

## **Abstract**

This paper highlights the lesser known history of the First Nations families who lived on the land that we now know as Stanley Park. When it comes to Stanley Park, there are many narratives that we tell about Stanley Park through personal experience, word of mouth, media and tourism. However, there are many narratives that are hidden from the mainstream in terms of understanding the importance of Stanley Park to the First Nations. But who has control over these narratives, and why do they have control over them? Ultimately, this culminates in understanding how we as a society relate to Stanley Park, and how that differs from its initial purpose. This paper highlights three different narratives that are told about Stanley Park as well as three different narratives that are hidden about Stanley Park, the ways these narratives impact our perception of Stanley Park, and concludes by introducing how the Vancouver Park Board has taken steps towards reconciliation.

***Key words:*** Colonization, First Nations, Power Relations, Reconciliation, Stanley Park, Vancouver

## **Preface and Acknowledgements**

Before coming into this topic and learning more about Stanley Park and parks in general, I had a very casual relationship with parks and other “natural” green spaces. I was fortunate to grow up in Surrey, B.C., about 40 minutes away from Vancouver by car. The proximity allowed for occasional daytrips with my family to Stanley Park. Through much of my childhood, I spent a lot of time playing outside in many of the parks in the City of Surrey, which is also affectionately nicknamed “the city of parks” (Discover Surrey, 2019, para. 1). Of course, given my age at the time, I had a very superficial view of parks. As a child I could afford to view them in a simple and practical way while also feigning ignorance. To me, parks were personal places of escape, where I could be one with nature and enjoy the sunshine and fresh air. I saw Stanley Park as a particularly majestic park, much greater than any neighbourhood park that I was used to in Surrey, with the perfect mix of trees, water, and mountain views.

All of this changed many years later when I took a Communication course at Simon Fraser University on Canadian cultural policy that had a particular focus on parks, parks policy, and issues pertaining to the creation, conservation and preservation of parks and other green/natural spaces. My eyes were opened to the fact that parks are not just the happy, airy, carefree places from my childhood. Rather, some parks like Stanley Park and many other well-known parks have a more insidious past. As I learned more and read about different parks, especially those here in Canada, my view of them began to change. I was never forced to think about these things as a child. I never thought about how a park was actually created – as a child, I just assumed that the trees, the playground, and the walking paths were already there before I was born. The “natural” space was not so natural to me anymore, as I started to see that the experience of the park and its “natural-ness” was actually constructed and fabricated.

I do not apologize for having a more critical and informed eye about spaces like Stanley Park now that I've done this research. However, I am confident that this is not the end of the discussion when it comes to learning about the ways in which urban space design has a deeper meaning than originally meets the eye. The ways in which a park is designed says a lot about its creators and designers, and the values that they hold. As a person who possesses a certain amount of privilege and power, there comes a task to use such privilege in a responsible way. It is my hope that this may open other people's eyes to look beyond the trees and grass to really question what power dynamics are at play, and how we as individuals wield a certain power as we enter into a space.

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Thank you to my supervisor Dr. Alison Beale for your insights and constant support, as well as for helping me expand my learning in this subject by sharing your knowledge and interests with me. Last but not least, thank you so much to my family and friends for their support and patience as I pursued this research project.

## **Welcome to Stanley Park**

To many Vancouverites and the nearly 8 million yearly visitors from around the world, Stanley Park is more than just a collection of trees and trails. There are many narratives that we tell about Stanley Park that makes up the collective identity that it has been given by the people who visit it. Stanley Park is undoubtedly Vancouver's crown jewel: a natural, West Coast rainforest that brings together majestic trees, mountains, and seas. It brings nature to the city, providing it with a sense of repose. Stanley Park is usually marketed to fall in line with the overarching message that the province of British Columbia paints: pristine, natural, and untouched. Our forests are our strength, and something that we aim to share with the hundreds of thousands of tourists that enter into our parks every year.

But despite this idealistic, picture-perfect narrative of Stanley Park, its extraordinary nature sometimes overshadows the troubling past that it keeps deep within its forests. To this day, not very much is known of the families that once called Stanley Park home – the very people who were forcibly removed from their homes for the creation of “a place for [Vancouver's] citizens to recreate themselves through active sport or peaceful relaxation” (City of Vancouver, 2018, para. 1). But while the City of Vancouver claims that Stanley Park was created for the sake of providing everyone with the opportunity to relax and recreate themselves, to what extent is this actually true? Further to this point, at what or whose expense did the creation of Stanley Park come at?

This paper is a culmination of the research that I did for the FCAT Undergraduate Research Fellowship in the Fall 2018 semester, which compares and analyzes the common and lesser-known narratives that are told about Stanley Park, and what this means about the way we as a society relate to this space. I will first introduce Stanley Park based on the narratives that are

told about it. These narratives have come about through first-hand experience, word of mouth, media, and tourism. Next, I will highlight the dichotomy between these very common narratives that are told about Stanley Park and compare them to the hidden narratives about First Nations families who used to live on the land we know as Stanley Park. This will come together in an analysis on how we relate to the space known as Stanley Park. Finally, this paper will address the ways in which the Vancouver Park Board is working to decolonize its practices and ultimately change the narrative about and around Stanley Park. Through this paper, I will uncover the narratives that we tell, the narratives that are hidden, and what this says about power dynamics and space where Stanley Park is concerned.

### **What is Stanley Park?**

Consisting of 400-hectares of forest, Stanley Park became Vancouver's first green space (City of Vancouver, 2018). Named after Lord Stanley, who served as the sixth Governor-General of Canada in 1888, the park opened on September 27, 1888. Stanley Park was not only a popular place for the locals to go out, but it was also named given the honour of top park in the entire world by the tourism website TripAdvisor in 2014, through the collection of millions of reviews (Judd, 2014). Over time, Stanley Park has grown to be known for more than its majestic nature. The City of Vancouver (2018) boasts a great variety of attractions for visitors of all ages, including "beaches, local wildlife, great eats, natural, cultural and historical landmarks...[and] Canada's largest aquarium" (para. 3).

Prior to its creation as a park, the land was designated as a government reserve out of fear of a potential American expansion (Steele, 1993). In 1859, the belief that a war between Britain and America was imminent. The peninsula where Stanley Park is now located was believed to be a key point for an American naval invasion, if it were to take place (Steele, 1993). Stanley Park,

then, was key to the British military operation. Though the feared attack never came, the government maintained a strict hold on the land and limited pioneer settlement on it. At the time, there was also a potential Canadian Pacific Railway project that threatened the park land, but ultimately that project fell through (Steele, 1993).

When asked to think about memories pertaining to Stanley Park, many will typically respond with similar versions of memories. Perhaps it consists of walking along the Seawall while dodging cyclists. It might be taking shade in the forest, looping through the trails and looking up at the tall trees. Or maybe it is taking out of town visitors to the very popular totem poles at the entrance of the park to take photos. Many of these memories make up the collective memory and identity of Stanley Park in the public's imagination. In many cases, these collective memories have shaped the persona of Stanley Park; that is, a place of beautiful nature that has a number of popular attractions to delight both locals and tourists.

Beyond all these attractions and memories, Stanley Park is so much more. As this paper will show, there is a whole side to Stanley Park that is rarely shown or discussed in public discourse.

### **The narratives we tell about Stanley Park**

The ways in which people describe space and how they feel when in the space speaks a lot to how people relate to the space. As a note, the following three narratives are by no means exhaustive, and there absolutely are more narratives that could be told. For the purposes of this paper, the three narratives that I will highlight in this section are:

1. Pristine and untouched nature
2. A must-see tourist destination

### 3. A place for the locals to relax

I will now walk through each of these narratives in turn and discuss how they came to be.

#### **Stanley Park: Pristine and untouched nature**

When it comes to discussing parks and nature in general, undoubtedly the terms “pristine”, “natural”, “oasis”, or other synonyms will arise. Historically, parks have always been viewed in this way. In various Western societies, elites saw parks as a place for natural escape from busy cities as well as a place to preserve pristine landscapes. For the elites, they felt that their use of parks was to achieve a higher, almost holier purpose: they wanted to preserve the natural beauty of the park, holding onto what McDonald (1984) calls the “romantic conception of nature” (p. 153). The creation of amenities such as a tramline would “destroy the peninsula’s unique solitude” and turn Stanley Park into a “commonplace city park” (McDonald, 1984, p. 154). We can see that the middle class desire for a place for recreation and enjoyment is opposed to the elitist desire of a beautiful forest, and further presents a divide with how the park should be used and who should have access to it. In the present, this class divide has subsided, especially in regards to Stanley Park. But despite the decline in class divide and the marketing of Stanley Park as a “perfect city escape” for everyone, the question still remains as to whether or not this is indeed true for all of Vancouver’s citizens (Vancouver Tourism, 2019, para. 2).

While walking through the park and seeing all of the wildlife and trees, it may be easy to think that Stanley Park has always been this way. As such, terms like “pristine” or “natural” come up quite often to build this narrative that we tell about Stanley Park: that it was made up of a virgin forest that settlers and Park Board officials stumbled upon and decided to turn into a park. Given its incredible biodiversity and the wide range of plant, tree, and animal species in the

park, Stanley Park has significant ecological importance, most notably the great blue herons (Hall & Page, 2006). All of these species together create “a significant secondary growth forest ecosystem and wetland” that is unique to the Lower Mainland and is also important for the overall natural health of the region (Hall & Page, 2006, 173).

The City of Vancouver and the Park Board, along with other tourism sites that are both run by private companies and filled with user-generated information, further perpetuates the narrative that Stanley Park is indeed a pristine environment. However, as will be discussed in a later section, this is certainly not the case. Stanley Park has experienced a great deal of devastation and change due to weather and natural causes as well as human interference, which impacts the extent of how pristine the environment actually is. Over time, city-wide efforts such as the “Rewilding Vancouver” action plan has brought together a number of partners, including the Stanley Park Ecology Society, to focus on strengthening the biodiversity in Stanley Park and others (see Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 2014). This gives further evidence that Stanley Park is by no means simply virgin forest, and the experience that has been created in the park is the product of many years of natural and human change.

### **Stanley Park: A must-see tourist destination**

When asked to bring an out of town guest around Vancouver, typically one of the first things to come to mind would be Stanley Park. Undoubtedly, a lot of those tourists will probably spend a great portion of the day taking in the different attractions in the park. These tourists help to contribute approximately \$4.8 billion annually to the Metro Vancouver economy every year (Tourism Vancouver, 2019). The fact that it was voted as one of the top parks in the world by users of the tourism website TripAdvisor (2014) highlights the fact that the space itself and the amenities within it really resonate with visitors on a number of levels. Beyond the natural



attractions that fulfill the narrative mentioned above about it being a beautiful natural environment, there are a variety of recreational sites for guests to use. These include swimming pools and tennis courts, the Vancouver Aquarium, a miniature train, the totem pole site, and a summer theatre for concerts and outdoor performance (Hall & Page, 2006).

Taken together, all of these attractions add to the allure of this urban park, especially for those who are visiting Vancouver from other parts of the world. Tourist sites such as TripAdvisor and others continue to be filled with comments and reviews from tourists, which adds to its popularity. On top of that, social media and photo sharing has made it incredibly easy for people to take photos and share them in an instant with their networks, further promoting the park. Between online promotion and word of mouth, the narrative that is told about Stanley Park is that it is a must-see destination when visiting Vancouver. As Vancouver is known for its planning and urban design, the uniqueness of having an urban park that mixes nature in the heart of the city is a draw for tourists and locals alike.

### **Stanley Park: A place for the locals to relax**

Regardless of what people decide to do at Stanley Park during their visit, certainly the overall natural atmosphere that the park offers provides park-goers with the perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of the city. Stanley Park provides Vancouverites with a quick and relatively low-cost way to take a break from fast-paced city life while not leaving the city behind entirely. Even the City of Vancouver, when describing the park, describes it as “a place for Vancouver’s citizens to recreate themselves through active sport or peaceful relaxation” (2018).

One might wonder who exactly these faceless citizens who are going to Stanley Park to recreate themselves. In keeping with the spirit of Lord Stanley, it seems that all Vancouverites

should be welcome to Stanley Park and recreate themselves. Further, this has become a part of the city's mandate: A 2014 fact sheet as part of the City of Vancouver's Healthy City for All plan found that most Vancouver residents have access to green space or a park, though the quality and quantity certainly varies from neighbourhood to neighbourhood (City of Vancouver, 2014). The City of Vancouver identified the need and importance of green space for all to improve overall health and reduce risk for chronic health conditions as well as improve social connectivity in the city (City of Vancouver, 2014). This shows the connection between nature and physical and mental health.

With this identified need by the City of Vancouver, this upholds the narrative of a place of relaxation for the locals. Especially for those who have the luxury of living near Stanley Park, it is not uncommon for these residents to walk or bike through the park on a regular basis. As such, park spaces like Stanley Park are crucial to Vancouver's health and attractiveness as a city known for its access to nature. But as the narrative highlights how the park is open for all to enjoy and relax in, I challenge to what extent this is actually the case. This question will be explored in the remainder of my paper.

### **Hidden narratives about Stanley Park**

The narratives highlighted above give an account of how Stanley Park is viewed by the public, both locally and internationally. However, research and historical record shows that these narratives present a one-sided view of the park that puts some groups in an advantageous position, and disadvantages others. This leads me to ask: Who has the power to advance certain narratives, and why do they have that power? Further, what are the narratives that are hidden from the mainstream?

It is crucial to note that I personally am not a person of First Nations descent, and I recognize that these stories are difficult ones to tell. In particular, I recognize that these are also not my stories to tell. The information gathered for my research came about through reading historical documents and other research, which will be summed up in a review of the literature. With this information, I do not claim to speak for the First Nations; rather, I tried to learn about their struggles in this time period through the pieces I read through my research. It is through conducting a review of the literature and documents made publicly available that I was able to come up with the following narratives that will be discussed in this paper:

1. Displacement
2. Rights to land taken away
3. Erasure of indigenous indigeneity

I will now go through and delve into these narratives a little further, describing each one in turn.

### **Displacement**

For the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, the land that is now known as Stanley Park was more than just a park: it was their home. In her 1998 Master's thesis, Susan Mather conducted extensive research that looked into the history of the Coast Salish peoples and their relationship to the land. Some architectural evidence points to "at least one major Coast Salish village" as well as "several other resource sites that were utilised for centuries", but more research into which Coast Salish group was using the area and to what extent (Mather, 1998, 27). Mather (1998) goes on to say that various studies on the relationship between the Coast Salish peoples and the Burrard Inlet show that the area was used by the Coast Salish for seasonal hunting, gathering, and ceremony. Regardless of which Coast Salish peoples and what time of

year they used the land, one thing is clear: the land was integral to their life and growth as a community.

In 1863, the land which is known as Stanley Park would change in its perception and use. The land would now be turned into a military reserve to protect against any impending attacks and expansion attempts by the United States. As Mather (1998) points out, the creation of the military reserve “created the illusion that the site...was not Indian land, though there was plenty of evidence to show that there was “a strong Coast Salish presence” there (p, 10). Eventually the land would be taken up by the City of Vancouver to create an urban park (Mather, 1998). By removing the Coast Salish peoples from the area, this changed the way that they would relate to the space and ultimately change their life. One by one, communities were forced to leave behind their homes without any potential for compensation or alternative housing. This was detrimental to the communities of First Nations who lived there. As will be discussed in the next section, the displacement of these peoples led to future problems beyond finding a new place to live.

During this time, the governing bodies in charge called the First Nations families in Stanley Park ‘squatters’ who resided on government land. This “reinforced the idea that those who were living [in Stanley Park] were illegitimate” (Mather, 1998, p. 17). In her thesis, Mather (1998) talks about how naming these residents as “squatters” was a primary discursive tool to dispossess and displace the First Nations people. Further, this helped to create clear boundaries in the eyes of the settler governments for these peoples and how they could use this space.

Mather (1998) writes:

“Stanley Park,” seemingly public, seemingly neutral space, was becoming, especially for Native people, like land owned by settlers, speculators, or capitalists, a space they could not define or control. (p.17).

The creation of a ‘squatter identity’ by the settler government is quite ironic, as the settlers are the ones trespassing on the homes and land of those who had lived there for thousands of years. But this idea is tied back to Western culture and the colonial land system – though the land is unceded, the First Nations had very little ways in which they could fight back for the rights to their land.

In the present age, various ceremonies or events that take place in Vancouver and the rest of the Lower Mainland typically starts with a land acknowledgement, recognizing that the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. With regards to Stanley Park, however, land acknowledgements are a small part of the overall narrative of displacement. The greater part of this narrative and history about Stanley Park is not readily available or accessible to the public. This can speak to the control that continues to be exercised over the First Nations hundreds of years after these events occurred. Though the First Nations may not be physically dominated by settlers or physically displaced today, the legacy of Stanley Park as well as relationships to other traditional and sacred spaces continues to speak to the damaging effects of colonization.

### **Rights to land taken away**

As colonization efforts expanded, the need for land steadily increased as well, and this led to some clashes between the settler government and the First Nations who lived on the land. During the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, debates and discussions around the definition of who constituted as being ‘Indian’ ultimately led to the creation of Indian reserves (Mawani, 2005). Because of this, racial identity was based on the factors of “blood, intermarriage, residence, and/or adoption” (Mawani, 2005, p. 320). As Mawani (2005) writes in her paper “Genealogies of

the land: Aboriginality, law, and territory in Vancouver's Stanley Park", this becomes a significant deciding factor for who can reside on government land, and on the other hand, who needs to be moved to a government reserve.

On top of being displaced from their traditional territories, the law was stacked against the First Nations when it came to appealing the court decisions. This set a new legal precedent that was never an issue before, and further created even more trouble for Indigenous peoples. Some of these communities consisted of half-European and half-Indigenous through intermarriage. In the eyes of the law, they were colloquially known at the time as "half-breed" due to this racial hybridity (Mawani, 2005, p. 321). Due to the fact that they were not European, there was already certain judgments levelled against them. Their lack of complete 'Indian-ness' or racial hybridity led to fewer rights, denying them their access to reserves and participation in community life with others (Mawani, 2005). This complicates the issue further and shows the ways in which people were removed from their homes, and even removed from their own identities. They could no longer claim their own land and their identity as First Nations families, because of the colonial gaze that was set upon them.

As mentioned in the displacement narrative section, this narrative of rights being taken away is no longer just about the land itself, but about their identity. Through these court cases (see Mawani 2003, 2005; Barman 2005) and the use of the derogatory term "half-breed" was a direct attack on their cultural identity. The governing body at the time used their power and authority to not only unsettle the First Nations from their home, but also unsettle their identity. This took away their rights to be themselves and their rights to the land that was rightly theirs. It is evident here with this lesser known narrative that place can make up a huge portion of a

person's identity, as place can signify traditions and ways of life. This is no longer possible for the First Nations peoples who lived at Stanley Park once the park was created.

### **Erasure of indigenous Indigeneity**

In her paper, Mawani (2003) looked at how Stanley Park commercializes and romanticizes First Nations and Aboriginal culture in the park in its present form. From the time that Vancouver began to be colonized, Vancouver's identity as a British settler city relied on what Mawani (2003) described as the "discursive and material erasure and invisibility of Aboriginal peoples" (p. 101). In order to take complete control of the space, any type of opposition needed to be eliminated. Once control of the space was gained, the narrative in which the space serves as a foreground was now also controlled.

In her 2007 article "Erasing Indigenous Indigeneity in Vancouver", historian Jean Barman discusses erasure in two ways. Erasure serves both as a means of unsettling and displacing populations (in this case, the First Nations living in Vancouver) and as a way to demonstrate that Vancouver is indeed "indigenous-friendly", despite unsettling so many First Nations people from their land (p. 4). For Barman (2007), the term "indigenous Indigeneity" means the presence of indigenous peoples who were indigenous to the land that we now call Stanley Park – that is, the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples (p. 4). In practice, a clear example of this is the erection of the totem poles that are located on Brockton Point in the park in 1923. These totem poles removed the indigenous Indigeneity and replaced it with "sanitized Indigeneity...from elsewhere" (Barman, 2007, p. 4). Further, Mawani (2004) notes in her article "From Colonialism to Multiculturalism? Totem Poles, Tourism and National Identity in Vancouver's Stanley Park" that the poles represent the Kwakwaka'wakw and Haida Nations

of Northern BC. This is a group that is not indigenous to the Lower Mainland, and was used as a stand-in to represent all indigenous groups.

Beyond replacing the local indigenous population with a more “sanitized” indigenous presence in the Lower Mainland, during the creation of Stanley Park the Park Board began to place “specific and selective visual reminders of Aboriginality [like] totem poles and an Indian Village that were commercialized and commodified for the ‘tourist gaze’” (Mawani, 2004, p. 38). This created a caricature of Aboriginal culture that was used to encourage tourism to the area, and ultimately fulfilled stereotypes of Aboriginality that further confused the overall population about what indigenous Indigeneity was. As the next section will discuss, this confusion and misrepresentation is incredibly harmful towards the ways in which we understand different cultures and histories.

### **How do these narratives change the way we view Stanley Park and other spaces?**

The narratives that are told about specific spaces help us to relate to the different cultures and people that use or reside in them. The initial creation of Stanley Park reflected the attitudes of the day towards First Nations – racial prejudice and a misunderstanding of another culture. Unfortunately these attitudes continue to persist, and this is partially why the narratives of displacement, rights to land being taken away, and erasure of indigenous Indigeneity are so foreign or new. Upon first coming across these themes, I remember feeling extremely shocked at what I read and how little I actually knew about Stanley Park beyond the trees and the Seawall. This paper is built upon a small portion of the literature that currently exists and continues to grow in this topic, to help shed some light on the lesser known histories and stories of First Nations and their relationship to Stanley Park.



All of these narratives question the validity of Lord Stanley's proclamation of a park for peoples of all colours, creeds and customs to enjoy the park. Barman (2005) notes that it was in 1958 when the last of the families who lived in the park were forced out of their homes so as to bring the park back to its pristine nature – highlighting again this idea of creating a pristine oasis in the form of a park, and removing anything that would blemish its identity as a pristine park. In this case, the First Nations needed to be removed. We see now in this era of reconciliation that this is not only a cruel action towards the First Nations people of the time, but it also severely alters the way that First Nations people relate to the space, and the perception of First Nations by the overall society.

It is here that I will note that the general displacement of a population for the sake of creating a park or another cultural amenity is not uncommon. One such example is New York's Central Park, where there was a significant population of African-American property owners that existed about 200 years ago (Central Park Conservancy, 2019). This community consisted predominantly of African-Americans as well as Irish and German immigrants, who held property and were eligible to vote because of it. Similar to the Stanley Park story, the creation of Central Park displaced these people and with the displacement came a loss of the stories and histories of them (Central Park Conservancy, 2019). With other examples of displacement due to park creation found elsewhere in the world, it raises the question: who decides who belongs to and can use a space?

With regards to Stanley Park, the question of who has access to the park may come down to the residents who live in the areas surrounding it, including the neighbourhoods of the West End, False Creek, and Kitsilano among others. This may also privilege those who have access to a car or the ability to pay for transit if they do not live close to the park. With all of these

indicators, we can begin to imagine the type of person that is able to meet these criteria. While more research needs to be done in this area, we can see how the neighbourhoods that surround the park may privilege a certain group of the population to visit the park more frequently than others. While the classist attitudes might not be as prevalent as they were in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is still something to be said about access to parks by all Vancouverites, especially if the City of Vancouver intends to create greater equity and accessibility to nature and green space.

### **What's next? Current and ongoing steps towards reconciliation**

The City of Vancouver and the Vancouver Park Board are currently taking steps to help educate all Vancouverites on this issue. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada played a crucial role in highlighting the harm done to First Nations and Indigenous peoples in Canada over many decades, and also came up with 94 “Calls to Action” to help decolonization efforts across governments, organizations, and groups (Dunlop, 2018, p. 3). Then-mayor Gregor Robertson proclaimed June 2013 to June 2014 as Vancouver’s Year of Reconciliation (City of Vancouver, 2018). The year of 2015 saw the Vancouver Park Board meet with the leaders of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples to begin the development of a comprehensive plan for Stanley Park. This was the first time that the Park Board officially acknowledged these First Nations peoples “as rights holders” to the land known as Stanley Park (Soutar, 2018, p. 2).

In January of 2016 the Vancouver Park Board adapted 11 reconciliation recommendations be put into practice in all the processes of the Park Board. One of the recommendations in particular provided a mandate for the overall process, which called for a continuation of the “Park Board’s precedent-setting intergovernmental approach to the future stewardship of Stanley Park and other relevant lands” (Dunlop, 2018, p. 3). This led to the

creation of positions such as an archeologist, a Stanley Park planner and a reconciliation planner. With these steps, reconciliation at the Park Board level slowly began.

Pertaining to Stanley Park and the 240 other parks in the city, the Vancouver Park Board announced that it will conduct a “colonial audit” so as to “[confront] its historic role in erasing First Nations culture from Stanley Park and other spaces” (Bula, 2018, para. 1). It is clear that the histories of the Musqueam, Squamish and the Tsleil-Waututh peoples and their relation to the lands which we now call Stanley Park are relatively unknown by the general public, and at this stage, the Vancouver Park Board and the leaders of the three First Nations are currently working together to build relationships and find ways to build up the comprehensive plan for Stanley Park. This is a significant step and the first action of its kind in Canada, as it welcomes leaders back to the decision making table after being shut out for most of Stanley Park’s history.

### **Conclusion: (Re-)Understanding Stanley Park**

I opened this paper by sharing a bit about my personal experience with parks as a child. I think that it is safe to assume that most children do not think about the power they bring into a space, or the social consequences of the creation of the park that they currently enjoy. Similarly, many parents could not be bothered to give their children this history lesson, and may not even have the knowledge or insight to do so. I certainly did not have this knowledge the many times I blissfully cycled the Seawall or sat lazily under the sun looking out at Lost Lagoon. My understanding of Stanley Park prior to this awareness had been a common assumption of what the function of all parks should be: places of enjoyment and relaxation in pristine, natural environments.

But while parks are beautiful and should be enjoyed, through writing this paper I learned that there is much more that history hides behind the canopy of the trees and deep within the forest. There are First Nations and Indigenous voices from Stanley Park that have yet to be heard. Through the destruction of their homes and the forced dispossession of their home lands, they have been silenced and kept out of view from the rest of the public. Narratives of displacement, rights to land being taken away, erasure of indigenous Indigeneity and many other narratives are some of the ways in which the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations have been disadvantaged over time in Vancouver. In the present, this continues to remain a reality for these groups, reflected through a lack of education and poor attempts at reconciliation.

This reflects a wider, historical attitude towards First Nations held not only with regards to parks and park access, but more broadly with their rights to vote, health care, education, housing, poverty, and many other social issues. When we zoom out, it is clear to see that reconciliation at all levels and in all areas of social life is extremely necessary in order to move forward as a more welcoming and inclusive society. Further, decolonization is not an overnight process or something that can be completed in a five-year plan. Dunlop (2018) likens the vision for Stanley Park as a seed growing into a tree: like a seed, the vision needs to be nurtured, grown, and articulated. Through the various steps of this process, “a clear picture of a 100-year vision for Stanley Park” can come about (Dunlop, 2018, p. 4). This vision entails many parts, such as education, building of connections and relationships, research and interviews, and decolonizing our own selves before we can adequately decolonize our practices and institutions.

Alongside the issue of reconciliation and decolonizing institutional and organizational practices, there needs to be a more equitable approach when designing public spaces such as

parks. As a case study, Stanley Park has evidence of racially-driven tensions, methods and designs that are not only exclusive but makes an effort to erase a certain indigenous group's presence and history from the land on which it occupies. Charles Montgomery, in his book Happy City: Transforming Our Lives Through Urban Design, discussed how equity in urban design should not just be an idealistic dream, but a reality that is pursued when creating and designing new spaces. Montgomery (2013) goes on to say that “in a fairer city, life can be better for everyone” (p. 244). In theory, parks should be accessible by everyone in the city regardless of their gender, race, and social status in a fair city. However, Montgomery (2013) notes that the design of parks typically reflects “the preferences of the socioeconomic class whose members designed them” (p. 244). Design and those who have the power to design has a significant impact on access, and this could have resulted in a skewed relationship that different groups have with Stanley Park – where there is general nonchalance from the general public, while First Nations have been disadvantaged and discriminated against.

If Lord Stanley were to walk into Stanley Park, would he see peoples of all colours, creeds and customs truly enjoying the park? This very fact was highlighted by Rena Soutar in her report to the Vancouver Park Board reporting on the initial findings on how the Park Board has impacted Aboriginal people in Vancouver. Though the Park Board has always seen itself as a “protector [of] public green space and a provider of recreation and places of respite for the people”, historically “people” have been defined as “those who participate successfully in the dominant *colonial culture*” (Soutar, 2018, p. 4, emphasis added). As such, Montgomery's point about the preference of the dominant socioeconomic class is pertinent here. Moving forward, there needs to be a shift in culture and understanding when it comes to park and urban design and creation. Soutar (2018) asks, “how does our commitment to spaces for “the people” sit alongside

the recognition of Aboriginal rights and title?” (p. 4). As such, this requires a deep reflection on the ways in which past harm has been caused, and what can be done moving forward to incorporate greater understanding and collaboration between the different governing institutions and First Nations peoples.

As a person who lives, researches, and enjoys the nature on the unceded Coast Salish territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, I know that it is my duty to learn more about how I can decolonize myself and help to bring about more equity in these public spaces before I can truly relax in the space. For myself, this paper and the research fellowship has served as a starting point for me to launch into an honours project that revolves around the issue of equity in urban design.

I cannot deny the fact that Stanley Park is beautiful and a huge tourism driver for the city of Vancouver. However, it is my hope that more people – including myself – continue to go about educating themselves on the land that they walk. When taking in the sights and sounds of Stanley Park, take time to remember the people who once called this land home. They were forced to leave their home with no warning at the expense of our enjoyment and leisure, which is by no means fair. I also hope that as the colonial audit goes on that this encourages more organizations and institutions – at the local, provincial, and national levels – to take a look inwards to see how they can better decolonize themselves and their own practices. It is only when we start to educate ourselves that we can move forwards together as a society, creating a more equitable and fair city for all.

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