

Writing Westward Podcast

Episode 034

June 2021

Rough Transcript, unedited, full of errors

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Benjamin Hoy interviewed by Brenden W. Rensink

Welcome to writing westward. I'm your host Brenden Rensink. The US-Canadian border has long been touted as the longest undefended border in the world. While true ish this idea obscures the very complicated, and often very violent history around its creation,

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the creation of the border is a quintessential Western history. And it reminds us of the messiness of settler colonial expansion native resistance to and participation in the same, and the ways in which differences in race or ethnicity can dramatically

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impact how state power is flexed and how individuals and experiences.

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We will explore these ideas and others in our conversation today with historian, Benjamin hoy about his book, a line of blood and dirt, creating the Canada, United States border across indigenous lands.

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Thanks for listening.

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For new listeners Let me take a quick moment to explain a bit about the podcast. Each episode features a conversation with authors journalists novelists poets, scientists, academics or others who write about the North American West.

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Our goal is not only showcase their work, but the spark curiosity among you, the listeners to think more deeply about the region. It's lands and environments and the histories and experiences of the people who call it home.

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If writer intrigues you. You can find links to their work in the show notes or at writing westward.org. And if you have a moment, please do subscribe, share links with friends, leave us a review or rating on Apple podcast or whatever platform you're using

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to listen, follow us on Facebook and Twitter, and send in some feedback.

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Writing westward is supported by the Charles redd center for Western studies at Brigham Young University where I Brenden Rensink serve as Associate Director, and an associate professor of history, for better or worse, this is a one man operation with me playing

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the roles of host producer sound engineer, and it just about everything else, all of which until tasks, which I have very little training, but I am passionate about the North American west, and all the work is well worth the excuse to read more and to

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talk to interesting people. At the end of this episode I will include some more information on me and my scholarship and on the red center, our programming and projects and funding opportunities that you could apply for.

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That's right, we may want to give you money.

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With all this business out of the way, let's move on to today's conversation. First, I'd like to introduce to you, who it is, we're talking to and why.

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Benjamin boys and Associate Professor of History and the director of the historical GIS lab at the University of Saskatchewan.

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He's published on a wide range of topics, including indigenous history Borderlands game based learning indigenous representations and board games and expedition policy.

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Today we discuss his first book, a line of blood and dirt, creating the Canada, United States border across indigenous lands, published in 2021 by Oxford University Press.

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In it, quite examines the creation and enforcement of the Canada, United States border between 1775 and 1839, and its impact on the indigenous residents, whose land the border was created across, rather than a dry administrative history of the borders

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creation voice text is driven by a focus on the lived experiences of the people at the border. The cast of characters is diverse and some of the stories are wild.

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Professor Benjamin Hoy Welcome to writing westward. Thank you for having me. It's, it's wonderful to be here. Yeah, I am glad that we're able to chat.

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Virtually we were just discussing off Mike about whether we've met at conferences before and I'm pretty sure we have, but you know after this zoom call know your face better and we'll definitely pick each other out in the crowd and the next time we're

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at conferences.

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Yeah, no I mean our work is is very very similar in a lot of ways so it's it's kind of a crime that we haven't really met properly before. Yeah, I mean I should make a confession to listeners This is by far the most self indulgent I've been in terms of

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picking books for the podcast that really speak to my own expertise and interests.

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My book that came out in 2018 was about natives crossing borders, the US Mexican and us Canadian border and your book is one that I really wish would have been out, say, in the early 2010s, so I could have read through it.

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You know before wrapping up my own but this is, this is the problem with publishing, you know, my book came out in 2018 but the real writing and research is probably finished.

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I mean, you know, if there's a couple years lag time and in the meantime all these new books come out and it's just impossible to keep up. No, it's, It's wild.

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I'm sort of getting used to that myself.

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Where you know the last time I touched the book is a year before the book actually sees print, and then you know that's, and then you know all of the research like you said is years earlier sometimes.

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Yeah, so I mean by the time something comes out it's already a couple years out of date and the brand new scholarship.

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Well, so you you've written this book about the creation of the US, Canada Border, it's not the first book on the topic. So, how was your approach different from previous books, but there's lots of books that talk about the border.

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But even there are books even specifically border creation I'm thinking, Tony reasons arc of the medicine line and there's others so what, how is your approach unique that merited, you know, a dissertation and and a book with Oxford University Press.

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Yeah, so this is a you know a really sort of interesting question I think because a lot of what I do is just born out of failure. You know my own failure just to understand what I think are really basic questions about the world.

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You know, so you know I'm.

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Although I didn't really think about this when I was creating the book I'm born in the Borderlands, you know I was I was born in Lethbridge Alberta, and then I lived in Minnesota, and then I lived in Toronto, and I live back in Minnesota I lived in British

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Columbia.

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And that was all before I was in grade five. So, my life just sort of float around the border and then as I grew up I kept crossing to visit family to do all of these things.

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And, you know, so I had this question which is, you know, how did this border come to be so open and so fluid and so different than all of the other borders that I crossed in my life.

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And so, you know, I got a chance to work on a project with Chris Inwood at the University of Guelph when I was an undergraduate, which was looking at the census.

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For all different kinds of things. And one of the questions that I had was can we use the census to understand how people move across borders, you know, if we look at the Americans who are in the Canadian census, you know, can we actually track mobility

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across time throughout these people's lives because you get little snippets of their life you get where they're born, you get where they are at that current day.

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If they have kids you know where the kids are born, which means you know on, on that day that they were in a specific location, this was actually a lot of all these questions you can, in your mind, see this.

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Geography of someone from Vermont. Now in Manitoba, with kids born in New Brunswick or whatever and you're trying to keep like what's the story. Yeah, you want to have a story, yeah know so it's just really interesting piece of information or suddenly

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move so freely. And the research that I was seeing is really brilliant, you know, in some ways, you know, much better than than my own research in certain areas but it was all focused.

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So each one of these books, you know one book would look at the Cree one book would look at them at one book at the Dakota one book would look at federal administrators and how they operated one would look at the military.

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And the end result was I wasn't sure how any of this fit together.

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So you have this really complicated really important border.

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But all of the books are either regional or they're set on one group or they're set on one administrative organization.

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And as I found out later in my dissertation was a good reason for that.

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You know what I chose was in some ways a really stupidly large project which is I, I just want to know how this border works, but there's you know 15 government organizations that go into that there's, you know, 60 or 70 ethnic or racial groups who all

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have very different stories around it.

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You know, it changes over time it changes by region and so I what I thought was a really simple basic question which is, what is this border and how does it work actually took me in sort of hundreds of different directions and you know it took a lot of

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time to sort of pull all of these together and quite frankly wouldn't have been possible without work like yours Reese's and and all these other people who have done, pieces of this bigger story.

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And so what I was hoping to contribute is, you know, something that pulls all of this work together and tells us sort of really accessible story

about this border that's so important to our lives as Canadians are Americans, or did it come from and why

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why does it look the way it does today.

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Yeah, I noticed this as I was reading through I would catch these snippets, I'm like, oh that I remember these kinds of stories from Beth Lou Williams book about Chinese.

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You know anti Chinese immigration stuff up in the Pacific Northwest, or this moment reminds me of Josh reads a book about the macaws or this about, you know, booze smuggling and Detroit and Windsor like I was I was catching all of these things that I've

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read about in. I mean, what you can see behind me like an entire, you know, row of my bookshelf, is all these other books so in some ways, your book is very synthetic in nature, which many writers especially you know historians who are coming out of an

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academic tradition.

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Their first big work their dissertation which is usually them their first book are generally not synthetic works, usually it's something on a very discrete topic that just digs down and that's where you kind of hone your skills and researching and writing,

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and then often it's later in a career that a writer will then say you know I have the expertise and the confidence to now take on, like, 30 different sub fields, I'm thinking of like think about like David Webber's book Barbados, which was a hemispheric

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history where he goes from the Arctic and down to Argentina, and it takes a very competent senior scholar to tackle that kind of synthetic work. So it was this.

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I didn't my book was competitive, and it wasn't because I was ambitious or I thought I could do it because I just didn't know any better. And partly and I realized oh this maybe I'm not up for this Did you kind of face that during the writing process.

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Yeah, so I think like you know this wasn't something that I set out to be, you know, super ambitious and you know stake my career on or anything like that it was, I had a simple question, or I thought it was a simple question.

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And every time I sort of moved in a direction. I just realized like I didn't know all of it. I couldn't answer what I thought was a really easy question.

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And so you know I never set out to, to learn about Chinese Exclusion or immigration.

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But I just, I couldn't understand the border without it. And so I picked up some of that and you know and then I was in the prairies and I was, you know, looking at trends national violence, and some of these.

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These kidnapping cases and these these moments of rupture, some of the ones that you talk about where groups like the career forced to cross the border.

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Again, not something I ever set out to plan to write about.

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And, you know, as ambitious as my book sounds, I, I actually wanted to do more.

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And then better judgment failed. So a lot of my book is on the Great Lakes the prairies and the West Coast, in many ways, half of the border is just missing or sort of a minor piece.

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I'd always dreamed of going up into the Arctic and help them to explain that, like the shield to move does or into the East Coast into Quebec, and the Maritimes and explain you know the stories there better, but a lot of it in the end focused on the American

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and Canadian West's right around sort of the 49th parallel.

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Although pieces of book go all the way down into Georgia and Carolinas and other things like that but that was, that was sort of one of those concessions that I had to make, where, at some point the book was getting too big, too hard, that I needed to

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get some of that focus because I, you know, as a PhD student you don't have a research team of 15 people and, you know, I'd already been to 20 archives at that point I wasn't really feeling like hitting another 15, nor did I have the funds to do it.

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So it's always this balance between trying to answer what what is sort of a fundamental question something that is really important. With the sort of logistics of, you're only one person, and any of these questions, sometimes can get really really big

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and so that's one of the reasons.

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It was so important to me that some of the work has already been done by other scholars certain pieces small questions. I could draw it didn't have to recreate this enormous body of scholarship every time.

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And I could focus in my sort of primary research on the places where there wasn't much done. Yeah.

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How do you balance this though, because you know we when you undertake via competitive work or really broad synthetic work you risk being kind of a master of none you know a little bit about a lot of topics.

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Right.

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I always, I felt strongly that my book, smoked in immigration history and it spoke to labor history, but I'm. Those are not my primary fields. And so, as I've tried to integrate them and be in conversation with those broader historiography, I was continually

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just nervous, and that I was not doing it. Justice right because that's not I'm not an expert in that so how do you how do you walk this line terrifying.

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You know, so you I think one of the ways that I try and get around this is sort of a really old approach that that writers have been doing for a long time which is just controlling scale.

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You know there are certain stories that are told better at certain skills.

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And so, the book really crosses a bunch of these but you know when I wrote my dissertation, I was not very good at writing, you know, partly because I'd spent so much time trying to just figure out what on earth is going on.

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And so it sort of this dry administrative history there's, there's no people there's no sort of life.



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And after I finished, I wasn't very happy with what I done it you know it was, it was done, and and that's wonderful as a PhD

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dissertation. Yeah.

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And so I wanted to go back and add people.

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And so, you know, I spent, I don't know how many months just going back through and reading and listening to oral histories, hundreds of them.

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As many as I could find at any archive that we would let me see them as talking with indigenous groups like the Korean style and others, and trying to find the personal stories that were sort of that would typify.

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Some of the sort of high level administrative trends that I want to see.

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So you could see that to scale so you could see, you know, this is what the government was trying to do this was sort of their goal, this is what the province was thinking or sort of aiming to do, but this is actually what happens on the ground, which

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is ultimately how the border is felt.

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You know how does it actually affect daily life. And that I think helps sort of ground me in lived experience, you know, and it sort of reminded me of the limits of the government where you'd see all these policies and you know all these capture rates

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and all these things were like wow this border is really like happening and then you read the people who it was supposed to affect and they don't they don't read it once in their diary.

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You know that they go, you can tell they're crossing the border you know 1500 times in their life.

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Sometimes even in a year, just because they're like oh I went to pick up groceries at, you know, store across the border. And then I came back and you realize that you've, you've misunderstood, how the border works on a day to day basis and so it was

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really helpful for me to sort of get into the weeds, as a way of helping to understand how this big national policy was actually playing out.

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That's one of the real strengths, I think I like about your book is that you could yes could have written a very dry administrative history about policing the border, or about, you know, the surveys right and, you know, But you instead you feel most of

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your narrative with these vignettes and moments of people's lives. And that's the driver of your of your narrative right isn't people lived experiences, which, which I think is one of the real unique contributions I was laughing, as I was going through

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the book because on one page.

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You're talking about Native look sacks and walk them county and British Columbia, working across the one that's where I grew up. So, you know I love seeing all these local place names like you know doing this stuff across the border and then on the opposing

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page you're talking about Chinese immigrants and then one page. Later, you're talking about, you know, in the 1870s Klu Klux Klan.

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Refugees running to you know to Canada to get away from the reconstruction South I mean so you're just constantly kind of churning through all these different types of people that the border impacted in very unique ways, and it was sometimes dizzying,

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but like just offer the diversity of experiences, and then taken together you do, you are left kind of, as you say, with this weird paradox in that at moments the border is everything.

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And it has such power.

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But often, paradoxically, and at the same time. It is, it is meaningless and people walk across it, daily, like my dad grew up in rural welcome County.

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Maybe like five miles from the border.

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In a Dutch family and there's a little Dutch town up right on the border, not quite in Blaine where the piece arch border crossing is that just a

nice that there's a town called Linden which is this Dutch town like windmills and stuff, and tulips right.

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and tulips right. But he says that he remember his dad talking about old time, these old timey Dutch guys that really liked ice skating. Hmm, and that there was, I don't know which Lake, it would have been but there was a lake that at one point straddle

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the border up and walk and kind of maybe just a small pond, but about how these Dutch guys from both sides of the border in the winter would go up and they liked ice skating.

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This lake across the border and they, you know, they've scaled up to Canada and visit some friends and have, you know, a drink or whatever and they escaped back across the border.

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And it's that those kinds of stories that make you think like wow the border, really doesn't mean much.

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But for other people, maybe even at the same time say, you know, this is during Chinese Exclusion or something, the borders

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inescapable. Right. And all powerful. Yeah, this was one of the big challenges when I was trying to figure out what on earth is going on, is you know when you, when you sit down to write a book.

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And you have these cases that are just polar opposites existing at the same time sometimes even like you said in the same city, you know, trying to make sense of that was was very different.

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And it took me, you know, and this is one of the reasons I kept looking elsewhere for people who had done research on on some of these different pieces was was trying to figure out you know what on earth is happening is this is just accidental.

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It was this just, we don't have enough people and so we're just behaving randomly and it's sort of luck of the draw whether you get hit, or not and some of that certainly true.

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But as I was an evenness. Yeah, all aspects of the border.

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That's perplexing.

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Yeah, but what I realized as I was doing more and more research was it wasn't an accident that part of what made this border so powerful and so unique.

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Was that the unevenness is baked at the core of the border. You know, I, the border was never meant to be even. And that a lot of the power comes from the ability to to add sort of, you know, you think you could think of them as sort of different walls,

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and that there's a different wall that different groups have to cross, or you know maybe a better metaphor is a prism you know all of the light goes in, but it's stratified some of it slowed more than others and that's why you should see a rainbow.

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And that's how the border works.

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You know certain kinds of movements certain people face a much more intense border than others. And this gives strategic advantages to some groups.

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You know, so for Chinese, you know the border hits hard, you know by certainly the late 1880s, and it gets more and more intense over time for indigenous people.

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It really depends on what they're what they're trying to do you know that the actual borders are often reservation borders are reserved borders.

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And that's where national borders are actually pleased because it's a lot easier to control this small reserve and the borders around it than it is to control this massive line.

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And that's sort of one of the problems you know the Kennedy was border is stupidly big.

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And, you know, the geography for us this.

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I know our sense of scale.

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And you're comparing Europe to the United States and depending on what globe, or map projection are using it, it distorts, you know, makes Russia look bigger than it is or makes the, you know, parts in South America look smaller than they are.

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But you open with this, just mind boggling stat that to go from like point Roberts, Washington to.

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What's your eastern terminus for this, I'd have to remember but the sort of European one is from France all the way to India, and you're crossing through all the stands.

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Yeah central a, it's, it's for a lot of it is.

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I mean if if people have been up onto the northern plains at all.

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There are some wide open lonely spaces that where there's just, I mean I've crossed the border a few different places and, you know, Montana over and there's just nothing out there, or go farther west across the Rockies and the Cascades between your Washington

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and British Columbia.

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And it says rugged of mountainous terrain that you could, you know, probably find it will not even talking about Alaska Yeah, dad. The Forgotten border right yeah I mean I'm still waiting for for like the book on or an entire body of literature on that

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and I've forgotten border. I don't know if you know do you know David McCready strangers. I had him on a panel once and he said, this is now maybe 10 years ago, but he said he was starting to maybe work on a book on the Yukon Alaska border.

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Wonderful he was he was really generous.

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When it was when I was traveling to the archive and I think Manitoba. One of the archivist said, Oh, you know this was really when I was starting out and I didn't, I was, this was one of my first archival trips, the archivist was like oh you have to meet

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David McCready, who at the time I think was working sort of in private industry I haven't spoken to him, you know, in a while, and then he was working for the Manitoba government.

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Yeah, yeah. And so, like, the artifice was like you know let me call him and see if they'll come have lunch with you.

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And I just finished reading his book and it's, you know, really, really thoughtful and he came down to the archive and just brought some of his research notes with him and saved me an awful lot of time, where he was, you know, he just sort of laid out,

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you know, these collections I don't think we'll have what you want.

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These ones you know you can have my notes if you want them but you know these are the ones that I found a lot of material and for those of you who haven't been to the Manitoba archive it's, it has an incredible repository of knowledge but it's not well

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organized. You know, sometimes the description will say something like, you know, there's 500 meters of records, you know if you laid the papers that then way and it will just be you know three sentences of description like the Attorney General papers,

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this like, you know, just this unwieldy amount of information, and so having someone generously provide you with with at least a little bit of a guidebook on, you know, where you might spend your time when you only have a week in an area is a real kind

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gift. So I get glimpses of this and acknowledgments where we're trying to as quickly as possible, not forget names, but behind that is just, yeah so many people that I just cold called or emailed and were so generous and, and without which, you know,

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Melissa was able to do.

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But more than 100 people helped by the end, you know David McCready being sort of one of them.

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And I think that's sort of the beauty of scholarship. You know some of these projects we can't do on our own, and and you know just either it's I sort of sending ideas you know and talking about all the citations I use where people have actually helped

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me understand the border and sort of a much more nuanced way. And that I think is the profession working it's best sometimes. Yeah.

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Well what about the border makes this a particularly Western story. What about the US, Canada Border is uniquely important to understanding the West as a region.

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I think there's there's a few things. So, when I was growing up I always thought if the border is the sort of peaceful place.

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You know, we think of the borders the longest undefended border in the world. And maybe with respect to other borders, it is, but if you actually start reading some of the history it's, it's actually quite violent.

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And, you know, one of the reasons.

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One of the reasons that the violence is so tied to this border is it's so big. Right. And if you think about just the logistics of serving a border like this.

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So you've got a couple guys with some chains and some horses, and you need to walk, the length of the Kennedy US border we're talking, you know 5000 miles.

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And, but they're walking into territory, they don't know right there surveyors you know they're sort of the vanguard of colonialism, which means they don't know where things like water are so you might know where the 49th parallel is because you've got

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all this, this crazy good equipment, but you don't you don't know the basic things about where to find food or water and so a lot of it is deeply tied to indigenous communities, you just you require them either for labor or for information.

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But even once you survey a border like this, you need a reason for it, or it is really really expensive to send these people out. You know, one of the crazy things that they do is they do what are called tree cuts, which are basically to see the border,

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you need to cut trees on other side otherwise you're just putting a you know a couple stones in the middle of a forest and no one could see them. You're only putting these stones every couple miles.

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But, but you're doing that across a continent. Every forest you come across on the border, you've got to cut. And this is such back breaking work that almost everyone who does one round into the forest quits.

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You've got to care you know 5060 pounds of supplies and then you you set them down and you're walking back miles and miles and miles.

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And then the people out there are chopping.

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And if they don't get food there they're coming home, and so logistically This is really painful it's really really expensive, which means you have to really want a border.

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You know, it's, it takes hundreds of people to survey these borders, it takes, you know, lots and lots of money it takes time it's there's a there's a risk that you're going to run into some violence while you're doing it.

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And so one of the interesting things is you need a reason to want a border as weird as that sounds.

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And so a lot of that actually comes from moments of of rupture. So, on planes its violence the Cypress Hills massacre and these other sort of moments of violence that show that neither Canada or the United States has any real power in the region.

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In the West, all this anti Chinese violence. There's riots there's expulsions there's, there's this unending sense of unease. And so in each region. The reason the border sort of forums plays out for a slightly different reason but you need the sort of,

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even this catalyst to justify the expense the initial expense of surveying and marketing is border in the first place.

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And so I think one of the big surprises for me was, was how much of a Western story this is how regional pieces of the border are and as you form each of these pieces.

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It sends a sort of peace back to the border as a whole. So from Chinese Exclusion we get a lot of focus on paperwork and sort of the administrative structure that that allows you to monitor the movement of people, because people are really expensive to

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track.

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So each, each region is back on how the border is going to grow in a certain direction.

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And another thing that struck me as unique in the Western and I think a theme that we don't talk about a lot.

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You we've throughout this text, not just how the creation of the border is linked to colonialism and indigenous dispossession.

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I think that's part of our general narrative and, but You talk a lot about Native peoples, not as just hapless passive victims, but how often the creation and maintenance of the border was entirely dependent on Native cooperation, active native participation

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in creating the border.

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And I'd like to discuss a few examples of that. But as I think about it, is an idea that I think needs to be exported to the west more broadly or thought about more we often talk about Western.

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You know native non native relationships.

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But solely through the, the lens of antagonism, but very little that the United States ever did in the West happened without native participation, not of all natives but of certain groups right that the only success they had was built on on their participation.

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Let's talk about a few of these moments, talk to us about. What was that again, because I'm Pacific Northwest kid, about the boundary condition,

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using native quarters and canoes and laborers, to get up to that just incredibly rugged, you know, cascade region to do as you're saying this tree cut right and all that so how did they use native.

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How to native peoples participate there.

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Yeah, so So this is sort of a really interesting story so I was looking at some of the most boring records that i think i've ever looked at, which are just boundary condition records so the people who are building the border.

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And I was sort of looking through and I was looking through their playlist, and I was like you know who is actually. Who do you pay to do this kind of work and it's normal people that you'd expect like astronomers and, you know, scientists and you know

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in the United States military personnel who are sort of trained in this in this large body of Labor's, and all of them are white.

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And I'm like, well, this is, this is a little bit, little bit surprising I was like, you know, surely they hired at least one indigenous guide somewhere.

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And so you know I keep flipping through and it's just you know, white people white people white people.

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And then we get to the supply section and sort of on a whim I'm like, you know, what do they bring you know i don't know and some of its really wild, you know they're bringing China plates they're bringing hundreds of pounds of sugars, thousands of pounds

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of supplies that bringing like just enough lumber, that you could build a whole city with, you know, the actually supplying these these people is very very time consuming.

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And as I'm looking through this you know they're bringing marmalade to bring you know the officers are sort of dining on fine china and all of this stuff in the soldiers are living in a ship life.

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They're poorly fed they're being swarmed by mosquitoes. You know there's a real difference between sort of the the leaders of this expedition and the people below them sort of reading through the supplies I start to see all of these indigenous people

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who are listed in the supplies, not as laborers. So it'll just be this this reference to, you know, Scoble and 28 indigenous lay person I'm like, Oh, that's interesting.

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And they're supplying canoes, and they're supplying food and they're, you know all of these different things. And it just keeps happening over and over throughout the supplies, and what I what I realized is they were just classifying indigenous people

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very very differently than the laborers themselves.

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And so I said about just actually trying to figure out you know how many people are involved.

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And it works out to about five ish percent of the laborers, the sort of by day, are indigenous.

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And that doesn't sound like a lot, But when you start to look at what they do.

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You realize the surveyors just can't do their job without these people. So these are all of the guides, these are these are a large portion of the people transporting this insane amount of supplies.

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And if you think about it, it's really really annoying to be traveling and suddenly find a body of water and not have a canoe.

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And so these indigenous guides are bringing, not just infrastructure with them they're building it with them. You know, when they hit some of these bodies of water they simply build canoes in the field, which means you don't have to portage this canoe,

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you know, up a mountain, or you know all of these other things and so it's.

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You can hear it in sort of the diaries of the people who build the border. How very important you know this this numerically small group is to the actual success of the border.

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You know that you know they'll, they'll say things like, you know, we just couldn't have done it, you know and understand sort of fundamental level and you can you can actually see it in how they move.

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So the Northwest Mounted Police if we move regions a little bit are really frustrated with their matey guides, their matey guides, every time they hit water.

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The matey guides are saying, No, we're going to take a tea break. And so they'll take eight or 12 breaks in a day and the northwestern police officers are just dying at the speed at which they're moving they just can't believe that they're moving so slowly.

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And you can really see the power dynamics, you know, despite, you know, being utterly frustrated and wanting to fire these people 100 times over.

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They can't.

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And the matey guides know how very dependent, the Northwest mountain police are on them and the same is very true in the Pacific Northwest where you want it to talk where, you know, you have to surveyors, and you have 30 indigenous people hauling supplies

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for them.

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And that's the only way they're getting up some of these mountains, you know, otherwise you have this, you know surveyor with, you know, three 400 pounds of supplies that they need just to live while they're going up and down this mountain.

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It just, it would have taken years longer, you would have needed much larger teams if you could even get them out there, you just would have been a disaster.

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And so you just sort of as you look through these unusual records, these, the supply lists and things like that.

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You get a much better sense of how vital. All of this is like you said, and it's not just across the border it's across all of the administration in the West.

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Yeah.

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So, how do we understand then.

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I mean it was especially shocking.

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With the Northwest Mounted Police.

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How kind of feeble and incapable they were at those early stages right to move around on the plains and whatnot.

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But you do say that native peoples cooperate and help more often than they obstruct. Hmm. So, one of the reasons for this. What are native peoples in making strategic decisions.

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Even if, in hindsight or in the macro level, we can see that they are eating in processes that that they that may hurt them in the long run right, helping the Northwest Mounted Police to set up and control their lands right.

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So one of the strategic decisions they're making or why they make these decisions to cooperate and to help.

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So, and this is going to depend on every single group and that's sort of some of the complexity of this is you know there's more than 500 federally recognized groups in Canada and similar number in the States, and all are going to make decisions for slightly

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different reasons. Some of it is just being a good host, you know, settlers are not the first newcomers to the region you know there's there's indigenous people moving all over the continent.

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And so there's there's sort of basic ways that you, you, you sort of deal with and handle outsiders. And often it's, you know, a pretty generous hand.

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The other piece, though, is in a lot of ways protecting or helping to build some of these national borders is a way to protect indigenous borders.

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So you know, being able to bring say the US military near-ish your lands was one way that a number of groups used to keep Canadian indigenous groups out of Buffalo hunting territory by essentially saying you know this border, they're not allowed to cross

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and in turn that helps protect some of my lands in the long run, that isn't necessarily a great strategy but it's one of those things were at the time.

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That's not something you could have ever predicted, you know, the, the, the geopolitical changes that happen across the continent, are some of the fastest that you'll see and it's brought about by starvation and and many other things.

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But at the time, a lot of the decisions that indigenous people make are really quite intelligent they're quite adept you're, you're bringing in powers to play off against one another.

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You're, you're supplying, you're getting allies for trade or military.

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You know and like and like you said it doesn't play out like that in the end but at the time that people are making these decisions they're quite intelligent.

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Yeah, this is a theme or an approach that I think needs to be thought about by a lot of us, and complicating how we think about the agency and decision making.

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It's often much more strategic and nuance then.

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And we often describe it as you spend a lot of time, not explicitly but implicitly demonstrating how the US Canadian border was built in opposition to the reasons for which the US Mexico border was built the ways in which was built in the ways in which

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it was administered as this more cooperative venture between United States and Canada as allies or peers, right.

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So, talk us through some of that what what makes. How does that influence the US Canadian border in its creation and how is it so fundamentally different than the other border.

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Yeah, so it's what the start, you know, there's a lot of the same processes happen, you have the border being cut through indigenous lands you have your station soldiers and all of these other things, you know, sort of, from an administrative perspective,

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it looks like it might follow the same path, initially, and I think there's a few sort of key differences. One of them is just the United States just doesn't respect Spain and later Mexico, it doesn't respect the military, you would annexes California

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and a bunch of other places it says very little respect for the sort of military capacity of either country, that's not necessarily true of Canada.

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Because Canada is strong and Canada is basically no military to speak of.

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But Canada doesn't become independent fully from Britain until something like 1980, some ridiculous.

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We later. And what happens is, so we mark Kennedy's birth in 1867 with Confederation, but it's a really really slow process of divestment, so in 1905 you have Britain removing its Garrison's from Halifax and Eskil malt, you know it doesn't sign its first

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international treaty until the 1920s, there's all of these different markers, it doesn't declare war independently, you know until you know the mid, 20th century.

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And so this is really really slow move away from Britain and Britain, United States does respect the military of, you know, it's not, it's not a country that I think it wants to try and bully.

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For the most part, and it realizes that you know it can take a lot of different approaches to influence in Canada, and it's very expensive to fight wars.

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There's these beautiful cartoons in the late 19th century that show Uncle Sam standing beneath a tree and above his winning class every semester, it's beautiful and above him are all of these different apples, there's Cuba there's Puerto Rico, the Philippines.

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And, and there's a bunch of in his basket that he's already collected and there's a bunch on the tree and one of them is just Canada, sitting there and the caption and I'm sure you can correct me if I get this a little bit wrong as us a little bit too.

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It's not quite right but off.

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So it's waiting.

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And I think that's sort of the USA stances, you don't we don't need to rush this, you know they're at the at the time that they could have annexed Canada easily.

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They're actually moving heavily sort of into an economic control kind of thing, you know that the sort of banks that Canada's using this transition from British banks into American banks, and they're gaining the kinds of leverage and control they've always

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wanted, but they don't need to risk a military invasion or the expensive military invasion, they're able to create this, this sense of control, without it.

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And and this idea that Canada is sort of a brother from a common mother, or you know, ambivalent allies there's hundreds of terms that scholars have used to try and describe this this relationship, but there's an idea of similarity in a way that I don't

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think exists among the US Mexico border.

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But on the ground, that's not always good cooperation.

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I mean the records I've seen you know the US military is always complaining about the Mounted Police and how they're not doing what they need to be doing on their side, and vice versa or think about when the border is used by people to escape right natives,

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African Americans, you know after The Fugitive Slave Act.

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The two countries don't automatically cooperate and extradite people, as, as the other country is always requesting. Yeah.

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So, I came across the extradition records in Canada, Britain and the United States. And this was the first time I've hired a research assistant and I was like, I'm going to give you an easy task.

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I thought it was easy and like most of the things that I try and do to be horribly complex, which was entered the British records. Enter the American records and just link them, and they're just going to line up right because this is the highest level

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of of law, right this is, you know, so high that these these are charges that are seems so important that we have to have an international agreement just to deal with them.

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And the people who are dealing with this are high ranking, you know diplomats and government officials, and I thought for certain that these were going to line up.

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And they don't like the British, you can see the Canadian side of the negotiations. And you could just have next door the American ones and you could just link up the two sides of these conversations and negotiations easily was not not even that, I thought,

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you know, it would say in the British records this person is extradited on this date for this crime, and the American records and British records would agree on that and they don't, it's this wild system.

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And part of the reason is because the extradition system does not work.

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It's expensive, it's slow. And worst of all, for many of the people on the ground right these are sheriff's who are dealing with local problems where people are swirling around them across this border, and they're not thinking about, you know, big macro

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diplomatic pictures they're thinking, well, I just need to prosecute this asshole in my community, who's making a mess of things.

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And so what they decide they try and bring all sorts of charges up that don't fit the extradition system.

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So you can extract for a murder, but you can't extradite for abortion. And so what they'll do is they'll start, they'll start bending the system in these impossible ways.

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Well, I can't extradite for abortion.

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But isn't that just another kind of murder they would say, right so they would first request an extradition for abortion, it would be denied. And then they switch the charge to murder.

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Right, or you know maybe they can't charge for embezzlement, but they can charge for forgery. And so, even the basic things that people are charged with change in our Benton is really awkward and creative ways as people on the ground trying to make this

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extradition system work for them. And in essence, what begins to happen is they get so frustrated with the system that doesn't work for what they want it to do that they just start making homegrown solutions, especially in the West, BC is just rife with

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these were essentially the way, there's a couple different ways it works.

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But one way is you follow the sort of Sheriff across the border and you say, look, there's there's this guy, you know he's wanting my community, you want to, you know, let me over and you and I will go and find them and we'll just, we'll tie them up and

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and we'll drag them back across the border and and we'll try him. And when you have something like that you know you just phoned me up, and I'm going to come over with you and you know it's going to be a partnership.

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Because, so both people are so frustrated with the sort of federal system, that they're trying to reimagine a system on the ground.

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And in essence, what you're doing is just kidnapping, you're just it's just state sponsored kidnap involvement sponsored often just the local guys doing their thing.

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And that's what that's what the sort of interesting thing is the state keeps getting these complaints where you know people are kidnapped get lawyers and they say you know what is going on this clearly can't be legal and US and Canada sort of say, Well,

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I don't know. It's all right.

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And basically what happens is they sort of turn a blind eye, and there there are general ruling is.

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This is a matter of diplomacy between countries, not a matter of individual justice.

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And so if if Canada complains the sort of the nation state complaints that one of their citizens has been unduly hampered, then maybe we'll think about this returning them on a diplomatic stance.

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But you get a bunch of Supreme Court legislation in the United States starting in the 1880s and then later reinforced in the 1940s it says, in essence, It doesn't matter how you come to the United States.

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Once you're in the United States will prosecute you and this is sort of an open door to bounty hunting to.

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They're called extra legal renditions that sort of the legal term for, but essentially state sponsored kidnapping or kidnapping, that is later accepted in some way.

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States and Canada will take a slightly different approach, although it will take a little bit longer to get there were increasingly even today.

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Canada is a little bit less comfortable with just essentially underwriting kidnappings of foreign nationals or, or even its nationals, as a way to sort of bring them back to justice.

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And so this is, this is actually a real divide that forms over time between how they conceptualize justice along the border.

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So how do we explain some of these really prominent cases of native border crossers like, you know, sitting boulders to Canada, and candidate is not extradite them, they don't come back out or, you know, little bear or Louie Riel comes down to the United

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the United States, the United States doesn't round them up and deliver them to the Canadian authorities, so.

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So there's lots of moments of on the ground cooperation.

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Extra legal, and then federal acceptance of it but there's also moments of not cooperating.

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Is this can speak to kind of just the unevenness of how the power of the border is imposed and just so many varied ways.

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Yeah, and this is also, this is sort of one of the surprises that I came across which is you know if you think about you. For the first time in a region, and you're trying to make it matter to people's lives.

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And there's two sort of approaches you can take one of them is hard and one of them is really easy. So the hard way is you station a bunch of guards and you try and actually monitor movement, and is brutally hard even today, people cross the Kennedy US

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border on announced, you know that you can you as you say in Montana and Alaska and large parts of the border, you can just walk across.

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The second way, which is much more powerful and a lot more subtle is you actually constrain your own power first.

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So you say my law will not go past this line, so many ways you're curbing your own power by saying you know I could reach across this border and bring you home.

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But one of the ways you make it meaningful as you make the last stop at the border.

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And this happens with administrative policies, it happens in sort of hundreds of different ways. And so one of the first things that the border divides is the nation states the sort of federal infrastructure that manages these borders.

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And I think part of that is, is what we see with sitting ball and, and others where you know you you could extend your power across this this nation state, but you don't and so there's sort of this parallel set of processes that are happening that are

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really interesting so on the one hand you're expending all of this money building this border, because you want to gain control over this region.

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And at the same time there's always this this enticement to break your own border, and grab these people who you desperately want. And so this is sort of one of the big balancing points between if you if you keep reaching across and always grabbing people

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then your border becomes less and less meaningful.

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But if you don't reach across, right, in some ways, you're tying your own hands. When you had the power to do something about it and so my first book is about how you build the border and the second book is about this parallel process where it's, you

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always want to reach across and there's all these cases where they are reaching across, but then you have other cases like sitting ball and real and others.

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And in a lot of these cases you can see this really interesting discussion on the ground. You know where they, they were planning to send soldiers American soldiers up to grab Sitting Bull, there was long negotiations about this, and they just decided not to

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not to partly because major hatches horses all die, Montana is, is, you know, Montana and then sort of the the northern West and Canadian south or just brutal on horses.

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And so, you know, and people get sick in these regions a lot, you know this, the soldiers are not in good health and so sometimes something as silly as horses, just all dying or people getting sick, or what determines whether or not you know you reach

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across this border or not. Other reasons why we did reach across the southern border differently.

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we, we range, deep into Mexican territory, chasing Apaches and others.

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Yeah, so I think, I think a lot of this is sort of a respect is is given to Canada that isn't given to Mexico.

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Because there's there's always there are there are moments for American soldiers cross into Canada to kidnap or to chase Raiders like the same albums Raiders.

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So it's not like this doesn't happen, you know, especially draft Dodgers are sort of a common place that that US military people sort of cross or interfere.

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But it's kept sort of a little bit lower, and, you know, it's sort of individual outbreaks of this, less sort of, you know, whole units going across.

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And I think a lot of that is just that that respect I was talking about, and that fear that you know if you if you aren't careful, you're going to start a war with the British.

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That is going to be really expensive and good for no one.

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And that fear just doesn't exist south of the border. Yeah.

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Well, we need to wrap up.

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Again, as we've already.

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You kind of accidentally hit and started talking about all the topics I wanted to talk about before I brought them up. That's really great.

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But again, I just wanted to you know underscore for listeners, you know why they should pick up the book

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on its, you know, by the title, you might imagine, the big macro level administrative history that would be very.

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That might not be the most engaging, but what's so great is that you tell that macro history, but mostly through individual people and lies and lived experiences, and I thought that gave us a really, really unique power that I was not anticipating.

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So I really, I really appreciate that approach.

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That's that's wonderful to hear that was one of my goals. I think what this book was I was, I was tired of reading books that weren't accessible to the public.

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You know, I think one of the sort of beautiful things about history is the highest level research is accessible to the public in a way that you know biochemistry will will never be.

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And so, and I think it's because we have this shared experience through stories.

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And so, I spent a lot of time trying to find these these wild and crazy stories about, you know, people getting shot across borders and all of this stuff because you can understand so much to these these lived experiences like you say, Yeah, well you've

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already told us about what you're working on next. Do you have any closing thoughts about how we might need to change how we think about the border today.

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Yeah, um, you know, this has always sort of an interesting question so I spend a lot of time, like learning about how borders work and one they work well.

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And one of the sort of the scary parts about this is you know the way that you make a border, really, really powerful is you affect people not

at the line itself you affect them at their homes before they start their journey.

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Right.

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And, and so you know I'm always sort of asked you know, how would you change borders for the better.

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You know, I think, you know, if you want the border to be more severe, the further inwards that you can move that border so it's not just you have to you have to beat a border once at the line, you have to keep beating it sort of over and over.

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I think that's one thing that you can see today is the legacy of what they learned in the 19th century, where you now see you know constant request for ID cards, things like that come out of the 19th century frustration with you just can't guard either

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the US Mexico or the US, Canada Border at the line people always cross but if you can extend the moment at which they have to keep proving themselves.

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You know that's that's an effective way to, to, to build the border, but it's also a really awful way in terms of their people's lived experience right it's sort of a border of fear and terror.

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And I think that's one of the sort of negative legacies that you see from the pieces of my work and others that I think we want to reimagine how we build borders, you know, we don't have the technical limit limitations of the 19th century, where they

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just simply couldn't do things you know the world we live in is quite different. And I think it's worth reimaging how you police a border in a, in a way that is less damaging to the people who live their lives in its shadow.

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I mean this is where we get a few years back and however, which is 2025 30 miles from the border that there are two.

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Two women I think like in a parking lot at a grocery store or something speaking Spanish, and the Border Patrol.

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Stop them, and detain them, right, not at the border.

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But 30 miles from the border, we see that even more extreme on the cross the southern border with the Border Patrol operating far distances from the border.

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Yeah. And that's the legacy of the 19th century.

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Well, thank you for spending some time with us, and we look forward to you trying to untangle extradition and make sense of that, hopefully you can employ many more research assistants to help you to help you make sense of it.

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Yeah, I hope so because those stories are absolutely wild.

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The number of sort of crazy stories about people getting tricked and kidnapped and you know lured into on fishing trips or by beautiful women in order to get them across the borders is wild and crazy but like you said, it's this huge, massive story that's

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more than half a million documents long So, hopefully, We'll look forward to that and you know 3040 years.

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thanks so much for having me. Take care. Bye.

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Well that's it for this month, thank you so much for listening and I hope you'll subscribe. Please leave us a review on whatever app or platform you're listening through or follow us on Facebook at writing westward podcast or twitter at writing West and

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We have an annual funding cycle with awards grants fellowships in categories that nearly, anyone researching and working on the region from nearly any disciplinary approach or towards nearly any kind of final product can apply.

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Our theme music was provided by local Utah composer, Micah doll Anderson find him at [Micah Dahl Anderson](http://MicahDahlAnderson.com), Anderson was a no.com. I'll put a link in the episode description.

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My name is Brian Wansink I serve as the podcast host producer sound engineer publicist just about everything else. so you can direct praise or critique my way.

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I'm the author and editor of a number of books and other studies on the west Borderlands native peoples genocide studies religion, and the environment to contact me about the podcast my own research, or just about anything else had to be w ransom.org.

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Until next month. be well be curious, and be kind.