with the buffalo nation. The purchase, removal, and confinement of the Pablo herd may have preserved the existence of the plains bison species, but this conservation work is entwined with colonial erasure. The extermination of bison across the prairies and the removal and confinement of the last free-ranging herd had spiritual and psychological dimensions. Cree, Blackfoot, and Métis stories about this time, Hubbard explains, mourn the deep, generational trauma of losing buffalo relatives.<sup>85</sup> The suffering in the wake of this loss did not completely nor permanently sever the relationship between buffalo and Indigenous peoples. Rather, Hubbard observes, 'the relationship was altered by colonialism to one of mutual hardship'.<sup>86</sup>

The 'Last of The Buffalo' booklet elides these complexities of human-buffalo relations and how they were further strained by the removal. Luxton's visual narrative of man versus beast does not include a sense of how these herds are also known as literal relatives, as fellow nations, in the lands from which they are being removed. There is little trace of the implications of this loss for both buffalo and Indigenous nations in the booklet's celebration of herding bison into a system of corrals that will ensure the survival of the species as objects of tourist consumption in a context of perpetual confinement. One image, however, near the end of the collection reflects something of lost relations. Next





**Figure 3.** *Two women collecting bison meat next to rail car, 1907, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Luxton family fonds (LUX/I/d2/4/32).*

to a dark boxcar and flanked by a grazing horse, two women gather flesh and bones from the grass. Luxton's caption reports that a bull has broken his neck in the shipping process (Figure 3). Of the women in the photo, he writes, 'Indian woman [sic] requesting the meat'. Perhaps to the settler-tourist audience for whom the book was produced, this image may have read as a moment of scavenging or of a disappearing people clinging to an uncivilized way of life.<sup>87</sup>

However, another reading might identify the work of these two women as honoring the bull's life that was given, as continuing the reciprocal relations between their families and their buffalo relations. This is the only image in 'Last of the Buffalo' that conveys some sense the direct relationship between Indigenous peoples, the buffalo, and the land – indeed it is one of only two photographs that identifies 'Indians' at all.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps in these women's labor, we can see an insistence on maintaining relations in a good way, even in the midst of the violence of removal. Reflecting on an ethic of reciprocity and maintaining good relations with fish, Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd describes in her *Tenderness Manifesto* the responsibility to check gill-nets regularly to ensure fish-relations are not trapped in the nets for too long. This responsibility is a responsibility to tenderness. 'Tend to the reciprocity of fish', Todd writes, 'to their gift to us through eons such that we can survive in this not-always-tender earth and world(s)'.<sup>89</sup> Amid the chasing down, corralling, and removal of their buffalo kin, the women's act of gathering flesh that will become feast is a tending to human and bison bodies and spirits with tenderness. Given the centrality of bison to Indigenous life on the plains, as noted by Hubbard, Ladner, Gaudry, and others, this scene is about more than sustenance. Reflecting on the ways fish have nourished Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, Todd explains: 'This nourishment is not only physical, but encompasses a host of philosophical, legal governance, sociocultural and political matters'.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, the image of the two Indigenous women (likely from the Flathead Reservation) gathering meat can be read as a scene of tending to the political relations and responsibilities disrupted by the removal of the Pablo herd.

The eponymous volume where the 'Last of the Buffalo' booklet was re-printed in 2016 also includes a reproduction of the Buffalo Treaty. An Indigenous-led vision for bison restoration first signed in 2014, the Buffalo Treaty outlines responsibilities to regenerate cultural, social, political, spiritual relations with the buffalo. Recognition of and deep respect for the interrelation of plains Indigenous nations and the buffalo is the heart of this



agreement. The Buffalo Treaty emerged out of several years of Indigenous organizing in Alberta, under the leadership of the Kainai First Nation. Beginning in 2009, Kainai elders gathered with youth to teach them about the importance of the buffalo, which inspired a series of buffalo dialogues in the community and eventually resulted in the Treaty.<sup>91</sup> The goals and methods of the Treaty have been guided by elders from the Kainai nation and include biologists, knowledge keepers, and political leaders from several Indigenous nations. Leroy Little Bear and Amethyst First Rider, both Kainai intellectuals and community leaders, and Paulette Fox, a Kainai environmental scientist and knowledge keeper, were key figures in drafting the Treaty and continue to build collaborative relationships across signatory communities.<sup>92</sup>

Human-bison relations are at the heart of the Treaty. Before outlining principles for the restoration of free-ranging bison herds to their homelands that center Indigenous knowledge and authority, the Treaty identifies the primary goal: 'so together we can have our brother, the buffalo, lead us in nurturing our land, plants and other animals to once again realize the buffalo ways for our future generations'.<sup>93</sup> The emphasis on the buffalo as kin is an assertion of knowledge and experience of human-animal relations as extending beyond physical nourishment and into the realms of sociocultural and political life that Todd and others identify. Further, the responsibilities outlined in the Treaty reflect a commitment to relationality that may have been profoundly damaged by the imposition of settler colonial logics and process but, as Hubbard notes, have never been destroyed or forgotten.<sup>94</sup> The inclusion of the Buffalo Treaty in Locke's *The Last of the Buffalo: Return to the Wild* volume provides a lens for re-reading Luxton's booklet for the human-animal relations excised from his photographs. The adjacency of the Treaty text to the celebratory narrative of settler conservation prompts important questions: How might settlers and conservation policy do right by these relations today? What are the possibilities for grappling with the processes of settlement captured in Luxton's photographs?

Attending to the complex human-animal relations radically disrupted by settlement provides a window into the material effects the colonial apparatus has imposed on land and life on the North American prairie.<sup>95</sup> The Buffalo Treaty and its emphasis on recognizing relations with buffalo and tending responsibilities to those relations provides a critical point of departure for envisioning a decolonial approach to conservation, which explicitly includes the task of reaffirming Indigenous sovereignty in dispossessed lands through rejuvenating relations between Indigenous nations and their buffalo kin. In affirming a responsibility to the buffalo as brother, the Treaty's orientation to human-animal relations disrupts the Euro-Western species hierarchy and relations of paternalistic control that often undergirds conservation policy. Situated alongside 'Last of the Buffalo', the Buffalo Treaty text and Little Bear's account of its emergence make visible the reciprocal relations with buffalo that were at stake in the round up and all but erased from Luxton's celebratory framing of settler conservation.

## Coda

As I completed the archival research for this article in Banff in July 2018, several elders from the Indigenous nations of Treaty 7 territory flew from an airstrip northeast of the Banff townsite into the park's remote Panther Valley.<sup>96</sup> There, they performed ceremony for

the 33 bison living in the valley. This was the third ceremony for the Banff herd. The first was performed with Treaty 6 representatives at Elk Island National Park in February 2017. At that time, elders from the nations of both territories met at the park to sing ceremonial songs to the bison to prepare them for their journey and to celebrate their departure. Elders reconvened in Banff at Lake Minnewanka as the bison were transported to their new territory, this time singing songs of welcome to acknowledge the arrival and to communicate to the young herd that this snow-covered alpine meadow was their new home – and once an ancestral home of the buffalo. The July 2018 ceremony coincided with Parks Canada rangers removing the soft paddock that had fenced the herd into a 16-hectare pasture for two birthing seasons, to ensure that the bison formed a bond with the land. With the removal of the fences, the Banff bison have 12,000 square kilometers of range – a territory that covers nearly one third of the park.<sup>97</sup> On the occasion of the fence removal, the assembled elders sang and performed ceremony to reaffirm for the bison that these montane valleys are a space where they will be nurtured and will roam more freely than bison have on the continent in more than a century.

These ceremonies are the work of tending to relations and to reciprocity. Such tending has developed out of the collaborative relationship between Parks Canada and the Stoney Nakoda and Kainai Nations. The Banff reintroduction has the goals of species restoration and cultural connection in a collaborative process that braids together Indigenous knowledge and practice with conservation biology. Leroy Little Bear and other Buffalo Treaty partners were key sources of information and guidance to Parks Canada in developing and finalizing the Banff reintroduction plan.<sup>98</sup> Critical to this work has been the efforts made by Little Bear and others to hold Parks Canada and other institutions accountable to the Stoney Nakoda, the Kainai, and other Indigenous nations. The still-unfolding collaboration between a Canadian government agency and multiple Indigenous nations is an acknowledgement of different expertise and knowledge and of multiple ways of being in relation. In emphasizing cultural reconnection alongside species restoration, the Banff reintroduction plan recognizes some of the responsibilities central to the Buffalo Treaty – not only responsibilities to the bison, but to restoring relations between nations.

Rounding up and shipping the Pablo bison herd from the open pastures of the Flathead Valley to national parks in Alberta between 1907 and 1910 may have ensured the survival of the plains bison species. This survival is not something to dismiss. However, the removal of this bison herd from their homelands also removed them from their human kin. A material instance of settler logics of elimination and replacement, the round up transformed both the bison and human-bison relations in ways aligned with colonial practices of consumption and control. 'Last of the Buffalo' is a document that makes visible settlement in process. Enacting settler colonial ways of seeing, Luxton's camera focused on the pursuit and enclosure of the Pablo bison, but the resulting photographs also inadvertently depict the transformation and loss of human-buffalo relations in Flathead territory. The reproduction of Luxton's photographs of the round up images in Locke's 2016 volume run the risk of re-affirming these ways of seeing. However, the inclusion of the Buffalo Treaty in this text offers a shift in framing and asserts a way of seeing that departs from settler structures of visibility and erasure. The photographs show – and indeed celebrate – the transformations imposed by settler conservation and the processes of settlement involved in animal preservation. But the reproduction of Buffalo Treaty alongside Luxton's booklet offers tools for thinking about how those processes might be walked

back, fences may be removed, and relations torqued by settler colonization might be restored.

## Notes

1. This article has benefited deeply from the generous insights of people and place. I am grateful to the insights of Curtis Gillespie, Zoe Todd, and two anonymous peer reviewers. The first version of this essay was written during a residency at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity and has been revised during a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Toronto's Jackman Humanities Institute. I have conducted this research and writing as a settler and guest to these territories – the homelands of Stoney Nakoda, Blackfoot, and Tsuut'ina Nations of Treaty 7 and, in Tkaronto, the Seneca, Huron-Wendat, Petun, and Mississaugas of the Credit River Nations, to whom I raise my hands in gratitude.
2. Harvey Locke, ed., *The Last of the Buffalo: Return to the Wild* (Banff: Summerthought Publishing, 2016).
3. In February 2017, 16 bison – ten pregnant cows and six bulls – were transferred to Panther Valley in the eastern slopes of Banff National Park. Initially the herd was held in a specially designed paddock, but in the summer of 2018 they will be released to roam a 1200 km<sup>2</sup> reintroduction zone.
4. The book of halftone prints and two brief essays written by Luxton was published by The Stovel Company of Winnipeg in 1908 and re-published for circulation in the United States in 1909.
5. American Bison Society, *Annual Report 1911* (New York: Wildlife Conservation Society Archives, 1911), 36.
6. Human-animal dimensions of colonization has been theorized by Zoe Todd, notably in 'Fish, Kin and Hope: Tending to Water Violations in amiskwaciwâskahikan and Treaty Six Territory', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry* 43, no. 1 (2017): 102–7; and 'Fish Pluralities: Human-Animal Relations and Sites of Engagement in Paulatuq, Arctic Canada', *Études/Inuit/Studies* 38, no. 1–2 (2014): 217–38. This issue has also been explored by other Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, including: Billy-Ray Belcourt, 'Animal Bodies, Colonial Subjects: (Re)Locating Animality in Decolonial Thought', *Societies* 5 (2015): 1–11; Andrea L. Smalley, *Wild by Nature: North American Animals Confront Colonization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 'Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 1–25; Juanita Sundberg, 'Decolonizing Posthumanist Geographies', *Cultural Geographies* 21, no. 1 (2014): 33–47; Danielle Taschereau Mamers, 'Human-Bison Relations as Sites of Settler Colonial Violence and Decolonial Resurgence', *Humanimalia: Journal of Human-Animal Interface Studies* 9, no. 1 (2018).
7. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 21.
8. Danielle Taschereau Mamers, 'Settler Colonial Ways of Seeing: Documentary Governance of Indigenous Life in Canada and Its Disruption' (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 2017); 'Disrupting the Register: *TreatyCard.ca* and Indigenous Counter-Archives', *PUBLIC: Art/Culture/Ideas* 57 (2018): 48–57.
9. Tuck and Yang, 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor', 21.
10. Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409; Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Shiri Pasternak, 'The Fiscal Body of Sovereignty: To "Make Live" in Indian Country', *Settler Colonial Studies* 6, no. 4 (2016): 317–38.
11. Andrea L. Smalley, *Wild by Nature*, 189–230; Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Frank

- Gilbert Roe, *The North American Buffalo: A Critical Study of the Species in Its Wild State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).
12. Chalk Courchane, 'Michel Pablo: A composite history', <https://www.oregonpioneers.com/bios/MichelPablo.pdf> (accessed June 15, 2018).
  13. Courchane, 'Michel Pablo', 4.
  14. Harvey Locke, 'Banff National Park and Plains Bison Conservation', in *The Last of the Buffalo: Return to the Wild* (Banff: Summerthought, 2016), 11.
  15. Tasha Hubbard, *The Call of the Buffalo: Exploring Kinship with the Buffalo in Indigenous Creative Expression* (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 2016), 89; Locke, 'Banff National Park', 12.
  16. Lauren Markewicz, *Like Distant Thunder: Canada's Bison Conservation Story* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 2017), 22.
  17. Isenberg, *Destruction of the Bison*, 23.
  18. Dan Flores, 'Bison Ecology and Bison Diplomacy: The Southern Plains from 1800 to 1850', *Journal of American History* 78, no. 2 (1991): 465–85; Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Scott M. Taylor, 'Buffalo Hunt: International Trade and the Virtual Extinction of the North American Bison', *American Economic Review* 101, no. 7 (2011): 3162–95.
  19. Tasha Hubbard, 'Buffalo Genocide in Nineteenth Century North America: "Kill, Skin, and Sell"', in *Colonial Genocide in Indigenous North America*, ed. Andrew Woolford, Jeff Benvenuto, and Alexander Laban Hinton (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 292–305.
  20. Smalley, *Wild by Nature*, 199; Markewicz, *Like Distant Thunder*, 12. Note that the term 'arrivants' from Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
  21. Bon Whealdon, *I Will be Meat for My Salish: The Montana Writers Project and the Buffalo of the Flathead Indian Reservation*, ed. Helena Robert Bigart (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2001), 79.
  22. Whealdon, *Meat for my Salish*, 86.
  23. Locke, 'Banff National Park', 12.
  24. Hubbard, *Call of the Buffalo*, 89.
  25. *Ibid.*, 92–4.
  26. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 191.
  27. Dale Lott, *American Bison: A Natural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 188.
  28. Locke, 'Banff National Park', 16.
  29. Prior to the final decades of the nineteenth century, the responses of settlers and state agents ranged from willful ignorance in the interest of continued extraction of bison bodies to the purposeful intensification of the slaughter in order to fully exterminate the herds in service of the broader project of colonial genocide of Indigenous peoples. Tasha Hubbard argues that slaughter constituted an act of genocide against the buffalo, as buffalo are themselves a people within the epistemologies of many plains Indigenous nations. See Hubbard, 'Buffalo Genocide', 292–305.
  30. American Bison Society, *Annual Report 1905* (New York: Wildlife Conservation Society Archives, 1905).
  31. Markewicz, *Like Distant Thunder*, 23; Locke, 'Banff National Park', 12–15.
  32. Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 34–7.
  33. Anastasia Yarbrough, 'Species, Race and Culture in the Space of Wildlife Management', in *Critical Animal Geographies: Politics, Intersections and Hierarchies in a Multispecies World*, ed. Kathryn Gillespie and Rosemary-Claire Collard (New York: Routledge, 2015), 108–26.
  34. Theodore Binnema and Melanie Niemi, '"Let the Line be Drawn Now": Wilderness, Conservation, and the Exclusion of Aboriginal People from Banff National Park in Canada', *Environmental History* 11, no. 4 (2006): 725.
  35. Loo, *States of Nature*, 46; Yarbrough, 'Species, Race and Culture', 112.

36. Tracey Banivanua Mar, 'Carving Wilderness: Queensland's National Parks and the Unsettling of Emptied Lands, 1890–1910', in *Making Settler Colonial Space*, ed. Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (London: Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2010), 80. Banivanua Mar notes that the first national parks in the world were created in Anglophone settler states: California's Yellowstone Park (1872), the National Park south of Sydney in New South Wales (1880), Canada's Rocky Mountains Park (1885), and New Zealand's Tongariro National Park (1887).
37. Jennifer Brower, *Lost Tracks: Buffalo National Park, 1909–1939* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2008), 38.
38. Quoted in W.F. Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1981), 26.
39. Brower, *Lost Tracks*, 39.
40. *Ibid.*, 169.
41. *Ibid.*, 40.
42. Pauline Wakeham, *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 43.
43. Wakeham, *Taxidermic Signs*, 75.
44. *Ibid.*, 84; George Colpitts, *Game in the Garden: A Human History of Wildlife in Western Canada to 1940* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 103–4.
45. Locke, 'Banff National Park', 17.
46. Jennifer Rutkair, 'Documenting and Preserving the *Last of the Buffalo* Booklet', in *The Last of the Buffalo: Return to the Wild*, ed. Harvey Locke (Banff: Summerthought Publishing, 2016), 68.
47. For example, the 'Luxton Family: Banff Pioneers' entry on the Eleanor Luxton Historical Foundation website (<https://www.luxtonfoundation.org/museum/luxton-family.html>) or the 'About the Museum' section of the Buffalo Nation's Luxton Museum website (<https://www.buffalonationsmuseum.com/content/museum>).
48. Rutkair, 'Documenting and Preserving', 70.
49. Luxton Family Fonds, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, LUX I/D4-3.
50. Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: The Beginning of Preservation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 26.
51. Audra Simpson, 'On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, "Voice" and Colonial Citizenship', *Junctures* 9 (2007): 69.
52. Taschereau Mamers, *Settler Colonial Ways of Seeing*, 43–51.
53. James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).
54. The annual Banff Indian Days festival illustrates the variable access the neighboring Stoney Nakoda nation and other communities were granted to the park. See Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the Line be Drawn Now'", 739; Laurie Meijer Drees, "'Indians' Bygone Past": The Banff Indian Days, 1902–1945', *Past Imperfect* 2 (1993): 8.
55. Rutkair, 'Documenting and Preserving', 78; R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzen, eds., *The Prairie West as Promised Land* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007); George Colpitts, 'Wildlife Promotions, Western Canadian Boosterism, and the Conservation Movement, 1890–1914', *American Review of Canadian studies* 28, no. 1–2 (1998): 103–30.
56. Banff's first three bison were donated by Toronto lawyer T.G. Blackstock in 1897. The herd grew by 13 more animals in 1898, gifted by then head of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Donald Smith. The display herd was held in a paddock near the Banff townsite until 1997. See Locke, 'Banff National Park', 12–15.
57. Quoted in Rutkair, 'Documenting and Preserving', 73.
58. Foster, *Working for Wildlife*, 57.
59. Locke, 'Banff National Park', 31.
60. The Neutral Hills region south of Wainwright, Alberta was selected and appropriated for a new national park, which opened in 1909. The area had been deemed unsuitable for agriculture and settlement in surveys by Palliser and Hind in the 1860s and again by block surveys in 1883 and township surveys in 1903. In a management strategy reflective of perceived

settler superiority, the management plan for Buffalo National Park aimed to make the land economically useful, but the fenced design of the park did not take into account the migratory nature of bison. The park soon became overcrowded, the land overgrazed, and the herd suffered high rates of tuberculosis, parasites, and other diseases. Eventually deemed a failed model, the park closed in 1940. See Brower, *Lost Tracks*, 11–17.

61. An online version of this portion of the exhibit is available: <https://www.whyte.org/buffalo>.
62. Gabrielle Moser, 'Object Lessons: Visualizing Displacement in the Canadian Arctic', *Photography and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2018): 92.
63. Beenash Jafri, 'Black Representations of Settlement on Film: *Thomasine and Bushrod*', *Cultural Studies – Critical Methodologies* 17, no. 1 (2017): 51–2.
64. All of the images included in the 1908 souvenir booklet and its 2016 reproduction are included in the Luxton Family Fonds (LUX I/D4/10/9) can be viewed online through the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies Archives, <https://www.whyte.org/research-collections>.
65. Two examples have captions that read 'An old bull refused to come out of the water' and 'With tails erect and pawing the ground, the buffalo bulls charge with the speed of a train'. See Luxton Family Fonds, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies Archives LUX I/D4/10/9, photograph 18.
66. Luxton Family Fonds, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies Archives, LUX I/D4/10/9, photographs 19 and 20.
67. WJT Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape', in *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 10.
68. Norman Luxton, 'The Buffalo Round Up', in *'Last of the Buffalo'* (1908, repr., Banff: Summerthought, 2016), 7.
69. Alan Krell, *The Devil's Rope: A Cultural History of Barbed Wire* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002); Joanne S. Liu, *Barbed Wire: The Fence that Changed the West* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2009).
70. Luxton Family Fonds, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies Archives, LUX I/D4-3 #6 (1912).
71. *Ibid.*, 6.
72. *Ibid.*, 4.
73. Brower, *Lost Tracks*, 51.
74. Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Historical Overview* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 16.
75. Jean O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv.
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77. Michael Wise, 'Colonial Beef and the Blackfeet Reservation Slaughterhouse, 1879–1895', *Radical history review* 110, no. 2 (2011): 59–82.
78. Luxton Family Fonds, Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies Archives, LUX I/D4/10/9, photograph 32.
79. Wakeham, *Taxidermic Signs*, 57, emphasis in original.
80. Kelly Aguirre, *Re-Storying Political Theory: Indigenous Resurgence, Idle No More and Colonial Apprehension* (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2018).
81. Hubbard, *Call of the Buffalo*, 21.
82. *Ibid.*, 13–14.
83. Kiera Ladner, 'Governing Within an Ecological Context: Creating an AlterNative Understanding of Blackfoot Governance', *Studies in Political Economy* 70, no. 1 (2003): 138–40.
84. Adam Gaudry, *Kaa-tipeyimishoyaahk – We are Those Who Own Ourselves: A Political History of Métis Self-Determination in the North-West, 1830–1870* (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2014), 95.
85. Hubbard, 'Buffalo Genocide', 300–302.
86. Hubbard, *Call of the Buffalo*, 84.
87. Wise, 'Colonial Beef', 65–8; James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013).

88. The second instance of an 'Indian' is the third to last image, where a woman mounted on a white horse is photographed from the side, against a grove of trees. The photo is captioned 'Squaw woman in full dress', but no additional context is given.
89. Zoe Todd, 'Tenderness Manifesto', September 2016, <https://zoestodd.com/tenderness-manifesto/>.
90. Zoe Todd, 'From a Fishy Place: Examining Canadian State Law Applied in the Daniels Decision from the Perspective of Métis Legal Orders', *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 36 (2016): 44.
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92. Hubbard, *Call of the Buffalo*, 182–4.
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95. Tuck and Yang, 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor', 21.
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## Disclosure statement

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