

**Jolly, Joanna. (2019). Red River Girl: The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine.
Toronto: Viking Press.**

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Joanna Jolly's book, "Red River Girl: The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine," explores the 2014 Winnipeg murder that paved the way for significant policy changes in the Canadian government and criminal justice system. Throughout her analysis of police notes, transcripts, recordings, trial testimonies, and interviews, Jolly explains the police investigation process and the agency's pressures to find her killer. Jolly's book "Red River Girl" also brings light to the heavily unreported violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada that has persisted for several decades. The book also identifies how Canadians have failed to protect and support their Indigenous counterparts. She does so by examining the consequences of Residential Schools on Indigenous families and how Child and Family Services' ineffective practices contribute to these adverse effects, and how the criminal justice system further perpetuates discrimination and callous treatment of Indigenous people. These racist systems and ideologies that Jolly identifies contribute to the overarching theme of perseverance demonstrated by the police force and the Indigenous population in the face of adversity.

As Jolly illustrates, the "policies aimed at assimilating the 'Indian' into a European and Christian way of life" that were the basis of Residential School teachings, which acted as a "cultural genocide that shattered communities, tore families apart, and frustrated the ability of generations of parents to raise their own children" (pp. 32-33). In these schools, "students were

treated harshly, forbidden from speaking their own language, isolated from their families, starved, and often sexually abused” (p. 34). As a result, many individuals who returned from residential schools suffer from severe substance abuse and addiction and struggle to maintain healthy, stable relationships. Jolly exemplifies the lasting effects of these schools when describing the ways that Child and Family Services attitudes reflect a “continuation of the colonial belief that Indigenous families couldn’t take care of their own children” (p. 37).

With these discriminatory values in mind, Jolly examines the various criticisms of Child and Family Services (CFS), specifically regarding their relationship with the Indigenous community. First of all, Jolly highlights the eagerness for CFS to place Indigenous children into the foster care system. For example, Jolly states how Manitoba has “the highest number of children in care in Canada, and the vast majority of these [are] Indigenous” children (p. 34). Moreover, CFS takes Indigenous children out of their home when they are babies, rather than providing these families with long-term support that would enable them to care for their children in a safe and stable environment.

Additionally, CFS engages in practices that endanger the children's lives in their care, which has significant impacts on the Indigenous community. Retracing Tina’s final months leading up to her death, Jolly notes several times that CFS failed to protect her; claiming Tina’s biological mother was sober and able to care for Tina, then stating that this interaction never occurred; using hotels as temporary housing due to a lack of foster homes and shelters; and contracting out supervision of their children in the hotels. As Jolly demonstrates, these systems allowed Tina to

remain under the CFS's radar, encouraging her engagement in dangerous and illegal activities. Accordingly, these CFS procedures disproportionately affect Indigenous youth and leave them vulnerable to the city's streets' predatory environment.

Since Indigenous youth are at a higher risk of being exposed to high-risk activity, they are also at a higher risk of being the victim of crimes. For instance, Jolly notes that "Indigenous women [are] 4 times more likely to be murdered or go missing" and are "more likely to be killed outside the homes by strangers or 'casual acquaintances'" (pp. 23-24). This disproportionate victimization of Indigenous women is directly related to the racist and sexist police operations Jolly features throughout the book.

Jolly provides numerous examples of police misconduct towards the Indigenous population, some of which directly affected the circumstances leading up to Tina's death. For instance, police had been found to turn "a blind eye" when Indigenous girls were being harassed for sex and often failed to "question whether the girls were being groomed or coerced into sexual activity" (p. 20). In Tina's case, this carelessness resulted in the police's failure to notice that she was not only a minor but a missing person when she was in the passenger seat of a suspected John's vehicle. Similarly, rumours surfaced about "patrolmen who'd had sex with girls they booked for prostitution" (p.58). This lack of appreciation by the police for the lives of Indigenous girls contributes to how "the justice system as a whole . . . [has] failed Manitoba's Indigenous population on a massive scale" (p. 20).

Throughout her book, Jolly illustrates the century of adversity faced by the Indigenous population of Canada and their ability to persevere, advocating for protection, justice, and rights.

Jolly quotes Raven Thundersky, an advocate for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and girls: “I can’t remember the last time – and I mean for Aboriginal women- when the last time was that we were actually able to see the face and have the name of one of the murderers responsible for taking one of our women” (p. 23). Likewise, Jolly states how news of Tina’s death shocked the people of the Sagkeeng reserve but did not surprise them:

The reserve already held the dubious distinction of having the highest number of missing and murdered women and girls of any Indigenous community in Canada. Activists spoke of how poverty, lack of jobs, and overcrowding were forcing women to leave and find work, separating them from their community and making them vulnerable. . . But it wasn’t only when they left that Sagkeeng women faced danger. It was impossible to grow up on the reserve untouched by domestic violence, abuse, addiction, mental illness, or suicide (p. 32).

Moreover, Jolly’s purpose for writing the book, enlightening readers on the police’s hardships during the investigation of Tina’s murder, reflects the theme of perseverance. As she describes, “the reaction to the not guilty verdict was one of sadness, frustration, deflation, and anger” among the Winnipeg Police Service (p. 274). “The Homicide Unit firmly believed Cormier was guilty, and that they did everything they possibly could do to bring him to justice” (p. 274).

Through the in-depth narrative of Tina’s life, murder investigation and trial, Jolly achieves her goal of publicizing the police investigation path and the pressures that they faced. However, she also accomplishes the publication of the inequalities and hardships experienced by Canada’s Indigenous peoples that have gone unheard and unrepresented in mainstream media. As Jolly asserts, “Tina was repeatedly failed by the systems meant to protect her, including Child and Family Services” (p. 275). As a matter of fact, it is through the analysis of the adverse societal

conditions experienced by Indigenous peoples that Jolly explains the various strains on the Winnipeg Police Service when working on her case.

Jolly's intended audience is the general public. While individuals interested in true crime, the criminal justice system, or racial inequality would find "Red River Girl" particularly intriguing, its entertaining but informative description of settings, characters, and obstacles makes it fitting for all audiences. Academically, the book allows for an examination of the Canadian justice system, socio-economic climate, and Child and Family Services.

I would argue that Jolly's work is a creative source that can be used to educate the general public about Canadian's dark history of abuse and neglect of its Indigenous population. Furthermore, it clearly exemplifies the ongoing cultural and political challenges that act as "'race-based genocide' against Indigenous women" in Canada (p. 275). I found "Red River Girl: The Life and Death of Tina Fontaine" to be enlightening and entertaining, as well as an engaging reading experience. The book was well-structured and easy to read. I would recommend it to anyone, especially those interested in topics relating to the justice system or racial inequality.