

Weekly Journals

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PART 3: WEEKS 9-13

WEEK 9:

The reading that I've chosen to speak to this week is "The New Jim Crow" by Michelle Alexander. This chapter, the color of justice, was a reminder of just how many injustices people of color face in the United States. I hear and read news stories about similar experiences of injustice from the justice system. What continues to be shocking to me is that after all these years, these news stories continue to happen. A quote that really spoke to me from this chapter was:

"What is painfully obvious when one steps back from individual cases and specific policies is that the system of mass incarceration operates with stunning efficiency to sweep people of color off the streets, lock them in cages, and then release them into an inferior second-class status"¹

The above quote depicts the flawed system in which our governments (both American and Canadian) run. The system is setting people of color up to fail based on their ethnicity. People of color are arrested and charged at higher rates and receive harsher punishments than their counterparts ². Being they are more likely to be arrested and charged than white people, means a higher representation in the criminal system and thus can reinforce those who are racially biased. Alexander makes a point that "a bit of common sense is overdue in public discussions about racial bias in the criminal

¹ Alexander, Michelle. "The New Jim Crow", The New Press, 2012, pg. 103.

² Alexander, Michelle. "The New Jim Crow", The New Press, 2012

justice system”³, which I feel is more that true in both American and Canadian justice systems.

This brings me to why I was drawn to this chapter for this week’s journal. I chose this chapter as a piece I wanted to reflect on because of the similar injustices that happen to our Indigenous people in Canada. Despite only representing 5% of Canada’s population, “as of January 2020, 30% of individuals in federal correctional facilities were Indigenous”. It is known by the government that “the overrepresentation of Indigenous persons in correctional institutions across many parts of the country is a critical issue”. It angers me knowing that our government is aware that this is an ongoing social issue that our Indigenous peoples of Canada face and have even thrown money into researching this issue. But I feel that’s where it stops.

I agree with the author’s main point, and I agree with how they presented it. It is not new that racism is overtly representative in the justice system in America. But it is a topic that needs to be presented repeatedly until the system changes and racism in the justice system is obsolete.

I’m including a news article titled “Federal minister announces \$2.1M to address Indigenous overrepresentation in justice system”. In this article there is a statement that really upset me. It was from Arif Virani, our justice minister and attorney general and he was quoted saying “the statistical overrepresentation of First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in the criminal justice system is plainly shocking,” ⁴. Why I included it and why it

³ Alexander, Michelle. “The New Jim Crow”, The New Press, 2012, pg. 103.

⁴ Draaisma, Muriel. “Federal minister announces \$2.1M to address Indigenous overrepresentation in justice system”, retrieved from CBC News <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/justice-minister-funding-programs-indigenous-overrepresentation-justice-system-1.7141855> on November 10, 2024

was upsetting is because this isn't new. Statistics have gone back decades and have shown an increase in the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the Canadian criminal system. I hope this is a step in the right direction as "this funding allows Aboriginal Legal Services to provide a safe space for Indigenous people to speak their truth, address root causes, and restore balance within themselves, their families and the community"⁵

Reference

Alexander, Michelle. "The New Jim Crow", *The New Press*, 2012.

Draaisma, Muriel. "Federal minister announces \$2.1M to address Indigenous overrepresentation in justice system", retrieved from CBC News <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/justice-minister-funding-programs-indigenous-overrepresentation-justice-system-1.7141855> on November 10, 2024

Parliament of Canada. "Indigenous People and Sentencing in Canada", retrieved from https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/202046E on November 10, 2024.

WEEK 10:

Completing weekly journals has been a great tool for this class.

One of the biggest things that came out of the first 8 weeks of class discussions and the readings was a major self-reflection to how I was raised. We grew up in a home with lots of anger and I never understood why until this class. With all the readings and discussions, I realized that my mom's anger came from her own intergenerational trauma of being raised by a parent who attended residential school. It was a big "ah ha" moment for me. What was empowering in this is that I no longer held any mixed

⁵ Draaisma, "Federal Minister Announces \$2.1M to Address Indigenous Overrepresentation in the Justice System"

emotions towards my own mother about how we were raised. I now have a greater respect for her and what she went through. This was the greatest learning for me on a personal level and I feel the need to share this learning experience.

My goals for this class for the most part have changed and have been adjusted. For my heart, I attend counselling every two weeks to maintain my own mental health. This now includes working through any intergenerational trauma that may have been passed down to my generation. For my mental goal, I have added that I want to be a part of discussion more, whether that is in class or not. I feel I can add to class discussions by adding thoughts and questions to the on-line forum. My physical goals have stayed the same. I want to continue managing my chronic pain. Lastly, for my spiritual goals (or my soul), I have changed it to include meeting with an Inuit elder. I'm hoping to connect more with Inuit culture through meeting with an elder.

Púsmen (heart) Emotional Goals: I want to continue with counselling to work through the intergenerational trauma my family has and continues to experience.

Sképqin (head) Mental Goals: A mental goal that I have is to be open minded with class discussions. To receive what others, have to say. I also want to be a part of the class discussion.

Tmícw (land) Physical Goals: I want to feel more connected to the land. To get out more and appreciate nature. I also want to continue working through my chronic pain by practicing yoga and completing daily exercises to help minimize the pain I feel every day.

Súmec (soul) Spiritual Goals: I want to meet with the Inuit elder that my Indigenous liaison worker is setting up in hopes of learning more about the Inuit culture.

Week 11:

The piece I chose to write and reflect about for this week is “An Analysis of Endocannabinoid Concentrations and Mood Following Singing and Exercise in Healthy Volunteers”. I find my story used to represent the story depicted in the article and that is what drove me to it. The article completed a study on how certain activities (singing, dancing and cycling) that people take part in can increase certain chemicals that help with depression and hunger to name a couple. According to the authors of the article, “dance therapy in a group of 60 students also significantly reduced depression over a period of 12 weeks”.⁶ What I think the author’s main point is, is that people can help with certain mood disorders through being active, such activities as singing and dancing. That, to an extent, we can control how we feel through our actions (not including those who suffer from physical disabilities and major mood disorders that are limiting).

As I previously mentioned, this study almost represents my life. And it gave me several emotions including sadness, anger, and happiness. Why this article makes me happy is that I was an avid runner, running every day, rain or shine. I took part in Zumba on a weekly schedule where I would sing and dance, and as stated in the article, “singing and dancing, especially as a group activity, are associated with positive mood

⁶ Stone, Nicole L., Millar, Sophie A., Herrod, Philip J.J., Barrett, David A., Ortori, Catharine, A., Mellon, Valerie, A., O’Sullivan, Saoirse E. “An Analysis of Endocannabinoid Concentrations and Mood Following Singing and Exercise in Healthy Volunteers”. *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2018.00269>. Pg. 2.

in humans”⁷. This did wonders for the depression that I had been struggling with since I was 16. I had taken control of my life. Then I broke my back. My doctor misdiagnosed me for two years and during this time there was a stop in most of my activities due to the pain I was experiencing. By the time I had surgery, there was permanent damage done and my pain was diagnosed as chronic pain. This broke me down for quite a while as I was healing from surgery and trying to manage my pain. It took several years to become somewhat active again.

I agree with the author’s point I feel they are trying to make. Taking away any physical or mental disability one might have, being active, singing and dancing are great ways to manage your mood. Looking at the study’s outcomes and taking away the study group it was done on, I feel like I fit into this. The outcomes were like what I experienced and, in some ways, continue to experience. I find that following through with singing and dancing has helped my mental health and it is something that I can do while living with chronic pain. What I wonder is what a study would look like if the Cohort incorporated younger individuals who struggle with mental health disorders.

I’m including an article I found that intrigued me as I went down a rabbit hold of information. It is titled “Dance for Wellness: Indigenous adolescents’ Perspectives on Mental Health, Wellness, and Dance”. It shows the power of dancing in a different cohort than the article I read for class and in a way answers the thought I had above.

Reference

⁷ Stone, Millar, Herrod, Barrett, Ortori, Mellon, O’Sullivan, “An Analysis of Endocannabinoid Concentrations and Mood Following Singing and Exercise in Healthy Volunteers”. Pg. 2.

Stone, Nicole L., Millar, Sophie A., Herrod, Philip J.J., Barrett, David A., Otori, Catharine, A., Mellon, Valerie, A., O'Sullivan, Saoirse E. "An Analysis of Endocannabinoid Concentrations and Mood Following Singing and Exercise in Healthy Volunteers". *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2018.00269>.

Wildeman, Tatum., Spurr, Shelley., Bally, Jill. & Bullin, Carol. "Dance for Wellness: Indigenous adolescents' Perspectives on Mental Health, Wellness, and Dance", 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07370016.2024.2424166>. Retrieved from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07370016.2024.2424166?src=exp-la#abstract>, On November 18, 2024.

Week 12:

This week I chose the article by David B. MacDonald titled "Settler silencing and the killing of Colten Boushie: naturalizing colonialism in the trial of Gerald Stanley". The author's main point was discussing and portraying examples of settler silencing which is "a process of suppressing Indigenous people's histories, lands, languages, cultures, and laws"⁸. The article also portrays how there is still ignoring of treaties regarding land and how Indigenous people are represented negatively in the justice system.

⁸ MacDonald, David B. "Settler silencing and the killing of Colten Boushie: naturalizing colonialism in the trial of Gerald Stanley", *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2021, 11(1), 1- 20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2020.1841505>.

The author used a case of a young man who was murdered by a white man, and with no surprise, the white man was found innocent. This brought anger for me. There is a young man and his friends that pulled into a farm for assistance and ended up with one, Colten Boushe, being shot point blank in the head. The excuses given by Gerald Stanley (the farmer who shot Colten) were unbelievable in my eyes. What is so angering to me is how it all came down. The jury that was chosen excluded any potential Indigenous men and, in the end, ended up with an all-white jury. There was a quote that stood out for me and that was “silencing is crucial in settler judicial systems, where lawyers and judges assume the task of determining what information is relevant for a jury in a determination of guilt or innocence”⁹. Boushie’s friends were dismissed on the stand, two for consuming alcohol and lying and the other two for lying and being thieves. At the end a young man’s murderer was found not guilty in a white supremacist legal system that is a part of our “great” nation.

This screams out “injustice” to me. People are entitled to the rule of law, not just a select few that are of a settler background. Indigenous people are overrepresented in our prison system because they are poorly represented in the court system. The author of the article made a point that really stuck out to me, MacDonald states “the trial also illustrates a common argument that the settler legal system is not broken but working entirely as it is intended to do”.¹⁰

⁹ MacDonald “Settler silencing and the killing of Colten Boushie: naturalizing colonialism in the trial of Gerald Stanley”, pg.4

¹⁰ MacDonald “Settler silencing and the killing of Colten Boushie: naturalizing colonialism in the trial of Gerald Stanley”, pg.16

I absolutely agree with the point the author was trying to make. Canada is guilty of settler silencing, and this can be seen represented in this case. The reasons are offered are compelling and really paint a picture of how unjust our system is when it comes to Indigenous peoples. Sadly, this topic is not shocking as this is not the first (and won't be the last) where an Indigenous person is murdered, and the murderer walks free or receives a slap on the wrist.

I enjoy reading news articles that represent the topic of the article I've chosen. This week was hard. There were no news articles regarding settler silencing. The news article I did find made me think of an incident that happened when I was a teenager, visiting with my Nan (grandmother). First, the news article is about the Indigenous, specifically the Inuit of Labrador, sharing their narrative. It is so often found that the narrative of Indigenous people that hits the media portrays us as what has been the narrative since the time of colonization, the savages. This news article spoke of the silencing that has taken place with the Inuit from Labrador (and across the nation). There is a quote from this article that really spoke to me, "even before Canada became a country, colonialism weaponized stories about Indigenous people"¹¹. The Indigenous person's narrative has always been spoken for them.

Now, secondly. This news article made me think of one weekend afternoon while I was over visiting with my Nan while she was still with us. I remember it like it was yesterday. My Nan, at the time of the story, had a police scanner (which is a whole other story). So, we were sitting and visiting when a phone call came through that caught our

¹¹ Michelin, Ossie. "Why it's important for Indigenous people to tell our own stories", CBC News, Retrieved on November 22, 2024 from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/first-person-indigenous-history-stories- narrative-sovereignty-1.6050453>.

attention. It was of a man speaking to another man from somewhere else and how he could not wait to return home to the island (which I'm assuming was Newfoundland). This man described our community as being full of "Indians" and that we were a bunch of drunks and how disgusting the community was with junk all over people's yards. The worst part was when he mentioned the "Indian Chief was sitting on the corner drinking beer". This still makes me tear up when I think about this. To this man, he created his own narrative of us and shared a story portraying us, which passed on the narrative to someone who has no idea of what the community was really like. We were just a bunch of savages.

Part IV: Reference (Include: proper citations)

MacDonald, David B. "Settler silencing and the killing of Colten Boushie: naturalizing colonialism in the trial of Gerald Stanley", *Settler Colonial Studies*, 2021, 11(1), 1-20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2020.1841505>.

Michelin, Ossie. "Why it's important for Indigenous people to tell our own stories", *CBC News*, Retrieved on November 22, 2024 from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/first-person-indigenous-history-stories-narrative-sovereignty-1.6050453>.

Week 13:

This journal assignment was a great tool to have in such a heavy class, there was a lot of learning from this assignment which was great. There was also a lot of self-reflection which was necessary in the growing process. These reflections from the classroom readings and discussions created a lot of "ah ha" moments for me that I will gladly take away. The journal assignments also gave room for deeper exploration of the classroom material. It brought a deeper understanding and appreciation for what you were learning as you were connecting it to your own life.

This brought up a lot of heavy emotions in some of the weeks and the journals gave a space for these emotions.

Progressing through the goals set out in class was slow at times and I admit, went to the back of the list. I'm proud that I managed to follow through on most of the goals I set. I've continued with my counselling and have had discussions on the heavy emotions I would sometimes feel when there was a week that hit close to home. I also feel like I grew more comfortable and confident with the classroom discussions as the weeks went on. This was a challenge for me with my social anxiety. I challenged myself to put myself out there and I feel I was successful. Next, there was a goal of getting out and feeling more connected to the land. This was a much-needed goal. I would walk my dogs every day but not really appreciate the outside like I used to, everything felt like a chore. So, I took it upon myself to slow down and appreciate more the world we have and really enjoy my time with my dogs. Lastly, I wanted to meet with an Inuit elder. I almost had a meeting set up, but my liaison never got back to me. Now that there is a break, I must take it upon myself to reach out and find an Inuit elder so I can start working on my Indigenous identity. Unless you know of one?

What would I have done differently? I think I would have put myself out there more the first part of the semester. I feel like I missed out on many opportunities to engage with the class and develop more meaningful relationships with classmates. I would have also been open about my social anxiety at the beginning of the semester instead of the end. The instructors were great support though, even without them knowing I had social anxiety. The most important thing I learned was to explore your

emotions and to trust the process. It's ok to feel things when we read or hear something that makes us sad or happy.

I just want to add that this course was full of learning for me. Not just educationally, but personally as well. There were a lot of opportunities for growth and exploration that really enhanced my learning of "me" and for that I am grateful.