



## Histories of Indigenous Peoples and Canada



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*JOHN BELSHAW, SARAH NICKEL, AND CHELSEA HORTON*



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Cover: Indigenous women were a key part of the wage-labour workforce in the industrial canneries of the northwest coast.

“First Nations women eating ice cream.” 1913, BC Canneries. Steveston. Photo by F. Dundas Todd. VPL Accession #2111.

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# Acknowledgement

Here, in 2020, it is customary to begin a meeting or an event with what is called a “territorial acknowledgement” of our presence on traditional Indigenous lands. Sometimes the traditional territory is covered by Treaty (as is the case across the Prairies and in much of the rest of Canada) or not (as is the case across most of British Columbia), in which case the term “unceded” is sometimes used. ‘Treaty,’ however, does not equal ‘ceded’ in every case. What’s more, some lands – such as Señákw (aka sənáʔqʷ, Kitsilano Point, False Creek Indian Reserve No.6) – are ceded but not covered by treaty. It’s complicated. But in every instance, the acknowledgement makes visible the historic and ongoing colonial reality and relationship.

Chelsea Vowel (aka âpihtawikosisân) – a Métis writer and lawyer – provides us with some thoughts and guidelines respecting the use of territorial acknowledgements [here](#). She argues that acknowledgements can shake us where we need a bit of shaking:

If we think of territorial acknowledgments as sites of potential disruption, they can be transformative acts that to some extent undo Indigenous erasure. I believe this is true as long as these acknowledgments discomfit both those speaking and hearing the words. The fact of Indigenous presence should force non-Indigenous peoples to confront their own place on these lands.

With this in mind, we – the three authors of this work – acknowledge the territories on which we live, work, and enjoy our lives. These are the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples (specifically, the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh, and Snaw-Naw-As Nations) and Treaty 6 territory – the Homeland of the Cree and Métis nations as well as the traditional homelands of the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota, Dene, and Saukteaux. Thompson Rivers University – Open Learning is located in Tk'emlúps in Secwépemc territory and this is a part of the world with which several of the people involved in this project have a deep personal and intellectual connection. None of the lands of the Secwépemc peoples were ceded through treaty; we are guests. We hope that our efforts reflect favourably our desire to be worthy guests.

In addition to these heartfelt acknowledgements we would like to express gratitude for the significant support and resources contributed to this project by Thompson Rivers University – Open Learning. Specifically, thanks go out to Dr. Michelle Harrison who got this off the ground and Melissa Jakubec who ensured a safe landing. Cory Stumpf handled the lion’s share of editing and production, for which we are thankful and Brenda Smith gamely and without complaint handled library and copyright queries. BCcampus – and specifically Mary Burgess and Amanda Coolidge – continues to provide support and build legitimacy to Open Educational Resource projects of this kind. Of course, we have also been urged along by various family and friends who see in this project something of importance and value. To all of these individuals we offer our sincerest thanks.

This book is the culmination of years of collaborative reading, writing, editing, talking, rewriting, rethinking, reflecting, and growth. It could not have been done by any one of us; it could only be done by all three.

This is a book about the past, but all books of history are inevitably about the future. People in the past made decisions and choices based on the kind of future they imagined they might have. Sometimes that future looked promising, sometimes far less so. But this is the curious thing about humans: every choice they make, every turn they choose to take, every time they set off in whatever direction ... it is about the future. Choosing to write a book about Indigenous histories is also about an imagined future. And we would like that future to be one in which Indigenous histories are visible, celebrated, told, respected, valued, and even marvelled at. And we’d like that to be the experience shared by the coming generation that includes the tiny person who was born to one of our number in the course of writing this book, and to whom it is dedicated.

# Dedication

*Ruby Louise Nickel Sabine*

# About the Book

*Histories of Indigenous Peoples and Canada* was conceived in 2016 as material in support of a new 3rd-year History course at Thompson Rivers University – Open Learning. The need for such an online course was underlined with the release of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015. In the process of developing the curriculum, it was decided that the part you see here could be shared as a stand-alone Open Educational Resource (OER)<sup>1</sup> in the form of an open textbook. Thompson Rivers University actively endeavours to decolonize and Indigenize its larger project; making this document available as an OER is consistent with those goals. Open textbooks are OERs created and shared in ways so that more people have access to them. This is a different model than traditionally copyrighted materials. OERs are defined as teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. This open textbook is openly licensed using a [Creative Commons licence](#) and it is offered in various e-book formats free of charge. For more information about open education in British Columbia, please visit the [Thompson Rivers University – Open Learning](#) website and the [BCcampus Open Education](#) website. In particular, please consult the [BCcampus Adoption Guide](#) (2nd edition or later) and the [Faculty OER Toolkit](#), both of which you may find useful.

Written by John Douglas Belshaw along with Sarah Nickel and Chelsea Horton, the project complements the BC Open Textbook Project undertaken by BCcampus. It is based in some sections on Belshaw's earlier open textbooks, [Canadian History: Pre-Confederation](#) and [Canadian History: Post-Confederation](#), some of which was contributed by other writers. Again, it was devised with a specific curriculum in mind and is not intended to meet the goals of every similar course, nor could it hope to do so. As is the case with any open textbook, it is a resource that you are invited to explore, use, revise, improve, set aside, return to....

1. "Open Educational Resources," Hewlett Foundation, <https://hewlett.org/strategy/open-educational-resources/> (accessed September 27, 2018).



# PREFACE: THE INDIGENOUS AMERICAS SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL



# I. Klahowya

This greeting comes from the Chinook language, an international language crafted between Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest long before contact. It was subsequently appended with words from English, French, Cree, and Hawaiian. It was widely spoken even among settlers in the late nineteenth century and it survives – a few words here and there – in the vocabulary of British Columbians and Washingtonians. It reflects centuries of efforts at understanding one another. So, welcome to *Histories of Indigenous Peoples and Canada*.

Like all History textbooks, this one deals with what happened in the past. It also deals with *how* we know what happened in the past. It is a combined study, then, of knowledge and the nature of knowledge. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century the historical study of “Indians,” “Natives,” and “Aboriginals” in universities and colleges was contextualized within the story of colonization and growing European influence. Whatever justification might be mustered for that practice, it had real and dire effects: Canadians – including many Indigenous people – came to understand Indigenous histories as tangential, small, unimportant, and even a blind alley. This kind of thinking enabled Canadian authorities and citizens to regard Indigenous communities as being “without history,” as in, *outside* of history. And no one outside of history is going to fare very well.

The times in which we now live have raised the profile of Indigenous experiences and perspectives to levels unseen in the ‘mainstream’ for ten generations or more. We – all of us – are those Canadians invited to engage in the Truth and Reconciliation process. Some truths are unknowable but what we *can* know, what truths we *can* distill from the past will be essential to the long hard climb toward reconciliation. This is an urgent necessity.

At the outset it must be said that a single *history* of Indigenous peoples – in the sense of a comprehensive textbook – would be impossible. Nations such as the Wuikinuxv (a.k.a. Oowekeeno), Tahltan, and many other peoples in what is now British Columbia, a great variety of peoples of the sub-arctic like the Tutchone, Kaska Dena, and Sahtú, and virtually all of the many distinct Inuit communities are barely mentioned and some are not mentioned at all. These are vast territories, there are so many communities and nations, and there are simply too many experiences to contain in one survey text. Another feature that must be acknowledged here is that the topics covered in the textbook reflect some of the contours of Canadian history generally: Part 1 starts on the east coast; the histories of conflict covered in Part 2 also begin in the east and move westward over a period of four hundred years. As you might imagine, it was difficult to totally escape the trajectories of colonialism in building this resource, not just because some of those narratives are familiar and thus easily – though not slavishly – followed, but because this is where the greatest amount of research has been done. These structures and conditions, then, simultaneously gave shape to our approach and resulted in some nations getting more of the spotlight and others getting none. It is regrettable...but not irretrievable! One of the opportunities presented by an open textbook is that shortcomings can be rectified by users, be they instructors, students, or communities.

This Preface introduces you to some of the practices and challenges of Indigenous history, focusing on the nature and quality of sources, innovative historical methodologies, and the leading historiographical trends (that is, what historians are thinking very broadly and what they have studied in the last decade or four). It turns, then, to histories of Indigenous peoples in the Western Hemisphere before ca. 1500. The twelve chapters that follow are arranged under three headings: Commerce and Allies, Engaging Colonialism, and Culture Crisis Change Challenge. And there is a thirteenth chapter that brings us deep enough into the twenty-first century to allow a visit with two of the most important recent developments in Canadian civic life: Idle No More and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Both of these processes arose from the failures of colonialism and the resilience of Indigenous communities; they reveal, therefore, as much about the history of Canada as they do of the historical experiences of Indigenous peoples.

An exploration of the sources of knowledge about Indigenous histories reveals not only the raw materials of the historian’s craft but some of those colonial biases that have conditioned public and specialist understandings of the past. And that is to what we will now turn.

## 2. Listen Up



Pictographs such as these near Canmore, Alberta, are a continent-wide phenomenon. Source: [Maureen Flynn-Burhoe, Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

The *idea* of “history” is not an unchanging one in any culture. Whether it is mythic, heroic, or civic, the story of the past serves a particular purpose and audience. As is the case with the oral traditions of many Indigenous nations, the oral tradition of the Hul’qumi’num-speaking peoples of the Coast Salish nations observe a difference between *syuth* (true histories) and *sxwi’em’* (fables and moral tales).<sup>1</sup> The two are not necessarily at odds and may complement one another. In either form, one common function of histories across cultures is that they legitimate a society’s claim to be where it is. This is not the same thing as a claim to territorial sovereignty or ownership; it begins with a statement of belonging *with* and sometimes to the land. Histories, then, can be highly metaphorical, if metaphor serves the history’s purpose best.

1. Brian Thom, “Coast Salish Senses of Place: Dwelling, Meaning, Power, Property and Territory in the Coast Salish World,” (unpublished PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2005), 81.

For millennia, Indigenous history was maintained by many means. Some Indigenous societies in the Western Hemisphere produced written records for centuries before Europeans arrived.

## The Written Record

Sébastien Rale, a Jesuit missionary in Wabanakiak (a.k.a.: Acadia) in the first two decades of the eighteenth century, observed figurative writing among his hosts:

While I was endeavoring to recover from my fatigue, one of the [Abenaki] who had camped on the Seashore, and who was ignorant of my return to the Village, caused a new alarm. Having come to my quarters, and not finding me, or any of those who had camped with me, he did not doubt that we had been carried away by a party of Englishmen; and, going on his way in order to inform the people of his own neighborhood, he came to the shore of a river. There he stripped the bark from a tree on which he drew with charcoal the English surrounding me, and one of the number cutting off my head. (This is the only writing of the [Natives], and they understand each other by figures of that kind as well as we understand each other by our letters.) He immediately put this sort of letter around a pole, which he set up on the shore of the river, so that passers-by might be informed of what had happened to me. A short time after, some [Natives] who were paddling by the place in six canoes, for the purpose of coming to the Village, perceived this sheet of bark: “Here is some writing,” said they, “let us see what it says. Alas!” exclaimed they on reading it, “the English have killed the people in our Father’s neighborhood; as for him, they have cut off his head.”<sup>2</sup>

As the Jesuit missionary observed among Wabanaki peoples, some Indigenous peoples maintained records in material forms. The practice of doing so extended well beyond the northeastern regions. Pictographs and petroglyphs are two well-known examples. Written/drawn documents include *Nindoonem* pictographs. Anishinaabeg signatories in the contact era deployed their *Nindoonem* as a kind of official seal with remarkable consistency across generations, although European observers regarded them as little more than illiterate sketches (sometimes used as signatures).<sup>3</sup> *Wikhegan* (mostly maps inscribed on birch bark) are another Anishinaabe document, as are images carved into the living wood of trees, which were commonplace in the Northeastern Woodlands and the Atlantic region. The “Midewiwin scrolls” associated with the Anishinaabeg medicine society of the same name are considerably more complex documents. Their subject matter ranged from maps (like the *wikhegan*) to spiritual tales and lessons. Niitsitapi (a.k.a. Blackfoot) and other Plains peoples inscribed their histories and personal accomplishments on their robes and the walls of their *tipis*. Not surprisingly, all of these are images whose information is dependent on an interpreter, and these skills became less and less common as alien diseases, warfare, and relocation interrupted the connection between the past and its heirs. And,

2. Sébastien Rales. “Letter from Father Sébastien Rales, Missionary of the Society of Jesus in New France, to Monsieur his Brother.” In *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, vol. 67, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: The Imperial Press, 1900), 132–229.
3. See Heidi Bohaker, “Reading Anishinaabe Identities: Meaning and Metaphor in Nindoodem Pictographs,” *Ethnohistory* 57 no. 1 (2010): 11–33.

of course, records made of birch bark are by their nature highly vulnerable. Many, too, disappeared into the hands of Christian missionaries and collectors where they met with any kind of fate, including willful destruction.



A Niisitapi (Blackfoot) Warrior's Robe, containing a history of his campaigns and bison hunts. Source: Humphrey Lloyd Hime, 1858, Library and Archives Canada, C-18696, MIKAN 3243331. Copyright expired.

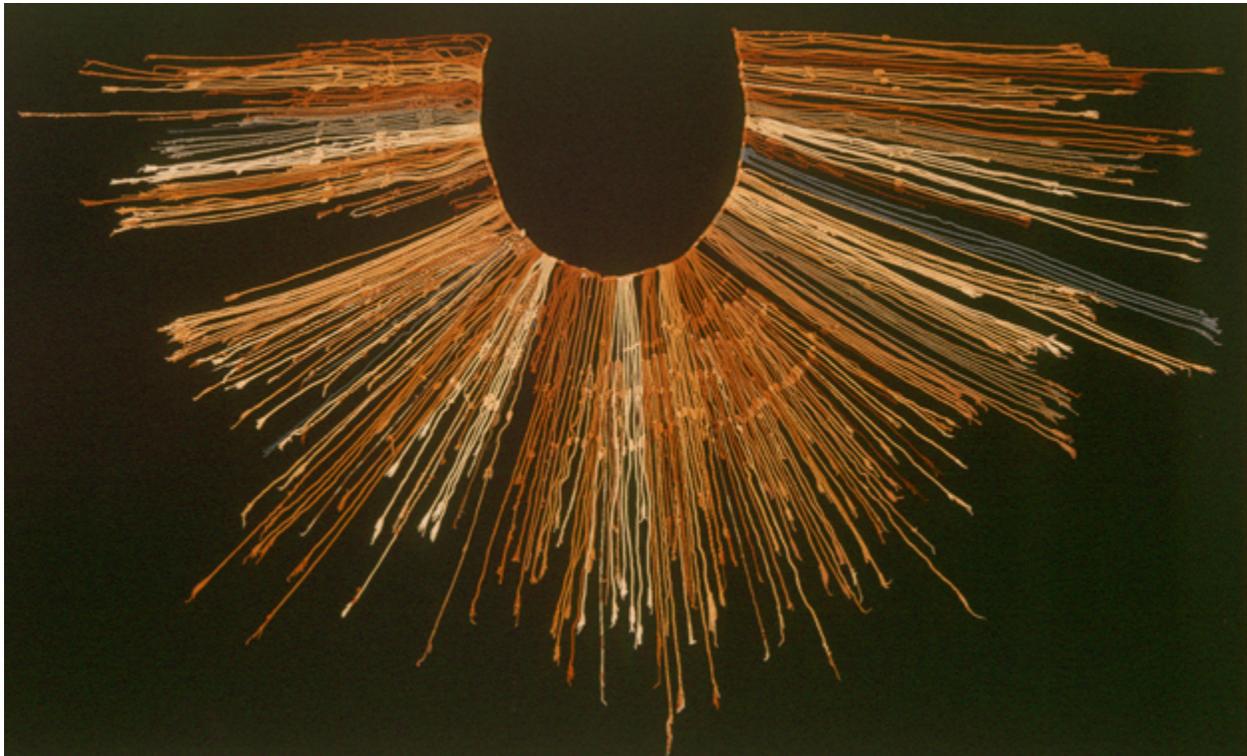
Most, however, relied on community memory rather than material records. Rigorous and highly disciplined memorization and ritual repetition stand at the centre of this process, as does community familiarity with a story. A succession event could, for example, call for the telling and retelling of family/community/clan histories. This takes place even now in many Indigenous communities where the preservation and presentation of histories remains a critical part of cultural and community resilience. What's more, events like the *potlatch*—a ceremonial giving away of goods, usually associated with significant community events like a leader's death or a marriage or an inheritance—had contractual elements that functioned like historic documents: by accepting goods at a potlatch, a guest/recipient took on the obligation to remember the event, to recall it, to validate it, to bear witness, and to pass on knowledge of the event to successors. (Nineteenth- and twentieth-century attempts by settler society to obliterate ceremonies like the potlatch and the Sun Dance thus threatened the very fabric of historical memory in Indigenous communities.)

It is for these reasons that oral tradition remains critical to the preservation of Indigenous histories. In Indigenous traditions, the ownership of a story—something that is handed down through generations—invests the account with its own importance and meaning. In Gitxsan territory, the hereditary houses own an *adaawk*—a collection of sacred oral

tradition about their past and their lands; likewise, their neighbours the Wet'suwet'en refer to *kungax*—a dance or song in which their connection to the land is performed. Whether recounted as a story or danced or sung or performed in some other way, the history is regarded as consistent and reliable. Over time, some stories—especially if they migrate from traditional languages to a different language—might acquire more contemporary elements. A new language might require a new metaphor, for example, in order for it to make sense. The ability to relate the story well and truthfully, however, is paramount. European observers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries commented repeatedly on the oratorical skills of Indigenous speakers (and similar comments would be made on the West Coast, on the Plains, and in the far north in later centuries). What they were witnessing was the fruit of a venerable tradition of speaking and knowledge-sharing that adhered closely to the core elements of a story. On the whole, Indigenous audiences regard oral accounts of the past as valid and trustworthy.

What's more, many Indigenous societies embraced—and continue to embrace—a circular or cyclical view of time rather than a linear view (the perspective espoused by European societies). Like the seasons and the rotations of the moon, time was generally regarded as a pattern of renewal. Ascendant young leaders inherited the position and the name of their predecessor in what was, theoretically, a renewal and not a replacement. The Aztec calendar effectively rebooted every 52 years. Euro-Canadians who look for Indigenous historical knowledge that runs parallel with the linear traditions of the Judeo-Christian world will mostly be frustrated. Myth, metaphor, and allegory loom large in Indigenous tales of the past, partly because “the past” is expressed differently in different cultures.

Privileging the written word, European and Euro-Canadian historians overwhelmingly disregarded and sometimes disparaged the oral tradition. This behaviour was typical of many Europeans in the Western Hemisphere. The Spanish were the most explicit and obvious in their hostility toward Indigenous historical records, destroying written and inscribed accounts throughout the Aztec Empire; in the Incan Empire they destroyed *quipu*—mnemonic assemblages of knotted strings that could have represented any number of record types—and prohibited their use and study. In New France, British North America, and Canada, the colonialist strategy was more subtle: it simply denied the existence of a historic past.



An example of a quipu from the Inca Empire, currently in the Larco Museum Collection in Lima. CC BY-SA 3.0



Remarkable robes – like this one made by Mary Ebbetts Hunt (Anisalaga) in the late 19th or early 20th century – were mislabeled by non-Indigenous collectors as ‘blankets.’ Thought to have originated with the Ts’msyan (a.k.a. Tsimshian), this kind of weaving is found on the northwest coast from Kwakwaka’wakw territory north to Tlingit lands in Alaska. The ‘Chilkat Blanket’ is, in fact, a ceremonial device covered in symbols elaborating the status of the wearer. Honolulu Museum of Art, accession 4183, reproduced on Wikipedia. CC-0 in the public domain.

Take *čəsnaʔəm*, or the Marpole Midden, a traditional village and burial site of enormous importance to the Xwméthkwiyeḡem (a.k.a. x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əy<sup>ə</sup>m or Musqueam) First Nation in what is now the city of Vancouver. A roadbuilding crew exposed the site in the 1880s and a systematic academic archaeological dig got underway, one that lasted until the 1950s. The evidence pointed to occupation that stretched back at least fifteen hundred years and abandonment sometime in the mid-1700s. Even in the mid-twentieth century, commentators wondered who the occupants of *čəsnaʔəm* might have been, despite the fact that their descendants—the Xwméthkwiyeḡem—made the provenance very clear. The *Ottawa Citizen* newspaper in 1948 took the view that, whoever they were, the people whose remains constitute the Marpole Midden “. . . were not Indians certainly.”<sup>4</sup> This tendency to deny a history before colonization survives in the practice among some scholars and commentators—still found in some quarters today—to refer to the

4. Susan Roy, “‘Who Were These Mysterious People?: *čəsnaʔəm*, the Marpole Midden, and the Dispossession of Aboriginal Lands in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 152 (Winter 2006/07): 67–95.

period before the arrival of Europeans as “pre-historic.” The alleged absence of anything *verifiable* or *reliable* (essentially euphemisms for written documentation) allowed newcomers to write their own history over top of Indigenous histories.

What’s more, European and Euro-Canadian accounts of Indigenous societies proceeded from the perspective of newcomer needs, concerns, fears, ambitions, and values. An eighteenth-century fur trader from Montréal or the Orkney Islands is more likely to journal about beaver pelts than, say, Cree moral debates and Ktunaxa (a.k.a. Kutenai, Kootenay) understandings of the past. In short, there can be issues with sources and with perspective. Europeans in the early contact period might transcribe Indigenous voices, but that is always *filtered* through the Europeans’ lens of what is important and how they understood the speaker. While these records ought not to be discarded out of hand, they are nevertheless accounts which tell us as much about the reporter’s perspective(s) as they do of Indigenous experience.

Academic historians’ approaches to Indigenous pasts began to change in the 1970s. Non-Indigenous scholars, such as Bruce Trigger, broadened their historical approaches to include techniques borrowed from several other disciplines, particularly ethnography. Described as “ethno-history,” this emergent methodology included paying heed to oral traditions. Inevitably, stories lined up with other evidence, enabling Trigger to transform understandings of the pre-, proto-, and post-contact history of the Wendat (a.k.a. Huron). At first, Western scholars were astonished that Indigenous knowledge included centuries-old elements. One correlation followed on another. A Huu-ay-aht story of massive loss of life resulting from a catastrophic flood on the west coast of Vancouver Island around 1700 was treated by settler scholars as a kind of allegory until it was connected with a significant seismic event and consequent tsunami that occurred on 26 January 1700. Indeed, the Huu-ay-aht story helped confirm the timing, character, and magnitude of the event. Farther up the west coast, the Heiltsuk (a.k.a. Bella Bella) people’s history includes the insistence that their direct ancestors lived in their region for many millennia; recent archaeological evidence validates this claim back about fourteen thousand years. By the 1990s, Indigenous people were growing visibly impatient with the condescension of academia: they had never doubted the reliability of this historic knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

## Naming Names

The issue of nomenclature looms large in the study of Indigenous societies in the past. You’ll find throughout this textbook that we have given precedence to names that may be unfamiliar. These are either the ancient, pre-colonial names of Indigenous communities and cultures, or they are the names currently preferred by Indigenous communities. To understand the importance of this issue, see the two-part Active

5. Pay a visit to Heiltsuk territory via their website: it highlights old village sites and food harvesting systems. [Húyat](#), accessed October 4, 2019.

History posting on this topic and the discussion by Chelsea Vowel.<sup>6</sup> There is, at the end of the book, a glossary of the names of Indigenous nations whose histories are surveyed or mentioned in the text.

In 1994, University of Victoria anthropologist and historian Wendy Wickwire published a landmark study of the Nlaka'pamux oral tradition.<sup>7</sup> In it, she compares Indigenous accounts—as told to a scribe nearly a hundred years earlier and as told to Wickwire herself in the late twentieth century—with the 200-year-old published accounts of North West Company trader Simon Fraser. The Nlaka'pamux stories meet Fraser on detail after detail, notwithstanding the fact that Fraser's own accounts come off in this comparison as self-aggrandizing and rather economical with the truth.<sup>8</sup> This study appeared at a time when land claims were advancing in British Columbia and demands for treaty negotiations were growing. Scholars like Wickwire, Robin Fisher, Catherine Carlson, Arthur "Skip" Ray, Victor Lytwyn, and many others were routinely called to appear in court to provide "expert testimony," while oral tradition was treated as unworthy of consideration. In 1997, Indigenous communities in Northern British Columbia made the challenge in court themselves. And they succeeded. In *Delgamuukw v. Supreme Court of British Columbia*, Chief Justice Lamer agreed that the courts have a responsibility to "come to terms with the oral histories of aboriginal societies, which, for many aboriginal nations, are the only record of their past."<sup>9</sup> A series of cases involving claims by the Tsilhqot'in Nation, beginning in 2009 and continuing through 2014, reinforced and expanded the courts' recognition of oral tradition.

In the twenty years since *Delgamuukw*, a number of trends have emerged in historical writing. More scholars have cultivated respectful relationships like those Wickwire nurtured with generous knowledge keepers in the Syilx (a.k.a. Okanagan) and the Nlaka'pamux First Nations. Increasingly, these have turned to life histories that remove the academic as the arbiter of information. The truth and complexity of memory and history become the principal message. This can be seen in *Written as I Remember It: Teachings (Pəms tαPaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder*, in which the stories and teachings of Elsie Paul are presented in collaboration with UBC historian Paige Raibmon and Paul's granddaughter,

6. Brittany Luby, Kathryn Labelle, and Alison Norman. "(Re) naming and (De) colonizing the (I?) ndigenous People(s) of North America – Part I." *Active History*, November 7, 2016. <http://activehistory.ca/2016/11/renaming-and-decolonizing-the-indigenous-peoples-of-north-america-part-ii/>; "(Re) naming and (De) colonizing the (I?) ndigenous People(s) of North America – Part II." *Active History*, November 8, 2016. <http://activehistory.ca/2016/11/renaming-and-decolonizing-the-indigenous-peoples-of-north-america-part-i/>; Chelsea Vowel, "A Rose by Any Other Name Is a Mihkokwaniy." *âpihtawikosisân*, January 16, 2012. <http://apihtawikosisan.com/2012/01/a-rose-by-any-other-name-is-a-mihkokwaniy/>.
7. Wendy Wickwire, "To See Ourselves as the Other's Other: Nlaka'pamux Contact Narratives," *Canadian Historical Review*, 75 (1) (1994): 1-20.
8. Similar and more recent developments in this field include Robin Ridington, "Dane-zaa Oral History: Why It's Not Hearsay," *BC Studies*, 183 (Autumn 2014): 37-63 and Iain McKechnie, "Indigenous Oral History and Settlement Archaeology in Barkley Sound, Western Vancouver Island," *BC Studies*, 187 (Autumn 2015): 193-229. While each new study reinforces the reliability and verifiability of oral tradition, none have appeared that offer a contrary view.
9. *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010, § 84.

Harmony Johnson (an engaged Indigenous scholar in her own right).<sup>10</sup> Collaborations of this kind take not only an enormous amount of time, but a deep ethical commitment to community-based research. And yet, the principle of respectful partnerships of this kind is visibly gaining ground, not least because, in the wake of Canada's recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools, post-secondary institutions are increasingly compelled to support it.

"Vindication" may seem like the right word here, but it has been more like an education.<sup>11</sup> Euro-Canadian society as a whole has been slow to grasp the strength and depth of Indigenous historical knowledge. Doing so, however, opens the door to a much richer understanding of the past. One historian, Bill Turkel, has written about "the archive of place," referencing the record of landmarks, footpaths, trade routes, fishing holes, hunting meadows, meeting points—all of which speaks to a living and current knowledge. These archives, however, are not public libraries. The knowledge is not customarily in the public domain. Indigenous societies speak of knowledge *keepers*, not necessarily knowledge *providers*. Under no obligation to disclose their historical knowledge, Indigenous peoples nevertheless have the right to demand truthfulness in historical studies.

## Resource

Thomas King is a storyteller who tells stories about storytelling. In 2003, he gave six Massey Lectures on the topic. Listen to as many as you like, but please be sure to listen to the first of them, in which he addresses creation stories.

King, Thomas. "[The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative](https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-2003-cbc-massey-lectures-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative-1.2946870)." CBC Massey Lectures, 2003. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/the-2003-cbc-massey-lectures-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative-1.2946870>

10. A digitally remediated version of this book has been produced by Paul, Raibmon, and Johnson -- along with Paul's grandson, Davis McKenzie -- and is available through [RavenSpace Publishing](#).
11. Note the appearance of the word in the title of this important article by Gitxaala knowledge-keeper and anthropologist, Charles Menzies, "Revisiting 'DM Sibilhaa'nm da Laxyuubm Gitxaala (Picking Abalone in Gitxaala Territory): Vindication, Appropriation, and Archaeology," *BC Studies* 187 (Autumn 2015): 129–53.

### 3. "Since time immemorial."



*Burial mounds, like this one on the rainy River, were produced in significant numbers down to about 1100 CE. They aren't artifacts of a "vanished civilization"; the descendants of the people who built them in all likelihood still live nearby. Source: J. V. Wright, A Late Western Shield (Laurel) Culture Burial Mound on the Long Sault Site, 1972, photograph, Canadian Prehistory Series, National Museum of Man, reproduced in Canadian Museum of Civilization, "Late Western Shield Culture," A History of the Native People of Canada, Vol. II (1,000 B.C. to A.D. 500), accessed December 16, 2013, <https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/archo/hnpc/npvol25e.html>*

Indigenous people often use this phrase to describe the temporal depth of their connections with ancestral lands. It sounds at one and the same time both grand and uncertain: it could mean thousands of years or as little as a few generations. The Heiltsuk, a seagoing people who make their home on British Columbia's central coast, have always maintained that they occupied the same place since beyond memory. Recent archaeological work on Triquet Island produced evidence that aligns with these claims, revealing occupation and land use dated back about fourteen thousand years.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, in a geologically volatile area where some of the most likely sites of occupation long ago sank into

1. Randy Shore, "Heiltsuk First Nation Village Among Oldest in North America: Archeologists," *Vancouver Sun* (Vancouver, BC), March 28, 2017, <http://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/heiltsuk-first-nation-village-among-oldest-in-north-america-archeologists>

the sea, we can be confident that ancestors of the Heiltsuk were well established around 14,000 BPE.<sup>2</sup> This is one of the oldest sites of human occupation in the Americas. It throws a wrench into the dominant theories of human migration into the Americas. It raises the very real possibility that the Americas were settled long before scholars down to the twentieth century were prepared to believe—and long before humans reoccupied northern Europe after ice sheets receded.

Anyone who is even slightly informed on this topic knows that Indigenous peoples are not recent arrivals in the Americas. Still, it happens from time to time that someone will say something to minimize that unimaginably lengthy connection to these lands. In the summer of 2017, then-Governor General David Johnston asserted that [all Canadians are immigrants, including Indigenous peoples](#) – even though he allowed that the initial waves of “immigrants” arrived fourteen–fifteen thousand years ago.<sup>3</sup> By this definition, virtually *every* human society *everywhere* is an “immigrant” society, rendering Johnston’s point doubly ridiculous. Sadly, Indigenous claims to belonging to this place—the whole of the Americas—have been systematically and repeatedly disparaged and treated with disbelief. In the history of land claims in the courts, it is common to find a refusal on the part of colonial society’s lawyers and judges to accept the possibility of long-term occupancy. Worse, for hundreds of years the onus has been put on Indigenous communities to prove their tenure rather than on the settler society to disprove Indigenous assertions of belonging.

As historical matters go, this is telling. It reveals something of the extent to which Indigenous histories remain eclipsed by the story of European imperialism, the growth of a trans-Atlantic economy, colonization, and the narrative of the nation-state. It is reinforced by the Canadian tendency to think of the country and its people as “new” and even “without history.” The “Canada 150” celebrations in 2017 were seized upon by Indigenous people as a chance to challenge that dominant narrative: even if we were to celebrate four hundred years of European settlement along the St. Lawrence River, that’s not one-twentieth the tenure of the Stó:lō on the West Coast or the Dane-zaa in the Peace River Valley, to take only two examples. When people say that Canada is a “young” country, they overlook the evidence of thousands of years of Indigenous human occupation, activity, and stories, privileging the last five hundred years over the preceding ten thousand to fifteen thousand years.

How do we correct that imbalance? “History” has been deployed for generations as an instrument of royal, imperial, and nation-state legitimacy. It has been thus in Europe, Asia, Africa, and, indeed, even among Indigenous societies globally. It isn’t an *accident* that modern histories overlook competing claims to territory, resources, or sovereignty; until recently, that has been the principal point of historical writing. It was, if you like, the job description. To that end, historians in the academy have focused their attention on stories of colonization—that is, on post-1500 tales of encounters with and, ultimately, conquest of the peoples and places of the “New World.” This creates and perpetuates the sense that there is a rupture in the histories of Indigenous peoples that begins roughly five centuries ago, and that the stuff that really matters happens thereafter. Without doubt, the kinds of documents on which academic historians of North America principally depend arise in this post-contact era; the pre-contact past is not, however, unknowable, and traditional Indigenous keepers of historic knowledge are certainly proof of this. At the very least, we can paint the

2. BPE—or Before the Present Era—is the dating system most often used in archaeological contexts. It refers to carbon dating that uses 1 January 1950 as the base year. 14,000 BPE might be represented as 12,000 BC (“Before Christ”) or 12,000 BCE (“Before the Common Era”), which is essentially the same thing. In the interest of consistency, we will use BPE in this course as often as possible when looking at events occurring more than four thousand years ago (that is, circa 2000 BPE or older). More recent than that, we will use the Gregorian system for the last four thousand years, which is divided in two. That is, the two thousand years BCE (Before the Common Era) and the last two thousand years or so, described as CE (Common Era).
3. David Johnston, “Governor General Apologizes for Indigenous ‘Immigrants’ Comment,” CBC News: *The National*, June 19, 2017, video, 2:15, <https://youtu.be/HLIMlp4fFhs>

picture in broad brushstrokes and look for patterns of continuity and even for fracture lines that pre-date the contact era.

## 4. Human Occupation to ca. 1300 CE

Modern humans were on the move twenty thousand to fifty thousand years ago. This is when they arrived in Western Europe, Australia, Asia, and Siberia. We can be confident that it was in this period, too, that modern humans made their first forays into the Americas. Glacial expanses covered northern Europe, Asia, and much of what is now Canada. These conditions limited movement in some directions while enabling it in others.

Two principal human migration models are widely accepted. The first and most well entrenched is the Beringia land bridge thesis, which posits that the last major ice age drew so much water out of the oceans that the Bering Strait was exposed land (albeit much of it covered in ice). That means that 50,000 to 10,000 years BPE, humans and other fauna could have occupied various niches in Beringia, gradually and incrementally working their way east into the Americas. This was not a stampede, or at least it is unlikely to have occurred that way. There are reckoned to have been at least four distinct migrations of humans across Beringia, the last occurring around 11,000 BPE.

Archaeologists and anthropologists in the 1960s and '70s pieced together a model of migration that involved an ice-free corridor to the east of the Rockies. This is the area where two major ice sheets—the Laurentide and the Cordilleran—met. If the ice sheets parted long enough, if food resources were sufficient, and if the landscape was passable for humans on foot, then this thesis would help explain the relatively early appearance of human-made artifacts in Tse'K'Wa (a.k.a. Charlie Lake Cave near Fort St. John, British Columbia) and Clovis, New Mexico.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, however, this theory has been challenged in two ways. First, the evidence that there were sufficient resources to sustain southbound human populations in the corridor is thin and, according to some, unconvincing. Second, while a study of bison populations shows that the genetic pools of northern herds from Alaska and the Yukon did in fact mix with those of southern herds—strong evidence of an ice-free corridor—that scenario offers an alternative possibility: perhaps humans followed the southern herds *northward*.<sup>2</sup>

With these concerns in mind, a second theory has become more widely entrenched. Ice sheets posed no barriers to sea-borne peoples who, over generations, island-hopped from Asia to the non-glaciated coastal regions of the Americas (beginning roughly at the forty-ninth parallel). This explains the early appearance of human artifacts on the central coast of British Columbia and at Paisley Caves in Oregon. Once into the unglaciated regions, human migration accelerated and expanded eastward and southward, perhaps mainly continuing along the Pacific coast. Monte Verde in Chile has yielded evidence of human occupation dating back 12,000–14,800 years, although more recent data suggests an even older occupation date of 18,500 BPE. If these discoveries hold up, then it follows that humans were on the Northwest Coast long before they [left footprints on Calvert Island](#).<sup>3</sup>

These two models reflect what is sometimes called the “short chronology theory,” which argues that the earliest human migrations came after the greatest extent of the last ice age. A “long chronology theory” suggests that human migration occurred earlier still, as much as 40,000 years BPE. Bluefish Caves in the Yukon have yielded evidence of a human presence 28,000 years BPE, but these findings remain somewhat controversial.

What is perhaps most remarkable is the speed of this human movement. Scholars debate the motivations of early occupants of these continents: were they pushed or pulled into new territories? Were they fleeing bad conditions or

1. Jonathan C. Driver and Mariele Guerrero, eds., *Archaeological Work at Tse'K'Wa* (Burnaby: Simon Fraser University, 2015).
2. Beth Shapiro et al., “Rise and Fall of the Beringian Steppe Bison,” reproduced in Driver and Marielle, *Archaeological Work*, 107–8.
3. Terry Glavin, “What makes the Ice Age Footprints Found in B.C. so Remarkable,” *Maclean's*, April 4, 2018, <https://www.macleans.ca/society/north-americas-oldest-human-footprints-are-in-b-c-and-older-than-anyone-thought/>.

drawn farther east and south by promising resources and better weather? The answer is probably a mix of all these factors, but—without underestimating the real magnitude of a thousand years here and a thousand years there—it seems clear now that modern humans had, by about 12,000 BPE, occupied many distinct and unique niches in what we think of as the Western Hemisphere.

Forty years ago, the consensus among scholars was that this settlement was perhaps half as old. Indigenous stories, however, consistently pointed further back in time and even pointed to specific locations. Archaeological finds move the academically-approved arrival date back every year or so, moving it ever closer to where Indigenous sources have planted their flag. The likelihood of archaeological science going much further must be increasingly slim. Some of the most promising sites for earliest occupation are submerged beneath the Pacific Ocean, compromised by other natural environmental changes, or paved over by modern settlements. For our purposes, however, the date does not need to be extended deeper into the past. Humans have been in the Americas for about fifteen thousand years, building communities, developing values and beliefs, naming things and forging languages, experimenting with economic activities and systems of government, and from time to time, moving about. We need to acknowledge, too, that for many thousands of years the Indigenous peoples of the Americas have been writing the history of Turtle Island in their memory.

## Origin Stories

Indigenous societies have their own accounts of the beginnings of the human presence in the Western Hemisphere. These stories are both historically grounded and contemporarily relevant; they describe real lineages and places, albeit usually with the use of metaphor. These stories link Indigenous communities directly to the places they occupy, and sometimes to places their ancestors abandoned.

Most of these traditions contain similar—and familiar—elements. Typically, they start with a first woman or man, sometimes with a first couple. Oftentimes, these progenitors arrive out of the natural world, brought forth by animals or elements like the sky or water. While it is common to find the natural world making a conscious effort to produce the first humans, it is less often the case that an omniscient “creator” crafts humans who are separate from the rest of the world; there is rarely a division in these tales between humans and nature.

These elements are so widespread and so similar across the Americas as to constitute a tradition in their own right: humanity is an extension of the natural world—of flora, fauna, and even geology—rather than something new that was imposed on nature (as is the case in the Judeo-Christian tradition). In many of these sagas, humans interact and cooperate with animals (some of them capable of adopting different forms) and elements like the sea or the sky; in a few accounts, humans are very much beholden to and taking direction from animals and elements. All of these stories point to a very different understanding of the human relationship to “nature” or, more broadly, the whole environment when compared with the views held by Christians and many Asian belief systems.

For example, the first Iroquoian—in the form of Kanien’kehá:ka (the name used by the Mohawk)—fell from the sky. An elderly couple of great virtue survive various trials to give birth to the peoples of the Earth, according to the Mi’kmaq. Animals play important roles in these stories as well. In the creation story of the Haida, Raven arranges things nicely and then releases the first humans from a clamshell. The Cree tell of the Earth mother’s offspring/agent Wisakedjak (a shape-changing and benign trickster whose name is widely

mispronounced as “Whiskey-Jack”), who peoples the world. And there are stories that involve a singular creator, such as the Niitsitapi (a.k.a. Blackfoot) figure Napi, who moulds the world and everything in it from a lump of mud. The oral traditions of the Lenape/Delaware and Iroquoian peoples, along with records from the Anishinaabe Midewiwin scrolls, refer to “Turtle Island,” a useful convergence of origin tales that has acquired broad acceptance among Indigenous peoples since the 1970s.

These origin stories encapsulated and shaped the worldview of each group, establishing their people’s purpose in this world as well as their relationship to the spirits and the world around them. In other words, origin stories are key to establishing a group identity and a deep connection with the region the people inhabit. It is also the case that these stories are invoked by Indigenous peoples as sufficient to their needs as regards history. Perhaps carbon dating can prove that ancient peoples crossed Beringia or paddled in proto-kayaks along the West Coast, but these stories retain their importance as allegories of cultural birth on an island of mud at a time beyond memory.

## The Archaic and Woodland Periods

From 10,000 to 9000 BPE, Earth’s climate began to warm, and the North American environment changed. A warming world created opportunities for plants to thrive and diversify. Huge lakes began to form as glaciers and ice caps melted. About eight thousand years ago, Hudson’s Bay began to take shape beneath the last major glacier. As a result, the northern coastline across what is now Nunavut was the last to take its recognizable shape. The disappearance of ice across the northern half of the continent allowed humans to reach the Atlantic coast and the Gulf of the St. Lawrence in increasing numbers. About 5,000 years BPE, the Arctic Archipelago emerged and humans began to make their mark on the far north, especially around the Beaufort Sea, but also in Nunavut. It was in this era as well that a human presence is detectable in what is now Ontario, along both the Great Lakes and the Shield. Over the next six thousand to seven thousand years, Indigenous cultures developed and diversified during the Archaic and the Woodland periods, 10,000–3000 BPE and 3000–1000 BPE, respectively.

Throughout most of this period and across almost all of North America, humans were dependent principally on food they could hunt or gather. The disappearance of megafauna created greater reliance on bison on the Plains and in most other parts of the continent as well—including the valleys of the interior of British Columbia. Indigenous peoples also made increased use of plant materials and, from about 9000 to 7000 BPE, West Coast societies started organizing themselves around salmon fishing and sea mammal hunting. The Nuu-chah-nulth of Vancouver Island, for example, began whaling with advanced long spears at about this time in their history. On the opposite coast, subarctic sea-mammal hunting got underway around the same time, enjoying a solid run to about 3500 BPE. Along both the Pacific and Atlantic, longhouses appeared as communities became sedentary (at least seasonally) and eager to take full advantage of ocean and foreshore resources.

It was, as well, during the Archaic and Woodland periods that the peoples of the Americas began to domesticate plants, leading to one of the most important transformations in human history: the development of agriculture. Conventional accounts describe Mesoamerica (the area between Central Mexico and Costa Rica) as the cradle of agriculture, but evidence exists for multiple sources. It is agreed, however, that the most complex farming societies first appeared in Central America and coastal Peru in the Norte Chico (or Caral-Supe) civilization. (In this regard, the original Indigenous farmers of the Americas were roughly contemporaneous with farming breakthroughs in China, the Middle East, and the Nile Valley.) There were many elements to this transition, one of the earliest being the growing of squash, attributed to peoples around Oaxaca, Mexico. Vines were tended so that the hard fruit could

be used as containers. Eventually, more tender forms of squash became a food source. Following the domestication of beans, around 6000 BPE, Mesoamerican peoples became more sedentary. Finally, maize (a.k.a. corn) was domesticated sometime around 5500 BPE. All of these crops were managed and selectively grown so as to improve their appearance and output. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the enormous variety of maize that appears across North America in the last three thousand years or more.

These three plants—corn, beans, and squash—constitute the “three sisters” at the heart of almost every truly agricultural Indigenous society, and were a mainstay of North American farmers. These are complementary crops in that their nutrients work well together in the human diet (although corn can be hard on the teeth), and they support one another in the fields. Maize stocks give beans a pole to climb, and the beans recharge the soil with nitrogen—which maize would otherwise exhaust on its own. Squash vines cover and cool the ground, preventing dehydration of the other sisters and fighting back competitor plants; their leaves compost naturally, assisting the work of the beans. Additional crops—tomato, potato, sunflower, tobacco, strawberries—were developed over thousands of years, several of them apparently showing up first in North America.

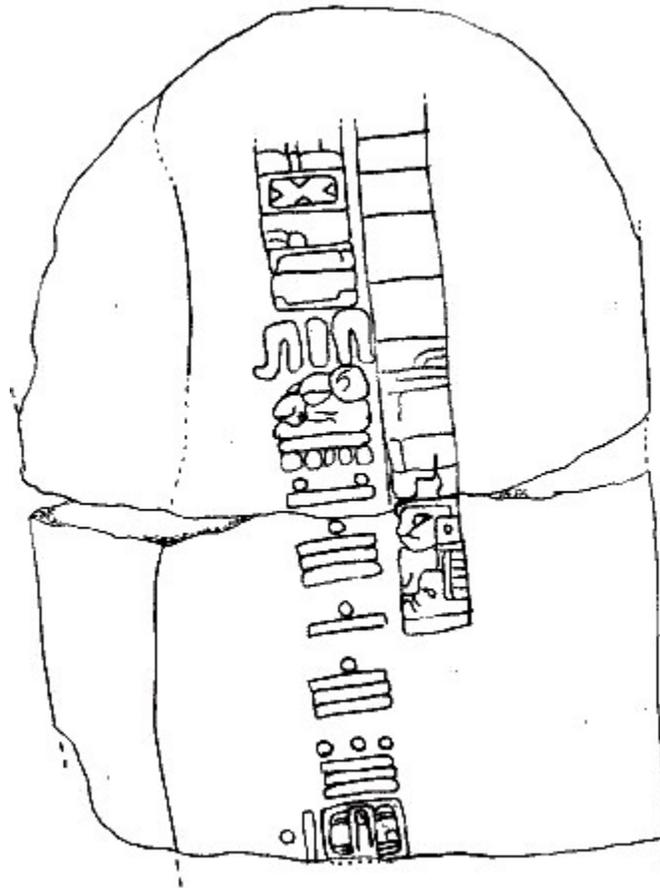
Indigenous peoples experimented with the domestication of animals, but there were few good candidates in the Americas. Turkeys and dogs were notable exceptions in Mesoamerica and further north. Horses, a species that may have originated in the Americas, disappeared along with the megafauna some eight thousand years ago. The remaining options were few. Mountain goats and bighorn sheep are fiercely recalcitrant creatures and almost impossible to contain, let alone domesticate. The Americas provided ample herds of bison, deer, and caribou, but no equivalent of African cattle to turn into a placid source of milk, meat, and hides. Most significantly, perhaps, there were no pigs or even boars to pen up and dine on. Turkeys were domesticated and they have the advantage of size and ease of capture, but they do not produce eggs (and thus offspring) as prodigiously as chickens.<sup>4</sup>

The ramifications of having few domestic animals are significant to the history of Indigenous peoples. The absence of large draught animals meant that land had to be cleared and prepared by human energy alone. Soil exhaustion could be mitigated to some degree by composting or using fallow field practices, and the ploughing methods used in Eurasia and Africa were much harder on the earth than the manual planting approach found across the Americas. But Indigenous farmers lacked access to the sort of fertilizers that cattle- and chicken-rearing peoples could exploit. The inability to secure a farmed source of meat-protein meant that Indigenous diets necessarily relied more heavily on wild game and fish for protein than was the case in much of Europe, Asia, and Africa. In urbanized places like the Valley of Mexico, deer and comparable prey were, not surprisingly, hunted to their limits. In more northerly territories, one strategy that was widely adopted was to become more nomadic or semi-nomadic so as to exploit scattered wild herds and distant spawning grounds; that mobility itself worked as a constraint against large-scale and concentrated populations. Mobility, as well, afforded the advantage of being able to avoid dependence on environmentally-vulnerable crops; against that, mobile foraging strategies imply smaller units of hunters and their families. Even the successful farming communities of the North were obliged to augment their agrarian economy with wild meat and fish, which is a much more time-consuming task than slaughtering hogs, regardless of the dietary advantages. Further, the lack of dairy animals precluded women from weaning their infants onto cow, goat, or sheep’s milk, which meant that infants were breastfed longer, and that, in turn, limited a woman’s lifetime fertility. Finally, the absence of domesticated animals meant that Indigenous peoples were not exposed to cross-species infections and epidemics. For fifteen thousand years or so this was a good thing, but after contact with Europe, Africa, and Asia it was disastrous.

4. Chickens were introduced to South America’s west coast in the early 1500s by Spanish ships sailing out of the Philippines. There is, however, tantalizing evidence that chickens reached Peru earlier via Polynesian routes before the Columbian era. Alice A. Storey et al., “Investigating the Global Dispersal of Chickens in Prehistory Using Ancient Mitochondrial DNA Signatures,” *PLoS ONE* 7, no. 7 (2012): e39171, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0039171>.

## The Last Four Thousand Years

When we speak of “civilizations,” we typically mean, first and foremost, the appearance of complex social orders that include social stratification (political elites, lower or commoner classes, and usually an official spiritual cadre of some kind), a significant concentration of population and households, and some specialization of labour (such as artisans, healers, engineers/builders, preparers of food, warriors, or spiritual leaders). In the Americas, the first such civilization arose on the Peruvian coast sometime around 3500 BCE: Caral-Supe or Norte Chico. About two thousand years later, the first major North American civilization—the Olmec—appears along the Gulf Coast in what is now southeastern Mexico. The Olmecs produced monumental stone sculptures and appear to have devised the first written language in North America. They may, too, have pioneered the Long Count calendar that was used and modified for thousands of years by different cultures across Mesoamerica. Olmec influence was extensive, and elements of it show up in almost all successor civilizations across Mexico and Central America.



A sketch of Stela C from Tres Zapotes, Mexico, shows the Epi-Olmec version of the Mesoamerican Long Count date of 7.16.6.16.18, which correlates September 3, 32 BCE. (Public Domain) Source: Locutus Borg, Estela C de Tres Zapotes, April 2006, sketch, Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tres\\_Zapotes#/media/File:Estela\\_C\\_de\\_Tres\\_Zapotes.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tres_Zapotes#/media/File:Estela_C_de_Tres_Zapotes.jpg). In the Public Domain.

Mayan centres began to appear around 1800 BCE and developed a strong agricultural and temple-building tradition, along with Olmec-style city-states. By 250 CE, the Mayan civilization entered into a long phase of stability and sophistication, which continued for another 600+ years. This makes the Maya one of the longest-lasting civilizations in

human history. Independent Mayan centres survived until the late 1600s and, although subjected to colonial oppression, there are reckoned to be some six million Mayan people today, many of whom continue to nurture elements of their ancestral cultures and economies.

Contemporary with the classical Mayan civilization, the city-state of Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico rose to prominence as one of the largest cities on Earth. Its foundations were laid around 300 BCE, and roughly seven hundred years later it reached its peak with a population estimated between 150,000 and 250,000 people. This put it into the top ranks of the largest cities in the world. Cosmopolitan and commercially dynamic, Teotihuacan—with its two massive pyramids—had a powerful influence on Mayan civilization at its peak, despite being a younger development. It was an important hub of trade, with goods arriving from both the Caribbean and the Pacific coast, as well as from what is now northern Mexico.

Teotihuacan collapsed around 600 CE for reasons that remain unclear. Other civilizations would pick up the slack in Mesoamerica, culminating in the Aztec/Mexica Empire (1428–1521 CE), which was centred on the massive city-state of Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City). This was part of a wave of Nahua migrations from northern Mexico, an area strongly associated with the cultivation of beans and other forms of dryland agriculture. The Mexicas' predecessors—including the Toltecs—had established powerful warrior-states and theocracies, a trend the Mexica copied and evolved still further. A theocratic empire based on tribute from its provinces, the Nahua/Mexica (still often referred to as Aztec) had an enormous range of influence at their peak. It is worth recalling, as well, that they originated somewhere close to what is now the American southwest, and so had connections that extended well to the North.

Remote though these Mesoamerican giants might be from the sub-Arctic and northern maritime regions of North America, their experiences point to some important long-term patterns. First, these were civilizations with staying power. Teotihuacan flourished for about seven hundred years; Mayan centres of worship, learning, administration, and commerce were around for nearly two thousand years.

Second, these were not stagnant or isolated communities. They engaged in trade, and their belief systems evolved, deformed, reformed, and changed—repeatedly. And they engaged in both warfare and diplomacy with their neighbours (near and far), developing complex systems of authority. The history of the Nahua in particular points to dramatic migrations of Indigenous peoples: they moved more than 1,000 km to set up their town—which became a massive city—in the Valley of Mexico. Indigenous peoples in North America—as per these examples—cannot be said to be either sedentary or persistently mobile: their civilizations both set down roots for millennia (as was the case on BC's central coast) and relocated in search of better prospects. An illustration of long migrations is provided by Athabascan-speakers who headed south from the Chilcotin Plateau to establish the Diné (a.k.a. Navajo) and Apache societies.

Third, the Mesoamerican civilizations towered over dozens of other civilizations and perhaps hundreds of smaller but significant cultural centres. Productive and complex communities were the rule, not the exception.

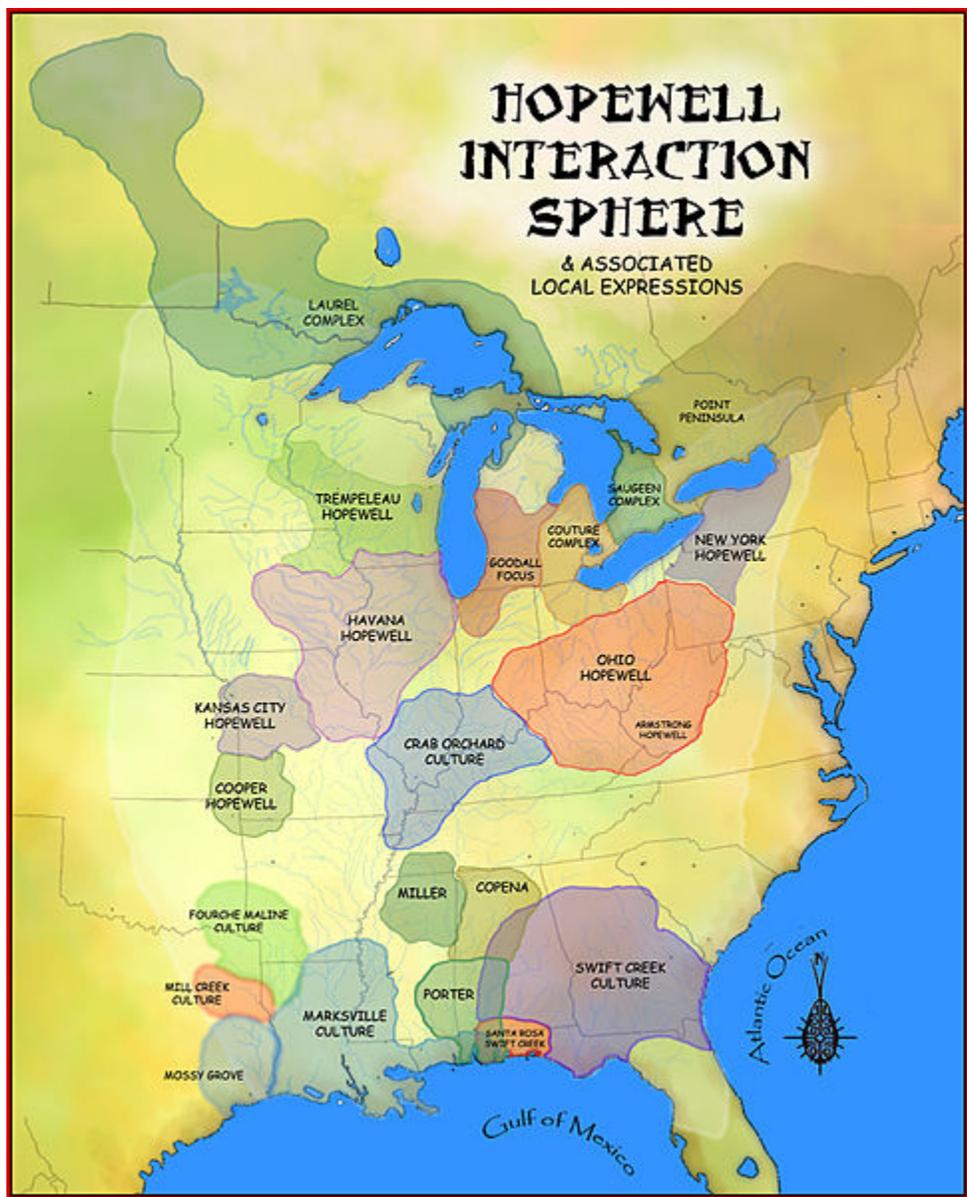
Fourth, collapse and renewal is an important theme. The Mexica/Aztec clawed their way to the top of a competitive league table of warrior and theocratic states. It wasn't all peace amid the cornfields prior to ca. 1500. Indigenous civilizations cycled through infancy, maturity, decay, and collapse, and this was something that was known to their citizens. The Mexica, with their cyclical and fatalistic view of the cosmos, knew that their meteoric rise would end in a fall.

Finally, the spread of Mesoamerican agricultural knowledge throughout North America tells us something about the connectedness of these communities. Whether directly and suddenly or through a more incremental process of diffusion, the major civilizations around the Caribbean appear to have had an influence on much of the rest of North America in terms of agriculture and civic organization. The Mississippi River and its tributaries were to play a key role in this process.

## An Era of Plenty in the Centre of North America

Agricultural communities spread through the centre of North America from about 200 BCE to 500 CE. These are

associated with what is called the Hopewellian tradition. The Ohio Valley, the western Hudson Valley, and the lands draining into Lake Michigan are all candidates for the earliest expressions of this culture. It consisted principally of trade in goods, and is marked by an elaborate network of commerce along river systems. A trademark feature, as well, is ceremonial or burial mound building. These features can still be found in areas north of the Great Lakes. The Laurel Complex is an example. It extended west to east from central Manitoba across northern Ontario to southern Québec. This culture is expressed in archaeological remains dating back as much as 2300 years before the present (ca. 300 BCE), and it lasted until about 900 CE. Clusters of mounds near the north shore of Lake Superior along the Rainy River at Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung (now a National Historic Site) are a reminder of this presence in the heart of what became Anishinaabeg territory. Linked to an important river corridor leading north and west, this cluster of villages would have been an influential and prosperous marketplace.



Hopewell exchange network. (CC BY-SA 3.0) Source: Hieronymus Rowe, Hopewell Exchange Network, February 2, 2010, map, Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hopewell\\_Exchange\\_Network\\_HRoe\\_2010.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hopewell_Exchange_Network_HRoe_2010.jpg). Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.

Roughly contemporaneous with the Laurel Complex is the Point Peninsula Complex, a trade network also strongly identified with elaborate ceramics traditions. Ceramics—both in Point Peninsula and in Laurel settings—tell us that these societies were becoming increasingly sedentary. Any kind of pottery, even the surprisingly thin kind produced in this area north of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes is—unlike tight-woven baskets—heavy and fragile and difficult to transport. Ceramics, however, are not necessarily evidence for year-round sedentism, although some permanent or at least semi-permanent villages were likely emerging at this time. Ceramic containers were used across the sub-Shield region for storing harvests of wild rice and other food products that precede the cultivation of maize in the North. As in the Laurel Complex, Point Peninsula sites contain burial mounds, including the Serpent Mounds at Keene, Ontario. These cultural complexes both declined around the time that full-time agricultural societies were making their appearance throughout the Hopewellian network zone.

Gathering and tending or encouraging plant growth was clearly well established across the northern half of North America by the time of Laurel and Point Peninsula. Elements of northern agriculture—specifically the cultivation of squash—have been dated at 2300 BCE. Maize first appears in the archaeological record around 500 BCE. Its arrival in the North is connected to the diffusion of the triad along the continent’s main river corridors. The Mississippian culture (ca. 500–1400 CE) fostered the spread of farming and extended—and expanded—the Hopewellian mound-building tradition. This was a large cultural complex that took in the Ohio drainage basin and all of the lower Great Lakes, and reached the southeastern-most points of North America.

The Mississippian civilization is marked by several important developments. These involve substantial urban centres, a stratified social order including a hierarchy of chiefdoms and spiritual leaders, a cadre of specialized artisans, and extensive commercial range. Matrilineality was another feature of the Mississippian culture, meaning that descent—and status—followed the mother’s family. Not all matrilineality in North America has its roots in this culture, but the Mississippian civilization ensured that matrilineality would become the dominant practice throughout the centre of the continent. In terms of their spiritual lives, the Mississippians developed a ceremonial complex that took root across the Eastern Woodlands. Some of the largest mounds were evidently dedicated as temples to spiritual activities. For most of their nearly nine-hundred-year history, the Mississippians built cities and towns without fortifications. This is noteworthy precisely because fortifications became increasingly common after about 1300.

The greatest of the Mississippian centres was located near to present-day St. Louis, Missouri. Cahokia began to emerge sometime after 600 CE and peaked about four hundred years later with a resident population reckoned to be between ten thousand and forty thousand people. This would make it on par with London ca. 1200–1300 and the largest city in the Western Hemisphere north of Mesoamerica. There were more than one hundred mounds, some of them enormous. The implication is that a considerable workforce would have been mobilized and directed in the execution of these projects, one of which was a 10-storey-high pyramidal mound.

The openness of the Mississippian cities and towns—of which there were many—reflects their dependence on trade. Goods reached Cahokia from the northern reaches of Lake Superior, and the influence of the Mississippians can be seen in sites as far afield as the Bow Valley in Alberta, the Tiger Hills in southern Manitoba, along the Wəlastəkw – a.k.a. St. John River – in what is now New Brunswick, and in the farming villages of the Eastern Woodlands that appeared two or three centuries before the Mississippian cultures went into decline.<sup>5</sup>

The Mississippian culture and Cahokia in particular coincide with what is called the Medieval Warming Period from ca. 950 to 1250 CE. The end of that period of weather favourable to the development of agricultural communities probably contributed to the decline of the mound-building centres. The Mississippians may have, as well, over-harvested the local fauna; the environmental impacts of their large populations on forests and soil quality as well as other resources were probably additional considerations. In all likelihood, however, it was the advent of the “Little Ice Age” beginning

5. On Wəlastəkiyik/Maliseet agriculture, see Jason Hall, “Maliseet Cultivation and Climatic Resilience on the Wəlastəkw/St. John River During the Little Ice Age,” *Acadiensis* 44, no. 2 (2015): 3–25

in the late 1200s that led to famine and abandonment of the Mississippian cities and villages.<sup>6</sup> (Notably, the evidence suggests that Wolastoqiyik (a.k.a. Maliseet) farming at Meductic persisted and survived through adaptation and a favourable microclimate.) Indigenous communities thereafter may have elected to keep their numbers in check so as to avoid a repeat of this crisis. Certainly, the desperate and violent conflict that took place between Iroquoian peoples of this period—and the peace-oriented confederations that were brokered soon after—has been ascribed to unsettled environmental and economic conditions.

6. Early in 2019, researchers in England reported their findings on a study of the environmental impacts of a massive depopulation of the Western Hemisphere after contact. Their study supports the hypothesis that so many people died and so much land was thereafter no longer tilled that reforestation occurred across a huge territory, leading to greater carbon uptake and, consequently, colder global temperatures. The second trough in the “Little Ice Age,” then, may have been the result of virgin soil epidemics. Alexander Koch et al., “Earth System Impacts of the European Arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492,” *Quaternary Science Reviews* 207 (25 January 2019): 13–36, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.quascirev.2018.12.004>

## 5. From Ice Age to Contact

Climate change around 1300 may have played a role in the shifting fortunes of other Indigenous civilizations. It was around this time that the Diné and Apache set out for the southwestern Plains and the Ancient Puebloan cultures—including the Anasazi—seemingly fell apart and/or migrated south to join with other peoples to create the “modern Puebloan” culture. And it was during the twelfth century, too, that the Nahua/Mexica were descending into the Valley of Mexico and the Inca were laying the foundations of their empire in Peru. Whatever the cause of the dispersal of Mississippian populations, the 1200s, 1300s, and 1400s witnessed a significant shift in agricultural societies, and some non-agricultural societies as well. Here, we’ll briefly survey what was happening in the Arctic, in the Eastern Woodlands, on the West Coast, and in the drainage basin of Hudson’s Bay.

### Eastern Woodlands & Great Lakes

This period saw the rise of modern northeastern farming cultures like the Haudenosaunee (a.k.a. Iroquois), Wendat (Huron), Laurentian Iroquois (Hochelaga, Stadacona, and others), Tionontati (Pétun or Tobacco), Attawandaron (Neutral), and Erieehronon (Erie). These were all located in the basin of the Great Lakes east of Lake Huron and extending east to the Gulf of the St. Lawrence.

Mostly sedentary, these Iroquoian societies were heirs to the Mississippian agriculturalists and heavily dependent on the “three sisters.” They did not consistently get along with one another: feuds and wars occurred often enough for diplomatic solutions to become significant turning points in their historical record. In some accounts, this violence was bound up in “Mourning Wars,” episodes in which members of enemy communities were captured to take the place of individuals in Iroquoian populations who had died prematurely (from warfare, principally). Confederacies were one way to reduce the threat of war and improve the odds of diplomacy and defence. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy may have been established as early as 1142 CE, although some scholars dispute that date as perhaps as much as three hundred years premature. In the Haudenosaunee account, fractious relations between the Onondaga, Onyota’a:ka (a.k.a. Oneida), Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk), Gayogohó:no (Cayuga), and Seneca were ended through the efforts of an elderly statesman (Hayonhwatha, Hiawatha), a young diplomat known as “The Peacemaker” (Deganawidah), and an influential matriarch (Jigonhsasee).<sup>1</sup> In some accounts, Deganawidah arises in the Wendat villages to the north and begins a largely fruitless pilgrimage through the rival peoples of Southern Ontario, only achieving some success when he and his allies are able to bind the Five Nations into a “League of Nations” beneath the “Tree of Peace.” Whether founded in 1142 or 1450, the Haudenosaunee League remains one of the oldest modern political entities in North America.

The Iroquoian peoples—including the Haudenosaunee, but not only the Five Nations “People of the Longhouse”—lived in villages of a thousand or more. These were near-permanent sites of occupation: villages would be relocated every ten years or so as soil became exhausted. Significantly, these Eastern Woodlands Indigenous civilizations abandoned the mound-building practices of their neighbours/predecessors. The Iroquoian villages, instead, tended to be palisaded sites, fortified against attack, and surrounded by cornfields and other crops. They survived—no, thrived—on a mix of grown produce and fish (including and especially eels) and game. Their longhouses held multiple families and served, as well, as warehouses in which trade goods could be stockpiled. The Mississippian civilization might have disappeared, but their extensive networks and traditions of commerce did not go away.

1. Robert W. Venables, “The Clearings and the Woods: The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Landscape – Gendered and Balanced,” in Sherene Baugher and Suzanne M. Spencer-Wood, eds., *Archaeology and Preservation of Gendered Landscapes* (New York: Springer, 2010), 23.

The Iroquoian longhouse villages created and reflected tightly-knit communities in which decisions were made collectively but which were binding on no one without their consent. Independent action was both tolerated and respected; coercion in personal relations and diplomacy was not. While the Tree of Peace prohibited conflict between its members, it did nothing to stop, say, the Kanien'kehá:ka from independently attacking their Mahican neighbours. It is important to note, too, the critical role played by women in decision-making and in the councils of the Haudenosaunee, Tionontati, Attawandaron, and Erieehronon, and the Wendat at Wendake Ehen (a.k.a. Huronia). Although oratory in council was pretty much the monopoly of men, the judgment of women and their ability to direct council discussions was at least as influential. Gendered roles existed, but the Iroquoian sense of equality and personal worth appear over and over in the written and oral record.

Similar patterns of life could be found among the Laurentian or St. Lawrence Iroquois. These people entered the region around 1000 CE to take advantage of the good soil in the valley and its tributaries. Their two largest centres, Hochelaga and Stadacona, were likely comparable to the largest Haudenosaunee villages. The “Laurentian Iroquois” were, however, distinct peoples, even among themselves; they ought not necessarily be considered a single, let alone united, polity. We just don't know for certain how they related politically to one another. What is almost certain is that all of these farming peoples were able—and happy—to trade their surplus food production with the hunter-gatherer peoples to the north. These other Indigenous communities were mostly Algonquian-speakers and included (from east to west) the Innu (a.k.a. Montagnais), the Omàmiwinini (Algonquin), and the Anishinaabe (Ojibwa). Some Algonquian-speaking peoples in the Northeast also pursued agriculture, but these were exceptions that proved the rule by the 1300s.

Populations (on which there is more below) were growing and moving in the post-1100 period. Conflict arose from many directions, and alliances were always being forged. The Haudenosaunee Confederation is one example, but there are others with far greater reach. The Council of Three Fires was struck as early as 796 CE at Michilimackinac between the Anishinaabe peoples—the Ojibwe (a.k.a. Ojibwa, Chippewa), Odawa (a.k.a. Ottawa), and Potawatomi—and occupied the lands of the Laurel Complex. The Wendat probably founded their confederacy early in the 1500s, and the Wabanaki (mostly in what is now the Maritime provinces) formed theirs around 1680. There is every likelihood that these alliances followed on earlier arrangements and that they were regularly renewed.

Anishinaabe tradition (some of which is preserved on the Midewiwin scrolls) has it that their people originated in the West, settled for many generations on the East Coast and, about two thousand years ago, began a return migration to the west. This migration—possibly set in motion by population pressures and said to have involved very large numbers of people—entailed the severing of links to Abenaki relations and the establishment of settlements along the way to the Great Lakes. These settlements—including one near what is now Montréal and another near present-day Detroit—may each have had a lifespan of hundreds of years. In other words, they weren't mere camps but effectively “permanent” village sites in their own regard, and they were bases on which to build relations with Innu and Omàmiwinini. This “migration” was, then, a very long-term process, and one that forged a common cultural framework and economy across the region.

## The Far North

An even more dramatic human movement was taking place roughly simultaneously in the Arctic. The Dorset culture appeared around 500 BCE and soon dominated the high Arctic, migrating across ice and islands from west to east until they reached the near shore of Greenland. Their economic and social order depended heavily on hunting on the ice in small family units. According to archaeological evidence, they were too slow to adapt to a warming trend beginning around 800 CE. By this time, as well, they were encountering pressure from other peoples who were taking advantage of changed environmental conditions. Competition came on their western fringe from the Thule culture—people who would subsequently create the Inuit culture—and on their southern margins by other Indigenous peoples (including Innu and possibly Beothuk). In a foreshadowing of events to come, the Dorset also found themselves competing for resources with Europeans. Vikings arrived in the area of Baffin Island and as far south as Newfoundland around 986–1020 CE.

Recent evidence indicates a sustained (if seasonal) Viking presence on Baffin Island at Tanfield Valley and prolonged trade with the Dorset peoples.<sup>2</sup> If this new commercial relationship presented the Dorset with some new opportunities and advantages, it wasn't sufficient. When the Little Ice Age took hold, the Dorset were reduced to marginal populations. They effectively disappeared around 1500 CE.

At this point, Thule culture had spent nearly 400 years adapting to conditions in the central and eastern Arctic. Their communities/villages were larger than those of the Dorset, sustained by a greater diversity of resources. Their toolkit and techniques won them success on the land and in open waters, as well as on the ice. They were, compared to the Dorset, virtuosos of their environment, even by 1300 CE. The Thule spread further south along the eastern shore of the Ungava Peninsula, where they encountered Innu peoples in what is now Labrador. The Thule/Inuit thus carved out a territory that stretched along coastlines and islands from Alaska to both shores of Greenland, much of Hudson's Bay, and what is now Québec's north coast. The fact that this was accomplished in the space of three hundred to four hundred years tells us a great deal about the speed at which human migrations can take place in largely hostile conditions. It is, thus, a compelling reply to the question of how it was that humans were able to occupy the whole of the Pacific coast in short order fifteen thousand or more years ago.

## The Hudson's Bay Drainage

East of the Rockies, there are four great drainage systems: the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence, the Missouri-Ohio-Mississippi, the Peace-Athabasca-Mackenzie, and the lands that drain into Hudson's Bay. This last region includes much of the sub-Arctic, the woodlands, parklands, and prairies of the West, and everything north of the Shield, including what is now northern Québec. The Saskatchewan (North and South), the lakes of Manitoba, and the Red and Assiniboine Rivers are the largest features of this system, while the Moose, Albany, and Severn Rivers, and James Bay are also critically important to the history of human life—and, eventually, colonialism—in the North. Remarkably, one group came to dominate this huge empire: the Cree.<sup>3</sup> An Algonkian-speaking peoples, the Cree territory includes lowland and swampy

2. Robert Park, "Contact between the Norse Vikings and the Dorset Culture in Arctic Canada," *Antiquity* 82, no. 315 (2008): 189–98, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003598X0009654X>.
3. The term "Cree" derives from French terms (*Kristineaux*, *Kiristinous*, *Kilistinous*), which may, moreover, be descended from names given them by their Aboriginal neighbours. The Cree in the pre-, proto-, and contact eras can be described as three cultures: Swampy, Woodland, and Plains. Each of these had a variety of alternate names. The Swampy Cree, for example, appear in European documents as "West Main Cree" and "Lowland Cree," and they describe themselves as *Maskiki Wi Iniwak*, *Mushkegowuk*, from which we derive Muskegon. There are eastern and western divisions within the Swampy Cree, which further complicates matters, as does migration across those two divisions. The Woodland Cree are similarly divisible between the Woods and the Rocky Cree, and nomenclature divides in this case between *Sakāwithiniwak* and *Nihithaw*. The Plains Cree refer to themselves as *Nēhiyawak*. Given the enormous territory in which the historic Cree were dominant—from the Rocky Mountains to Labrador—it is unsurprising to find significant differences in identities among these Algonkian-speakers, even at the dialect level. There is, however, a historic and pre-contact continuity across the Cree range, and for that reason and to avoid confusion, the decision has been made to perpetuate the mislabel, "Cree," when we describe the whole configuration of peoples.

regions rich in fur-bearing animals and fish, as well as parkland and woodlands where wood bison and other large mammals could be hunted. Their range extends onto the Plains, which could be both a more generous and a more stingy environment. There is uncertainty and debate as to when the Cree first arrived into this last territory—the Plains—and began to adopt the main features of Plains culture. Much of this way of life they evidently learned from their neighbours and allies, the Nakoda Oyadebi (a.k.a. Nakota, Assiniboine), a Siouan-speaking peoples who themselves were moving westward from ancestral places in what is now Wisconsin. Relations between the Nakoda Oyadebi and other Siouan-speakers were mostly poor, and the Nakoda Oyadebi opted to stay out of the Sioux Seven Fires Council, probably in the sixteenth century. Instead, they helped to forge with the Cree and the Nahkawiniwak (a.k.a. Saulteaux, Plains Ojibwa, Chippewa), an alliance known as the Iron Confederacy—likely an indicator of their early involvement in trade with the Europeans.

Most Plains societies evolved bison-hunting cultures that required coordinated and collaborative strategies. Bison are profoundly powerful animals, and one hunter with a spear poses little threat to an adult bison. Their herds, too, were so enormous prior to the nineteenth century that a confrontation on open ground would go very badly for a human on her or his own. Guile and deception with a little help from built infrastructure, topography, and families working in larger band units, however, could be highly effective. Buffalo jumps appeared across the Plains about 6000 BPE. The Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump site in southwestern Alberta first came into use about 5700 years ago, making it a contemporary of Peru's Chico-Norte. It was used as a kill site where herds of bison were driven off of a 35-foot cliff, seriously injuring or killing the game outright. The bodies would then be hauled off to a nearby campsite and processed. The site remained in use for thousands of years, until relatively recently: excavations at Head-Smashed-In have unearthed a deposit of skeletons, measuring more than 10 metres (33 feet) deep.<sup>7</sup> Although all Plains peoples seem to have made use of bison jumps and pounds (a corral-like arrangement into which bison were painstakingly moved), the Niitsitapi in particular are associated with these practices.



Head-Smashed-In is the best known of many bison slaughter sites on the Plains. (Public Domain). Source: Head-Smashed-In, July 1, 2005, photograph, Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Head-Smashed-In.jpg>. In the Public Domain.

## The Northwest Coast

The Pacific coast—which is now considered to be one of the longest settled regions in the Americas—was already a quilt work of distinct cultures and languages two thousand years ago. There were more than thirty distinct languages spoken in what is now British Columbia, and a far greater number of dialects. These unique qualities are reflected, too, in cosmologies, artwork, ceremony, and engineering. But there are also important shared elements, many of which arose from the staple foodstuff that sustained so many populations in this region: salmon.<sup>4</sup>

Most easily captured in spawning channels, salmon could be harvested from Alaska to California. Their range took

4. Current and ongoing research suggests that herring -- rather than salmon -- may have been the coastal 'staff of life.' See Iain McKechnie, Dana Lepofsky, Madonna L. Moss, Virginia L. Butler, Trevor J. Orchard, Gary Coupland, Fredrick Foster, Megan Caldwell, and Ken Lertzman, "Archaeological data provide alternative hypotheses on Pacific herring (*Clupea pallasii*) distribtuion, abundance, and variability," *PNAS*, 111, 9 (March 4, 2014): E807-16.

different species deep inland along the major rivers of the West Coast, including the Stikine, the Skeena, the Fraser, the Columbia, and the Sacramento. In this way, the peoples of the Cordillera—the highland plateaus that stretch across most of what is now British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon—were connected with their distant neighbours on the coast. So rich was the salmon resource that the region was home to some of the highest population densities on the continent.

The remains of one early and very large community have been excavated at Keatley Creek, just above the Fraser Canyon north of Lillooet. The residents appear to have been Stl'atl'imx, although the benchlands are on the boundary with Secwépemc (a.k.a. Shuswap) territory. Settled around 2800 BPE, Keatley Creek was continuously occupied until about a thousand years ago. This was a community of many pithouses (*kekuli*), some of them as much as 20 metres across. At its peak there were seven hundred to one thousand people living in the village. This may not seem like much, but Keatley Creek is one of many such sites along the Fraser, an indicator of how a whole social and economic regime could be built around a reliable staple. All in, this constellation of communities probably held close to ten thousand people. What's more, these villages—otherwise sustained by hunting and the gathering of a multitude of root and berry plants and an Indigenous pharmacopeia—were among the largest northern sedentary settlements of their time, comparable to the Wendat farm villages between the Great Lakes. The fact that they lasted for close to two thousand years is also noteworthy.

The Keatley Creek complex evidently faced a food crisis around 1000–1200 CE. The same phenomenon of warmer sea temperatures that played havoc with Dorset peoples on the Arctic Sea impacted the Stl'atl'imx far inland from the Pacific. A period of sustained elevated average river water temperatures hurt the salmon runs; when the principal source of protein came under pressure, the middle Fraser villages expanded their hunting and gathering radius, inevitably reducing those resources as well. This chain of villages—a marketplace for coastal goods coming inland and inland goods heading west—were then wound up and their occupants relocated. This history, one study concludes, witnessed:

. . . the development of many large villages with population densities along the Mid-Fraser greatly exceeding those at contact or even today and the abandonment of such settlements at least six centuries before contact. The history of these communities was undoubtedly marked by the founding of new villages; the rise and fall of powerful lineages and chiefs; the shifting of alliances between chiefs, lineages, villages, and distant trading partners; the spread of new technologies and rituals; periods of strife and peace; and others of plenty and dearth.<sup>5</sup>

The Stl'atl'imx of the benchlands thereafter congregated at lower elevations in the sharp valleys that link the Fraser Canyon (at Lillooet or Títq̓et) to the Fraser Valley via Harrison Lake and in the gap leading to Lil'wat (a.k.a. the modern town of Pemberton). Their numbers appear to have recovered somewhat, and they continued to exploit their geographical position as brokers in regional trade between the interior plateau and the peoples across the Coast Mountain Range. It was around this time, too, that Athabascan-speakers related to the Tsilhqot'in (a.k.a. Chilcotin), Dakelh (Carrier), and Tahltan made an even more dramatic shift. By 1400, this fragment arrived in what is now Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

The Ts'msyán (a.k.a. Tsimshian) of the Northwest Coast also experienced a significant transition around 1200 CE. The Ts'msyán began continuous occupation six thousand to ten thousand years ago of a great number of small village sites. These settlements are associated with lineages, a traditional social entity known as the *wilnat'aal*. Some of these communities expanded in size and population around three thousand years ago, while new, larger, and more complex village sites began to emerge as well. Current research suggests that this was not a move from simple to complex: the smaller villages remained influential forces within the region and perhaps housed higher-status families. However, around 800 CE these communities faced intensifying attacks from their northern neighbours, the Lingít (a.k.a. Tlingit). Increasingly, the Ts'msyán communities united and consolidated for defensive purposes. It is likely that Lingít expansionism reflected changing ecological and climate circumstances. Regardless, villages were abandoned and new,

5. Jesse Morin et al., “Late Prehistoric Settlement Patterns and Population Dynamics along the Mid-Fraser,” *BC Studies* 160 (Winter 2008/09): 9.

more militarized Ts'imsyan settlements appeared.<sup>6</sup> The social organization, structures, and distribution patterns first recorded by European visitors in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, then, reflect historical events that had occurred at least a thousand years earlier and had been evolving ever since.



Artisanal skills among Northwest Coast peoples developed over many centuries to produce a distinctive style with plenty of local variations. Cedar bark and spruce roots are the principal materials used to produce waterproof rain hats, like this one from Haida Gwaii (no date). Source: Horniman Museum and Gardens, Haida Rainhat, March 25, 2014, cedar bark, Flickr, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/hornimanmuseum/41710176734/in/photostream/>.

Other coastal peoples were likewise long lasting. Haida settlement on their chain of islands—Haida Gwaii—is thought to have begun about fifteen thousand years ago. On the west coast of Vancouver Island, as well, sites like Ts'ishaa in the Broken Group Islands—the place of origin of the Ts'ishaa7ath (a.k.a. Tseshaht) people, a branch of the Nuuchahnulth Nation—were occupied continuously for five thousand years. Facing the open Pacific, these were sea-going and whaling peoples. Studies of other peoples around the Island indicate varieties of village types, including fortified, moated, and prominent sea-facing structures whose dimensions indicate coordinated labour, the execution of strategic plans, and a variety of adaptive engineering techniques. They also indicate the presence of conflict with neighbouring peoples. Slave raiders—mainly associated with Laich-kwil-tach (a.k.a. southern Kwakiutl, Ligwilda'xw, Lekwiltok)—combed the Salish Sea and travelled far up the Fraser River for potential captives.

Slavery was, indeed, widespread and one feature of a social hierarchy that was reflected in housing, village

6. See Andrew Martindale et al., “The Role of Small Villages in Northern Tsimshian Territory from Oral and Archaeological Records,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 17, no. 3 (2017): 285–325.

organization, dress, and power. West Coast villages could be very large, dominated by cedar plank longhouses that could be as big as a football field inside. Stunning house posts and massive front panel designs announced the identity of the residents and their clan, as well as their powerful artistic traditions. An abundance of food made it possible for these societies to grow large and engage in substantial construction projects that required a lot of strong backs and limbs. They had the luxury, as well, of craft specialization, which led to expertise in weaving, loom work, toolmaking, and the production of beautiful personal and utilitarian objects. Villages were typically built on the foreshore in coves and bays, many of them atop clamshell middens that could be several metres deep. This signifies an effective food economy, and prosperity.

West Coast cultures are very different from other Indigenous civilizations and communities elsewhere across the continent, but some commonalities emerge. Even in highly settled areas there was some degree of population mobility. West Coast peoples moved seasonally to take advantage of resources in other sites. This meant the creation and maintenance of seasonal villages that complemented the more substantial “winter villages.” This necessitates having the time and equipment needed to relocate hundreds if not thousands of people a few times a year. Although Iroquoian villages were similarly large, they seldom moved. Across the rest of the northern half of North America, the numbers involved in seasonal migrations were significantly smaller. Parties of a dozen might characterize the basic unit of the Thule/Inuit community, although they would gather seasonally in much greater numbers. On the Plains, highly mobile communities consisted of about fifty people before the arrival of the horse on the Plains. This was fairly typical of Eastern Woodland Algonkian peoples and northern Athabaskan peoples as well. The complexities of West Coast clan structures and systems of governance and lawmaking meant that *place* had nuanced meanings that further informed migrations. Villages everywhere included people born elsewhere, either within a lengthy family network or utterly unrelated to the host group. Mobility and a wide-ranging understanding of resource use and ownership—aspects of which we find in many Indigenous societies—profoundly informed the lives of West Coast and Cordilleran peoples. It is something that must be kept in mind when we consider the meaning of *traditional territories* in Indigenous societies over the last five hundred years.



Systematic harvesting of food on land and from the sea indicates experimentation with and refinement of technologies. The shoreline of the Comox Estuary is dotted with thousands of ancient cedar stakes, part of a fish weir complex that is as much as 1200 years old. (CC BY-SA 3.0) Source: Guinness323, Coast Salish Fishing Weir Stakes Comox BC Canada, July 11, 2014, photograph, Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coast\\_Salish\\_fishing\\_weir\\_stakes\\_Comox\\_BC\\_Canada.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coast_Salish_fishing_weir_stakes_Comox_BC_Canada.jpg), Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.

There is another aspect to place that is worth mentioning. All of these groups modified their landscape in some measure. Some studies suggest that Indigenous farmers cleared much of the Eastern forests and encouraged the growth of large game herds by means of burning land so as to nurture grazing areas. On the West Coast, various peoples did much the same to encourage native plants like berries and camas bulbs, and to otherwise manage the supply of game. Evidence of irrigation canals in the American southwest, clam gardens on the West Coast made of carefully raised barriers, and stone eel weirs in the St. Lawrence system are all modifications designed to maximize food output while supporting sustainable stewardship of resources.<sup>7</sup> This scenario sees Indigenous people as the keystone species in the Americas, landscaping continents that were far from “pristine wilderness.”

7. John M. Casselman, “Dynamics of Resources of the American Eel, *Anguilla Rostrata*: Declining Abundance in the 1990s,” in *Eel Biology*, eds. Katsumi Aida, Katsumi Tsukamoto, and Kohei Yamauchi (Tokyo: Springer-Verlag, 2003), 259–60; William A. Allen, “The Importance of Archaeology in Understanding a Species at Risk: The American Eel as a Case in Point,” paper presented to the Ontario Archaeological Society 2007 Symposium, Kingston, ON (November 3, 2007), 1.

## Populations

The environmental events of the period between about 1000 and 1400—occurring at different rates and in different forms in different regions—brought an end to the largest agrarian societies in North America and affected the Pueblan communities in the Southwest as well. What followed appears to have been shrinkage in community size, a readjustment to new conditions, and the emergence of new alliances. What sort of numbers were involved?

This is one of the great unanswerable questions of Indigenous histories. Outside of the Mesoamerican civilizations and their peers further south, few societies in North America were in a position to keep track. Communities like Cahokia might have had the wherewithal to run a census, but the disappearance of mound-builder societies led to smaller, less bureaucratic, and less theocratic communities. Archaeologists and historians—often working with Indigenous collaborators—have attempted to build a picture of Indigenous demographics before ca. 1500 CE. The results have provoked much debate and little consensus.

For the past fifty years, however, the estimates have been moving upward. There are some outliers—too low and too high to bear much scrutiny—and some estimates that have gained increasing support. For the territory of what is now Canada, it is reckoned that a population of 500,000 meets several tests that satisfy scholars. This is five times the estimate accepted a century ago, but one-quarter of the estimate presently championed in some quarters. Of this half million, the largest share would have been living on the West Coast—where scholars' estimates continue to climb. Population densities would have varied considerably, being highest on the West Coast and in the Iroquoian and Wabanaki farming villages. Small though many family and band units may have been at this time, seasonal gatherings—at Michilimackinac, for one—were huge and attracted thousands each year.

It seems likely that populations fell across most of North America during the collapse of the Mississippian cities. It is also likely that Indigenous populations were rebounding ca. 1500. We know that the Mourning Wars (described earlier) reflect a need to rebuild numbers; this may have arisen from spiritual beliefs, and it may also indicate that Iroquoian numbers were too close to the razor's edge of unsustainability. This is, however, only conjecture, and it is highly probable that the rationale and objectives of the Mourning Wars changed over time. Developments beginning ca. 1500 would raise terrifying new questions about population and survival.

## 6. Contact and the Columbian Exchange

What happens next? Mostly what had been happening for centuries, if not millennia. Indigenous people kept on making good use of their environments, finding new niches, competing amongst one another for resources, cycling through one economic and social system to another, and so on. It is important to remember that very few Indigenous peoples directly encountered Europeans prior to the late 1700s. Since the largest clusters of Indigenous populations were on the West Coast, and since they met Europeans for the first time only in the eighteenth century, it's safe to say that their principal concerns were not greatly changed from 1492 to 1792. It is true that some Indigenous peoples in the northern half of the continent met Europeans early in the contact era. The Dorset had already encountered Europeans as much as five hundred years before the arrival of French navigator (and kidnapper) Jacques Cartier in 1534; the Beothuk and the Mi'kmaq were familiar from about 1530 with fishers and whalers from the Basque homelands straddling France and Spain. But even there, on the Atlantic seaboard, what is striking is how doomed populations like the Beothuk carried on doing what they liked doing, sometimes greeting Europeans and at other times either ignoring or avoiding them. But a couple of key things changed, beginning in what we call the "proto-contact" period.

The proto-contact period is a moving target. It's that era in which European influences were being felt by Indigenous peoples even though actual Europeans may have been nowhere in sight. Exotic new trade goods were passed along long ancient networks of commerce. Refugees from hostile encounters with outsiders showed up on another Indigenous nation's boundaries, thereby impacting territorial and resource domains and perhaps creating further knock-on effects. When, in 1806, a British-Canadian merchant led a party of traders and mapmakers for the first time into Nlaka'pamux territory, he and his party were greeted at Camchin (a.k.a. Lytton) with news that they had been expected. How could it have been otherwise? After 400 years of contact in various quarters of North America, there could not have been many corners into which European materials and/or ideas had not penetrated. Long before Simon Fraser showed up at Camchin, the Nlaka'pamux were living in the proto-contact phase. Indeed, they had probably already encountered elements of the Columbian Exchange.

### The Columbian Exchange

Europeans—beginning with the Vikings but in earnest with the fifteenth-century Spanish—were pleased to introduce Western Hemisphere products into European markets. Furs and feathers were among the earliest goods taken to European courts by Norse traders. Starting in the late 1400s and the early 1500s, the Iberians transferred foodstuffs like maize, potatoes, and tomatoes from the Americas. These and other foods contributed to significant population booms in Europe and Africa in particular. Gold and silver were less "gifts" than booty, and they both had the effect of turbocharging Eastern Hemisphere economies.

In return, Indigenous peoples got very little, but what they did get, they received in excess. New foods were not well received, cattle fared badly, and pigs were more nuisances than advantages. Horses were eventually welcomed, and herds worked their way out of Mexico (a.k.a. New Spain) and reached the Northern Plains in the eighteenth century (a topic to which we will return), revolutionizing the lives and societies of the Nêhiyawak (a.k.a. Plains Cree), the Nakoda Oyadebi, and their neighbours. Draught horses showed up in Haudenosaunee villages in the early 1600s, having been purchased from the Dutch colonists. These were useful, but not revolutionary in the same way prairie mustangs would be a century or so later. In short, there wasn't much in the plus column to show for this Columbian Exchange. But then, there was disease.

New and lethal diseases showed up in the early sixteenth century, possibly earlier. The passage from Europe was not sufficiently long to flush out and kill off all contagious illnesses. These were viruses and germs to which Indigenous peoples had never been exposed. Consequently, they had little natural immunities and no knowledge of suitable

containment strategies, such as quarantine. What Europeans had come to regard as serious, inconvenient, and sometimes fatal childhood diseases like measles and mumps were major killers in the Western Hemisphere.

The worst of the lot was smallpox. Dangerous enough in Africa, Asia, and Europe, smallpox discovered ideal circumstances in the Americas. On its arrival, *variola major* found medium-to-large sedentary communities that were linked to others by extensive and busy trade networks. Smallpox played a leading role in the fall of Tenochtitlan, and it also devastated those Indigenous communities nominally allied against the Mexica. These—and subsequent smallpox outbreaks in North America—are called “virgin soil epidemics” because the populations had never before experienced these diseases, and because mortality rates ran as high as 95 per cent. Able to lay unnoticed in a human carrier for nearly two weeks, smallpox could leapfrog great distances in the Western Hemisphere, finding new opportunities to run riot. It was, therefore, able to move quickly and far ahead of the Europeans. The effects were catastrophic. In very short order, whole civilizations collapsed. Many villages on the East Coast of North America were eradicated, and quite a few inland towns fell to smallpox as well, long before actual Europeans were even encountered.

The proto-contact period was much longer for people farther north and farther west. If it took centuries for Europeans to reach them, the same cannot be said—with absolute certainty—for ‘Old World’ diseases. It has been speculated that smallpox or something very much like it reached the Columbia Valley and possibly the Northwest Coast as early as the 1530s. Even if it did not arrive until the 1780s, it would have had the same results—including anything from minimal or worst-case scenarios—as it did elsewhere. From the 1730s, changes on the Northern Plains meant that disease could move at the speed of a horse, rather than a woman or man walking—and all without seeing a single European face.

As we’ve already indicated, pre-contact population numbers are the source of considerable disagreement and debate. There are few scholars now, however, who would back the lowest estimates proffered in the early to mid-twentieth century. At that time, it was widely assumed that Indigenous populations had fluctuated, but not by much. Ten million was proposed as the total for the whole hemisphere. Since the 1960s, historians and anthropologists have worked backward from colonial censuses and missionary burial records to estimate the impact of epidemics in small communities.

If there were in 1491, as is currently widely accepted, half a million people in what is now Canada, that number probably began falling in the 1500s. It fell to about 103,000—a total reckoned in the 1871 Dominion Census—and only bottomed out (or reached a nadir) in the 1920s. As the spheres of contact closed in on and overlapped with more remote peoples, the cycles of proto-contact and contact-era death began anew. This was recorded on the West Coast and in the Arctic, two regions of relatively late contact and exchange. Old viruses were joined by heretofore-unseen illnesses, perhaps the most persistent and pernicious of which was tuberculosis. While we may be uncertain about the impact of foreign diseases in the proto-contact period, what we learn from the outbreaks in the later contact period is this: a mortality rate of one-third was not exceptional, and 80 per cent was not unheard of.

This must serve to remind us that, while most of North America remained an Indigenous world in the three centuries or so after contact, the communities were in many cases reeling from disease and depopulation. This was something genuinely new and comprehensive. Occasionally, a mudslide or some other natural disaster might eradicate one village—as at Ozette in the Makah homeland on the Northwest Coast—or a war might turn especially bloody, but these are localized phenomenon. The Columbian Exchange, by contrast, was a species-wide event as regards humans in the Western Hemisphere. It set the tone in many respects for the events that followed.

There is one other thing that changed with contact and needs to be mentioned. It was in the course of contact that Europeans began producing written and drawn records of encounters. Every one of those documents is filtered through several lenses, whether it is the *Jesuit Relations* (regular reports filed from the missionary field in the seventeenth century), navigators’ charts, the diaries of ships’ captains, or fur trade ledgers. Indigenous people’s voices reach out from the past through some of these records, transcribed with—inevitably—varying levels of competence, integrity, and understanding by the European scribe. In short, the kinds of records available change, and our ability to explore Indigenous societies in the past changes, too. What we are seeing in these documents, keep in mind, are often post-apocalyptic scenes involving the survivors of epidemics. *They* knew the past they had come from; *their* actions arise from

a longer and deeper history in North America. European observers in what they called “the New World” dated history from 1492, but Indigenous people were not so shortsighted.

# PART I: COMMERCE AND ALLIES



# Introduction



*Ceramic containers such as this one began appearing in the Manitoba Lakes, Great Lakes, and St. Lawrence region as early as 300 BCE. Their simultaneous appearance points to the rapid movement of ideas, techniques, and technologies across a vast area in the middle of North America. The individual styles, however, point to distinctive artistic cultures within relatively small areas. This one comes from the Rainy River corridor. Source: Kenora Office of the Ontario Ministry of Culture, Citizenship and Recreation, Exhibit Specimen 9, ceramic, ELKn-2, Canadian Museum of History, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/archo/ceramiq/pot9e.html>.*

As described in the preface, commercial relations were a fundamental part of life across the Western Hemisphere. Commodities and merchants travelled great distances, and goods were passed along from one network to the next. Language skills and knowledge of the neighbours' cultures were invaluable. In some instances, trade jargons—like *Chinook*—sprang up to serve whole trade zones, while in others sign languages evolved. These were means of greasing the wheels of trade and interaction, and they worked well. There was barely a landscape in the whole of North America that wasn't permeable to trade. It is worth underlining that commerce itself had symbolic properties. To engage in trade is to engage in a social (and sometimes a spiritual) relationship. And from that relationship there might spring other relationships, such as marital and martial alliances. And where mutual intercommunity hostility existed and erected a barrier to commerce, there was always the possibility of falling back on raids for goods, plunder, and captives—and the consequent need for defense. "Trade" as a word minimizes the complex network of activities associated with the processing and manufacturing of goods and the technologies necessary for trade (like cloths and footwear), distribution of goods received, setting priorities, ensuring that trade participants are fed and equipped for trade missions, and so on. While paintings of traders typically show men, there were a lot of women, children, and elders involved in the commerce of Indigenous societies.

The Chapters of Part 1 explore examples of Indigenous commerce and diplomacy at a time when European goods were working their way into the continent's economy. The focus is principally on alliances *within* the Indigenous world rather than conflicts associated with newcomer colonies. Likewise, the first priority in the study of Indigenous commerce is to

find its meaning within Indigenous paradigms, not within the context of European goals and ambitions. We look, too, at four regional experiences. The first explores relations among and between the robust confederacies around the Great Lakes. The second considers and compares the experiences of members of the Wabanaki Confederacy with that of the Beothuk of Newfoundland. Both nations experienced some collaboration with Europeans and quite a lot of conflict, too, but the arc of their respective stories is strikingly different (and yet profoundly connected). The third takes us into the North and West, into the region dominated geographically and economically by the Cree and the Iron Confederacy. It is a region in which significant environmental and cultural changes occurred between the early 1700s and the 1870s, some of which we'll consider in subsequent chapters. The final section looks at the Pacific Northwest, the most densely populated Indigenous space north of Mexico and the last region to experience direct contact with non-Indigenous peoples. The arrival of Europeans from several countries at once—as well as Asians and Polynesians—is only one unique feature of the Cordilleran and coastal history in the period before 1900.

# The Wawa Shorthand.

See how easy.

A in fat: o	P:	B:	Sh: (	J: (
O in not: O	T: -	D: -	S: )	Z: )
Oo in foot: O	F: \	V: \	N: )	NG: )
OW in now: O	K: /	G: /	M: (	The: -
Wa in was: O	L: /up	R: /up	Th: -	Etc.: ~

i in fit: i	u in use: (
e in legal: e	u in us: (
e in met: e	an: , in: , on: , un: ,
a in fate: a	i in file: o We: O

Pa: b	Ta: ~	Fa: v	Ka: d	La: /
Po: b	Toe: P	Foe: v	Ho: d	Law: P
Poo: b	Too: P	Foo: v	Koo: d	Loo: P
Ap: q	At: ~	At: q	Ak: q	Al: /
Op: q	Ought: Q	Ot: q	Oak: q	All: /
Oop: q	Oot: Q	Oot: q	Ook: q	Ool: /

Sha: ~	Sa: )	Na: )	Ma: (
Show: ~	So: )	No: )	Mow: (
Shoe: ~	Soo: )	Noo: )	Moo: (
As: e	Ash: ~	Ann: q	Am: (
Os: e	Osh: ~	Own: q	Om: (
Oose: e	Oosh: ~	Oon: q	Oom: (

Pea: b	Tea: ~	Fee: v	Key: L	Lee: /
Pay: J	Tay: ~	Fay: v	Quay: /	Lay: /
Jeay: ~	See: ~	nay: )	me: (	h: .
hap: p	hat: a	halt: a	hash: ~	

Pat: L	cat: L	Laugh: A	Caught: L
Pit: b	kilt: L	Lift: ~	Knew: L

*The Chinook language was used throughout what is now British Columbia. In the 1890s Catholic missionaries developed a transcription that relied on French shorthand. Indigenous learners soon became teachers and the system acquired local popularity on the Interior Plateau.*

## The Marketplace

Every account of Indigenous societies in the Americas draws attention to the extent and vitality of trade. Items like *wampum* – beads made from shellfish shells – were assembled and configured to record life-events, historic events, and agreements of many kinds and they were highly valued for their aesthetic qualities as well. Europeans understood *wampum* to be a kind of currency, but the hemispheric norm was bartering. Even in the most urban communities in Mesoamerica, trade was conducted in goods and not coin.

What are some of the implications of this one fact? There are several, the first of which is specialization. Where there is a demand for corn, there will be maize growers. Where there is demand for feathers or hides, there will be those who gather, refine, and sell only these things. Localized and specialized economies thus develop levels of mutual dependence on their neighbours. Harald Prins describes the relationship between the various member groups of the Wabanaki Confederacy as complementary economies: some specialized in hunting and fishing while others tilled the soil.<sup>1</sup> In other words, while it is possible that some individuals or groups produced and sold a bit of this and a bit of that, most households/bands played to their strengths.

Doing so implies that Indigenous societies had the ability to process, stockpile, and transport goods in quantities that made it worth their while. We see evidence of large-scale production in extensive wooden racks used to dry fish on every coastline, riverbank, and lakeside. We see it in the harvesting and processing of bison across the Great Plains. We see long-term strategies for storage in the Mexica warehouses at Tenochtitlan, Pueblo granaries, food storage caches among the kekuli pits at Keatley Creek, bent cedar boxes used to pack oolichan grease on the Northwest Coast, and the large cellars developed by the Metepenagiag on the Miramichi. Clearly, all human societies produce and refine necessities, and they store a surplus against lean times. What is important to recognize here are millennia-old and varied practices in North America associated with the production and storage of larger surpluses of goods for commercial purposes.

Those goods, of course, had to be transportable. Networks of rivers and footpaths linked inland communities with one another and to coastal regions. Design skills and engineering provided the vessels and bridges necessary to bring goods and people to market. The extent of these tributaries of trade are visible in the Similkameen Valley, where traders from very distant communities obtained ochre paint (vermillion) and could not wait to try it out on nearby rock faces as they took the first steps back to their respective homelands. Their “graffiti” is a little like a tourist signing a guestbook, and from the distinctive styles involved, we can tell how far they came, albeit probably along very roundabout and indirect routes.

How did Indigenous peoples see trade in the period before 1800? Were their views of commerce static and unchanging, or did they evolve? What motivations lay behind generations of individuals, families, and whole communities gathering, processing, and often transporting resources across great distances for exchange? If there is

1. Harald Prins, “Children of Gluskap: Wabanaki Indians on the Eve of the European Invasion,” in *American Beginnings: Exploration, Culture, and Cartography in the Land of Norumbega*, co-edited with E. Baker et al. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 165–211.

one thing of which we can be certain it is this: trade is a social and cultural as well as an economic phenomenon, and its expression is bound to be different over time and space. Indigenous trade took place in Indigenous contexts first and foremost, which is our principal concern. There are obvious historiographic obstacles in that regard: for one, it is through the filtered accounts of foreign visitors, merchants, clergy, and warriors that historians have mainly perceived the Indigenous societies of the fifteenth and subsequent centuries. For that reason, we describe exchange commerce that involved wool blankets, metal tools, cooking implements, ceramics, firearms, alcohol, and a multitude of other goods as, simply, “the fur trade.”

## The Northeast

Beginning in the sixteenth century, trade got underway between seaboard communities and the civilizations of the St. Lawrence River valley on the one hand, and parts of Europe on the other. At our end of the telescope in the twenty-first century, knowing what we know now, it might be tempting to look exclusively for the seeds of disruption, colonialism, and the loss of power and territory experienced by Indigenous peoples. But this is to fall prey to hindsight.

In the 1500s, the number of Indigenous people in the northeast who had even encountered a European was small. Viking incursions in the Arctic, Labrador, and Newfoundland around 1000 CE were limited in impact. Basque fishing and whaling expeditions around Newfoundland and into the Gulf of the St. Lawrence picked up in the early 1500s, and these introduced some new goods and ideas. French expeditions also appeared in the 1500s, and some trade took place. These voyages also mark the first documented incidence of abductions of Indigenous peoples and their transportation to Europe. Still, even with the rise of the French colonial presence in the 1600s and the takeoff of trade in the area around the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, European numbers remained low and the extent of their reach was entirely determined by the participation and permission of Indigenous communities. In 1720, after more than a century of settlement in the St. Lawrence Valley, the population of the French colony was fewer than twenty-five thousand—less than that of Wendake Ehen (a.k.a. the Wendake Confederacy, Huronia) a century earlier.<sup>2</sup>

This is not to say that trade along the Atlantic coast, across the northeast woodlands on the St. Lawrence River system, and into the Great Lakes basin lacked almost immediate consequences. Indigenous peoples had experience with metals—including copper and small quantities of iron—but other materials served them well enough. European metal implements—everything from knives to sewing needles, copper pots to axes—rather suddenly transformed the toolkit. Guns had an impact, but one that is easily overstated: they were heavy, difficult to reload, impossible to use effectively in close-quarters combat, surprisingly delicate when faced with a harsh northern winter, and loud (a shock value in battle but one that could not be counted on indefinitely, and a liability in hunting birds and deer). Guns also required gunpowder and shot, neither of which were available except from European traders; this was an advantage in trade from a seller’s perspective but a downside for buyers. (Imagine, too, running out of powder several hundred miles from the nearest trading post and having, then, to carry an effectively useless gun for the rest of the season.) Imported goods moved swiftly through existing trade networks from the early 1600s on, but it is important to keep in mind that, although European products in the Indigenous marketplace proved to be attractive and, in some cases, revolutionary, it was

2. “Wendake” means, simply, the home of the Wendat. Wherever there are Wendat, there is Wendake. “Wendake Ehen” refers to that region near Georgian Bay where, in the seventeenth century, we find a confederation of Wendat villages sometimes referred to as “Huronian.” The Wendat/Wyandot/Wyandotte diaspora extends across what is now Central Canada and the American Midwest with nodes in Québec, Oklahoma, and Kansas. See “Introduction,” in Thomas Peace and Kathryn Magee Labelle, eds., *From Huronia to Wendakes: Adversity, Migrations, and Resilience, 1650–1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), p. 3.

nevertheless still an Indigenous marketplace. It was one in which older, pre-European commercial networks survived and mattered greatly. It was, as well, one in which gendered roles and needs mattered: most of the goods demanded of the European traders were of greatest value to Indigenous women who, in turn, were the individuals who processed pelts and hides to ready them for trade.

Complicating this picture is the impact of unfamiliar diseases and the disruption of diplomatic agendas. Well-armed Europeans were, at the very least, a wildcard in ongoing conflicts between neighbouring peoples. By the time the fur trade had spread deeply into the Prairies and the sub-Arctic, new social bonds and regional frictions had come into play. Imperial conflicts influenced and were influenced by Indigenous rivalries, at least in the lands south of the Canadian Shield; in the drainage basin of James Bay and Hudson's Bay, however, there were no European colonies over which to fight, no imperial nemeses to battle, notwithstanding a few skirmishes between 1670 and 1713. In the sub-Arctic, then, Indigenous priorities can be perceived through a different lens.

In this long history of trade and troubles, commerce and continuity, it is possible to focus on any of several themes. Here, we look at the outlines of early trade and its motivations, impacts, and implications. In Chapter 2, we explore the ways in which trade was linked to diplomacy and conflict, and the extent to which economic and political relationships such as these led to transformations in Indigenous polities and priorities.

## Conclusion

Histories of Canada have tended to lay a heavy emphasis on the fur trade. It attracted settlers from Europe, enriched merchants and empires, provided the rationale for a colonial administrative structure and a military presence, and led the French and English (and briefly the Dutch) inland from the places of first contact at tidewater. It is presented as the key element, the catalyst that led to full-scale colonization and dispossession. It is, in short, the *sine qua non* of Canadian history.

Repositioning the fur trade as an export business, one that allowed Indigenous suppliers to obtain imported goods and to exploit the desires of foreigners to advantage, obliges us to look at the history of North America differently. Colonialism is still there, but it need not eclipse all other stories.

The four chapters in Part 1 explore aspects of Indigenous histories in the Atlantic region (where one peoples disappeared entirely while another resisted invasion with remarkable persistence for centuries), in the Great Lakes basin (which saw confederacies and leagues attempt collective replies to their historical circumstances), in the North and across the Prairies (dominated here by the Cree and their allies), and on the West Coast (a culturally complex area on which global markets rather than mercantilism were rather suddenly acting).

## Additional Resources

The following resources may help supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this section:

Belshaw, John. *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation*. Vancouver: BCcampus, 2015. See esp. chap. 4, 5, 6.7, 6.8, 8, 13.1–13.5, 13.10.

Bragdon, Kathleen Joan. *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Northeast*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001. See esp. pp. 37–61.

Delâge, Denys. *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600–64*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993. See esp. pp. 36–77.

Dickason, Olive and David McNab. *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, 4th ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009. See esp. pp. 160–82.

- Morgan, Cecilia. *Travellers through Empire: Indigenous Voyages from Early Canada*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.
- Moutsette, Marcel. "A Universe under Strain: Amerindian Nations in North-Eastern North America in the 16th Century." *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 43, no. 1 (2009): 30–47.
- Prins, Harald E., and Bunny McBride. "Discovering Europe, 1493." *World Monitor* 5, no. 11 (November 1992): 56–59.
- Ray, Arthur J., and Donald Freeman. "Give Us Good Measure:" *An Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson's Bay Company before 1763*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978. See esp. pp. 19–25.
- Thrush, Coll. *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016. See esp. chap. 2–3.

# Chapter 1: Better Together -- The Great Confederacies

Several alliances are known to have pre-dated the contact era. That is to say, alliances—even complex ones—were common. This chapter continues the exploration of Indigenous people’s experiences of commerce and alliance, shifting the focus to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Wendat Confederacy (a.k.a. Wendake Ehen, Huron Confederacy), and the Anishinaabe Council of Three Fires around the Great Lakes. Some elements of the history of the Iron Confederacy on the Northern Plains and the Niitsitapi Confederacy are taken up in this section’s third chapter. Any of these alliances might be described in many ways, including emergent and long-standing, temporary and permanent, defensive and aggressive. It is important to note at the outset that words like “confederacy,” “federation,” and “league” come with caveats: Indigenous societies in the Americas, by and large, display a strong preference for autonomy, whether within interpersonal relations, the household, the clan, or larger political structures. While the Haudenosaunee, for example, demonstrated the ability to act with remarkable unity toward specific and clear political and military goals, the Five Nations was not a modern nation-state with binding and bureaucratic institutions in place. Onondaga may have been their seat of power, but none of the other affiliate peoples were bound to Onondaga’s will. What we have here, then, are—as in the case of any state, empire, or assembly—works in progress, phenomenon that are constantly changing in response to changing circumstances. And we are able to observe the arc of their progress with some clarity from about 700 CE on.

## Ententes and Alliances

Alliances spring from many sources. Commercial links, mutual defense, the need for peace, common systems of belief, linguistic connections, shared and overlapping clan systems, and family bonds are only a partial inventory of possible origins. If a federation proves durable enough, it will acquire a narrative of its own. This is as true of modern federal systems—one has only to think of “founding father” mythologies—as it is of much more venerable alliances like the Council of Three Fires. The means of building alliances, moreover, were many. Intermarriage between peoples sealed commercial and diplomatic bonds whilst confirming lines of inheritance in some cases. The adoption of people from one community into another also opened the door to possible future connections. Even captives who were unwillingly absorbed into new communities brought with them the prospect of linkages. Broadly, alliances reflect the role of family and kin, defined in ways that are both diverse and consistent: women show up as the key figures in these arrangements more often than not, and children play important roles as well. Histories of the Council of Three Fires, the Wendat Confederacy, and the Haudenosaunee League provide examples of these diverse and complicated relationships.

The Anishinaabe exodus from the East Coast to the Lakes is briefly surveyed in Section 5 of the Preface. By the 1500s, if not earlier, Anishinaabe control of the three largest (and northwesternmost) Great Lakes was almost complete. Much of the north shore of Gchi-zaagigan (a.k.a. Lake Ontario) was also Anishinaabe territory before the Mourning Wars and the Beaver Wars. Michilimackinac—traditionally an Odawa centre—constituted their seasonal “capital,” a place to which thousands would migrate each year to trade, exchange news, offer gifts and loyalties, celebrate, engage in rituals, and forge marriages (and, thus, alliances). Anishinaabewaki—the lands of the Anishinaabe peoples—radiated outward from Michilimackinac like spokes on a wheel. Bonds of real and “fictive” kinship “knitting together disparate peoples and places across the *pays d’en haut* . . . [linked] winter bands and village communities in far-flung places.”<sup>1</sup> Although

1. Michael A. McDonnell, “The Indigenous Architecture of Empire: The Anishinaabe Odawa in North

individual bands zealously guarded their autonomy, the components of the Council of Three Fires could be brought into alignment when the need arose.

Haudenosaunee aggression and epidemic diseases destabilized the Anishinaabeg world from the 1630s. The arrival of (mostly) traditionalist Wendat refugees after the destruction of Wendake Ehen in 1649 inflated Anishinaabe numbers, and they retreated northward to regroup.<sup>2</sup> Fifty years later they were sweeping the Haudenosaunee from Southern Ontario and reclaiming the lands of the Misi-zaagiing (Mississauga).<sup>3</sup> By 1700, Wendat and other Iroquoian languages in the region had been reduced to a tiny minority: Anishinaabemowin—in its various dialect forms—was spoken from Gchi-ziibi (Ottawa River) through Bnesii-wiikwedong (Thunder Bay) and much further north.

Against the apparent resilience of the Anishinaabeg, the Haudenosaunee had a singular advantage: farming societies were consistently larger and more densely packed than their non-agrarian, foraging neighbours. Recent estimates indicate that there were about one hundred thousand Iroquoian people in total, ca. 1550–1610—although the possibility exists that these numbers were already reduced by European diseases.<sup>4</sup> Before 1600, the St. Lawrence Valley at night sparkled with the fires from hundreds of small villages and a few large ones. The “three sisters” were adapted over generations and centuries for production at the northern limits of agriculture, within sight of the Canadian Shield. Tobacco production, too, was common throughout the Iroquoian regions. The St. Lawrence and Wendat villages were thus the larder of their Algonquin-speaking neighbours to the north and west. This involved a mutually advantageous exchange of respective surpluses: fatty protein for dried carbohydrates, lush fur blankets for practical ceramics and baskets of pulses, bales of feathers for bundles of sacred tobacco, and so on. It was here, across a frontier knitted together by lakes and rivers, that two food cultures met.

The Wendat Confederacy brought together five Iroquoian-speaking communities: the Attignawantans, Attigneenongnahacs, Arendarhonons, Tahontaenrats, and Ataronchronons. The last two joined the Confederacy around 1500 CE, by which time the core elements of Wendake had been together for about a hundred years. Archaeological evidence points to a westward migration that may have paralleled that of the Anishinaabe, albeit a few centuries later. The Wendat were related culturally to the St. Lawrence Iroquois (who disappeared in the mid- to late sixteenth century shortly after contact with French expeditions in 1534, 1536–37, and 1541–42), the Tionontati (a.k.a. Petun) and Attawandaron (a.k.a. Neutral) to their south and east, and the Haudenosaunee southeast of Lakes Erie and Ontario. Cultural similarities, however, were clearly no guarantee against conflict with Iroquoian neighbours, not least because of the expansive ambitions of the Wendat. At its largest extent, Wendake stretched from the northern shore of Ka:niata:ro:io (a.k.a. Lake Ontario) to the east coast of Lake Huron. Unlike the Anishinaabe nations, whose economic

America,” in *Facing Empire: Indigenous Experiences in a Revolutionary Age*, eds. Kate Fulagar and Michael A. McDonnell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 48–71.

2. Make a special note of the fact that only Wendake Ehen—the location of the Wendat near Georgian Bay—was destroyed. The Wendat carried on, taking their home—Wendake—with them wherever they went. This is important because of the power of “the destruction narrative” that sees them doomed to disappear. This is a theme you’ll find throughout European (and some Indigenous) accounts of Indigenous societies. For more on this subject, see “Introduction,” in Peace and Labelle, *From Huronia to Wendakes*, 6–7, and Kathryn Magee Labelle, *Dispersed, But Not Destroyed: A History of the Seventeenth-Century Wendat Diaspora* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).
3. Heidi Bohaker, “Anishinaabe Toodaims: Context for Politics, Kinship, and Identity in the Eastern Great Lakes,” in *Gathering Places: Aboriginal and Fur Trade Histories*, eds. Carolyn Podruchny and Laura Peers (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 99–100.
4. Brad Loewen, *Contact in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century: Networks among Fishers, Foragers, and Farmers* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of History & University of Ottawa Press, 2016), 3–4.

culture depended on seasonal movement and hunting and fishing, Wendat peoples established a more sedentary, agrarian way of life. The trademark features of Iroquoian nations—a farming economy and longhouses that held several families organized along clan lines in villages surrounded by tall palisades (a reflection of political tensions in the region)—were all present in Wendake.

Relations between Iroquoian-speaking “farmers of the North” are known to have been poor through the 1500s, and they may have been bound up in conflict for centuries. What we know for certain is that the histories of the Wendat and Haudenosaunee intersected and intertwined. The theme of palisaded villages persisted south of Ka:nia:ta:ro:io and east to the Oh-iio-ge (a.k.a. Hudson River). The fact that all five of the original members of the Haudenosaunee League spoke separate and distinct variants of Iroquoian underlines their cultural and political differences along with their common ancestry. Down to the 1100s, they were in a near-perpetual state of internecine war, raiding one another while suffering attacks from their non-Iroquoian neighbours as well. The establishment of a Confederacy by 1142 brought an end to this conflict and allowed the allied “Five Nations” to turn their attention outward. This may have catalyzed other confederacies like Wendake and the Laurentian Iroquois. Indeed, it may have led to the elimination of the Laurentian Iroquois in the sixteenth century.

Between about 1550 and about 1580, the Laurentian peoples—including the large villages at Stadacona and Hochelaga—were wiped from the map. In the seventy years that followed, Wendake was shattered, destroyed as a political and economic unit and scattered as a people. This represents an enormous change in the geo-politics of the region. The rise of the Haudenosaunee in the 1600s was fired as much by desperate circumstances as it was by ambition. Smallpox ate into the Iroquoian village populations around the Great Lakes, threatening the sustainability of the Haudenosaunee and Wendat alike. By 1640, both confederacies were badly depleted of population, young and old. Ruthless attacks in the generations-long Mourning Wars enabled the Haudenosaunee to capture replacement populations—perhaps as many as four thousand in the seventeenth century—to replenish falling numbers. By 1700, it was reckoned that Kanien'kehá:ka (a.k.a. Mohawk) was mostly comprised of foreigners adopted in raids. The influence of the Haudenosaunee at this point was so great that they had effectively cleared a domain from the rapids at Lachine, all around the southern Great Lakes to the south end of Lake Michigan and the junction of the Ohio and the Mississippi. And yet their population numbers remained far less impressive than their deeds.

Each of these confederacies/councils/leagues pursued complex strategies in order to secure their economic and political future. Wendat and Haudenosaunee cultural practices—as well as those of the Attawandaron, Tionontati, and Wenrohronon (a.k.a. Wenro)—contained many similarities beyond an agricultural focus. (Their reverence and rituals for their dead was particularly definitive.) But farming (most of which was conducted by women whose knowledge of plant husbandry, crop development, and effective land use was extensive and advanced) made it possible to build up larger numbers in semi-permanent villages that relocated once every ten to twenty years based on soil exhaustion and the depletion of fuel sources. Thousands might occupy these longhouse villages; there was reckoned to be four thousand at an Attawandaron village in the late seventeenth century when Haudenosaunee warriors launched their winter campaigns. That site had been repeatedly occupied for something like five hundred years. Having a surplus of food and a regular supply of trade goods, as well as the ability to warehouse both, put the Iroquoian peoples in an interesting position: their villages were marketplaces capable of producing scores of warriors, and they were also sitting targets that might be terrorized, besieged, and burned.

That particular narrative, however, places too much emphasis on conflict. Political cultures evolved within these confederacies that ably governed and reinforced their claim to sovereignty. Councils in the Iroquoian societies were the principal form of government, one that depended on democratic consensus. As a rule, these councils were heavily influenced by female members of the community, even if men were the visible representatives. Women's authority reflected their everyday significance in food and material production, and it was reinforced in their active engagement in trade. As Jan Noel has demonstrated, Haudenosaunee women worked overtly and covertly as merchants, eluding and

exploiting the view of European traders for whom the women were invisible.<sup>5</sup> Also, matrilineality (descent marked along the mother's line) and matrilocality (residence in the home of the woman's family) were common denominators in this region. Women were also active in spiritual matters, which in Iroquoian societies involved, among other things, a great many seasonal festivals. Haudenosaunee women, moreover, used their position as clan leaders to determine when it was both desirable and feasible to go to war. Although Iroquoian peoples were—largely by dint of their ability to feed an army—widely and very visibly engaged in conflict, it was this underlying and interlocking structure of economic, social, political, and cultural activity that made them a force with which to reckon.

## Conclusion

The Eastern Woodlands and Great Lakes peoples experienced waves of disruption in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They had to address population collapse caused by unfamiliar diseases even while locked in a long-term cycle of conflict with rivals. While Haudenosaunee numbers were depleted by war and disease, they were also rebuilt by captives. The same was not true of the Iroquoian peoples of Wendake and the St. Lawrence. Both were virtually scoured from the face of the earth between 1550 and 1650. The geopolitical and economic vacuums had significant consequences in the moment and over the two centuries that followed. The arrival of Europeans in their territories was both a cause and a consequence of these developments. With the disappearance of Wendake Ehen, Anishinaabe commerce and defense strategies had to adapt, which led to the emergence of the Council of Three Fires as the military powerhouse of the continent's heartland by the early eighteenth century. How the easternmost peoples addressed the arrival of Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is considered in the next chapter.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

- Cook, Peter. "Onontio Gives Birth: How the French in Canada Became Fathers to Their Indigenous Allies, 1645–73." *Canadian Historical Review* 96, no. 2 (June 2015): 165–93.
- Dickason, Olive. *The Myth of the Savage and the Beginnings of French Colonialism in the Americas*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1984. See esp. pp. 161–80
- EmperorTigerstar. "The Rise and Fall of the Iroquois." EmperorTigerstar. February 25, 2016. Video, 2:54. <https://youtu.be/P7u-0Dmpi4M>
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- Labelle, Kathryn Magee. *Dispersed But Not Destroyed: A History of the Seventeenth-Century Wendat People*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013. See esp. pp. 1–28.
- MacLeod, D. Peter. "The Anishinabeg Point of View: The History of the Great Lakes Region to 1800 in Nineteenth-Century Mississauga, Odawa, and Ojibwa Historiography." *Canadian Historical Review* LXXIII, no. 2 (1992): 194–210.
- Moogk, Peter. "The 'Others' Who Never Were: Eastern Woodlands Amerindians and Europeans in the Seventeenth Century." *French Colonial History* 1 (2002): 77–100.
- Noel, Jan. "Fertile with Fine Talk: Ungoverned Tongues among Haudenosaunee Women and their Neighbors." *Ethnohistory* 57, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 201–23.

5. See, for example, Jan Noel, "Fertile with Fine Talk: Ungoverned Tongues among Haudenosaunee Women and their Neighbors," *Ethnohistory* 57, no.2 (Spring 2010): 201–23.

- Richter, Daniel K. "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience." In *Trade, Land, and Power: The Struggle for Eastern North America*, 69–96. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
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- Trigger, Bruce G. *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660*. Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987.
- Warrick, Gary, "European Infectious Disease and Depopulation of the Wendat-Tionontate (Huron-Petun)." *World Archaeology* 35, no. 2 (2003): 258–75.

# Chapter 2: Two Models of Commercial and Diplomatic Encounters—Wabanaki and Beothuk

This chapter explores aspects of the encounter between neighbouring Indigenous peoples on the Atlantic coast and Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the Beothuk and the member nations of the Wabanaki Confederacy, we can see different strategies for engaging with foreigners and different contexts in which they did so. One irrefutable lesson in this comparison is that the meeting between Indigenous peoples and Europeans did not follow a single trajectory.

## The Wabanaki World

Everything known about the Wabanaki peoples ca. 1500 indicates a network of rich cultures based on abundant natural resources. This confederacy of related Algonquian-speaking peoples—including the Abenaki, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, and Wolastoqiyik (a.k.a. Maliseet)—emerged in the 1600s, bringing together complementary economies specializing primarily in fisheries, farming, and hunting. Theirs was a large territory, stretching from what is now the state of Maine through the whole of the Maritimes, along the south shore of the St. Lawrence through the Gaspé Peninsula, and across Cabot Strait to the South Coast and the central parts of Taqamkuk (a.k.a. Ktaqamk, Newfoundland) as well. The influence of the Wabanaki Confederacy was felt hundreds of kilometres from their heartland as a trading network and, after contact, as a persistent military force. A culture of seasonal mobility—the sort of movement that expanded the range of resources that might be tapped as well as social and political interactions—defined the Wabanakiak world.

While most members of these related communities foraged for a wide variety of foods, their economic order left little to chance. Inland hunting communities made use of large controlled burns to create open spaces that would attract game. Outer shore populations specialized in open-sea fishing (including for swordfish) and sea mammal hunts. Some communities in the southwest of the region were farmers of the “three sisters.” While the Iroquoian peoples specialized in agriculture and traded to outsiders for meat and fur, the Wabanaki Confederacy was much more self-sufficient and included complimentary resource strategies.

Of the Wabanakiak peoples, the Abenaki, Mi'kmaq, and Wolastoqiyik have figured largest in Canadian history. They were very active participants in trade in their principal territories. They also played a key role in the successes and defense of the French colony, Acadia, and remained a thorn in the side of British imperial efforts in the region. They were not the first peoples in the Northeast to encounter Europeans, but they may, in all likelihood, claim the longest relationship. Basque whaling and sealing expeditions first arrived in the region in the 1500s; they were frequently intercepted by Mi'kmaq fleets setting out from Unima'ki (a.k.a. Cape Breton). Trade inevitably occurred. It would take nearly two hundred years before the Wabanaki would begin to seek formal agreements with newcomers. Their territory was bisected by colonial and then national boundaries, but their anti-British/pro-revolutionary position in the 1770s and '80s means that they continue to straddle imaginary geo-political lines dividing Canada and the United States.



The Beothuk harvested discarded metal—such as nails—left behind on their beaches by touring European fishing fleets, and repurposed it into fishing, sewing, and other implements. Doing so meant they had little need to engage in a structured fur trade. Source: Beothuk Tools, metal, IMG2009-0063-0140-Dm, Canadian Museum of History, accessed January 15, 2019, <https://www.historymuseum.ca/blog/beothuk-tools/>.

## The Beothuk Saga

The Beothuk are best known to modern scholars and the public at large as a disappeared population and culture, which does an injustice to their millennia-long occupation of Newfoundland. They were resourceful and tough. We know, for example, that they shrugged off the hazards of open-ocean canoeing to reach tiny Funk Island, where they could harvest large quantities of bird flesh, eggs, and feathers annually.<sup>1</sup> We know, as well, that their spiritual beliefs were closely tied to bird symbols and artifacts, that they buried their dead on offshore islets—even if they had to carry corpses out of the Newfoundland interior in order to do so—and that they didn't last for more than fifteen hundred years in this territory

1. Todd Kristensen, “Wings and a Prayer,” *Canada's History* 94, no. 1 (February/March 2014): 29–34.

by living hand-to-mouth. They did well, feasted, and celebrated. According to one affecting Spanish report, “they laugh considerably.”<sup>2</sup>

Having said that, the Beothuk fared poorly after contact, and poorly at the hands of historians. The source of the descriptor “red Indians” (so called because of their use of body paint), the Beothuk never integrated into a trans-Atlantic trade network and were viciously persecuted by Europeans. The last known individuals who self-identified as Beothuk died in the early nineteenth century. The archaeological record indicates a retreat from the coast beginning in the eighteenth century as European fishing and land crews competed with Beothuk for foreshore positions and resources. Around Trinity Bay, in the rather chilling words of one study, “we have evidence for a vibrant Beothuk presence in antiquity, overlaid by scorched earth and European artifacts.”<sup>3</sup>

Thoroughly dehumanized in the eyes of European fishing fleets in the seventeenth century, the Beothuk were hunted for decades, despite imperial injunctions against the practice. Representations of the Beothuk reflect the function they served in settler society’s emergent narrative: bloodthirsty and treacherous savages, barbarians, stealthy, reclusive, primitive. These storylines were used to justify colonial violence and Indigenous dispossession and to legitimize colonial settlement. At the same time, foreign observers from the sixteenth century on were often struck by Beothuk ingenuity, technological skill, and strategic ability. These were, after all, a people for whom the fur trade held no appeal: they could obtain iron for free from seasonally-abandoned cod drying racks, and taught themselves how to cold-hammer and the basic blacksmithing skills needed to fabricate tools and weapons from salvaged metal.

Beothuk history is as important and revelatory for its uses and misuses as it is for its detail. A “shadowy people” as far as European intruders are concerned, their near-invisibility became an asset to storytellers among the newcomers. They could be anything that anyone wanted to project onto them. No Euro-North American spent as much time in close contact with a member of the Beothuk nation as W. E. Cormack. He was, depending on one’s perspective, Shanawdithit’s host or captor in St. John’s. And yet, Cormack allegedly thought the Beothuk were Scandinavians. This, and the subsequent discovery of abandoned Viking settlements at L’Anse aux Meadows, helped sustain for the better part of two centuries the myth of Beothuk as non-Indigenous peoples. And, of course, if they weren’t Indigenous then—the logic runs—they couldn’t have been dispossessed. This kind of argument or discourse is an example of what has been called “moves to innocence,” a strategy for exculpation of settler society.<sup>4</sup> Who the Beothuk were, what they did, how they experienced contact, and why they eventually disappeared are important and worthy of study. But it is to the uses of the Beothuk that one is constantly drawn as well.

Widely-read non-academic histories such as Barbara Whitby’s *The Last of the Beothuk* (its title a play on the much more famous *The Last of the Mohicans*) position the last known Beothuk—a young woman named Shawnadithit—as a merciful and forgiving Christ-figure who carries the stories of her people and the sins of her oppressors off into eternity. Colonist handwringing inevitably follows such accounts. Other versions tend to caricature the Beothuk as “archaic,” a stunted branch of Indigenous cultures, one that—by dint of its insularity and challenging environment—was set up for failure.<sup>5</sup> An 1848 play entitled *Ottawah, the Last Chief of the Red Indians of Newfoundland*, offers an example from popular (Euro) culture of the ways in which European culpability in the Beothuk disaster has been dodged. The story

2. L.F.S. Upton, “The Extermination of the Beothuk of Newfoundland,” *Canadian Historical Review* LVIII, no. 2 (June 1977): 136.
3. Donald H. Holly Jr., Christopher B. Wolff, and John C. Erwin, “Before and After the Fire: Archaeological Investigations at a Little Passage/Beothuk Encampment in Trinity Bay, Newfoundland,” *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* 39, no. 1 (2015): 24.
4. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.
5. Donald H. Holly Jr., “A Historiography of an Ahistoricity: On the Beothuk Indians,” *History and Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (June 2003): 127.

pits the Mi'kmaq against the Beothuk, with a young couple caught in between. It has been likened to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, and it has affinities as well with *Romeo and Juliet* (and, anachronistically, *West Side Story*) in that it concludes with the tragic death of the two lovers. What is significant about this play is that it casts the Mi'kmaq as foreigners in Newfoundland and the cause of the Beothuk extinction.<sup>6</sup> This construction of the narrative shifts the blame away from the Europeans, whose depredations against the Indigenous people of Newfoundland and sanctioned murders were continuous features of imperial intrusion. This theme of Mi'kmaq culpability and European innocence persisted in popular discourse throughout the twentieth century.

Did the Beothuk disappear? Mi'kmaq accounts suggest that some married into the Mi'kmaq population along Newfoundland's south shore and in the interior.<sup>7</sup> Similar connections seem to have been forged between the Beothuk and the Innu (a.k.a. Montagnais and Naskapi), the third Indigenous peoples with a toehold on the island of Newfoundland. The language and way of life may have ceased rather sharply, but the genetic legacy of the Beothuk percolates on.

## Conclusion

The western Atlantic before 1700 was predominantly an Indigenous foreshore, and parts of it remained dominated by Indigenous peoples' fleets for much longer. Whether whaling, fishing, or hunting seals, auks, and otters, the Inuit, Innu, Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and their neighbours plunged nets and spears into the rich inshore waters and harvested food across the "domain of islands." Whatever European empires may have thought or claimed, the French and British were not much more than guests or interlopers in this realm until the eighteenth century. In the hundred years that followed, the Mi'kmaq and the Beothuk in particular would confront imperialism and colonialism in different ways and with different outcomes. More of those themes are taken up in later chapters.

Just as Eastern Woodlands peoples were coming to terms with what was, by 1700, an indisputably permanent European presence, the peoples of the far west were beginning to feel a change in the commercial climate as well. The next chapter considers the trading realm of the Plains, parklands, and lowlands, and explores some of the ways in which the many and varied Indigenous peoples of the region interacted from the 1500s to the 1800s.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

6. University of Guelph, *Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare Project*, "Ottawah, the Last Chief of the Red Indians of Newfoundland," accessed July 4, 2017, [http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/a\\_ottawah.cfm](http://www.canadianshakespeares.ca/a_ottawah.cfm).
7. Donald Holly, Christopher Wolff, and John Erwin, "Before and After the Fire: Archaeological Investigations at a Little Passage/Beothuk Encampment in Trinity Bay, Newfoundland," *Canadian Journal of Archaeology/Journal Canadien d'Archéologie* 39 (2015): 1–30. See also Chief Mi'sel Joe and Christopher Aylward, "Beothuk and Mi'kmaq: An Interview with Chief Mi'sel Joe," in *Tracing Ochre: Changing Perspectives on the Beothuk*, ed. Fiona Polack (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 117–32.

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- Upton, L. F. S. "The Extermination of the Beothuk of Newfoundland." *Canadian Historical Review* LVIII, no. 2 (June 1977): 133-53.
- Walls, Martha Elizabeth. *No Need of a Chief for this Band: The Maritime Mi'kmaq and Federal Electoral Legislation, 1899-1951*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010. See esp. pp. 35-37.
- Wicken, William, and Michael Lanphier. *Mi'kmaq Treaties on Trial: History, Land, and Donald Marshall Junior*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

# Chapter 3: The Plains Peoples—Allies, Conflict, Adaptation

In the heart of the Prairies, not far from where the Saskatchewan River puddles into Cumberland Lake, the Cree—probably the Assin’skowitziniwak or Rocky Cree—came to blows with a people known variously as the Atsina, Gros Ventre, or A’aninin. The Piikáni (a.k.a. Stoney, Piegan-Blackfoot) despised them and called them “Snakes.” Their identity is uncertain, in part because they were in all likelihood comprised of individuals and families drawn from Tsétsêhéstâhese (a.k.a. Cheyenne) and Arapaho backgrounds: their language was distinct and reputedly difficult to pick up. They arrived on the plains and parkland sometime around 1200 CE, having been chased out of their Wisconsin-area homeland by the Anishinaabeg. With a range that extended deep into what is now Minnesota and the Dakotas, the Atsina were among the first on the Northern Plains to acquire horses. At Cumberland Lake in 1793, however, they were just in the way.

The Cree, enjoying a population boom (or possibly a rebound), were expanding westward in the early eighteenth century, bringing with them the bounty of European trade goods acquired at Hudson’s Bay. They found eager buyers for guns among the Niitsitapi (a.k.a. Blackfoot) who, for their part, could provide bison robes and hides, as well as the newest transportation technology in the West: horses. The Atsina, eager to exploit and expand their own position as horse traders and wanting to benefit from a regular supply of guns, too, tried to intercede. Rather than giving their immediate neighbours guns, however, the Nêhiyawak (a.k.a. Plains Cree) preferred to send guns deep into the Niitsitapi Confederacy. At the same time, they stepped up their raids against the Atsina, wearing them down and pushing them out of the Saskatchewan valleys. In 1793, then, a party of Nêhiyawak ambushed a sixteen-lodge band of Atsina, slaughtering almost the entire population. Just as soon as they could regroup, Atsina warriors turned their anger against traders of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) and the North West Company (NWC), the source of guns wielded by the Nêhiyawak raiders. In the two decades that followed, the Atsina retreated from the Northern Plains, some of them evidently settling into the Mandan-Hidatsa villages, the principal trade mart of the region.

Why does this matter? Strong fences make good neighbours, it is said, and the Atsina/Gros Ventre/A’aninin/Snake were a strong fence, a valuable buffer state on the Prairies between the Niitsitapi and the Nêhiyawak. Once that was gone, matters on the Northern Plains were bound to change dramatically. Cree and Piikáni raids on northern Atsina positions opened a corridor for improved trade between the two powerhouses and, with the arrival of smallpox on the Plains in the 1780s, the Atsina were pushed farther and farther south, largely by the Nakoda Oyadebi (a.k.a. Nakota, Assiniboine). Southern Niitsitapi depended on Atsina cooperation in obtaining horses for decades and bridled a little at Cree-Nakoda Oyadebi attacks on their sometime-trade partners. But, by 1800, the Niitsitapi had direct and more reliable access to supplies of horses, as did the Nakoda Oyadebi. (One Canadian trader wrote, around 1799, that the Nêhiyawak were so desperate for horses that “If they can procure a gun they instantly give it to the Assiniboines in exchange for a horse.”)<sup>1</sup> The war with the Atsina opened space for the Nêhiyawak; it also meant that the HBC could venture farther inland without fear. Once Edmonton House was in place, the Piikáni in particular had no more need of their Nêhiyawak suppliers of guns. In 1806, the Niitsitapi Confederacy broke off their fragile alliance with the Iron Confederacy (the Nêhiyawak-Nakoda Oyadebi- Anihšînâpê); conflict between these two parties sharply intensified over the seven decades that followed as each became better-supplied with guns and horses. Pushing the Atsina into the Mandan-Hidatsa camp,

1. Alexander Henry the Younger, quoted in John Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), 35.

however, meant that there was less of a welcome for the Nêhiyawak and Nakoda Oyadebi at the trade marts.<sup>2</sup> Nêhiyawak aggression and expansion was rapidly complicating life on the Northern Plains.

This chapter looks at the Indigenous peoples of the Prairies within the context of trade, resources, relationships, and competition across the interior of North America and how that was influenced by the addition of Atlantic commerce. We also consider the ways in which new technologies and environmental change transformed Plains cultures in particular into mobile food-production factories, mounted cavalries, and merchant brigades.

## Finding the West

What Canadians today describe as “the West” or “the Prairies” is far from a monolithic landscape of grasslands. Rolling, tree-covered parkland covers enormous tracts, and whole nation-states could be lost in the vast expanse of lowlands and marshes around Hudson’s Bay. There are, as well, dramatically sculpted drylands, the resource-rich foothills of the Rocky Mountain range, and the Precambrian Shield of the North—a region that is so pockmarked with lakes as to be as much water as land. There is no natural boundary to the south, which means that the peoples of the parklands and plains in the North were residents, neighbours, relatives, allies, clients, and adversaries of peoples located across the Great Plains.

Likewise, there is no monolithic “Western Indian” culture, despite the persistence of Hollywood images and the simplicity of some historical narratives. Partly the substantial differences one encounters within regions and across even a single language group reflect the variety of economic niches in which western and northern peoples operated. The Cree offer several useful examples.

No modern identity term can capture the enormity and nature of the Cree world. Their traditional territories extend from the Rocky Mountains (associated with the Nêhiyawak), across the parklands (dominated by the Nihithaw and Assin’skowitziniwak, a.k.a. Woodland and Rocky Cree), to the lowlands around Hudson’s and James Bay (homelands of the Maskiki Wi Iniwak, Mushkegowuk, Maskekon, and Mōsōni, a.k.a. Swampy Cree), and into northern Québec and Labrador (the territory of the Innu, a.k.a. Montagnais and Naskapi). The Cree have been for centuries, if not millennia, mobile and interconnected peoples whose Algonquian dialects are distinct but related. Their collective territory is the largest associated with any one Indigenous people in what is now Canada, both currently and over the last six hundred years or so. On the Prairies they emerged in recent centuries as effective bison hunters, while in the parkland they survived on a much more varied diet, and in the lowlands on fowl and fish. These food sources did much to determine divisions of labour and social organization. A bison hunt requires—and, when effective, can feed—much larger numbers than snaring rabbits or weiring/spearing fish. The Montagnais (a.k.a. Neenoino) and Naskapi branches of the Innu alone can be differentiated by the less migratory former and the caribou-hunting latter. Horses, too, are of much greater use on the Plains than in the swampy lands of the Northeast and across the Canadian Shield. These are superficial and obvious distinctions, but worth making at the outset because of the complexity of the Cree domain.

2. Mary E. Malainy, “The Gros Ventre/Fall Indians in Historical and Archaeological Interpretation,” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* XXV, no. 1 (2005), 166–7.

## Credit Where Credit Is Due

It is interesting to note how the term “fur trader” has come to be used. Typically, it only denotes the European or Canadian who exchanges goods for pelts. The people who capture, prepare, and transport furs and hides across vast distances (as much as a thousand kilometres annually in some cases) are not, conventionally, called “fur traders.” And yet, that is their job description: trade furs. What’s more, when we look more closely at Indigenous participants, the trapping of some animals (especially smaller mammals, like rabbits) was explicitly women’s work, as was the scraping and treating of hides. This was true, too, of goods heading south to the Mandan–Hidatsa villages: many of those were prepared and—in the days of the travois, before horses—packed by women. The production—from catching to cleaning and presenting—of foods that sustained the HBC personnel around York Factory and elsewhere was also “women’s work.” This included involvement in local fisheries and the lively trade in swan meat and feathers. And yet, representations of so much of the fur trade, in print and in pictures, is of a men-only industry.

Borders between Indigenous peoples in the North and west have never been precise, nor have they been unchanging. The Niitsitapi, for example, are thought to have originated as far east as Maine and migrated—roughly in parallel with the Anishinaabe—west through the Great Lakes and then onto the Northern Plains sometime around 1300. Arriving in what are now the borderlands between Alberta and Montana, they eventually pushed the resident Ktunaxa (a.k.a. Kutenai, Kootenay) off the Prairies, over the foothills, and across the mountains into what is now southeastern British Columbia. The Anihšināpē (a.k.a. Nahkawiniwak, Saulteaux, Plains Ojibwa, Chippewa) extended their reach into the Red River Valley of southern Manitoba in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They were pushed, as many nations were, by increased competition for land between Indigenous peoples in the Ohio Basin and settler societies. Similarly, the Atsina shifted gradually north and west into the Badlands and were followed in the late nineteenth century by the Lakota Sioux.

Rounding out the main peoples of this Indigenous landscape are the Athabaskan-speaking peoples of the North. Their territories reach from Hudson’s Bay west to the Yukon and the Pacific coast. Were it not for the presence of the Inuit around Mackenzie Bay, the Athabaskan-speakers would have waterfront on three seas. Of this complex and widespread people, the group that plays the most prominent role in the post-contact fur trade is the Dēnesųłīné (a.k.a. Chipewyan), neighbours and adversaries of the Maskiki Wi Iniwak on northwest Hudson’s Bay.



Three Káínaa women—whose names are recorded as Double Strike, Heavy Face, and Takes a Gun—stand beside a pair of dogs harnessed to traditional travois. In the days before horses, this was the principal means of moving goods across the drylands. Source: Provincial Archives of Alberta, Kainai Women and Dog Travois, ca. 1910, photograph, Flickr, [https://www.flickr.com/photos/alberta\\_archives/29614156192/in/photostream/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/alberta_archives/29614156192/in/photostream/).

## Commerce and Conflict

Prior to the 1730s, peoples in the West moved about mainly by means of an extensive webwork of river systems. Where there were gaps, they walked. Homes were *tipis*, substantial conical tents consisting of long poles and sheets of animal hide. These were constructed, assembled, disassembled, and relocated by women—who were recognized as the *tipi* owners. Moving possessions over land from one seasonal location to another, from one trading opportunity to the next, involved carrying their possessions or dragging them—using a *travois*, pulled by dogs and people, usually women. Mostly, however, these were riverine peoples whose homelands drained either into Hudson’s Bay via the Saskatchewan Rivers or the Red and Assiniboine system, or south into the Mississippi from the Milk River and the Missouri. These river systems circulate through the interior of the continent, allowing Maskiki Wi Iniwak merchants along Hudson’s Bay to send goods into Niitsitapi territory, where the same goods might be carried south to the Milk and then to the junction of the Heart and Missouri, where the Mandan and Hidatsa trade marts were located. Or the Cree party could double back via the Qu’Appelle and Assiniboine to Red River, and then south and west to the watershed between the Souris, the Sheyenne,

and the Missouri, and then on to the Mandan villages. Another alternative was to square the circle from the Assiniboine/Red by heading downstream (north) into Manitoba's lakes and home to Hudson's Bay. If the Mi'kmaq can be said to occupy an "empire of islands," the Western Cree dominated an empire of rivers. Their hold on this territory tightened after 1700.



*Lake and river systems in the Hudson's Bay drainage basin presented the possibility of circuits rather than one-way travel, as may be seen in this map drawn by Cha Chay Pay Way Ti, of the Cree. (Public Domain). Source: Cha Chay Pay Way Ti's Map of the Waterways of a Part of Northern Manitoba 1806 [facsimile by Peter Fidler]. [1:1,267,200] Published in John Warkentin and Richard I. Ruggles, Manitoba Historical Atlas: a Selection of Facsimile Maps, Plans, and Sketches from 1612 to 1969 (Winnipeg: Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, 1969), 142. In the Public Domain.*

Regional economic specialization didn't stop at the forty-ninth parallel, not before or after contact with Europe. The Mandan-Hidatsa were the last remaining agrarian societies in the Northern Plains; consequently, goods reached their trade mart from every direction. The Mandan-Hidatsa were influenced by the Mississippian cultures and, much later, the expansionist Comanche Confederacy and their Shoshone (a.k.a. Shoshoni) relatives, as well as the French and Spanish intruders along the Mississippi in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. The trade marts opened with two days of welcoming festivities and pronouncements of fair trading and goodwill, all of which was forgotten when the hardnosed villagers pressed their advantage in trade. It was thanks, in large part, to the Mandan-Hidatsa commercial system that horses reached the Northern Plains in the 1730s, initiating a revolution in economic activities, conflict, and human mobility. Shoshone bows, reckoned to be the best on the Great Plains, were also sold on through the trade marts, as were crafts, furs, and hides.

Access to trade good sources was assiduously guarded on all sides. The Shoshone dominated the horse trade in the Northern Plains (across what is now the borderlands between the US and Canada) and worked hard to keep horses out of the hands of their rivals, the Niitsitapi and Nêhiyawak. The Mandan-Hidatsa were consummate managers of supply lines and knew that a European/Canadian/American fur trade presence farther west would reduce their monopolistic control—onto which they held until smallpox undid them in the 1830s. Similarly, the Sioux taxed Nakoda Oyadebi traders—financially and physically—as they attempted to access the Mandan-Hidatsa villages. The Maskiki Wi Iniwak established “home guard” encampments outside the Hudson's Bay Company's York Factory post in the 1680s, and for the next two centuries charged fur-packing Indigenous merchants from farther west for the privilege of trading with the British, or they simply took on the role of full-time intermediaries and middlemen. As French, French-Canadian, and Anglo-Canadian traders appeared in the region west of the Red River Valley in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, other Cree and, later and farther north, Dènesuḷḷiné set up similar buffers around new posts and forts. There were symbiotic elements to these relationships, home guards protecting the merchant forts while gleaning benefits from the trade opportunities that drew in other traders.

The movement of the Cree into the Prairies has been placed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, perhaps earlier. Certainly, the increased migration and acclimatization of the Swampy and Woods Cree to the Prairies was spurred by new commercial developments. Beginning in the late 1600s, European traders were anchoring their ships in Hudson's Bay and James Bay. In the Eastern coves and river deltas, this allowed the Innu to choose between trade in the North and trade on the St. Lawrence. These two marketplaces were separated by significant distances, but seasonal migrations and networks of trade brought both within reach of the region's Cree. To the west, the Mōsonī (a.k.a. Moose Cree) took advantage of the HBC's Moose Factory, which gave them more direct access to European goods than they had enjoyed through the Wendat two generations earlier. A fourth fort—York Factory—was built in 1684 between the Nelson and Hayes Rivers. French naval and commercial interests attacked these positions and tried to lure away Cree traders with competitive trade goods. This put the Innu in a particularly good position to haggle and demand improvements on the quality of British goods. (It has even been suggested that insistent Cree consumers directed British gun-makers to significantly improve their product—mechanically and aesthetically—in a process that contributed to an emergent

industrial revolution in England.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, “the stuff of the Americas,” including beavers fashioned into top hats—and Indigenous people both real and imagined—helped make the city of London itself.)<sup>4</sup>

For the Maskiki Wi Iniwak on the west shore of Hudson’s Bay, where there was no hope of whipsawing European traders against one another, their own long-established backward linkages were key to their success. For almost the whole of the eighteenth century, the HBC personnel “slept by the Bay,” not venturing further inland and relying on the various “Swampy Cree” to bring the furs to their posts. In most histories of Canada, this is pointed to as the British company’s critical failing; it is presented as a kind of entrepreneurial lethargy that gave the French and then Anglo-Montréalers an advantage in the West. For the better part of a century, however, it was the Maskiki Wi Iniwak, Mōsōni, and their lowland neighbours who enjoyed the real advantage. They were able to obtain European goods directly and in large quantities. These could then be traded on through their various networks to Niitsitapi, Nakoda Oyadebi, and Anihšināpē allies. The Nakoda Oyadebi—tough prairie fighters before and after the arrival of horses—were instrumental in getting those British goods through Sioux lines to the Mandan-Hidatsa trade marts. More and more lowland Cree were, as a consequence of the success of these trade expeditions, spending greater amounts of time farther in the western parklands and prairies.

It was in the company of their Nakoda Oyadebi friends that these Cree adopted the principal features of Plains societies: bison hunting, larger and more tightly organized family units, and elements of a militarized culture. Because the “Plains Cree” as a culture evolved around the time of the arrival of horses, the Nêhiyawak were almost from the start a mounted society with an increased range and a competitive advantage. Cree leadership models were changeable under these circumstances. Smaller foraging communities might get by with a patriarch-style leader tacitly selected by dint of their ability to provide and protect; bison-hunting communities, by contrast, could consist of many lodges and upwards of 200 people, leading to a more specialized and even hierarchical civil leadership. In these Nêhiyawak societies, a leader’s credentials had to include ability as an orator, a provider, and a warrior. The Plains societies’ practice of “counting coup”—an act of courage in raids or battle—was a key part of a leader’s list of accomplishments. Nêhiyawak women, for their part, were conduits for cultural change. Whether voluntarily or otherwise, Plains women moved from one camp and one nation to another, bringing with them older Plains traditions in clothes-making, tipi design, and food cultures. In this last respect, Nêhiyawak (and Nakoda Oyadebi) women read the landscape as a larder with a huge array of nutrients and flavours, as well as strategic opportunities. One account from Pembina in 1801 describes women taking advantage of a bison herd frozen solid in the river: they “harvested the buffalo for the entire month of April, processing meat, tongues, and tallow until the weather warmed and the flesh was too decomposed to be useful.”<sup>5</sup> Through extensive economic activity and the production of necessities like clothing, snowshoes, caulking for canoes, and tons of pemmican, Nêhiyawak women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries literally *made* the Plains culture.

Not to be left out of this picture, the Anihšināpē controlled access to the Red River (which provided another avenue into Mandan-Hidatsa territory) and links through the Council of Three Fires to Montréal-based trade lines. The Nêhiyawak/Nakoda Oyadebi/Anihšināpē alliance—the Iron Confederacy—thus had access to British and French guns, Shoshone bows, Mandan-Hidatsa trade marts, and clients among the Niitsitapi who could supply horses. The Iron Confederacy emerges in the eighteenth century as a powerhouse of commerce and a culturally vibrant, adaptive peoples whose population was growing faster than their neighbours’.

3. Ann Carlos and Frank Lewis, *Commerce by a Frozen Sea: Native Americans and the European Fur Trade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 69–105.
4. Coll Thrush, *Indigenous London: Native Travelers at the Heart of Empire* (Princeton: Yale University Press, 2016), 15.
5. Sherry Farrell Racette, “Nimble Fingers and Strong Backs: First Nations and Métis Women in Fur Trade and Rural Economies,” in Carol Williams, ed., *Indigenous Women and Work: From Labor to Activism* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 151.

The counter-balance to Cree ascendancy on the Northern Plains—and a peoples who loom large in Western Canadian history—is the Niitsitapi (a.k.a. Blackfoot) Confederacy. Spread across what is now Alberta and some of western Saskatchewan, the Niitsitapi included the Piikáni (Piegan), Káínaa (Bloods), Siksika (Siksikáwa, Blackfoot), and the Tsuu T’ina (Sarcee). They claim ancestral territories stretching from the North Saskatchewan River (at Edmonton) to the Yellowstone River in Montana. Like the Cree, their commercial interests pulled them into the Mandan–Hidatsa sphere of influence. But the Niitsitapi were geographically closer to the horse–trading and breeding nations to the southwest and so became a mounted people earlier. While horses provided obvious advantages in raids and in the bison hunt (although new skills had to be learned and drilled, of course), it was as a pack animal that the horse had the greatest impact. Able to carry or pull vastly more than dogs, the horse made it possible for the Niitsitapi to acquire and move material wealth. This catalyzed the production and display of the grand and splendid ceremonial wear that would become a prominent outward expression of Plains culture.

Having suffered badly in the smallpox epidemic of 1781–83, the Niitsitapi Confederacy found itself targeted by its principal enemies: the Shoshone and Ktunaxa. In response, the Niitsitapi mounted a highly effective counterassault that cleared the region of all competition and replenished their own numbers with captives. The turmoil of these years introduced a period of growth and authority in the Prairie west for the Niitsitapi. In 1795, they had direct access to European manufactured goods at what the Niitsitapi variously call *omukoyis*, *titunga*, and *nasagachoo*: Fort Edmonton, an HBC post. Because of the barriers erected and maintained by the Iron Confederacy, and because of the distances involved, the Niitsitapi had been insulated from direct contact with Europeans. Now regular contact with Europeans was a reality, and the Niitsitapi were suddenly freed from dependency on the Nêhiyawak for guns.

When historians look at this period of Nêhiyawak ascendancy in particular, the focus is often on the conflict it aroused. The Nêhiyawak–Niitsitapi alliance unraveled in 1806, and raids across the southern Prairies accelerated. In part, this was a continuation and even an extension of the status-winning business of “counting coup.” It also reflected changed demographic and economic conditions. Indigenous peoples of the Northern Plains in general were rebuilding post-epidemic population numbers and pursuing the bison herds with unprecedented energy, both for food and for trade. Competition from the Métis of the Red–Assiniboine valleys and the Lakota Sioux occupied the southeastern flank of the Plains, while the Atsina held on by their fingernails to the Cypress Hills. American traders and cavalries became a new factor in the West, bringing with them the smallpox that destroyed the Mandan–Hidatsa villages in the late 1830s and pitching everyone into even more tense competition and instability. It was also in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century that employees of the HBC and the NWC were killing one another in the literally cut-throat “fur trade wars.” Despite this long list of conflict-laden developments and ruptures, what deserves to be emphasized is continuity, fluidity, and adaptability. The eighteenth and the nineteenth century was a period of fast-moving economic, social, and technological revolutions in the West and the North. People were being asked to make choices quickly as to how best preserve and advance their lives, cultures, and interests. It is, therefore, an exciting and possibly unparalleled historical era.

## Conclusion

Reorienting the fur trade from the colony-to-nation narrative familiar to students of Canadian history to something that is more completely Indigenous is challenging. In part, it’s due to the sources of original information, informants, and the huge pile of historical literature that obscures other storylines. On the Pacific coast and in the Cordillera—that area between the Rockies and the sea—there are both additional challenges and tremendous resources for a closer understanding of commercial and political systems before, during, and after contact.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

Bird, Louis. *Our Voices*. Last modified 2019. <https://www.ourvoices.ca/index>

Carlos, Ann, and Frank Lewis. *Commerce by a Frozen Sea: Native Americans and the European Fur Trade*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010. See esp. pp. 69–105.

Colpitts, George. “Peace, War, and Climate Change on the Northern Plains: Bison Hunting in the Neutral Hills during the Mild Winters of 1830–34.” *Canadian Journal of History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 420–41.

Ferguson, R. Brian, and Neil L. Whitehead. “The Violent Edge of Empire.” In *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States and Indigenous Warfare*, edited by R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, 1–30. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1992. (Pay special attention to pp. 23–25.)

Kheraj, Sean. “Dr. Sean Kheraj Question 2 – Transfer of Biota to Canada.” TRU, Open Learning. November 18, 2015. Video, 2:33. <https://youtu.be/72mP5Y9JXUg>

Kheraj, Sean. “Dr. Sean Kheraj Question 3 – Animals Introduced to Canada.” TRU, Open Learning. November 18, 2015. Video, 2:31. <https://youtu.be/XPXQtdGKFX8>

Lytwyn, Victor P. “The Lowland Cree before European Contact: Images and Reality.” In *Muskegowuck Athinuwick: Original People of the Great Swampy Land*, 27–40. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002.

Milloy, John S. *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988.

Podruckny, Carolyn, and Laura Peers, eds. *Gathering Places: Aboriginal and Fur Trade Histories*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.

Ray, Arthur J. *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660–1870*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

Ray, Arthur J., and Donald Freeman. “Give Us Good Measure”: *An Economic Analysis of Relations between the Indians and the Hudson’s Bay Company before 1763*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978. See esp. pp. 44–49, 218–28.

St-Onge, Nicole. ““He Was neither a Soldier nor a Slave: He Was under the Control of No Man’: Kahnawake Mohawks in the Northwest Fur Trade, 1790–1850.” *Canadian Journal of History* 51, no. 1 (2016): 1–32.

## Chapter 4: The Trans-Cordilleran West



*This photograph of a Haida village in 1878 shows the size and wealth of coastal communities, as well as signs of abandonment. Encounters with European traders inevitably entailed encounters with unfamiliar diseases as well. Source: George Dawson, Cumshewa Indian Village. Haida Indians. Cumshewa Inlet, Queen Charlotte Islands, B.C., 1878, photograph, MIKAN no.3193496, Library and Archives of Canada.*

This chapter considers the highly sophisticated communities west of the Rockies. This is much more than a “sea of mountains” and it is much, much more than simply the Northwest Coast. This is a territory in which at least 30 different and rich languages developed over centuries and millennia. (To get a sense of the historic and current cultural diversity of the region, take a look at this [First People’s Language Map](https://maps.fpcc.ca/).<sup>1</sup>) This chapter considers the pre-contact relationships between various peoples, the achievements of a distinctive and rich regional cultural matrix, the changes brought on by the intrusion of outsiders, and the impact of the early fur trade.

1. First Peoples’ Culture Council, “Language Map of British Columbia,” 2019, <https://maps.fpcc.ca/>.

## The Trans-Cordilleran West Encounters Global Capitalism

For Indigenous peoples, the great mountain range at the western edge of the Prairies—the Pacific Cordillera—represents a barrier that historically kept the affairs of Plains peoples and other societies at some distance. There were, however, peoples who probed and made use of the passes, rivers, and lakes that make movement possible between the continent's penthouse on the Interior Plateau and the Prairies. Secwépemc encounters with Niitsitapi in the foothills and in the passes are well documented, as is the conflict between Ktunaxa and Niitsitapi. Nonetheless, this is one quarter of North America into which the “three sisters” evidently made no headway, where egalitarianism was not universally embraced, and where the impact of European encounters was muted for several centuries.

Different peoples enjoyed different vistas. The Dane-Zaa (a.k.a. Dunne-za, Beaver) in the Peace River Valley looked east across the Prairies toward Nèhiyawak traders; they also straddled the Rocky Mountains to the west and partnered with Sekani neighbours and traded for obsidian from Mount Edziza in Tahltan territory—more than 1000 km away (and a very hard 1000 km at that).<sup>2</sup> Their trade network reached far to the north and all the way to the West Coast. The Syilx (a.k.a. Okanagan) traded south along their river and lake system deep into Salis (a.k.a. Flathead) territory and across the mountains. There, they obtained horses ca. 1730s and occasionally hunted bison. Their northern neighbours and sometime foes, the Secwépemc, enjoyed commercial relations to the west with the peoples of the Fraser Canyon and to the north with the Tsilhqot'in (a.k.a. Chilcotin); and they traded as far afield as Nuxalk (a.k.a. Bella Coola) territory.

Perhaps ironically, the very richness of West Coast environments did more to contain than connect Indigenous communities. Hemmed in by great numbers of neighbours on every side, coastal peoples used commerce as a lubricant for good relations and force to defend and advance their interests, too. There was plentiful regional conflict and competition for resources before the arrival of Europeans, some of which resulted in shifting territorial boundaries. There are signs of a population decline in the early 1500s, which at least one historian has tried to tie to smallpox spreading north from Mexico, but warfare is as likely a culprit. While the process of diffusion—the spread and swapping back and forth of customs, foods, beliefs, and so on—can be documented across a broad canvas stretching from Mesoamerica to the Northern Plains and the Great Lakes prior to 1492, there's little to suggest similar exchanges between the West Coast and societies either east of the Rockies or much farther south than Oregon. Everything west of the Cordillera is a huge and culturally rich area but isolated nevertheless from the rest of North America.

2. Robin Ridington and Jillian Ridington in collaboration with elders of the Dane-Zaa First Nations, *Where Happiness Dwells: A History of the Dane-Zaa First Nations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013) 69.



*Kitwanga (a.k.a. Gitwangak, Battle Hill) was one of several fortified locations in Gitxsan territory. This one was built, defended, and used as a launch pad for raids by 'Nekt in the 1700s. Source: Gitwangak Battle Hill National Historic Site, photograph, TripAdvisor, accessed September 30, 2019, [https://www.tripadvisor.ca/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g6483328-d6419707-i211932171-Gitwangak\\_Battle\\_Hill\\_National\\_Historic\\_Site-Kitwanga\\_Kitimat\\_Stikine\\_D.html#21193217.1](https://www.tripadvisor.ca/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g6483328-d6419707-i211932171-Gitwangak_Battle_Hill_National_Historic_Site-Kitwanga_Kitimat_Stikine_D.html#21193217.1)*

Notwithstanding recurrent conflicts and the occasional catastrophe—and there were a few associated with earthquakes and mudslides—regional civilizations and populations appear to have enjoyed overall good health. Conditions were perhaps ideal, then, for large populations clustered in sizable villages in the 1500s through the 1700s. Ascertaining the numbers before contact is challenging. Village sites and capacity can tell us a great deal, but some villages were used only seasonally and so there's a danger of double-counting. What is absolutely clear, however, is that these were the largest population nodes north of Mexico. And, as populations between the Atlantic and the Rockies declined due to colonial wars, epidemics, and loss of resources from 1600 to 1800, the West Coast towns became even more anomalously large in contrast. The limits of Cordilleran isolation were flagged, however, by the arrival of introduced diseases. Smallpox, measles, and other foreign diseases swept through some of these communities in the late 1700s, cutting them to shreds. There is evidence for a severe epidemic of smallpox in 1782–83, mostly likely with origins in Mexico and on the Western Plains. This affliction would have arrived without the help of European ships. Some accounts reckon there was a mortality of 50 to 75 per cent of the population in affected areas. Not all parts of the territories west of the Rockies were hit, however, and the central coast in particular appears to have escaped unscathed until the nineteenth century. The Haida and the Ditidaht were not so lucky, nor were the Stó:lō.

Smallpox was only one part of an accelerating Columbian Exchange. The region would not be as impacted by imported biota (apart from horses inland) until the 1850s, and colonialism would mostly wait until mid-century as well. Nevertheless, for the coastal and interior peoples, the decade between 1772 and 1782 was a watershed. It was in these years that Spanish vessels worked their way north from Mexican ports to counter Russian claims in the region. The Spanish didn't make landfall between California and Alaska until a British expedition arrived in 1778. By 1788—when the

Spanish returned in force—only those Northwest Coast peoples in the most accessible bays and inlets would have seen as much as a handful of Europeans in their territories. Some new trade goods were working their way into and through the ancient trade networks; consequently, well-placed local leaders, such as the Mowachaht figure Maquinna (d. ca. 1795) and his brother Callicum (murdered by the Spanish in 1789), and Wickaninnish of the Tla-o-qui-aht (a.k.a. Clayoquot) emerged as regional commercial kingpins by the late 1780s. They used their enhanced status to advance territorial claims at the expense of their rivals and to exact tribute from weaker or less advantageously-located communities. At the same time, the peoples of the Salish Sea were increasingly in conflict as Kwakwaka'wakw slavers made the most of post-epidemic vulnerability among the Stó:lō and other Coast Salish communities. It was these same raids that propelled Salish people to combine in what may have been their first political and military confederacy in the 1830s.<sup>3</sup> Bill Angelbeck and Eric McLay, “The Battle at Maple Bay: The Dynamics of Coast Salish Political Organization through Oral Histories,” *Ethnohistory* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 359–91. New factors such as trade goods and foreign diseases were thus interpreted by Indigenous peoples within their own contexts.

The Spanish were invited to build a post at Yuquot, which was dismantled in 1795. For the next 30 years, there were no coastal Russian, British, American, or Spanish bases between the mouth of the Columbia River and Lingít (a.k.a. Tlingit) territory. Indigenous traders whipsawed European trading expeditions against one another, waiting until there was enough competition in their harbours to do so. Foreigners were obliged to participate in lengthy winter ceremonies before trade could begin. The pace and rituals of trade were, therefore, largely determined by Indigenous needs and expectations, some of which were adapted to suit the emerging context of global commerce. Additionally, attempts at gunboat commerce were typically answered with force. A few dozen unfortunate sailors thereby found themselves enslaved by the local communities and some of them executed. These were all new developments but still within an overwhelmingly Indigenous context.

The Interior saw the establishment of European trading outposts from the 18-aughts. Fort Fraser in the North was established in 1806 by the Canadians, whose personnel included French- and Anglo/Scottish-Canadians, Loyalist refugees from the United States, Orkneymen from the North Sea, Iroquoian-speaking voyageurs, Abenaki men, and a few Cree and Métis women. Six years later, Fort Thompson was erected at Tk'emlúps (a.k.a. Kamloops) by the American Pacific Fur Company, which also established the first of several forts at the mouth of the Columbia. These and other posts were linked together in a chain that stretched, until 1821, from the Pacific to Montréal and thereafter to London via Hudson's Bay. Secwépmc merchants might sell their goods at Fort Kamloops or Fort Alexandria for Canadian and British manufactures or, sensing a better deal on the coast, hand their pelts on to Nuxalk traders who could haggle between American and British dealers on ships that had just sailed from Guangdong, Boston, Chile, or Hawai'i. At the same time, Secwépmc and Syilx maintained their active trade relationships with peoples from across the lower Columbia Plateau and into the Southwest.

## Succession Planning

Ligeex. Maquinna. Kw'eh. These were, in this period, giants of trade and political clout. Maquinna was reckoned to have between three hundred and six hundred warriors at his disposal. Ligeex (a.k.a. Legaic) was both the title and the name by which a line of powerful Tsimshian leaders were known. One Ligeex in the 1820s and '30s dictated terms of trade to the HBC and the Russians: he stipulated where trade posts could

be built, and he forged alliances through marriage to his daughter, Sudaal. Kw'eh (b. circa 1755–d. 1840) asserted monopolistic control over salmon fisheries in the Dalkeh territory, enabling him to starve foreign traders if the need arose. On the Interior Plateau, one lineage in particular had dramatic impacts before, during, and after contact.

The Pelkamulox family had roots in Spokane territory outside of the Syilx lands. The second man to wear the name Pelkamulox took a wife from the Secwépemc and another from the Head-of-the-Lake Syilx. The latter emerged as a favourite and her community became the seat of power in the early eighteenth century, drawing the Syilx centre of gravity northward. A son from this Okanagan marriage, also called Pelkamulox, emerged in the later 1700s as an ambitious military planner, and is described by one biographer as a megalomaniac who needed to be reeled in by a Secwépemc half-brother before launching a catastrophic war against all his Indigenous neighbours. Turning from war, this Pelkamulox thereafter enjoyed his greatest triumphs as a diplomat, especially among the foothills peoples east of the Rockies, which is where he first encountered white traders with the North West Company. His only son, Hwistesmetxē'qEn (a.k.a. Nkwala, Nicola), was born in Pelkamulox's stone fortress near present-day Oroville around 1780, and his life straddles the proto-contact and contact phases.

Different communities were able to exploit the practice of political and economic polygyny under Hwistesmetxē'qEn. He is said to have had formally sanctioned unions with fifteen women, with whom he produced some fifty children. These arrangements constituted a kind of glue that held together the whole Syilx-Secwépemc alliance.

Hwistesmetxē'qEn vastly increased Syilx power by means of huge herds of horses and a powerful mounted cavalry, with which he avenged his father's murder with four hundred deaths among the offending Stl'atl'imx. The Nicola Valley gets its name from this figure: its inhabitants were effectively subdued by the Syilx. The long-running Secwépemc-Syilx wars of the eighteenth century may have ended under the leadership of Pelkamulox and his half-brother Kwoli'la, but what remained was a largely militarized zone with influence that extended from the Columbia Valley north to Tsilhqot'in territory, from the Fraser Canyon to the Rockies, and deep into Ktunaxa lands as well.<sup>4</sup> Peter Carstens, *The Queen's People: A Study of Hegemony, Coercion, and Accommodation among the Okanagan of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 16–20. See also Mary Balf, "HWISTESMETXĒ'QEN," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 8 (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003), accessed January 17, 2019, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hwistesmetxe\\_qen\\_8E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/hwistesmetxe_qen_8E.html).

Indigenous motivations for engaging in trade, as we have seen, were not always straightforward. It was never entirely about the acquisition of goods. There was status as a trader (sometimes described as a “captain of trade”) to consider, the possibility and profitability of trading imported goods to Indigenous neighbours, the prospect of a technological edge in warfare, and the very great likelihood of drawing European trade partners into a web of diplomacy, networks of kinship, and conflict. On the West Coast, many of these elements and goals may be found but, more visibly and commonly, it was the demands of the potlatch that informed trade with Europeans and Americans. This was more the case on the coast than in the interior, to be sure, but the act of hosting a celebration that entailed—and would be marked by—the giving of remarkable gifts dovetailed nicely with the arrival of foreign products. Potlatching confirmed systems of governance

and (typically matrilineal) lines of succession, bound families and clans together in elaborate webs of social and legal relationships, created obligations on the part of gift recipients to bear witness when called upon to do so, and served to redistribute food and other kinds of wealth between relations whose local resources could from time to time fall short of need. All of these elements persisted; the fur trade with Europeans added new wrinkles. Newfoundland wealth intensified artistic output and, according to some historians and Indigenous accounts, led to *competitive* potlatching in coastal communities.<sup>5</sup> Although potlatching was diffused along trade corridors to some inland communities, such as the Dakelh, it was not necessarily framed by the social rankings common to coastal societies. Other interior peoples, such as the Tsilhqot'in, rejected the materialistic aspects of potlatching and regarded the practice as sign of avarice. John Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 127. One effect of epidemics was to create openings for new and aspirant leaders; pitching one's case for status based on success in trade and diplomacy was a response to these vacuums in leadership and the opportunities they presented. Potlatching was the means to those ends.

So far in Part 1 we have not considered the motivations of non-Indigenous traders. Largely it was about profit—usually in the mercantile system based in Western Europe. That was the case in the East, and it was the *raison d'être* of the HBC until the late nineteenth century. By the time the European fur trade reached the Cordillera and the West Coast, some of the stakes and players had changed. The NWC brought a Montréal-based element to the Interior; it had negligible links to the old mercantile order in Europe, except as a market. The two British North American firms, the HBC and NWC, played out their rivalry from the mouth of the Columbia to forts across the Peace District, until they were unified in 1821. On the coast, the four original outsider nations—Spain, Russia, Britain, and the US—were whittled down to three with Spain's withdrawal in the Nootka Convention of 1794, and to one in the 1830s as British interests strangled American-Russian trade relations. All four of these foreign powers had in mind trading pelts—principally sea otter pelts—not in Europe but in China. The trans-Pacific connections made possible the arrival of Chinese and Filipino men recruited by the Europeans to build a station at Yuquot in the late eighteenth century. The first of many Kanaka (a.k.a. Hawaiian, Polynesian) participants in trade, diplomacy, and resource extraction arrived on the Northwest Coast in 1787. A Pacific Rim economy was emerging, and Indigenous merchants and communities would play a key role in the growth of a genuinely global marketplace.

Indigenous responses were many and varied. Individuals joined the crews of fur trading vessels and traveled to China. Others took European men in relationships we might characterize as marriages. Some, like two leaders of the Nuuchah-nulth, learned Spanish. Some Europeans were captured, some were slaughtered, and some were driven off. First the Stó:lō and then the Haida took to growing potatoes—in large quantities—to trade with the British, a cultural and economic adaptation that occurred in the 1830s.<sup>6</sup> Haida oral tradition indicates that the potato was cultivated before the 1490s. “These stories state that the Haida grew ancient varieties which they have traded for centuries with northwest Pacific islanders and inhabitants on the Russian mainland. Their oral history traces the origin of one of these varieties to ‘Baylu’ thought to be a variation of Perú.” See Linhai Zhang et al., “Inferred Origin of Several Native American Potatoes from the Pacific Northwest and Southeast Alaska Using SSR Markers,” *Euphytica* 174 (2010), 26. The first century of contact in the region from the 1740s to the 1840s saw the European presence severely localized and, usually, permitted only at sites prescribed by the Indigenous hosts. Down to the 1840s, Indigenous control of the region was not in question; in the 1850s and early '60s, with the Fraser River and Cariboo gold rushes, it was severely tested; after the plague of 1862–63, the balance of power was suddenly and decisively reversed.

5.

6.

## Conclusion

The size, complexity, and richness of West Coast societies have long been a source of comment. Indigenous narratives regularly express awe at the grandeur of neighbours' chiefly villages. The enormity of longhouses in many Northwest Coast communities—which were a manifestation of excellent construction techniques, dramatic aesthetic sensibilities, community cooperation, and sound mathematical and engineering knowledge—amazed early visitors from Canada. The scale of potlatches from the early nineteenth century—particularly as they became competitive—dazzled foreigners and Indigenous locals alike. More often overlooked is the success enjoyed across the Interior Plateau and into the north of what is now British Columbia. Down to the 1840s, the presences of Europeans and other outsiders in this region consisted of several very scattered outposts. One story from Laxłgu'alaams (a.k.a. Lax Kw'alaams, Fort Simpson) in Tsimshian territory may help achieve perspective. In 1855, tensions grew between the Tsimshian home guard community and the HBC post. In an effort to show off their defenses, the HBC personnel fired a few rounds of eight-pound cannonballs into deserted longhouses. Having done so, the HBC chief trader realized they had nearly exhausted their limited stock of projectiles, and so offered to buy back any recovered cannonballs at a shilling apiece.<sup>7</sup> The fact that the Tsimshian obliged is an indication of how little they feared the British presence.

The chapters ahead address the early and later stages of cultural interaction between Indigenous peoples and foreigners (principally Europeans and Canadians). These relationships, as the Laxłgu'alaams story indicates, might be based on Indigenous authority and European pragmatism or on oppressive colonial structures. The incremental growth of newcomer authority and influence is a factor and theme that will be considered at length.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

- Angelbeck, Bill, and Eric McLay. "The Battle at Maple Bay: The Dynamics of Coast Salish Political Organization through Oral Histories." *Ethnohistory* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 359–92.
- Barman, Jean. *The West Beyond The West: A History of British Columbia*, 3rd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007. See esp. pp. 15–54.
- Belshaw, John Douglas. *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009. See esp. pp. 72–90.
- Carlson, Keith Thor. "Toward an Indigenous Historiography: Events, Migrations, and the Formation of 'Post-Contact' Coast Salish Collective Identities." In *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, edited by Bruce Granville Miller, 138–81. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007.
- Clayton, Daniel W. *Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000. See esp. pp. 131–61.
- Fisher, Robin. "Contact and Trade, 1774–1849." In *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia*, edited by Hugh J.M. Johnston, 48–67. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.
- Harris, Cole. "Strategies of Power in the Cordilleran Fur Trade." In *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change*, 31–67. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997.
- Ignace, Marianne, and Duane Thomson. "'They Made Themselves Our Guests': Power Relationships in the Interior Plateau Region of the Cordillera in the Fur Trade Era." *BC Studies* 146 (Summer 2005): 3–35.
- Ignace, Marianne, and Kenneth Favrholt. "LeQ7ésés re Scwescwesét.s-kucw ell re S7eykemiנים-kucw/Trade, Travel,

7. Marius Barbeau, "Fort Simpson, On the Northwest Coast," *Canadian Historical Association Annual Report* 2, no. 1 (1923), 86.

- and Transportation.” In *Secwépemc People, Land, and Laws: Yeri7 Re Stsq'ey's-Kucw*, by Ron Ignace and Marianne Ignace, 220–33. Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017.
- Lutz, John. “Dr. John Lutz Question 2 – Aboriginal People and the Economy in the West.” TRU, Open Learning. November 17, 2015. Video, 5:02. <https://youtu.be/BrgHH1UatKw>
- Lutz, John. “Dr. John Lutz Question 4 – Early Contact between Aboriginals and Explorers.” TRU, Open Learning. November 17, 2015. Video, 6:55. <https://youtu.be/iPIL-71CeTw>
- Ridington, Robin, and Jillian Ridington in collaboration with elders of the Dane-Zaa First Nations. *Where Happiness Dwells: A History of the Dane-Zaa First Nations*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013. See esp. pp. 67–112.
- Trimble, Sabina “Storying Swí:lhcha: Place Making and Power at a Stó:lō Landmark.” *BC Studies* 190 (Summer 2016): 39–66.
- Wickwire, Wendy. “Dr. Wendy Wickwire Question 2 – Oral History.” TRU, Open Learning. November 18, 2015. Video, 4:07. <https://youtu.be/cbggCXkIcgs>
- Wickwire, Wendy. “Dr. Wendy Wickwire Question 4 – James Teit.” TRU, Open Learning. November 18, 2015. Video, 6:20. <https://youtu.be/mCx8VOKZsJY>



## PART 2: ENGAGING COLONIALISM



# Introduction: Defining Colonialism

If you've ever noticed a blue-green mould on your bread, that's called a "colony" of bacteria. You've no doubt seen, as well, a "colony" of ants. Neither penicillin nor ants (*scwicwéye*, in Secwepemctsin), however, have a conscious goal, a strategic plan, or an ideological framework to inform what they are doing. Ants and mould are all tactics.

Human colonies share some qualities with those of other animals. They might start as an outpost and will only really succeed when they have the wherewithal to increase their numbers sustainably through natural increase. Norse migrants to Beothuk or Innu territories in the twelfth century included women and men, so the possibility of establishing a biological colony existed. But this was a false start, one that lacked the backward linkages to sustain settlements. Basque and Breton fishing and whaling fleets reached Mi'kmaq waters over a sustained period of time from the early sixteenth century, if not before. These encounters were typical of European efforts to exploit natural resources, to view the Americas as an account from which they could withdraw and into which they would make few deposits. Early Basque visitors consisted entirely of male populations whose goal was not to establish anything other than temporary and seasonal forward positions; they had the advantage of regular return voyages and the possibility of bringing commercial or naval reinforcements, but they had no interest in doing so.

Other missions from Spain developed different ideas about colonization. Encounters with gold-rich civilizations in Mexico and Peru, and with agricultural communities in the Caribbean Basin and along the north and west shores of South America, had three principal consequences for Europe as a whole. First, injections of precious metals charged up all the Western European economies. English rope-makers, for example, refined their skills working on Iberian naval contracts; that expertise enabled the English themselves to build up their shipping and naval capacity. Merchants in coastal towns were the main beneficiaries, and gold began to accumulate in vaults that were owned by someone other than royals. Wealth thus begat a wealth-oriented and hungry class that saw the western Atlantic as a source of still further wealth and influence. This fed the second outcome of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century European encounters with the Western Hemisphere: the prospect of getting rich quick. Sixteenth-century French expeditions into the St. Lawrence Valley were tasked with finding a northern "El Dorado," a city of gold to compare with Cuzco. They were disappointed, of course, and the prospect of a French colony of any kind in the region was deferred for half a century. Similar motives drove English, Swedish, Scottish, and Dutch explorations of the East Coast of North America and farther south, many of which stalled badly.

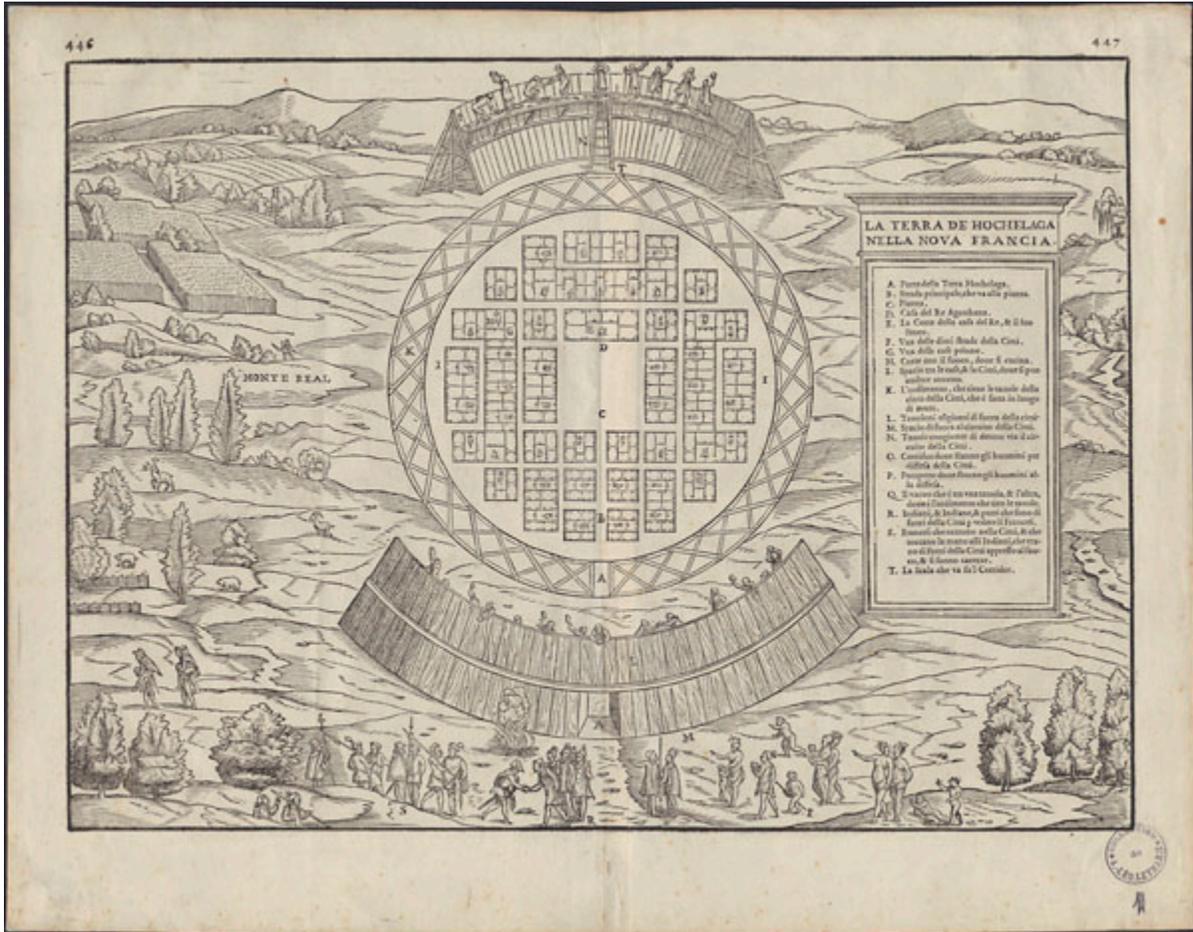
The third model of European colonialism—one that attracted European investors and empires—was the planter model developed by the Spanish on Caribbean islands. The *encomienda* was a grant offered by Castille to land seized an ocean away. *Conquistadores* and holy orders set up plantations that were soon shipping agricultural products to Spain. These depended on Indigenous labour: voluntary, indentured, but most often forced. In Mexico and Peru some of the grantees were Indigenous individuals and communities, but increasingly in the sixteenth century the norm was Europeans of modest status acquiring tenure on land that their families could effectively inherit. This was land—and mineral resources—that, thanks to Indigenous labour, they were able to exploit profitably.

The experience of New Spain established ideas and goals that infected all of Western Europe. European colonialism became inextricably connected to exploitation of Indigenous populations and, very often, their displacement and resettlement. Some of the colonies established in the first two hundred years after contact were highly aggressive in this respect, some less so. The fundamental features, however, could be observed in every instance: the transfer of European humans and associated biota (including animals, plants, seeds, and germs), the establishment of settlements that were distinct and separate from Indigenous communities (and often defined by that very separation), and the exploitation of landscape and ecosystems with an eye to enriching imperial homelands.

In these ways, European colonialist ideals, goals, and strategies occurred on a spectrum. English and Scottish territorial appetites produced a particular kind of colonialism in New England and Pennsylvania. Slavery was limited—not least by the pitched resistance mounted by Indigenous peoples in the region—and the dominant feature was the establishment of towns surrounded by farms on which settler populations grew largely from their own resources.

English colonies farther south gradually became land-hungry, too, and when they did, they did so with a vengeance. Plantations spread inland along river systems, devouring landscapes and making extensive use of white indentured servants and, more spectacularly, slave labour: Indigenous and African. Dutch traders established posts at the mouth and along the course of the Hudson River, focusing less on an agrarian frontier than on commerce. This model of colonialism was abandoned as soon as English competitors took over New Netherlands and renamed it New York.

These approaches were not a reflection of ethnic predilection. There wasn't something inherent to the English that led them to colonize in this way or that. The variety of colonial strategies reflects changing circumstances and attitudes.



Contrast this image of Hochelaga—which was in all likelihood drawn up by the cartographer Giacomo de Gastaldi after Cartier's visit—with the maquette, pictured below. Source: *La Terra de Hochelaga Nella Nova Francia*, 1565, drawing, MIKAN No. 3810432, Library and Archives of Canada.



Model of the Iroquoian village of Hochelaga, from the descriptions of Jacques Cartier and other Quebec archaeological sites. Source: Travail Personnel, Maquette du Village d'Hochelaga, January 6, 2018, model by Michel Cadieux, Wikipedia. Photo by Pierre5018 – Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=65384008>

## Colonialism 1.0

At a Gaspé fishing station in 1534, Donnacona (the leader of Stadacona, the largest of a multitude of Iroquoian villages or *kanata* in the St. Lawrence valley) encountered a French expedition. Upbraiding the foreigners for erecting a cross on his territory, Donnacona narrowly avoided being abducted. Instead, he agreed to send his sons to France for a year. Taignoagny and Domagaya were thus the first Iroquoians to visit Europe.

Donnacona's purpose in this arrangement can be guessed as twofold: to build goodwill with and gather intelligence on the visitors. The following year the young men returned, fluent in French and wary of their erstwhile "hosts." Stadacona itself (subsequently the site of Québec City) received the 1535 French expedition and permitted the Europeans to proceed farther upriver to the height of navigation. Taignoagny and Domagaya persuaded the French that they were on the brink of a northwest passage to the Pacific Ocean; swallowing this disinformation, the French called the rapids that blocked their way "Lachine," as in "China." The *kanata* nearby—Hochelaga—was a heavily fortified town of some three thousand, surrounded by cornfields. The French were invited in for a tour and then headed back downriver. Stadacona was closer to the sea and therefore more attractive to the little French fleet, so it was on Donnacona's hospitality that they had to rely. The river froze up around their vessels, and the French—comprised of 110 men—had little plan beyond

survival through the winter of 1535–36. By December, however, the French were already crippled with scurvy; twenty-five of their number perished, and the rest were spared only because the Stadaconans provided a cure. The Stadaconans themselves were not so lucky. Some fifty died over the winter from an unidentified disease. It is unlikely that it was smallpox, because the disease usually takes a heavier toll and it does not stay dormant in human carriers very long (the French had been at sea for nearly eight months). But it was certainly a foretaste of one aspect of the Columbian Exchange in North America.

The French found nothing in the way of riches in this visit, and they managed to alienate the Iroquoians everywhere they went. They doubled down on kidnapping and sailed home in May 1536 with ten unwilling Stadaconans, including Donnacona himself. None of them lived long enough to return to Iroquoia. The French, however, inflated whatever hints and tales of mineral wealth and a passage to China that they had heard from the Iroquoians in order to get funding for a third visit to the region. In 1541–42, they proved even more intolerable than before. Gathering up what they mistook for samples of gold and diamonds, they returned home to unimpressed sponsors.<sup>1</sup> Religious wars and other concerns put further French forays on hold for the rest of the sixteenth century.

These, then, were additional “false starts.” No trading, religious, or diplomatic colonies were established, let alone settlements with an eye to permanence or biological sustainability. The French in the sixteenth century were simply concerned to loot the locals. This matters to our study because the longer relationship between Indigenous peoples and the French took a different turn: practically, philosophically, and territorially.

## The Columbian Exchange in the Northeast

Broadly speaking, the “Columbian Exchange” refers to the transfer of technologies, manufactured and processed goods, raw materials, biota (plants, animals, bacteria, viruses), and ideas. If we think of the process hemispherically, by far the greatest impacts on Europe came from Mesoamerica: corn, tomatoes, cocoa, squash, beans, gold, and silver, etc. The Northeast principally provided pelts, which may seem like a real step down from precious metals, but the long-term impact of direct mercantile involvement and the building of processing capacity in Europe necessary to turn furs into hats all contributed to the rise of a middle class, democratic ideals, and manufacturing.

What did the Northeast get in return? Metal products—copper pots, iron and steel tools, sewing needles—and new technologies, including swords, knives, and guns; manufactured cloth and clothing; new aesthetics of dress; distinctive spiritual ideas; bacteria and death.

Whatever became of the Laurentian Iroquois, we know with certainty that the Wendat, Pequot, Wabanaki, Haudenosaunee, and all their neighbours suffered terribly from introduced epidemics. In 1610, a French Jesuit recorded the thoughts of Chief Membertou, who stated that Mi'kmaq and Wabanaki numbers had collapsed in his lifetime; as a youth, he saw people:

. . . as thickly planted there as the hairs upon his head. It is maintained that they have

1. Barbara A. Mann, “Cartier, Jacques (French), c. 1492–1557,” *Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy)*, eds. Bruce Elliot Johansen and Barbara A. Mann (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 45–9.

thus diminished since the French have begun to frequent their country . . . During this year alone sixty have died at [indistinct], which is the greater part of those who lived there.<sup>2</sup>

Speculation as to whether diseases were introduced on purpose is moot: one cannot command smallpox into action. What is more, Europeans had no idea how it worked, at least not until long after the worst damage had been done. It is worth noting that no disease from Turtle Island had any comparable impact on Europe. The deck was, in this respect, stacked.

This is a point that could be reiterated and repeated endlessly, so keep it in mind: whatever else was going on in the histories of Indigenous peoples from 1492 to the present, there was always the background noise of epidemics, huge death rates, and persistent illness and fear. Whether it's smallpox or measles or tuberculosis, it's always part of the story. Life may have been nasty, brutish, and short for the European intruders as well, but nothing so apocalyptic pursued their every step, and nothing destabilized their societies and economies in the same way.

## Colonialism 2.0

What the French attempted in the sixteenth century—or rather, what they hoped to attempt—is sometimes called classic, classical, or metropole colonialism. The goal is plunder, often won at the point of a sword and with forced labour provided by the locals. “Settler colonialism,” however, quickly came to define the European approach to northeastern North America, and it has cast a long shadow on the history of Indigenous peoples as a result. Settler colonialism can be said to have three principal features:

First, settler colonisers “come to stay”: unlike colonial agents such as traders, soldiers, or governors, settler collectives intend to permanently occupy and assert sovereignty over indigenous lands. Second, settler colonial invasion is a structure, not an event: settler colonialism persists in the ongoing elimination of indigenous populations, and the assertion of state sovereignty and juridical control over their lands. Despite notions of post-coloniality, settler colonial societies do not stop being colonial when political allegiance to the founding metropole is severed. Third, settler colonialism seeks its own end: unlike other types of colonialism in which the goal is to maintain colonial structures and imbalances in power between colonizer and colonized, settler colonization trends towards the ending of colonial difference in the form of a supreme and unchallenged settler state and people. However, this is not a drive to decolonize, but rather an attempt to eliminate the challenges posed to settler sovereignty by indigenous peoples’ claims to land by eliminating indigenous peoples themselves and asserting false narratives and structures of settler belonging.<sup>3</sup>

European toeholds were established along the Atlantic seaboard, and settler colonialism got fully underway in the seventeenth century. The French encountered two different environments: Wabanahkik and the St. Lawrence Valley. The former was heavily populated by members of the Wabanaki Confederacy, particularly the Mi'kmaq. Settlement

2. Quoted in Olive Dickason, “Louisbourg and The Indians: A Study in Imperial Race Relations, 1713–1760,” unpublished Master’s Thesis, Ottawa University, 1971, 45.
3. Adam Barker and Emma Battell Lowman, “Settler Colonialism,” *Global Social Theory*, accessed March 12, 2018, <https://globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/settler-colonialism/>.

proceeded tentatively and was never aggressively focused on displacement. The Laurentian lands, however, presented different opportunities. For starters, the Iroquoian peoples who built Hochelaga, Stadacona, and other *kanata* were gone. Whether extirpated by imported disease, raided by the Haudenosaunee and/or Algonquin/Wendat neighbours, disrupted by climate change, or a combination of these and other factors, the Laurentian Iroquois effectively vacated the region. This left it more or less open to European settlement. It is certainly the case that Indigenous occupants and regular visitors to the region have been written out of Canadian history. Presented with a “vacant” land, the French very slowly filled it up.

The functionalist model introduced in what the French called “Canada” saw the establishment of commercial colonies that soon required settlement in order to provision the trading posts and merchant ships. By the late seventeenth century, these colonies were generating their own growth. They lacked, however, sufficient immigration to enable territorial aggrandizement: the old saying that the French were more modest or even humane in their colonialism really derives from the fact that they were scarcely able to hold on to what little they had. Within Acadia and Canada, however, the French regularly attempted to impose their authority, spiritual beliefs, laws, and culture. These efforts met with mixed results.

Settler metanarratives of North American history in the years before 1816 focus on competition between colonies: Dutch, English (after 1707, British), Spanish, and French. In the Northeast and around the Great Lakes, these were almost entirely conflicts with Indigenous roots. The Dutch fought the French through their Haudenosaunee clients, whose own ambitions had little to do with either of the European parties. The English followed suit and also took on the French in Acadia—motivated principally by Wabanakiak resistance to British settler colonialism. British assaults on Acadian settlements—culminating in *le grand dérangement* in the 1740s, '50s, and '60s—were provoked by effective Mi'kmaq guerrilla raids. These are examples of what Indigenous histories look like under settler colonialism: invisible. They are rendered so because the discourse becomes ossified into conflicts between “great powers”—that is, European empires.

## Colonialism 3.0

The eighteenth century saw rapid colonial expansion along the Eastern coastline, but every now and again the advance of settler colonies was slowed. The dam finally broke at the end of the Napoleonic Wars generally and the War of 1812 specifically. Settlers and their armies rapidly devoured everything from the Canadian Shield south and from the Atlantic to the hundredth meridian. British North Americans and Mexicans might bridle at the professed “manifest destiny” of the United States of America, but their own commitment to annexation and transformation of Indigenous worlds was similarly driven.

Imperial governments sponsored their colonies against Indigenous communities, but London and Paris were not at the sharp edge of the settlers’ frontier. It was possible for France and Britain to demonstrate—in documents and deeds—a commitment to diplomatic relationships. The Proclamation Act of 1763 is frequently cited as the key document in the historic relationship between colonizers and Indigenous people insofar as it lays out principles by which colonist societies could—and could not—extend their reach. These principles were quickly rejected by most of settler society (in the form of the thirteen British colonies that coalesced into the United States). Governments and citizens in what was called, after 1783, “British North America,” however, were nominally bound to the Proclamation Act. The treaties that arose subsequently reflect this fact, whether honoured or breached.

By the late nineteenth century, settlers were advancing across the Great Plains and Prairies of the West and slithering up the fjords, valleys, and canyons on the Pacific coast. Their progress was marked by occasional outbreaks of violence. The British made use of gunboat diplomacy on the West Coast. Two emergent nation-states—the US and Canada—deployed armed troops to subdue Indigenous resistance. Indigenous leaders confronted this more hostile approach with a variety of responses, one of which was to seek (or in some cases acquiesce in) treaties. In the West and the Pacific Northwest, treaties bore similarities but also important differences. Even the annexation of all these regions

(and the North and subsequently Newfoundland) under Confederation did not result in a standardization of practices or a uniform understanding of treaties' meanings. Nor, for that matter, were treaties negotiated in all the territories that became Canada.

Armed conflict and formal agreements were only two facets of nineteenth-century colonialism. Cultural assaults were every bit as profound in their impact. Some cultural change was seized upon and directed by Indigenous peoples themselves. But these are topics dealt with in Part 3. The focus here is on the diplomatic confrontation between sovereign Indigenous societies and the growing settler colonial state.

Indigenous strategies for resistance to colonialism and control of the pace and character of change are many. The chapters that follow examine Indigenous perspectives on “colonial wars,” armed resistance to the settler frontier, and the litany and implications of treaty relationships.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this section:

- Alvarez, Alex. *Native America and the Question of Genocide*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014. See esp. chap. 4.
- Belshaw, John. *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation*. Vancouver: BCcampus, 2015. See esp. chap. 3, 4, 5, 6.9–10, 7, 13.1–13.5, 11.15.
- Dickason, Olive, and David McNab. *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, 4th ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009. See esp. pp. 160–82.
- Madley, Benjamin. “Reexamining the American Genocide Debate: Meaning, Historiography, and New Methods.” *American Historical Review* 120, no. 1 (2015): 98–139.

# Chapter 5: “Colonial” Wars Looking East



Colden Cadwallader's 1723 "Map of the country of the Five Nations, belonging to the province of New York; and of the lakes near which the nations of far Indians live, with part of Canada" provides a sense of the region around the lower Great Lakes and the Ohio. Its title also reveals that the British colony of New York was already laying claim to the whole territory. Source: Colden Cadwallader, A Map of the Country of the Five Nations, Belonging to the Province of New York; and of the Lakes near Which the Nations of Far Indians Live, with Part of Canada, map, 2000038, The JCB Library, accessed December 31, 2019, <https://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/JCBMAPS-1-1-2008-107470006:A-Map-of-the-Country-of-the-Five-Na#>

If nation- and state-building are core issues of modern history, then the principal features of the nation-state become the most important themes. Any list of such themes would have to begin with centralized political power—at the imperial heart or in the colonial capital—and its expression in military force. It is for this reason that intercolonial conflict looms large in histories of Canada and the United States in particular. French versus British, British versus American, Canadian versus American, American versus Spanish—these conflicts define the settler regimes because the participants are recognized (retroactively, if not at the time) as *legitimate*. Going to war against competing imperial interests defines one colony or state against another.

Obviously, these narratives have tended to obliterate Indigenous perspectives. Indigenous “nations” vanish in

the long shadow cast by settler societies and their issues. The political and territorial perspectives and actions of Indigenous peoples are, however, key to making sense of North American history.

## Whose War Is It Anyways?

One of the remarkably consistent themes in Indigenous histories is the hospitality shown to visitors. Tales of early contact seldom end badly for the foreigners. Once the outsiders begin to overstay their welcome, however, the situation changes.

From the Powhatan Confederacy (in what is now Virginia) through Mi'kmaki, English settlements were resisted everywhere in the seventeenth century. The more ambitious and land-hungry the settlers became, the more pitched the battles. Settler communities in Massachusetts and Maine threatened and even captured Wabanaki lands and resources, displacing the host community and offending the larger Wabanaki Confederacy. Prevailing winds and shipping lanes reliably brought Europe-bound vessels—and colonists—within reach of Mi'kmaq territory, including Newfoundland. Wars on the Avalon Peninsula in the 1690s pitted Abenaki and Mi'kmaq against English settlements and fleets; the active involvement of the French signals an inter-imperial agenda, but that does not obviate the fact of Wabanaki defense of their own “empire of islands” across an area as wide as 1600 km. Wabanaki leaders saw in the French, by contrast, a source of goods and a market for furs, and—best of all—the limited French presence could be restricted to tidal marshes, which their settlers, the Acadiens, drained and farmed. The host society was, therefore, not immediately at risk of losing territory to avaricious squatters.

Haudenosaunee relations with the Wendat and Algonquian were, as we have seen, fraught, perhaps for centuries. The Innu-Algonquain alliance with the French in 1603 and the subsequent attack they mounted in 1609 against the Kanien'kehá:ka (a.k.a. Mohawk) extended Haudenosaunee enmity to the Europeans on the St. Lawrence. The League would find allies among the Dutch and then the English as they extended their Mourning Wars against the French and the Wabanaki Confederacy to the East. The Haudenosaunee military tradition, already plenty strong enough, became so robust in the two centuries after contact that their territory was unassailable by the British and quick to recover from French assaults.

Farther west, the peoples of the Ohio Valley and the Great Lakes endured Haudenosaunee attacks in the seventeenth century that almost depopulated their region. No sooner were they able to retake ancestral lands in the eighteenth century than they were confronted by British-American incursions. Resistance to these invaders would continue until the 1820s.

### Risk Assessment

Father Joseph François Lafitau (1681–1746) was a Jesuit missionary in Iroquoia. Here's what he reported about Haudenosaunee militarism:

They may yield to some in advantages of the mind and body, vivacity in conversation, gentleness of facial expression, skill in different exercises, lightness in running and so on,

but they do not yield to any one in courage. They pass incontestably as being the best soldiers and the quality of the courage cannot be disputed.

War is a necessary exercise for the Iroquois and Huron, perhaps also for all the other American Indians for, besides the usual motives which people have in declaring it against troublesome neighbours who offend them or furnish them legitimate causes by giving them just reasons for complaint, it is indispensable [sic?] to them also because of one of their fundamental laws of being.

The families . . . are sustained only by the number of those composing them, whether men or women. It is in their number that their main force and chief wealth consist. The loss of a single person is a great one, but one which must necessarily be repaired by replacing the person lacking by one or many others, according to the importance of him who is to be replaced.

It is not up to the members of the household to repair this loss, but to all those men who have marriage links with that house, or their *Athonni*, as they say; and in that fact, resides the advantage of having many men born in it. For these men, although related at home and limited to themselves, marry into different lodges. The children born of these different marriages become obligated to their fathers' lodge, to which they are strangers, and contract the obligation of replacing them [those who are lost] so that the matron, who has the principal authority in this household, can force these children to go to war if it seems best to her, or keep them at home if they have undertaken a war displeasing to her.

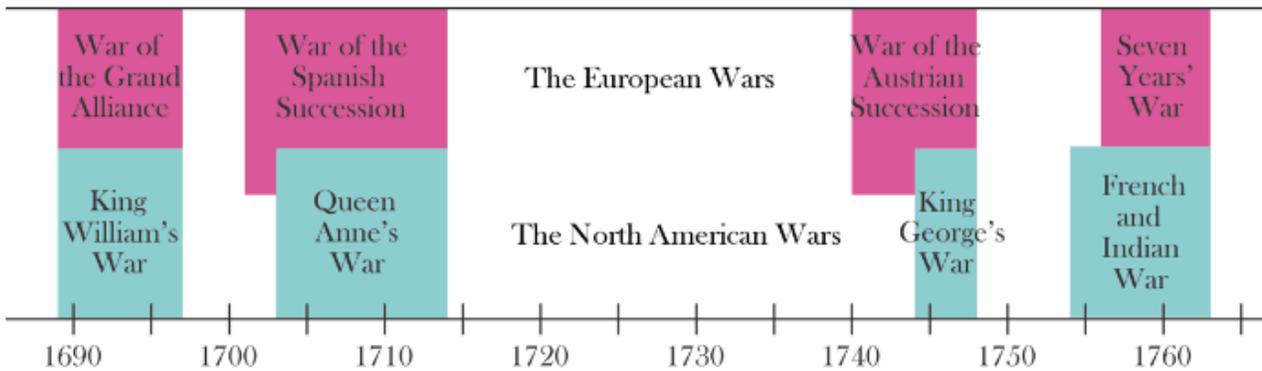
When, then, this matron judges it time to raise up the tree again, or to lay again on the mat someone of her family whom death has taken away from her, she addresses herself to some one of those who have their *Athonni* at her home and who she believes is most capable of executing her commission. She speaks to him by a wampum belt, explaining her intention of engaging him to form a war party. This is soon done.<sup>1</sup>

Assembling a simple list of conflicts and a timeline is by no means an easy task. The imperial colonial wars ostensibly between European parties can be reduced to a short list:

- War of the League of Augsburg (a.k.a. King William's War) ca. 1688-97
  - Mostly contained to the northeast mainland with some significant conflict along the Bay of Fundy and in Hudson's Bay
- War of the Spanish Succession (a.k.a. Queen Anne's War), 1701-13
  - Principally fought in and around the Gulf of the St. Lawrence

1. Father Joseph François Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moor (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1974-77): 98-103. Reprinted in James Axtell, ed., *The Indian people of Eastern America: A Documentary History of the Sexes* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1981): 161-2.

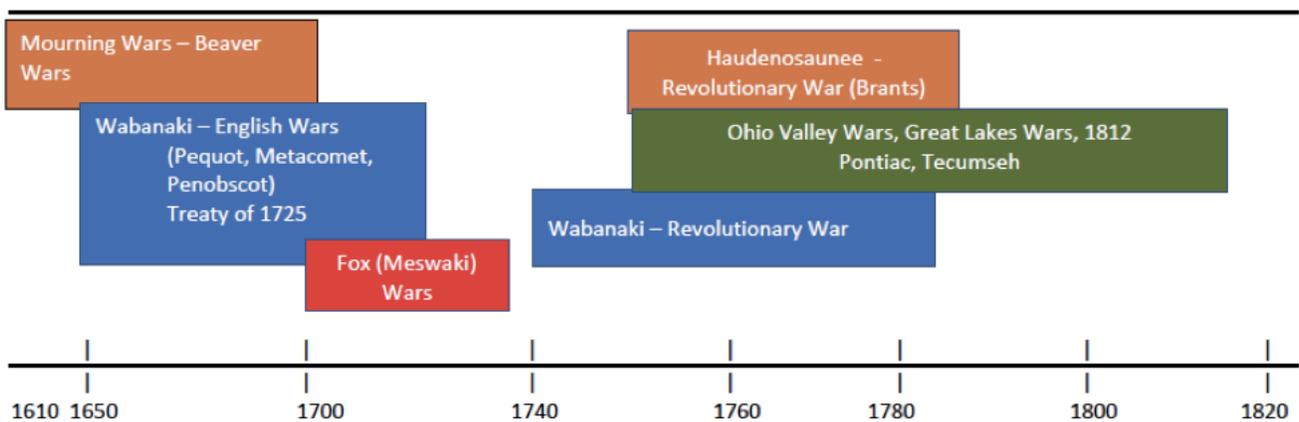
- War of the Austrian Succession (a.k.a. King George's War), 1739-48
  - In North America contained to raids on British settlements in Nova Scotia, New York, and New England
- Seven Years' War (a.k.a. French and Indian War), 1754-63
  - Beginning in the Ohio Valley, this conflict spread throughout northeastern North America, culminating in the fall of New France.



Timeline of the North American imperial wars from 1690s–1760s. (CC BY-SA 3.0) Source: R. A. Nonenmacher, *Imperial Wars Timeline*, June 8, 2006, timeline, Wikimedia Commons, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=852187>. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.

Add to this list the American Revolution (a.k.a. War of Independence), 1776–83, which pitted British troops and “loyalists” and British-dominated French colonists against “Americans” throughout the Northeast, though not in Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, or Hudson’s Bay. Looking at the century between 1688 and 1788, that’s 38 years of colonial wars. It was followed in 1812 by another three years of war, this time largely in the Great Lakes region, including the Niagara Escarpment.

From Indigenous perspectives, the history of conflict looks rather different.



Indigenous timeline, 1610–1820. (CC BY 4.0) Source: John Belshaw. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

Conflict between the English/British<sup>2</sup> and the Wabanaki Confederacy began in earnest in the middle of the seventeenth century. The principal Pequot village to the south of the Penobscot and Abenaki was razed to the ground by the English in 1637, an act of brutality that shocked the Indigenous peoples of the East Coast. Forty years later, there were several attempts made to push the English back into the sea. But by the 1670s, their numbers in New England neared 80,000, and Indigenous populations were still recovering from early-seventeenth century epidemics. Metacomb's War (1675–78) focused mostly on the New England settlements, but there were important clashes farther north and on the coast—in Wabanakiak—involving the Abenaki and Penobscot against the English. The northern violence was mostly contained to small raids on villages, but the Wabanaki also proved adept at stealing English vessels. By the end of the war, the Wabanaki fleet consisted of more than fifty ships of varying draughts. Following a brief respite, conflicts resumed in the late 1690s and continued past the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 because the Wabanaki were not signatories to the European peace agreement. With only brief interruptions, war was conducted by the Wabanaki through the first quarter of the eighteenth century. It resumed once more in the 1740s and continued through the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution (at which time many of the Wabanaki supported the Americans against the British). Throughout this period, the main focus of attacks by the Mi'kmaq in particular was British settlements in Mi'kmaki. All attempts at diplomacy with the British foundered on British unwillingness to be bound to Mi'kmaq limitations. While there were elements in these conflicts that reflect growing Wabanaki economic dependence on European materials (particularly gunpowder and shot), the overwhelming impression is that these were wars of resistance and sovereignty. There is barely a single generation of Wabanaki who, from 1637 to the 1780s, would not have experienced an anti-colonial war in their homelands.

Conflict involving the Haudenosaunee was less often about resistance to settler colonialism. Conventional descriptions of Haudenosaunee reactions to the French presence are typically lumped together as the “Beaver Wars.” Revealingly, the Battle of Sorel (1610) is often given as the first confrontation.<sup>3</sup> It was, in fact, the third, all of which followed on French raids (alongside Wendat and Algonquian allies) into Haudenosaunee territory, but it was the first Haudenosaunee assault on a French colonial settlement. League attacks on the French would continue and intensify through the seventeenth century, abating only when the Haudenosaunee had other targets that demanded their attention. Occasionally the French would press back, a practice that accelerated with the arrival of French troops after 1663. The idea that these wars were an expression of Haudenosaunee frustration over French involvement in the fur trade or the League's aspiration to conquer more fur-rich territories to the northwest has lately faced challenges from historians. Retributive motivations dominate new interpretations, as does hostage-taking that might figure into strategies to restore population numbers. As well, the Haudenosaunee resented French efforts to dictate diplomatic protocols in the League's sphere of influence. League attempts to restrict French power and colonial resilience were conducted almost continually down to 1701. The *Great Peace of Montréal* was signed that year—in negotiations largely conducted by Wendat—and that had the effect of freeing up the Haudenosaunee northeastern front, thus allowing the League to pursue other conquests to the south and west instead.

The Haudenosaunee were consummate diplomats in these years as regards external affairs. As early as 1701, however, cracks were showing within the League itself. The Kanien'kehá:ka, the “keepers of the Eastern door,” were necessarily at the sharp end of conflicts with the Abenaki and other nations aligned with the French in Canada or Acadia, as well as the Mahican. The main Dutch and then English fur trade post was in Kanien'kehá:ka territory, and it was here that European rivalries were most keenly observed. The British were, in some instances, more reliable allies than the rest of the League when it came to conflicts with the Wabanaki. Moreover, Kanien'kehá:ka had adopted many former citizens

2. England and Scotland were united in 1707, after which it was possible to use “British” to define the nation-state as well as the peoples of the British Isles.
3. See, for example, the Canada list under “List of Conflicts in North America,” *Wikipedia*, accessed March 22, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_conflicts\\_in\\_North\\_America#Canada](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_conflicts_in_North_America#Canada).

of Wendake Ehen in the late 1640s, some of whom were traditionalists stridently opposed to what they regarded as the disruptive influence of French Catholic missionaries. No surprise, then, that the Kanien'kehá:ka were cautiously pessimistic about the Great Peace. By the 1770s, the Kanien'kehá:ka under the leadership of Konwatsi'tsiaienni (a.k.a. Molly or Mary Brant) and her younger brother Thayendanegea (a.k.a. Joseph Brant), were firmly connected to the British governing and merchant elite. When push came to shove between the British colonists and their imperial government, the League (now comprised of six nations) divided in two: Kanien'kehá:ka, Onondaga, Gayogohó:no (a.k.a. Cayuga), and Seneca sided with the British; the Oneida (a.k.a. Onyota'a:ka) and Tuscarora (a.k.a. Skarù:reǵ) aligned with the colonists (as did the Mahican). The Kanien'kehá:ka-British alliance outlasted the Revolution, and the Kanien'kehá:ka were among the first "Loyalists" to seek refuge in Canada. When the dust settled in 1783, two thousand Kanien'kehá:ka withdrew from their traditional lands to take up settlements in the St. Lawrence Valley and, most importantly, along the Grand River in what we call Southern Ontario. (These were ancestrally Iroquoian lands, and the Kanien'kehá:ka regarded the move as a kind of restoration. But they were, as well, lands into which Anishinaabe people—the Mississauga—had moved sometime after the fall of Wendake Ehen and to which they too had a substantial claim.)

Conflict with the colonies in the Northeast was thus more common and had deeper historical roots than typically recognized in national narratives. Looking at the literature critically, Europeans (in which category we include those peoples who became "Canadians" and "Americans") wandered into the middle of a movie and assumed that it began pretty much with their arrival. And these conflicts were much more complicated than long thought. Motives and loyalties shifted, and they did so within an Indigenous matrix. Centuries of diplomacy and warfare had created deeply embedded protocols and expectations, as well as grudges and histories of both trust and enmity.

## Conclusion

By the mid-eighteenth century, the combination of European immigration and Indigenous populations' decline due to attacks, virgin soil epidemics, and loss of necessary resources was a call to explore new tactics. From this point on, Indigenous peoples would strategize resistance in different ways. Direct confrontation would continue to occur, but so would new experiments in diplomacy, as the next chapter reveals.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

- Bahar, Matthew R. "People of the Dawn, People of the Door: Indian Pirates and the Violent Theft of an Atlantic World." *Journal of American History* 101, no. 2 (September 2014): 401-26.
- Baker, Emerson W., and John G. Reid. "Amerindian Power in the Early Modern Northeast: A Reappraisal." *William and Mary Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2004): 77-106.
- Brandao, Jose Antonio, and William Starna. "From the Mohawk- Mahican War to the Beaver Wars: Questioning the Pattern." *Ethnohistory* 51, no. 4 (2004): 725-50.
- Cook, Peter. "Dr. Peter Cook Question 3 - European Approach to Inter-cultural Diplomacy." TRU, Open Learning. November 17, 2015. Video, 5:37. <https://youtu.be/Em0YKSSH32E>
- Jaenen, Cornelius J. *Friend and Foe: Aspects of French-Amerindian Cultural Contact in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976.
- Loewen, Brad. *Contact in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century: Networks among Fishers, Foragers, and Farmers*. Ottawa: Canadian Museum of History & University of Ottawa Press, 2016. See esp. pp. 57-76.
- Lozier, Jean-François. *Flesh Reborn: The St Lawrence Valley Mission Settlements through the Seventeenth Century*. Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018.

- Paul, Daniel N. *We Were Not the Savages: A Mi'kmaq Perspective on the Collision between European and Native American Civilizations*, 3rd ed. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2006.
- Plank, Geoffrey. *An Unsettled Conquest: The British Campaign against the Peoples of Acadia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Rushforth, Brett. "Slavery, the Fox Wars, and Limits of Alliance." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (2006): 53–80.
- Richter, Daniel K. "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience." In *Trade, Land, and Power: The Struggle for Eastern North America*, 69–96. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Wicken, William. "Mi'kmaq Decisions: Antoine Tecouenemac, the Conquest, and the Treaty of Utrecht." In John G. Reid et al., *The "Conquest" of Acadia, 1710: Imperial, Colonial, and Aboriginal Constructions*, 86–100. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

# Chapter 6: Resistance I -- 1750s to 1870s

The Seven Years' War (referred to in the US as the French and Indian War) changed the balance of power in North America in ways that few Indigenous nations could have foreseen. Certainly, the French misread the situation and paid for their error at the treaty table: the price was New France. The British, too, thought they could forge new relationships in the Ohio Valley but were foiled by their own colonists. The revolt of the British Thirteen Colonies (leaving out Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Québec) engaged Indigenous troops, military leaders, and political leaders on both sides of the dispute. Despite that involvement, neither Treaty of Paris (not the one in 1763 nor the one in 1783) had Indigenous signatories. For all intents and purposes, the Seven Years' War continued in Mi'kma'ki (a.k.a. the Maritimes) until 1779. It lasted even longer in the Ohio Valley, where it carried on from 1754 to 1814 with only one significant break.

This Sixty-Two Years' War is another good example of how settler colonialism erases Indigenous narratives. Although there are several names for different fronts, Americans tend to lump together the 1783–95 conflicts as the “Northwest Indian War.” *Wikipedia* provides a wry insight on this score: “Many books avoid the problem of what to call the war by describing it without putting a name to it, or ignoring it.”<sup>1</sup> For the Indigenous resistance in the region—a zone that includes and impacted the Great Lakes, what we know as Southern Ontario, and peoples as far away as the Great Plains and the Canadian Shield—it was something that could not be ignored. Nations were expelled, pushed west and south and north, and large numbers died from direct conflict and indirectly from the diseases associated with war; others died from the traumatic effects of dispossession, loss of resources (both physical and spiritual), and the hardships of refugee status. From the 1740s through 1815, the Eastern Woodlands diaspora took in more and more nations. A large part of that uprooted population found itself in the St. Lawrence valley or north of Lakes Ontario and Erie.

On the eve of the nineteenth century, European involvement in colonial settlement and displacement had become the most pressing issue facing Indigenous peoples from the Atlantic Ocean through the Great Lakes. Efforts to reassert Indigenous hegemony—what historian Daniel Richter calls “Native American wars of independence”—enjoyed brief but limited success. Some historical studies view the end of the Napoleonic Wars (which include the War of 1812 in North America) as the last conflict in which Indigenous forces might turn the tide; others disagree.

In this chapter, we explore three aspects of these conflicts and those that followed. The struggle for territories and attempts to brake the advance of colonial societies is at the heart of the matter. In the aftermath of the War of 1812, Indigenous power was so weakened east of the Great Lakes that Euro-Canadian efforts to appease and recognize sovereign peoples quickly withered. Two centuries of neglect began, as did various efforts at assimilation into the colonial matrix. The armed struggle, the experience of marginalization, and the tensions and violence in the West are, then, the topics we explore in this chapter. Some of the issues involved in treaties around these conflicts will be considered in the following chapter. The West remained a stronghold for independent and powerful Indigenous nations until the 1880s, at which time Canada seized its chance to decapitate regional leadership and impose colonial authority in the region. These themes are reviewed in Part 2, Chapter 8.

## Armed Resistance

Conventional historical accounts of the Seven Years' War often lose sight of its immediate causes. In many respects, we can think of this era of conflict as two distinct realms: Mi'kma'ki and the Ohio Valley. In the former, the collapse of Acadian and French authority exposed the Wabanaki peoples to intensifying attacks by the British and the New

1. “Northwest Indian War,” *Wikipedia*, accessed April 5, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwest\\_Indian\\_War#Aftermath](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwest_Indian_War#Aftermath).

Englanders (who, despite a related pedigree, often acted independently of one another). The British and their settlers repeatedly breached whatever treaties and agreements they reached with Indigenous communities and they ignored Mi'kmaq sovereignty, but this was part of a pattern that was, by the 1750s, nearly a century old. In the Ohio Valley, however, Indigenous societies—who were much less closely aligned than the Wabanaki—were witnessing a fresh invasion.

## Armed Resistance I: Mi'kma'ki

British authority on the Northeast Coast had been building since 1713, at which time the French presence was reduced to a rump: Louisbourg and some stations in Newfoundland. The Acadiens—French settlers with whom the Mi'kmaq in particular had established deep political, economic, social, and family relationships—enjoyed a “golden age” of population growth and economic prosperity down to the 1750s.<sup>2</sup> Their strategy in what was called by imperialists “the cockpit of North America”—that is, a battleground between two furious enemies—was to embrace neutrality. The “neutral French,” however, were always regarded with suspicion by the British and from time to time manipulated by the French, who were based nearby at Louisbourg. The Acadians also faced pressures from their Mi'kmaq neighbours and friends, who saw the French as a means to oust British invaders, particularly from Kjiptuk (a.k.a. Halifax) and its vicinity.

2. See, for example, Naomi Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian: A North American Border People, 1604–1755* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2005).



Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral territories of the Mi'kmaq, cover most of the "Maritime provinces." The rest of New Brunswick was principally Wolastoqiyik lands with some Abenaki territories in the Northwest. [CC-BY-SA-3.0](#). Source: [Mikmaq, The Mi'kmaq, June 9, 2014, map, Wikimedia Commons](#).

Mi'kmaq—and Wolastoqiyik (a.k.a. Wuastukwiuk, Malicite, Maliseet, Etchemins), Abenaki, and Penobscot—resistance was as aggressive and effective as anything witnessed farther inland. From the early eighteenth century, the Great Peace (1701) cleared the way for joint raids on English settlements like Deerfield.<sup>3</sup> Wabanaki forces and their French allies descended into Massachusetts and attempted to dislodge British settlers and military from positions in Maine as well.

The Seven Years' War in Mi'kma'ki is always eclipsed by the story of the fall of New France. Here is an important difference: while the French struggled to defend the St. Lawrence against the British, their efforts in Mi'kma'ki were far less extensive and impressive than the Indigenous defense of the region. Assaults were launched by the Abenaki, Wolastoqiyik, and Mi'kmaq along the south coast, at Kjipuktuk and Punamu'kwati'jk (Dartmouth), and deep into New England. (These attacks began as early as 1752 and so push the start of the war even earlier than its putative beginnings in the Ohio Valley.) The Mi'kmaq created refugee camps in the Miramichi for Acadiens fleeing the Expulsion (a.k.a. *Le Grand Dérangement*) and mobilized some of the Acadiens in raids on British forts throughout the region. The fighting stuttered to an end in a process that began with the Treaty of 1752, signed by *sakamore* Jean-Baptiste Cope of the Shubenacadie Mi'kmaq, who spent the next six months trying unsuccessfully to create a consensus agreement among

3. An interesting and layered approach to the attack on Deerfield can be found here: ["Assault on Peskeompskut," 2004, Memorial Hall Museum.](#)

Mi'kmaq parties. A more effective peace was established in the Halifax Treaties of 1760–61, at which point the Mi'kmaq abandoned their goal of expelling the British. The period that followed was characterized by Mi'kmaq efforts to hold the British to their commitments.

Doing so inevitably involved further force. A Wolastoqiyik and Mi'kmaq delegation sided with American revolutionaries against the British in the Treaty of Watertown in 1776. Insofar as Nova Scotia was poised to become the fourteenth colony in the American uprising, it was because of Mi'kmaq dissatisfaction with the British. Some Mi'kmaq in the Miramichi also rose up at this time, an indication that the British were mistrusted the length of the Maritime region. The outcome of the war reinforced British settler society in the region with an influx of nearly forty thousand Loyalist refugees. Competition for resources now required a strategy other than arms. Mi'kmaq delegations turned increasingly to diplomacy, negotiations, and the British courts.

## Armed Resistance 2: The Ohio Valley

The Appalachian Mountains were the western limits of the thirteen British-American colonies. Most of the Indigenous people at tidewater—those who had not been enslaved or killed off in war or destroyed by foreign diseases—had been forced over the mountains in a process of removal that lasted about 150 years. In the middle of the eighteenth century, land-hungry plantation owners in Virginia sought to expand across the mountains into the Ohio Valley. At a Myaamiaki (Miami) village and British trading post in 1752, a party of Odawa and Ojibwe warriors launched an attack that revealed two things: Indigenous peoples in the region were not of a single mind about the disposition of the Ohio Valley, and there was a British presence that was not welcomed by the Council of Three Fires (whose representatives took four British traders hostage with them back to French-controlled Fort Détroit).<sup>4</sup> The Virginians responded with an advance party in 1753, which met with French military in the region and got sent home empty-handed. The next year, a larger American colonial force was sent in, made up of volunteer militiamen who had been promised shares in 200,000 acres of land on the Ohio River. They carried orders to meet opposition with lethal force. The Virginia governor made this last point very clear: “make Prisoners of or kill and destroy them.”<sup>5</sup>

“Them” certainly included Indigenous opponents. The Ohio had been depopulated during the Beaver Wars of the seventeenth century, and refugee communities were reluctant to return—even after the Great Peace of 1701—because they continued to fear the Haudenosaunee. The effect was several decades of wilderness recovery: forests grew back and the numbers of large mammals and fur-bearers were replenished. By the 1730s, the Ohio and the southernmost Great Lakes were once again vital hunting lands. The Indigenous people who moved in included a variety of peoples with distinct histories: there were those evicted from the East Coast by British settlers, like the Lenape (a.k.a. Delaware); the long-term residents of the region, the Shaawanwaki (Shawnee) and the Myaamiaki (Miami); arrivals from the northwest, like the Kickapoo and Mascouten; and westward-moving Haudenosaunee drawn from the Gayogohó:no and Seneca, together called “Mingo.” Members of the Council of Three Fires were also involved in this reshuffling of populations in the Ohio and its surrounding regions. The Potawatomi—originally resident on the southeastern drainage of Lake Michigan but having fled the Beaver Wars to the lake’s northwestern coast—found their way back into their homelands and established a presence around the French post at Fort Détroit by the 1750s. The upshot of this repopulation of the region was that many peoples had a stake in keeping out the British/Americans, but they were a disparate peoples suspicious of the agendas of many of their Indigenous neighbours as well. For some, like many of the Haudenosaunee,

4. Michael McDonnell, *Masters of Empire: Great Lakes Indians and the Making of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2015), 3.

5. R. Alonzo Brock, ed., *The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1751–1758*, vol. 1 (Richmond, 1883–84), 59, 82.

the French presence was as unappealing as the British-Americans. As historian J. R. Miller has underlined, “notions that one [Indigenous] nation or another took up arms to advance a commercial or strategical aim of the French or British were erroneous.”<sup>6</sup> While earlier conflicts in which Indigenous nations sided with colonists involved common trade interests (as well as specifically Indigenous agendas), the conflicts of 1754–1815 were, first and foremost, about preserving territory. Indigenous people’s fear of an expanding British-American presence soon made strange allies.

The history of treaty-making is pursued in Chapter 7, but we can introduce here one that is often overlooked. In 1758—four years into what we generally regard as the Seven Years’ War—some thirteen Indigenous nations signed the Treaty of Easton with the British. Their number included the Haudenosaunee—even the reluctant Seneca/Mingo at the “Western Door” of the League. Easton purchased Indigenous support against the French (or at least a commitment to not side with the French against the British) at the price of British claims on the Ohio Valley. From an Indigenous perspective, title to the Ohio was no longer in dispute, and French entrenchment in the region might be viewed as the greater threat. American colonists were angered by this development. They’d be even more provoked in the decades ahead as the British tried to honour their commitments to the signatories at Easton.

In 1754–63, the Haudenosaunee sided with the British against the French, to good effect—at least initially. Haudenosaunee strategy had long involved whipsawing enemies against one another or bargaining for peace on one flank so as to better prosecute war on another. They may well have believed that the conflict would bloody some French noses but would not end with British control over the St. Lawrence and much of the rest of New France.

The geopolitics of the region were rapidly changing and continually in flux. With the fall of New France (on the battlefield in 1760 and at the treaty table in 1763), the League had British-Americans on one side and British-Québec on the other. The British military was in no hurry to depart from its newly-captured French forts in the west of the Great Lakes, either. And so long as settlers were kept at bay, the British could claim to be honouring the terms of Easton. Earlier internal division among the Haudenosaunee regarding the British continued to fester. The League had been joined in 1722 by the Tuscarora, Iroquoian speakers who sought refuge among the Haudenosaunee from British-led attacks on their homeland on the Southeast Coast. The Seneca/Mingo were also unhappy with both the war and its outcome. Anishinaabeg in the region to the northwest were even less pleased. Their interests were more aligned with those of the French, but the fall of New France changed nothing for them in terms of what might be called the big picture: keeping the British-Americans out of the region. They did not cease to fight in 1763. Carrying forward their effective campaigns of guerrilla warfare, the Odaawaa (a.k.a. Odawa, Ottawa) and the Potawatomi forged an alliance of nations that included the displaced Lenape, who provided spiritual leadership in the person of Neolin the Prophet. In 1763, the Potawatomi war leader Pontiac laid siege to British-held Fort Détroit as Neolin called on the region’s peoples to reject the cultural influences of European societies. This renaissance of Indigenous values targeted alcohol and materialism in particular, and served to bind together a large and complex alliance of peoples.

Of the Haudenosaunee, it was the Seneca who were most within range of British cannons along Lake Erie. Like their Algonkian-speaking neighbours, they bridled against the style of British diplomacy in the region. Where the French sought to build alliances with annual allowances, gifts, and tributes of many kinds and by “covering deaths” in war with further “gifts,” the British did not. Alienated by the new imperial presence, unlikely to believe entirely in the terms of the Treaty of Easton, and probably gambling that the American colonists would be weaker if they didn’t have the British backing them up, increasing numbers of Indigenous communities sided with the “Patriots” as the American Revolution broke out. The Kanien’kehá:ka were squarely in the opposite camp. They had a longstanding alliance with the British that they chose to continue. As was the case elsewhere, this was a commercial and military frontier in which intermarriage entangled the various parties. By the 1780s, then, the League of Five Nations was fractured between those who regarded the British as the greater threat and those who saw colonist ambitions as insatiable.

6. J. R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 76.

## Armed Resistance 3: The Great Lakes War

These moves set up territorial conflicts that would be played out in warfare mostly in the lands south of the Great Lakes and which culminated on the Niagara Escarpment in 1813. These battles represent the last armed resistance against colonialism east of the Great Plains, and they constitute a tipping point in several ways. The distinctions Indigenous peoples had earlier drawn between British, French, Canadian, and American were starting to dissolve. The wars in the Ohio resulted in Indigenous peoples now thinking of these settler societies as, simply, “whites.” Likewise, Euro-Americans were increasingly uninterested in the subtleties of Indigenous identities: increasingly they applied the catch-all term “Indians.” What’s more, nations that were once adamantly opposed to the British found themselves fighting alongside them. The British were in full retreat from the Ohio, and the “Yankees” were now pouring in and pushing Indigenous peoples north and west in large numbers. War raged across the Ohio until 1794, at which point a fragile peace broke out. Epidemics in 1805, however, brought further crises and turmoil.

North of the Great Lakes, Indigenous peoples were assiduously attempting to secure what territory they could. Having lost the Ohio and other territories, they had to consider how best to create conditions that would stop further reductions. The Mississauga sale to the British of lands north of Lakes Ontario and Erie brought former enemies—the Kanien’kehá:ka—closer. The Mississauga calculated that the Haudenosaunee loyalists would prove to be an effective buffer against American attacks. Political and military responses were once again on the table, and alliances were, in the years after 1805, being forged anew. Two Shaawanwaki brothers—Tenskwatawa (alias “The Prophet”) and Tecumseh—were among a new cadre of leaders who echoed the goals of Neolin and Pontiac a generation earlier. In addition to rejecting the material culture of the whites, Tenskwatawa called on Indigenous nations to reject European clothing and Christianity. At the same time, Tecumseh sought to inspire a pan-Indigenous front against American expansion. Individual nations, of course, were not always receptive to the idea of this amalgamation and what it implied for their autonomy and heritage. The American Army’s bloody destruction of Prophetstown—Tenskwatawa’s traditionalist village near Lake Michigan—forced Tecumseh’s hand, and he turned to the British for support in protecting the region. By this stage, the British had been persuaded of the value of paying tributes and employing better diplomacy in the region, so they had become easier to trust. Tecumseh developed a strong—indeed warm—relationship with General Isaac Brock, and together they proved effective in the early stages of the War of 1812. At the Battle of the Thames in October 1813, however, Tecumseh and many of his followers fell before a massive American onslaught. With Tecumseh’s death, the alliance he built quickly fell apart. Although the British would go on to push the Americans out of Southern Ontario, an easily-mobilized Indigenous alliance in the region was no longer likely.

## Armed Resistance 4: Moving West

There were several conflicts and organized acts of violent resistance to settler colonialism in the nineteenth century. All were consequential in some degree.

The Mica Bay War of 1848 saw frustrated Anishinaabeg on Lake Superior burn to the ground a fledgling settler mining operation on Lake Superior. The business had been established on Anishinaabe lands without permission and was part of a longer-term pattern of resource harvesting on reserves. These incidents led to the Robinson Treaties of 1850 (see the next chapter).

In 1858–64, the gold rush on the West Coast and deep in the interior of the Cordillera region introduced an immediate clash over resources, territories, and health.<sup>7</sup> Syilx peoples were among the first to confront American prospectors,

7. The Dakelh, Secwépemc, and Nlaka’pamux peoples were all involved in the hunt for gold, as well as in provisioning and freighting during the 1858–64 gold rushes. See Mica Jorgenson, “Into That

many of them hardened in the genocidal vigilantism of the California goldfields. Unprovoked attacks on Syilx villages motivated a response that raised alarms throughout the region. The Nlaka'pamux were soon faced with European-American incursions up the Stó:lō (the Halq'eméylem name for the "Fraser River"). French miners raped a local woman; they were summarily captured, executed, and beheaded by her people. Their bodies were tossed into the river and later caught in eddies at the main goldminers' village, Yale. These events launched the so-called Fraser River or Fraser Canyon War. The miners, led by veterans of the California Gold Rush, worked their way north to Camchin (a.k.a. Lytton), where they were instructed on the peace terms required by the Nlaka'pamux and their neighbours. Although this was more a panic than a "war," it gave the settlers and settler society an excuse to raise armed militias and establish the ability to respond with courts and official colonial force to what they perceived as threats. These institutions were deployed in 1864 when members of the Tsilhqot'in nation attacked a road survey crew in their lands. The Tsilhqot'in leadership later made it clear that the assault was, in their eyes, an act of war and not random homicide. The road crew arrived not a year after one of the worst smallpox epidemics hit the whole north Pacific slope, and no one in the colonial regime had consulted with the Tsilhqot'in about the prospect of building a road through their lands to the goldfields of the Cariboo. Colonial troops were dispatched, but the Tsilhqot'in eluded capture and confrontation. Only a duplicitous promise of immunity lured the leadership into discussions, which proved to be a trap followed by a kangaroo-court trial and six executions. Smallpox and settler terrorism and murders obliged the Tsilhqot'in to cease their attacks.

A decade later, another "rush" was underway. The Eastern British North Americans, having bound New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and the Province of Canada (a.k.a. Ontario and Québec) together in a confederation in 1867, looked to the West and the prospect of annexing Rupert's Land. Indigenous and Métis peoples at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers—at the heart of the Red River Colony (a.k.a. Assiniboia)—were not consulted, nor were the European settlers in the region. Many parts of this community banded together to present Ottawa with demands for a negotiated entry into confederation that would put the region on the same level as the other provinces. Ottawa resisted this idea, and the Métis and settlers responded with a provisional government and well-articulated demands. Led by a 25-year-old Métis with some basic legal training—Louis Riel (1844–85)—the provisional government attempted to meld the interests of all the local elements. Métis, country-born, and a large number of the Anglophone community were brought on-side, but the small Canadian (that is, Protestant and mostly Ontarian) population remained at odds with the resistance. Efforts to sabotage the provisional government failed, leading to the execution of a rabidly anti-Catholic Orangeman named Thomas Scott. While Ottawa eventually capitulated to the demand for a negotiated entry into confederation for "Manitoba," it would not grant amnesty to the provisional government for Scott's execution. Riel fled.

What might we generalize from all of these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conflicts? First, that intercolonial wars are only part of the story, and that there is a long record of Indigenous engagement in resistance and conflict with an eye to securing rights and respect. Second, that these goals—rights and respect—were increasingly difficult to obtain. Third, that the overarching narrative of Canadian history—which is largely informed by an urban tradition of state- and institution-building—doesn't leave a lot of room for alternative storylines. Some of the readings that follow will take you deeper into unfamiliar narratives.

## Conclusion

The flight and exile of Riel, Canadian abuses of the agreements negotiated with the Métis in particular, and the arrival of more and more settlers were only part of the background to events farther west in 1885. Some of these elements are examined in the next two chapters.

Country to Work': Aboriginal Economic Activities during Barkerville's Gold Rush," *BC Studies* 185 (Spring 2015): 109–36.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

- Carleton, Sean. "Rebranding Canada with Comics: Canada 1812: Forged in Fire and the Continuing Co-optation of Tecumseh." *Active History*. Accessed September 24, 2019. <http://activehistory.ca/papers/history-papers-15/>
- Corbiere, Alan Ojig. "Ojibwe Chief Shingwaukonse: One Who Was Not Idle." *Muskrat Magazine*. June 6, 2013. <http://muskratmagazine.com/ojibwe-chief-shingwaukonse-one-who-was-not-idle/ojibwe-chief-shingwaukonse-one-who-was-not-idle/>
- Lutz, John. "Dr. John Lutz Question 6 – Aboriginal-Settler Relations." TRU, Open Learning. November 17, 2015. Video, 6:31. <https://youtu.be/yofwd3k2MBM>
- Lutz, John. "The Tsihqot'in." In *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-White Relations*, 119–62. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.
- "Nobody Knows Him: Lhat's'aš'in and the Chilcotin War." *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History*. Accessed September 24, 2019. <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/klatsassin/home/indexen.html>
- Pegg, Brian. "The Archaeology of 1858 in the Fraser Canyon." *BC Studies* 196 (Winter 2017/18): 67–87.
- Plank, Geoffrey. "The Two Majors Cope: The Boundaries of Nationality in Mid-18th Century Nova Scotia." *Acadiensis* XXV, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 18–40.
- Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association (PVMA)/Memorial Hall Museum. *Raid on Deerfield: The Many Stories of 1704*. Accessed September 24, 2019. <http://1704.deerfield.history.museum/scenes/scene.do?title=Peskeompskut>
- "Remember/Resist/Redraw #14: The 1864 Tsihqot'in War." *Active History*. May 11, 2018. <http://activehistory.ca/2018/05/remember-resist-redraw-14-the-tsihqot-in-war-of-1864/>
- Richter, Daniel K. "The Plan of 1764: Native Americans and a British Empire that Never Was." In *Trade, Land, and Power: The Struggle for Eastern North America, 177–201*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Stark, Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik. "Marked by Fire: Anishinaabe Articulations of Nationhood in Treaty Making with the United States and Canada." *American Indian Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 119–49.
- Tsihqot'in National Government. "We Meant War, not Murder: Continuing the Work of our Chilcotin War Chiefs of 1864/65." March 21, 2018. Video, 5:16. <https://youtu.be/FmYyZQKmjIM>
- White, Richard. *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815*, 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 2011. See esp. pp. 269–314.

# Chapter 7: Settler Colonialism & Treaty Peoples

This chapter considers the ways in which elements of Indigenous peoples' relationships with an emergent imperial/nation state evolved from 1763 to the early twentieth century. It focuses on the versions of the future expressed by hopeful Indigenous negotiators under often very difficult circumstances. The treaty era on the Plains and resistance to the settler regime are considered more fully in Chapter 8.

There are a number of intellectual developments to keep in mind as we survey this period. First, there is the rising impact of racialized perspectives. As indicated earlier, binary categories of "Indians" and "whites" began to take hold during the late eighteenth-century wars in the Ohio Valley and in the years from 1800 to 1814 around the Great Lakes. These views would only intensify in the decades that followed, alleviated in settler society briefly by the rise of humanism at mid-century. And although Indigenous societies would differentiate between the motives and tactics of Canadians, British-Canadian fur traders, Americans, and others, they themselves would commonly use "Indians" in a way that indicates a consciousness of categorization and experience. The term simultaneously holds up a mirror to white, settler society.

Second, there is the rise of science and technology as a factor in the lives of Indigenous peoples and settler societies to consider. The early stages of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism in settler societies fractured the centuries-old relationship between two largely rural peoples. The collapse of the beaver and otter fur trade, the advance of the bison robe and hide trade (some of it, ironically, in support of the industrial drive-belt sector and the mass production of fine "bone" china) with the consequent precipitous decline of bison stocks, the invention of repeating rifles, and the arrival of intercontinental railways all set the stage for increased pressures on Indigenous peoples in the West in particular. Changes in the social priorities of settler colonies in these years include the rise of formal schooling and state institutions like courts, prisons, asylums, and governments, alongside a revival of the missionary impulse. The unfolding of some of these forces may be detected very long ago, but they are definitely evident after the War of 1812.

## Marginalization: Life During Peacetime

The Americans and the British signed the Treaty of Ghent in December 1814. Let's pause for a moment to consider how the context of Indigenous life had changed, and how it would look in the year that followed.

The British Crown had cast a large net across much of the continent. It was able to exclude other European nations from the great expanse of Rupert's Land (where the Hudson's Bay Company operated a trading monopoly and increasingly acted like a little government). Farther east, the British claimed almost all of the Wabanaki territory and had carved it into five separate administrative units: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, Prince Edward Island, and Lower Canada, where Abenaki communities clustered along the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. The remainder of the Wabanaki peoples could be found in the state of Maine in the United States—a country that had only recently been at war with Britain and British North America. Another branch of Mi'kmaq remained in yet another British colonial possession, Newfoundland. That colony, at least, did not have its own administrative system as yet. On the mainland, to be succinct, the Wabanaki after 1763 had the British on all sides of them; in 1784 they had the British on three sides, the Americans on the fourth, and thirty-six thousand Loyalists pouring into their midst. By 1815, the Mi'kmaq and Wuastukwiuk were badly outnumbered and scrambling to retain what they could of their ancestral lands.

Colonial officials did little to address the increasing desperation of Mi'kmaq and Wuastukwiuk communities. Access to traditional foraging areas on the coast was being lost; settlers squatted on what little arable land the Wabanaki could secure; transitioning to European-style agriculture (which, in many cases, Mi'kmaq sought to pursue) presented challenges; settlers competed for wildlife; and the logging industry exploded in the first half of the nineteenth century,

resulting in rapid deforestation and erosion along the major river systems of the region. In so many ways, the Wabanaki world was in distress. The Mi'kmaq and Wuastukwiuk faced starvation (a worsening situation in the early 1830s) and, given the apparent fate of the Beothuk (pronounced extinct in 1829), they had cause to be concerned for their longer-term prospects. While Halifax and Fredericton were aware of the extent of the problem facing Indigenous peoples, the two colonial governments had neither the capacity nor the inclination to do anything about it.

In 1841–42, conditions in Nova Scotia appeared to change, catalyzed by Mi'kmaq diplomatic actions. Paussamigh Pemmeenauweet (1755–1843) was recognized in 1814 by the settler regime in Halifax as “chief” of the “Micmac Indians” of Nova Scotia.<sup>1</sup> For years he presented petitions to the colonial assembly and to touring Catholic clergy and bishops, calling for aid to the Mi'kmaq people. These were not ignored, nor were they truly acted upon. In 1841 Paussamigh Pemmeenauweet addressed a new petition to Queen Victoria (at that time only twenty-two years old and on the throne for a mere four years). The response was direction to the settler administration to establish an Indian commissioner under the colony's own Indian Act (1842).

Letter to Queen Victoria from Louis-Benjamin Peminuit Paul, received in the Colonial Office, London, 25 January 1841<sup>2</sup> Ruth Holmes Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us: Excerpts from Micmac History 1500-1950* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Limited, 1991), 218–19.

To the Queen

Madame: I am Paussamigh Pemmeenauweet...and am called by the White Man Louis-Benjamin Pominout. I am the Chief of my People the Micmac Tribe of Indians in your Province of Nova Scotia and I was recognized and declared to be the Chief by our good friend Sir John Cope Sherbrooke in the White Man's fashion Twenty Five Years ago; I have yet the Paper which he gave me.

Sorry to hear that the king is dead. I am glad to hear that we have a good Queen whose Father I saw in this country. He loved the Indians.

I cannot cross the great Lake to talk to you for my Canoe is too small, and I am old and weak. I cannot look upon you for my eyes not see so far. You cannot hear my voice across the Great Waters. I therefore send this Wampum and Paper talk to tell the Queen I am in trouble. My people are in trouble. I have seen upwards of a Thousand Moons. When I was young I had plenty: now I am old, poor and sickly too. My people are poor. No Hunting Grounds – No Beaver – No Otter – no nothing. Indians poor – poor for ever. No Store – no Chest – no Clothes. All these Woods once ours. Our Fathers possessed them all. Now we cannot cut a Tree to warm our Wigwam in Winter unless the White Man please. The Micmacs now receive no presents,

1. The Mi'kmaq (especially the Mi'kmaq of Unimaki, or Cape Breton) regarded Paussamigh Pemmeenauweet as chief only of his people at Shubenacadie. There's nothing to suggest that he regarded his position otherwise. Nevertheless, he and his people used this settler society title as best they could to effect change.

2.

but one small Blanket for a whole family. The Governor is a good man but he cannot help us now. We look to you the Queen. The White Wampum tell that we hope in you. Pity your poor Indians in Nova Scotia.

White Man has taken all that was ours. He has plenty of everything here. But we are told that the White Man has sent to you for more. No wonder that I should speak for myself and my people.

The man that takes this over the great Water will tell you what we want to be done for us. Let us not perish. Your Indian Children love you, and will fight for you against all your enemies.

My Head and my Heart shall go to One above for you.

Pausauhhigh Pemmeenauweet, Chief of the Micmac Tribe of Indians in Nova Scotia. His mark +.

The first settler to occupy the position of Commissioner was Joseph Howe, a journalist and prominent reformer who was far more interested in high-level politics in Halifax than Indigenous affairs. Howe faced requests to restrain squatters, conduct proper surveys of Mi'kmaq lands, and assist their transition to new economic activities. In reply, he assessed the conditions facing the Mi'kmaq and provided a pessimistic prognosis for their future. Howe concluded that Mi'kmaq numbers were falling so quickly that they would join the Beothuk as an extinct people in forty years or so. With fewer than fifteen hundred left in Nova Scotia, their circumstances were indeed perilous. Howe's successors did not change course: even assimilationist strategies (education, agricultural training) were regarded as throwing good money after bad.

The situation in early nineteenth-century Upper Canada was similar in that settler encroachment was quickly cutting into Indigenous lands. But there was more space in the region, and access to traditional resources was slower to disappear. The threat of squatters was, however, very much on the mind of Anishinaabe representatives in the aftermath of the War of 1812. They agreed to relinquish certain lands in exchange for annuities, an arrangement that echoes the tribute-gifts of the days of New France (which, to be clear, were still within living memory). This approach appealed to the Indigenous participants because it served as a kind of guaranteed income in perpetuity; it worked well for the colonists because it freed up lands relatively quickly. This is, in all likelihood, how the idea of annuities became embedded in Canadian treaty agreements in the decades to follow.<sup>3</sup>

By the 1830s, the situation was worsening for the Anishinaabe. Militarily, they were themselves weakened and unable to stand up to settler incursions. More than that, their ancestral allies across the whole Great Lakes region were now dispersed by the Americans. Increasingly, the Anishinaabe were an Indigenous island encircled by settler societies. In addition to petitions that resembled what the Mi'kmaq were trying in the Maritimes, the Anishinaabe increasingly made use of their connections with the Methodist Church.

3. Arthur J. Ray, *I Have Lived Here since the World Began: An Illustrated History of Canada's Native People* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1996), 152–3.



*Kahkewāquonāby (a.k.a. Peter Jones, 1802–56) was an Anishinaabe-Welsh convert to Methodism who, starting in the 1820s, played a leadership role as both a minister and a chief of a Mississauga community. Able to function in at least two languages and with family in both the Mississauga and Kanien'kehá:ka communities, Kahkewāquonāby was able to build up land and other assets that allowed the Mississauga to successfully transition into farming and other activities. He also authored a history of the Ojibwa people. Source: Matilda Jones (engraved by T. A. Dean), Kahkewāquonāby, engraving, Toronto Public Library. Public Domain.*

The Upper Canadian wheat boom of the early and mid-nineteenth centuries increased demand for farm land and increased the wealth that could be earned from land sales, and this created still further pressure, pushing some Anishinaabeg into rocky northern quarters where the opportunities to take up farming were less viable. Whether bought out or shipped out by well-meaning or predatory colonial administrators, the effects were the same: the majority of Anishinaabeg moved from their position as the dominant peoples and force within Southern Ontario on the eve of the War of 1812 to a remote and increasingly impoverished and missionized cluster of reserve communities by 1860.

These conditions set the stage for Victorian-era treaty negotiations between Indigenous peoples and Canada.

## Treaties from 1763 to 1921

There are some general themes and specific consequences of the treaty process.

From an Indigenous perspective, a common complaint has been that there is an inherent and significant difference between “the Crown” and “the government.” Among the Anishinaabe and Anihšīnāpē in particular (but not exclusively), the symbolic significance of signing an agreement with Queen Victoria—who was represented in the negotiations as a matriarch—was far more powerful than any agreement between business partners or even official diplomats could ever be. Niitsitapi belief that a “covenant” is an agreement involving three parties, one of whom is a spiritual figure or deity, further complicates the meanings of treaties. The question of joint occupation of lands was no less complicated. In every case that has been carefully documented—and this covers at the very least every treaty east of the Rockies and in the Yukon—it is clear that Indigenous negotiators did not intend to concede land absolutely and in perpetuity. The use of land was to be shared, and Indigenous access to traditional resources would in no way be impeded. Shared use is significantly different, too, from shared ownership. It is difficult to imagine, based on oral tradition and written evidence arising from the treaty processes, that Indigenous signatories foresaw the carving up of their lands into freehold lots that could be bought, sold, and owned forever by anyone, let alone outsiders.

Instead, common Indigenous goals in seeking treaties include erecting reasonable barriers against waves of settlers and/or resource-seeking industries. Other common provisions were food, medical support, education, and agricultural instruction, all of which reflects fear of lethal epidemics like smallpox and measles, and of starvation in the wake of declining food resources (especially bison). These priorities also point to a desire to better understand the colonial world and to become better equipped to face it.

From a Canadian perspective, we need to consider first the constitutional landscape. From 1763 to 1840, all responsibility for negotiations and treaties resided with the British Crown and was handled by direct representatives of the British government. At the end of this period, the British government handed responsibility to the government of the Province of Canada, but only for its territory at that time (that is, the heartland of Ontario and Québec). On the West Coast at mid-century to 1871, the British remained directly responsible for treaty negotiation, but effectively left it in the hands of the colonial governments of Vancouver Island and British Columbia (which the Crown did not support with resources). In 1867, Ottawa’s responsibility for treaty-making (and *-keeping*) extended to the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Two years later, Britain divested the HBC of Rupert’s Land and transferred responsibility over the region to the new Canadian government, conditional on Ottawa negotiating treaties with the peoples of the region. This federal responsibility implicitly extended thereafter to newly added, created, and expanded provinces: Manitoba (1870), British Columbia (1871), Prince Edward Island (1873), Alberta and Saskatchewan (1905), northern extensions of Ontario and Québec (from 1877 to 1912), Manitoba’s northern expansion (1912), and the admission of Newfoundland (1949). It is important to note that while Canada eventually (over a period of not less than fifty years) addressed its obligation to Britain as regards Indigenous lands and treaties in what was Rupert’s Land, it chose to understand British Columbia’s situation as exceptional. The Peace District in the province’s northeast was part of Rupert’s Land, so Ottawa negotiated treaties there. As for the rest of the province, Ottawa saw it as exempt from the provisions of the 1763 Royal Proclamation and opted to pursue no treaties beyond the fourteen Vancouver Island treaties signed by Governor James Douglas in the 1850s.

Had Canada modeled its government on the United Kingdom and produced a unitary state, at least all would know where final responsibility for “Indian Affairs” resides. But it is and has been since 1867 a *federal* state. Under the constitution—from the BNA Act of 1867 to the current Constitution Act (1982)—provinces have responsibility for most resource sectors, apart from fisheries.<sup>4</sup> So, while ultimate responsibility for relations with Indigenous peoples resides with “the Crown,” in practical terms it has become the responsibility of Ottawa; at the same time, there is inevitable jurisdictional overlap, duplication, and conflict between the provinces and Ottawa that impacts the business of honouring the terms of treaties.

As Canada claimed and annexed more land in the West, the prospect of settler intrusions grew larger. The arrival

#### 4. Ottawa withheld from the three Prairie provinces control over resources and resource revenues until 1930.

of surveyors—who were sent west to map out land for settlers and, most aggressively, for railway routes—spurred Indigenous interest in negotiations with the Canadians. The collapse of the fur trade also drove interest in treaties. This was coupled to the growing belief among Indigenous peoples that a transition to farming or ranching might be the best strategy. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, some western leaders, including Isapo-muxika (a.k.a. Crowfoot), took up Canadian invitations to visit the emerging city of Winnipeg, the capital in Ottawa, and what the Canadians regarded as “model” reserves in Ontario and Québec. Impressed by what they saw, they advocated for the addition of schools and teachers’ salaries in treaties.

In the section that follows, Professor Keith Smith surveys the evolution of the Treaty relationship and introduces us to the implications of the Indian Act of 1876.

## Living with Treaties ([CC BY 4.0](#))<sup>5</sup>

Keith Smith, *Departments of History and First Nations Studies, Vancouver Island University*

Not unlike communities in Europe or elsewhere, the Indigenous peoples of North America confirmed access to resource sites, facilitated trade, resolved conflicts, settled alliances, and navigated the mass of other relations with their neighbours by negotiating agreements. When European newcomers found their way into Indigenous territories, they realized it was in their interest, and often necessary for their survival, to learn Indigenous treaty protocols and to fit themselves into Indigenous commercial networks. After these initial encounters, over time, treaty making changed in intent and content, but whether for military alliance, access to land and resources, or for some other reason, all of those involved understood that only agreements of this sort could protect the often divergent strategic, cultural, and economic interests of the treaty partners.<sup>6</sup>

The significance of treaty making to the newcomers is evident in Britain’s Royal Proclamation (1763) that, in part, committed it and then Canada to gain the consent of Indigenous Nations before settling in their territories. This commitment led to several treaties on Canada’s West Coast, and in what became Ontario and southern Manitoba prior to 1867. Soon after Confederation, the treaty process continued with the negotiation of the so-called “numbered treaties,” the first seven of which were concluded between 1871 and 1877 and covered the southern region between Lake Superior and the Rocky Mountains. For its part, Canada was primarily concerned with the acquisition of land and the fulfillment of its promise to British Columbia for a transcontinental railway. First Nations, on the other hand, were generally interested in protecting their territories and resources from incursion, while at the same time ensuring their cultural survival and independence. For them, these treaties were peace treaties. As Piikani (Peigan) elder Cecile Many Guns (aka:

5. Keith Smith, “11.6. Living with Treaties,” *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016). Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

6. On treaty-making in Canada across time, see J. R. Miller, *Compact, Contract, Covenant: Aboriginal Treaty-Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

Grassy Water) confirmed almost a century after the treaties, the intent was that there would be “no more fighting between anyone, everybody will be friends . . . Everybody will be in peace.”<sup>7</sup>

From the perspective of the newcomers, the transfer of land stood above all other policy considerations, and the numbered treaties were presented as successful mechanisms by both politicians of the day and many later historians. However, it is becoming increasingly recognized that rather than representing everything that was agreed to, the written treaties are much more reflective of Canada’s goals and Euro-Canadian interpretations of treaty-making, and much less representative of the objectives of First Nations and of Indigenous understandings of treaty processes. Many of the arrangements that were presented and agreed to orally during treaty negotiations are absent or minimized in the text of the numbered treaties.<sup>8</sup> The actual meaning of these treaties remains in dispute among historians and in the courts.

### *Reserves*

As a central provision of the numbered treaties, and where there were no treaties as Federal Government policy initiatives, isolated enclaves called Indian reserves were created to accommodate Indigenous people. The reserve system, as it developed in the mid to late 19th century, was meant as a temporary measure only, providing closed sites where missionaries and agents of the state could indoctrinate Indigenous populations in the economic, political, religious, and social conduct acceptable to settler Canada. Reserves offered residents refuge of sort from the various forms of discrimination they faced in the outside world, but to policy makers and church officials, they were laboratories of reform where residents could be observed and judged and where “Indian-ness” could be instructed, legislated, or coerced out of Indigenous people.<sup>9</sup> On these fragments of ancestral territories, Indigenous residents held the right to occupancy only. Ownership and title remained in the hands of Canada.

Since non-Indigenous lawmakers took for themselves, even in treaty areas, absolute authority to decide who would own land, reserve size depended largely on local settler demand. Even in areas covered by the numbered treaties, reserve size was calculated differentially on the basis of between 160 and 640 acres per family of five, while in British Columbia, for example, 10 acres per family was established as the standard. These inequities, and the smaller average reserve land base in Canada compared to the United States, were recognized and challenged by Indigenous political movements such as the Allied Tribes of British Columbia during the First World War and Interwar period, but they have largely remained to the present day.<sup>10</sup>

7. Cecile Many Guns and Annie Buffalo, “Interview with Mrs. Cecile Many Guns (Grassy Water) and Mrs. Annie Buffalo (Bear Child),” interview by Dila Provost and Albert Yellowhorn Sr., University of Regina, oURspace, 1973, <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/handle/10294/586>.
8. Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 118–27.
9. Keith Smith, *Liberalism, Surveillance, and Resistance: Indigenous Communities in Western Canada, 1877–1927* (Edmonton, AB: University of Athabasca Press, 2009), 50.
10. *Ibid.*, 132; Robert White-Harvey, “Reservation Geography and Restoration of Native Self-Government,” *The Dalhousie Law Journal* 17, no. 2 (1994): 588–589; Statement of the Allied Indian

Regardless of the original size of reserves, even these small tracts remaining to Indigenous people were often under threat. While the Federal Government restricted the ability of reserve communities to manage the lands they lived on, Canadian officials were more than willing to alienate reserve lands themselves to meet settler demands for mineral, forest, or agricultural lands; for the construction of transportation routes or military sites; or for a myriad of other purposes. While often, though not always, Indigenous agreement of a sort was sought, this consent was regularly acquired under circumstances that were at best questionable. Additionally, the sale of reserve lands was consistently presented as being in the long-term interests of the reserve communities, although it was railway and corporate executives and other members of the settler elite – including senior Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) and other public officials – who gained possession of the alienated reserve lands during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>11</sup> Some of these land sales continue to be the subject of land claims and court challenges.

The contradictions here are apparent. While Canada presented its policies as beneficial to Indigenous peoples, and while it maintained that its goal was to remake reserve residents into farmers, the best agricultural land was the first to be removed from First Nations' control. Even the right to use modern farming equipment and to participate in training programs, farm organizations, and wheat pools like their non-Native neighbours were curbed by Canadian officials. Further, amendments were made to the Indian Act soon after its creation, and more strictly applied after the mid-1880s, whereby reserve residents were required to secure a permit before selling or giving away any goods located or produced on reserves or by reserve residents. While some, like Cree elder John Tootoosis (1899–1989), recognized the positive aspects of the permit system as a means to protect First Nations vendors and consumers, he nonetheless saw it as a “loaded gun” that was, in the end, turned against those it was ostensibly designed to protect. Certainly, there was ongoing resistance to all of this from Indigenous communities, but for the most part, the protests were disregarded in Ottawa.<sup>12</sup>

### *Restricting Movement and Cultural Practices*

Most Canadians are secure in their right to move about freely and practice whatever form of spirituality they choose, but in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Canadian and church authorities went to some lengths to restrict both for those they defined as Indians. The kinds of activities allowed on ever-shrinking

Tribes of British Columbia for the Government of British Columbia (Vancouver: Cowan & Brookhouse, 1919) in LAC, RG 10, vol. 3821, file 59335, part 4A.

11. Robert Cail, *Land, Man and the Law: The Disposal of Crown Lands in British Columbia, 1871–1913* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1974), 14; Peggy Martin-McGuire, *First Nation Land Surrenders on the Prairies, 1896–1911* (Ottawa, ON: Indian Claims Commission, 1998), 15–16, 42, 493–94, and 497–98.
12. Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 253–58 and 156–58; Smith, *Liberalism, Surveillance, and Resistance*, 99–103; Jean Goodwill and Norma Sluman, *John Tootoosis* (Winnipeg, MB: Pemmican Publications, 1984), 123–25.

reserves were increasingly limited, restrictions were placed on movement, and cultural practices among reserve residents were policed and penalized. The suppression of liberty among Indigenous peoples was central to Canada's Indian policy.

### *The Pass System*

The confinement of Indigenous peoples to reserves was set in motion through the application of a matrix of laws, regulations, and policies meant to “elevate” reserve residents while advancing the interests of non-Indigenous settlers. In much of Canada, movement was limited through the vagrancy provisions of the Criminal Code or the restrictions against trespass in the Indian Act. However, in the region that became the Prairie provinces, the most notorious and comprehensive element of the restrictive matrix was implemented through a Federal Government policy known as the pass system. Under this initiative, a reserve resident was required to first secure a written pass from their Indian agent if they wanted to visit family or friends in a nearby village; check on their children at a residential school; participate in a celebration or attend a cultural event in a neighbouring community; leave their reserve to hunt, fish, and collect resources; find paid employment; travel to urban centres; or leave the reserve for any other reason.<sup>13</sup> According to Assiniboine Chief Dan Kennedy of the Carry the Kettle First Nation in Saskatchewan, “[t]he Indian reserve was a veritable concentration camp.”<sup>14</sup>

Official correspondence from the decade before 1885 reveals that procedures were already in place and that there was a will at all levels of the D.I.A., the North-West Mounted Police, and political hierarchies, including Prime Minister John A. Macdonald himself, to restrict Indigenous movement in the West. The Northwest Resistance of 1885 provided the justification for the application of a comprehensive pass system in the Prairie West, regardless of whether individuals or their communities were part of the resistance.

All of those involved in the implementation of the pass system understood that it had no basis in Canadian law. It was never included in the Indian Act or any other piece of Canadian legislation, which naturally put senior police officials in a difficult position. The regulations were at odds with settlers who relied on Indigenous labour and trade (and so opposed the restrictions), but high-ranking policemen also feared that they would be humiliated once Indigenous people recognized the pass system lacked a legal foundation and then chose not to comply with the policy. Generally, the NWMP/RNWMP/RCMP leadership preferred compliance by persuasion rather than by force, although individual officers were at times even more zealous than Indian agents, and chose to apply force when they felt it was necessary. Indigenous people naturally resisted their confinement to reserves and seem to have made little distinction between being persuaded to remain on, or return to, their reserves and being escorted back by a contingent of mounted policemen. They tended to choose to comply with the policy, or openly defy it, according to their own judgment of the specific situation.

There is textual evidence that passes continued to be issued until after World War I, and oral evidence

13. This section on the pass system is drawn from Smith, *Liberalism, Surveillance and Resistance*, 60–77.

14. Dan Kennedy, *Recollections of an Assiniboine Chief*, ed. James R. Stevens (Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 87.

that the pass system remained in operation into the mid-1930s at least. Even though Canada never had the capacity to forcibly restrict all off-reserve movement, the will of both the police and the D.I.A. to do what they could in this regard—regardless of the lack of legal foundation—is evident, even if some in the upper echelons of the police were sometimes uncomfortable.

### *Cultural Restriction*

Not only were Indigenous people restricted in their right to move about freely, even in their traditional territories, but also spiritual practices that were fundamental to personal and community identity and well-being – and that had been practiced since time immemorial – were targeted for suppression. State and church officials alike were intolerant of these practices, which they regarded as alien and immoral. Canadian and religious authorities also recognized that spiritual systems were integral components of the cultural, political, economic, and social structures of Indigenous communities. To transform one, the others had to be reconfigured as well.<sup>15</sup>

While there is evidence of this cultural repression across the country, the ceremonies of West Coast peoples known collectively as the potlatch received particular attention from politicians, missionaries, and government officials. The term potlatch refers to a complex of strictly regulated ceremonies that continue to be of critical significance to the Kwakwaka'wakw, Nuu-chah-nulth, Coast Salish, Haida, Tlingit, Tsimshian, Heiltsuk, and other peoples of the North West Coast of North America. The potlatch is the central institution that binds each of these societies together. Potlatches can be held to confirm leadership, alliances, or access to land and resources. Names (and, thus, status) can be given or passed down, debts repaid, dishonour erased, marriages performed, births announced, or the loss of loved ones memorialized. Potlatches provide a forum for history to be transmitted and verified, and gifts are given to witnesses who are obliged to remember and confirm what they have experienced. In addition to handling and healing earthly concerns, potlatches also have important spiritual components.<sup>16</sup>

Many in late 19th and early 20th century settler society who were fortunate enough to witness potlatch ceremonies first hand, or who benefited materially by providing supplies, supported their continuation. On the other hand, Indian agents who saw families working for months to meet the expense of a potlatch denounced the institution as “foolish, wasteful, and demoralizing.” It seemed to them that these ceremonies were held solely to give away material goods, a concept that was directly opposite to settler goals of capitalist accumulation and private property, and which simultaneously challenged settler understandings of what constituted “wealth.”<sup>17</sup> Missionaries, for their part, tended to see potlatches simply as a manifestation of evil. Thomas Crosby (1840–1914), who worked as a Methodist lay missionary to Coast Salish

15. Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1994), 3–4.

16. John Lutz, *Makuk*, 58.

17. Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian–European Relations in British Columbia, 1774–1890*, 2nd ed. (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), 206–7; Jean Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 160.

peoples of southern Vancouver Island and the lower Fraser Valley, from 1863 to the 1890s, said of potlatches, “Of the many evils of heathenism, with the exception of witchcraft, the potlatch is the worst, and one of the most difficult to root out.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1884, the Indian Act was amended to include a ban on the potlatch along with the expressly spiritual dances associated with Plains ceremonial practices. Unlike the pass system, the prohibition against these institutions and practices was backed up by the force of law that became ever more strict and comprehensive over time. Despite the legislative prohibitions, many communities felt they had no alternative but to continue to hold potlatches and dances, even if they went to considerable effort to make them more portable and keep them out of the view of missionaries and Indian agents. Even with these precautions, there was a wave of prosecutions and subsequent incarcerations soon after World War I. It wasn't until 1951 that the prohibitions against Indigenous ceremonies were finally dropped from the Indian Act. Some of the masks and other spiritual objects confiscated during the period of the ban have since been returned to their owners, but many others remain in the hands of museums and private collectors.

## Conclusion

Historians continue to debate the multiple and sometimes contradictory meanings of these treaties. Indigenous spokespeople often return to the theme of renewal of treaties, suggesting strongly that they believed these were arrangements subject to regular, perhaps annual, review. Certainly, all earlier agreements between fur trade companies and French and British imperial representatives across Ontario and the western interior of North America operated according to those principles. A once-and-for-all-time agreement that saps sovereignty from a people is neither a contract nor a diplomatic agreement: it is an unconditional surrender, and no one was signing off on that. Nothing could make that point more clearly than the Métis and Nêhiyawak protests that arose in the 1880s.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

*An Act to amend and consolidate the laws respecting Indians* [a.k.a. *The Indian Act*] 1876, §§ 3(3)–3(6). [https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/1876c18\\_1100100010253\\_eng.pdf](https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/DAM/DAM-INTER-HQ/STAGING/texte-text/1876c18_1100100010253_eng.pdf)

Battiste, Marie. “Resilience and Resolution: Mi'kmaw Education and the Treaty Implementation.” In *Living Treaties: Narrating Mi'kmaw Treaty Relations*, edited by Marie Battiste, 259–78. Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press, 2016.

Borrows, John. “Wampum at Niagara: The Royal Proclamation, Canadian Legal History, and Self-Government.” In *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada*, edited by Michael Asch, 169–72. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997.

Craft, Aimée. *Breathing Life into the Stone Fort Treaty: An Anishnabe Understanding of Treaty One*. Vancouver: UBC Press & Purich Publishing, 2013. See esp. Part One.

18. Thomas Crosby, *Among the An-Ko-me-nums or Flathead Tribes of Indians of the Pacific Coast* (Toronto, ON: William Briggs, 1907), 106.

- Kelm, Mary-Ellen and Keith D. Smith. *Talking Back to the Indian Act: Critical Readings in Settler Colonial Histories*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018.
- Long, John S. *Treaty No. 9: Making the Agreement to Share the Land in Far Northern Ontario in 1905*. Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010.
- Miller, J. R. "Canada's Historic Treaties." In *Keeping Promises: The Royal Proclamation of 1763, Aboriginal Rights, and Treaties in Canada*, 81-104. Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015.
- Moore, Christopher. "George MacMartin's Big Canoe Trip." *Ideas*. CBC Radio, January 10, 2013. <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/george-macmartin-s-big-canoe-trip-1.2913267>
- Obomsawin, Alanis, dir. *Trick or Treaty?* 2014; Montréal: National Film Board. [https://www.nfb.ca/film/trick\\_or\\_treaty/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/trick_or_treaty/)
- Venne, Sharon. "Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous perspective." In *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada*, edited by Michael Asch, 173-208. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997.
- Wicken, William C., and John G. Reid. "An Overview of the Eighteenth Century Treaties Signed between the Mi'kmaq and Wuastukwiuk Peoples and the English Crown, 1693-1928." In *Report Submitted To Land And Economy Royal Commission On Aboriginal Peoples 1996*, 2-66. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1996.
- "William C. Wicken." *Canada's History*, November 19, 2013. <http://www.canadashistory.ca/awards/governor-general-s-history-awards/award-recipients/2013/william-c-wicken>
- Williams, Alex. *The Pass System*. Tamarack Productions, 2015, <http://thepasssystem.ca/>

# Chapter 8: Resistance II -- Red River and Saskatchewan

The final chapter of this section deals with the dramatic breakdown of the treaty relationship in the late 1870s and early 1880s.<sup>1</sup> Not all Indigenous peoples on the Plains rose up against Ottawa, but all complained that their needs, rights, and entitlements were being neglected. There were fatal repercussions for doing so.

The path to the treaty table was, for Indigenous peoples in the West, a traumatic one. Nearly a century of transition to the mounted, bison-hunting culture was intermittently punctuated by outbreaks of epidemics of imported diseases. The worst took place in the 1780s and the 1830s. The latter cleaned out the Mandan-Hidatsa villages and marketplace. In that instant, the commercial and diplomatic balance of the Plains peoples was disrupted. Smallpox also affected the Nakoda Oyadebi (a.k.a. Assiniboine) dramatically, and everyone else to some greater or lesser extent. American traders moved into the region, filling in some ways the vacuum left by the Mandan and bringing additional—almost insatiable—demand for bison hides. Rifles replaced the old flintlock guns. Beaver populations were hunted to the brink. The HBC's monopoly in trade was effectively nullified in the 1840s. Wars between the much better armed US Cavalry and the Indigenous peoples of the lands south of the forty-ninth parallel were in full swing. The Sioux and the Niitsitapi moved freely back and forth across the “Medicine Line” (the forty-ninth parallel) and thus posed a threat to the ambitions of both Euro-North American nation states. Indigenous alliances strained, and some rivalries exploded. On 24 October 1870, the Nêhiyawak and Niitsitapi engaged in a bloody confrontation: the Battle of Belly River, near Fort Whoop-Up in what is now Lethbridge. At the time, there was no way of knowing that this was to be the last major confrontation between First Nations on the Northern Plains, but the fatalities made it decisive. The upset victory of the Niitsitapi over the Nêhiyawak (who lost as many as 300 warriors) was pyrrhic: both sides were rendered vulnerable to attack, starvation, disease, and despair.

Canadian trepidation about Indigenous and Métis affairs in the West was worsening in the years 1869–70. The Métis resistance at Red River had, after all, won provincehood for Manitoba—something that Ontario's leadership deeply resented. For many Ontarians, the entire point of confederation was gaining Rupert's Land so as to settle surplus population there. There was suspicion in Ottawa that the Métis might have further plans and the ability to upset Canadian ambitions. As for the Nêhiyawak, Niitsitapi, and Anihšīnāpē of the southern Prairies, the Canadians could be only less certain. Somehow that threat would have to be diminished. The solution, of course, was treaties. Ottawa's approach to the Métis, however, was punitive.

There was no love lost between the Métis and the English- and Protestant-Canadians, and the federal government believed that it had met all obligations undertaken in 1870 as regards the historic residents of Red River. Ottawa consistently refused to fold Métis communities—scattered after 1870 in a diaspora across the West—into the numbered treaties, even when requested to do so by Indigenous negotiators. When Métis protests resumed in 1885, the Anglo-Canadians in particular were inclined to see it as evidence of insatiable greed on the part of a population too feckless to get on with successful farming.

Not all Canadians shared the priorities and prejudices of Ottawa. There was sympathy in Québec for the Métis, who were viewed in some measure as part of a francophone and Catholic family. Some Anglo-Canadian settlers in the West, perhaps surprisingly, also sympathized and shared in the grievances registered by the Saskatchewan Métis. The original course of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was to come north through the Saskatchewan River valleys, where the best farmland was to be found. Canadian migrants had rushed into the area as a consequence, and the CPR's decision

1. The material in this chapter derives from John Douglas Belshaw, *Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016), sections 2.5–2.8. The material is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

to use the southern route instead left them hundreds of kilometres from a rail link. Among the leaders of the “Métis” uprising were Ontarian-westerners who criticized Ottawa’s arbitrary behaviour and the duplicity of the CPR. While some were less sympathetic than others, former HBC employees—who had a longer-term perspective on Nêhiyawak, Nakoda Oyadebi, and Niitsitapi societies—decried the state of affairs and the worsening condition of Indigenous peoples.

## The Indigenous West<sup>2</sup>

From an Indigenous perspective, treaty promises of medicine chests, agricultural instruction, annuities, and food were consistent with the gift-giving diplomacy of past generations; offered up emergency relief in the face of hardship from famine or disease; and purchased peace. Some Indigenous leaders refused to sign, mostly because they recognized that the treaties didn’t really promise land; instead, the treaties proposed to take all of the land away, except for a small amount that would be marked on maps as reserves. Other Indigenous negotiators understood the treaties as creating exclusive lands—reserves—and the rest would be shared, perhaps held in common. There was confusion, clearly, but reluctance and caution were swiftly worn down by hunger.

The crisis that brought the Indigenous peoples of the Plains to the treaty table in the 1870s was rapidly worsening. What was left of the bison herds was, in the 1880s, under assault by better-armed hunters (Indigenous and otherwise). The repeating rifle was only one of several technological innovations that would severely compromise the remaining herds, most of which were now huddled in the southwest corner of Alberta. But even the Niitsitapi Confederacy could no longer count on this resource. By 1879, even the Cypress Hills resource was largely played out.<sup>3</sup> What had only decades earlier been a continental population of hundreds of thousands of Plains bison was reckoned to have plummeted to a few hundred in the early 1880s. It wasn’t so much the case that the clock was ticking; for the Cree and their neighbours, alarm bells were ringing.

Additional pressure was applied on the food stocks of the Plains by the arrival of refugees in the 1870s and 1880s. The crisis began in 1877, when the Lakota Sioux and their allies combined for one final push against the genocidal attacks of the US Cavalry. At Little Bighorn, they inflicted the most severe defeat that United States forces would suffer until Pearl Harbor. Nevertheless, Ta-tanka I-yotank (a.k.a. Sitting Bull, 1836–90) and his people were forced to flee to sanctuary across the Medicine Line. Their refugee camps were swollen with newcomers in the years that followed, and by 1880 their plight was desperate.

Beginning in 1879, famine swept repeatedly across the Prairies. Provisions promised under treaty were not supplied. What cattle that did arrive on the Plains to be used as draught-animals were, instead, eaten. The Nêhiyawak, Nakoda Oyadebi, and Anihšînâpē who conformed to Ottawa’s expectations and remained on reserve were, as a consequence of their choice, vulnerable to starvation when Canada failed to meet its obligations. Those who rejected treaty and the reserves—including Nêhiyawak under the leadership of Piapot (1816–1908), Mistahimaskwa (a.k.a. Big Bear, 1825–88), and Minahikosis (a.k.a. Little Pine, 1830–85)—faced hardship just the same. What’s more, Ottawa exploited these conditions to try to push the recalcitrant factions onto reserves and into a European-style regime of agriculture. To be clear, Canadian authorities knew that famine was on the march. They had resources warehoused nearby, and yet withheld supplies in order to achieve a political goal: the submission of the Nêhiyawak and their neighbours to Canadian authority.

2. This section derives and has been adapted from by John Douglas Belshaw, “2.6 Canada and the First Nations of the West,” *Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Victoria: BCcampus, 2015), and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.
3. John Milloy, *The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988), 120.

The situation was no better for the Niitsitapi. Reports of twenty-five starvation deaths in the last days of 1879 signalled that the last refuge of the bison was also in peril. Successive hard winters compounded conditions for everyone in the southwest Prairies and along the foothills. Despite fears of American attacks, many of the Niitsitapi relocated to the United States in pursuit of food or, perhaps, rations.

Resistance to taking treaty was crumbling. In 1879, Minahikosis signed Treaty 6. He nevertheless worked for the remaining six years of his life to expand and draw together the reserve lands into a contiguous pattern so as to create a Nêhiyawak homeland. Ottawa, however, feared an “Indian Territory” which might enable the growth of stronger political and military resolve. As a result, the Nêhiyawak reserves were chopped into smaller and more distinct parcels. This approach, of course, made the administration of aid still more difficult. What’s more, these now concentrated populations created promising conditions for epidemics to emerge. As if disease was not enough, food poisoning appeared. Tainted meat was, in desperation, consumed on many reserves and in many towns, with predictable results.

Still, the Canadian government adhered to an austerity-first policy and the notion of the “vanishing Indian” gained ground. Some Canadian critics of rationing and relief argued that supporting Indigenous peoples was throwing good money after bad: if the Indigenous population was doomed to disappear, what would be the point? In this respect, both the Liberals and the Conservatives in Ottawa were on the same page. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald took the view that relief to anyone who was not actually starving would create dependence rather than self-reliance. And yet, even in famine the Plains peoples were not being supported. One of the last big pushes to get bands onto reserves came in the spring of 1882 to clear all the lands south of the CPR route in Assiniboia (now southern Saskatchewan), especially the Cypress Hills, where thousands of peoples from different nations had gathered. As one historian frames this, every move made by Ottawa had cynicism at its heart: “Within a year, 5,000 people were expelled from the Cypress Hills. In doing so the Canadian government accomplished the ethnic cleansing of southwestern Saskatchewan of its indigenous population.”<sup>4</sup> In 1883, several Cree leaders petitioned Ottawa, clearly stating that they felt betrayed by Canada’s lacklustre commitment to the terms of the treaties:

Nothing but our dire poverty, our utter destitution during this severe winter, when ourselves, our wives and our children are smarting under the pangs of cold and hunger, with little or no help, and apparently less sympathy from those placed to watch over us, could have induced us to make this final attempt to have redress directly from headquarters. We say final because, if no attention is paid to our case we shall conclude that the treaty made with us six years ago was a meaningless matter of form and that the white man has indirectly doomed us to annihilation little by little . . . Shall we still be refused, and be compelled to adhere to the conclusion spoken of in the beginning of this letter, that the treaty is a farce enacted to kill us quietly, and if so, let us die at once?<sup>5</sup>

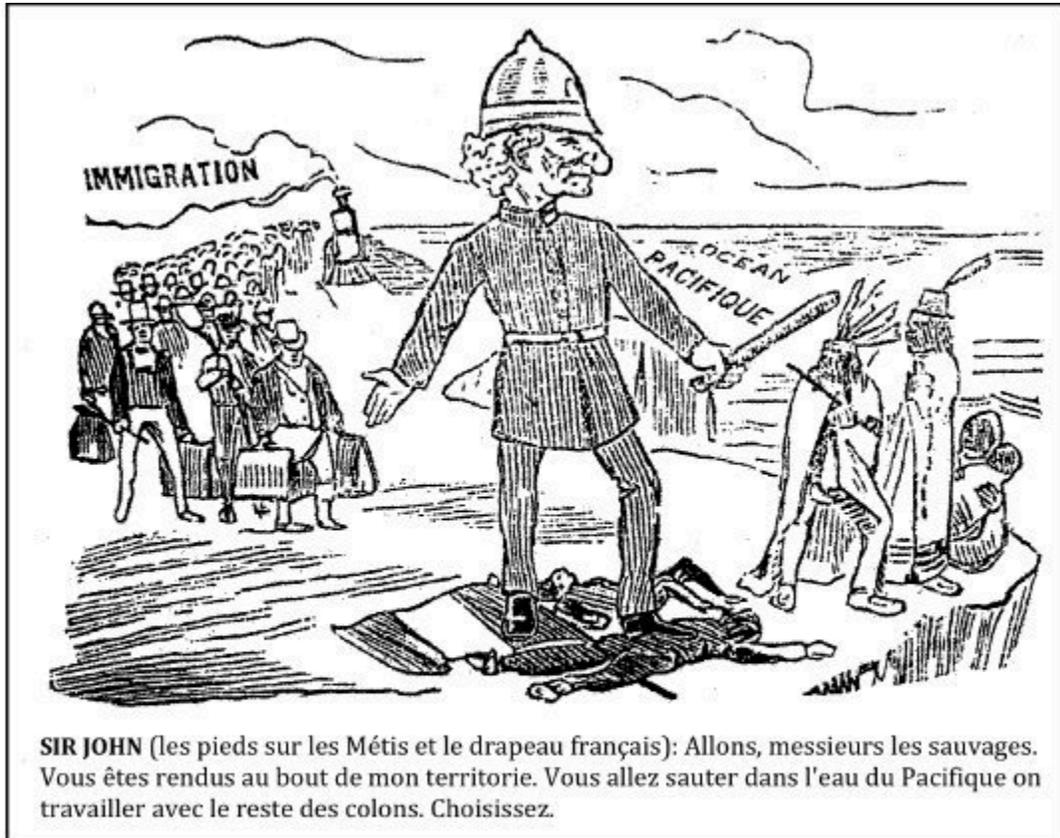
By 1884, the Nêhiyawak were prepared to speak as a single body under the leadership of Mistahimaskwa. In response, the Canadians—led by Lieutenant-Governor Edgar Dewdney and embodied in the newly-formed North-West Mounted Police (NWMP), both of which were based at Regina—began detaining Indigenous leaders as they attempted to travel to meetings, breaking up gatherings where legal resistance and court challenges were being discussed, and once again using rations to squeeze the Plains peoples into submission. The government also turned to the banning of Indigenous cultural practices. In 1884–85, movement was restricted by means of a “pass system,” and arrests were made of Indigenous diplomats visiting reserves other than their own. Disagreements arose between the Niitsitapi under Isapo-muxika (a.k.a. Crowfoot), the Hunkpapa Sioux (led by Ta-tanka I-yotank), the Nêhiyawak (whose spokesperson was

4. James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013), 123.

5. Bobtail et al. to John A. Macdonald, January 7, 1883, quoted in Jennifer Reid, *Louis Riel and the Creation of Modern Canada: Mythic Discourse and the Postcolonial State* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 15.

Mistahimaskwa), and the Métis (led after 1884 by Louis Riel). The possibility of a united front emerging across the Plains was receding.<sup>6</sup>

As 1885 approached, relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians in the West were at a low ebb. The worst of famine had passed in some quarters, but the trauma and the death toll were hardly going to be expunged overnight. Cree leaders like Piapot and Mistahimaskwa had watched for more than a decade as the Canadians neglected their treaty obligations and communities were purposely shattered and brought to heel.



**SIR JOHN (standing on the Metis and the French flag):** Let's go, gentlemen. You have come to the end of my territory. You are going to have to jump into the Pacific or work with the rest of the settlers. Make your choice. [tr.]

*Le Canard, Montréal, 18 July 1885*

Contemporaries of Macdonald were aware of the nature and implications of his policies as regards the Indigenous peoples of the West. This cartoon from the Montréal newspaper, *Le Canard*, appeared just after the Nêhiyawak leadership surrendered. Source: Sir John, cartoon, *Le Canard*, July 18, 1885.

## The 1885 Rising

Protest letters gained no ground, and by March 1885 a loose coalition of Métis, settlers, and First Nations communities declared a provisional government. Less than a week later, some of their troops (led by Métis field general Gabriel Dumont and Assiwiyin) confronted a party of NWMP and members of a local militia drawn from settlers around Prince

6. J. R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*, 170–5.

Albert. The battle at Duck Lake claimed nearly two dozen of the Canadian force, killed or injured; the coalition force lost only five, one of whom was Assiwiyin.

Indigenous unrest finally spilled over. A farming instructor was executed on the Mosquito Reserve, and the northern Nêhiyawak leader, Pitikwahanapiwiyin (a.k.a. Poundmaker, 1842–85), marched his followers and some Nakoda (a.k.a. Stoney) into Battleford on 30 March. Alarmed settlers abandoned the town, and the Indian agent was unwilling or unable to offer the Nêhiyawak–Nakoda protest group any food or resources. Looting of empty homes followed. At Frog Lake on 2 April, Mistahimaskwa's Nêhiyawak broke with their moderate leader and attacked and killed nine settlers, including the Indian agent. Two weeks later, Fort Pitt was captured, although this time without bloodshed.

Less than twenty-four hours after Duck Lake, word reached Ottawa via the new telegraph technology that paralleled the Canadian Pacific Railway line. Macdonald called for volunteers for militia duty while local newspapers across Canada, from Fort William to Sydney, admonished settler males to step up and join local regiments sponsored by the newspapers themselves. (Under these circumstances, Canadian media accounts of the events of 1885 were bound to be slanted.) Two weeks later, about eight thousand soldiers (almost all of them inexperienced) were boarding trains and speeding west. The ability to do so had not been there in 1870; the failure of the Indigenous and/or Métis forces to cut the rail line or telegraph line suggests that their leaders did not appreciate the extent to which the world had changed since Red River in 1870.

The Canadian forces launched a two-pronged attack on the Nêhiyawak–Nakoda forces and the Métis provisional government headquarters at Batoche. Over three days, from the ninth through the twelfth of May, the Winnipeg Militia pounded away at the Métis position. Vastly outgunned, the Métis nevertheless held out until their ammunition was exhausted. As the Métis resistance failed, many of their troops and leaders fled. Three days after the battle, Riel surrendered. He was subsequently tried, convicted, and hanged in Regina.

The resistance to Canadian ambitions in the West was not over. Canadian troops performed less well against the Nêhiyawak: at Cut Knife Hill and Eagle Hills, and at Frenchman's Butte and Loon Lake, Indigenous forces scored significant victories. However, the Canadians were wearing them down. Pitikwahanapiwiyin and Mistahimaskwa surrendered on 26 May and 2 July, respectively.

In the 1885 trials that followed in Battleford, the outcomes for the Indigenous leadership were particularly bad. Eight men—among them Kapapamahchakwew (a.k.a. Wandering Spirit) and the two Nakoda leaders (Itka and Man Without Blood)—were tried in October and condemned to hang. Some traditional Plains cultures believe that the soul is located in the neck, and so the idea of hanging was especially horrific. One of the condemned men unsuccessfully requested death by firing squad instead. A gallows large enough to hang eight men at once was built, and the mass—and public—execution took place on 27 November. It remains the largest public execution in the history of settler societies in what is now Canada. Evidence suggests that Indigenous children were brought from the Battleford Industrial School to watch. The fate of Pitikwahanapiwiyin and Mistahimaskwa was only slightly better. Along with One Arrow, they were each sentenced to three years at Manitoba's Stony Mountain Penitentiary—itsself an expression of growing settler society power on the Prairies. All three leaders were badly reduced in health by the experience and were released ahead of schedule; they all died soon thereafter as a result of their incarceration.

In the aftermath of the trials, executions, and imprisonments, many Nêhiyawak and Nakoda fled to the United States. While the story of Ta-tanka I-yotank and the Sioux flight into Canada is relatively well known, the fact that a couple of hundred Indigenous people from the Canadian Plains thought themselves safer south of the Medicine Line is not.<sup>7</sup>

7. Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1997), 222–5.



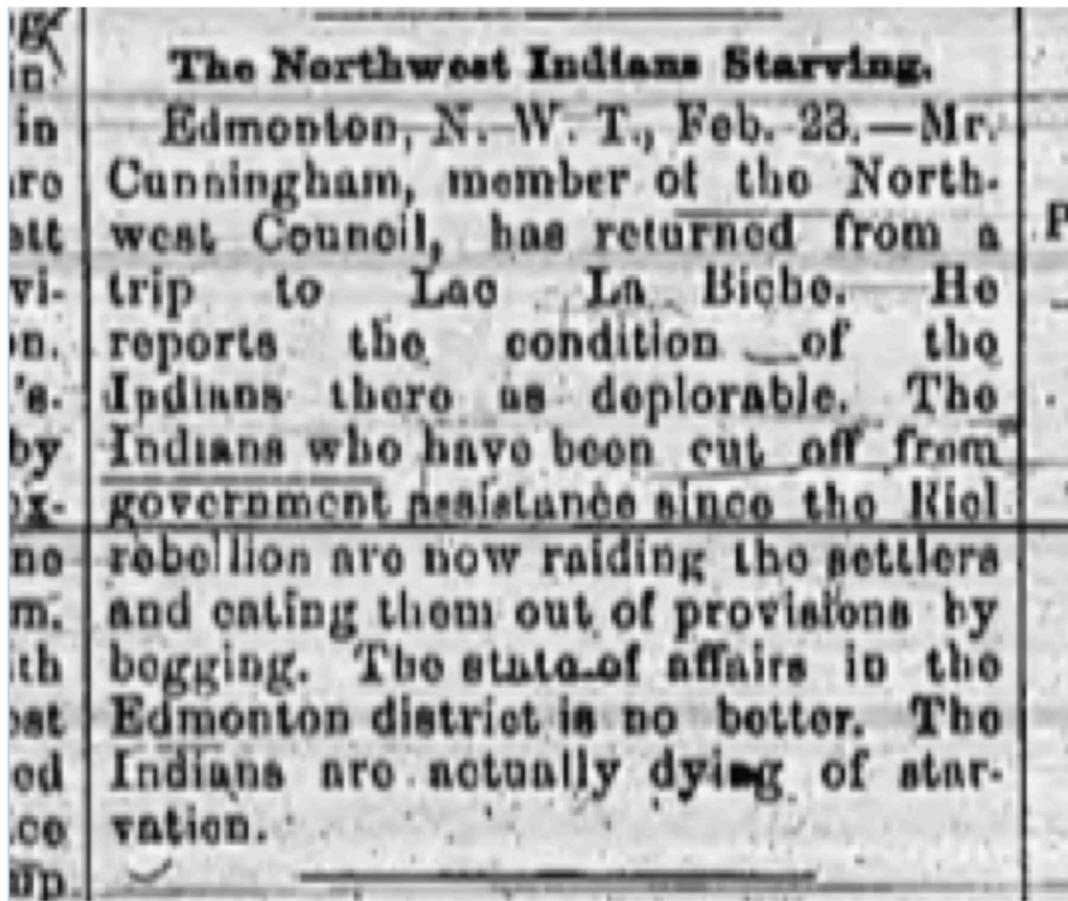
**"CHRISTIAN STATESMANSHIP."**

*Sir John:* Indians starving? Oh, well, they're not "friends of Dewdney," you know. I'll see that *you* don't come to want, though, Mr. Contractor.

[Note: Edgar Dewdney was the Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Territories.]

John Wilson Bengough was a cartoonist with *The Grip*, a Toronto publication. He was also a strident critic of Macdonald and corruption. His work demonstrates that the Canadian public was aware of the tragedies unfolding in the West. Three years after the "Rebellion," Bengough produced this piece. The sign at the top reads: "Starved by a Christian Government." The depiction of the Indigenous people is a caricature and carries with it its own racist baggage; Bengough's point, however, is unmistakable. Source: *Christian Statesmanship*, April 1888, cartoon, *The Grip*, via Sean Carleton (@SeanCarleton), Twitter, August 31, 2017, <https://twitter.com/SeanCarleton/status/903410756959346688>. Public Domain.

Ironically, the Sioux who remained north of the border fared the best in these years. They brought their farming skills (honed for more than 50 years) to their existing settlement hubs in Canada. They were not covered by numbered treaties and, as a result, fell between the administrative cracks. They didn't face the scrutiny of Indian agents and could largely ignore the pass system. Although they weren't eligible for government relief, that was rarely forthcoming anyways. They were thus able to get on with adjusting to the new paradigm without wilful mismanagement by the Canadians. How serious was this distinction? Very. Of the Plains people in the 1880s, only the Sioux escaped the tuberculosis epidemics, and they did so likely because they were better fed, more self-sufficient, and not economically destabilized.



Canadians in British Columbia knew how grim the situation was in the aftermath of the 1885 uprising. The Kamloops *Inland Sentinel* published this brief but alarming report on 25 February 1888. Source: "The Northwest Indians Starving," *Inland Sentinel* (Kamloops, BC), Feb. 25, 1888.

## Conclusion

The events of 1885 foreshadow changes that were to befall Indigenous communities across the country. Settler society would introduce more stringent laws and regulations and would increasingly monitor Indigenous behaviour and punish transgressions. 1885 gave elements in Canadian society license to “manage” Indigenous cultures, which translated into assimilative policies and what has come to be regarded as cultural genocide. The century and more of policies associated with Canadian settler colonialism are the subject of the next section.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

Daschuk, James. *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013. See esp. pp. 79–180.

Ferguson, R. Brian, and Neil L. Whitehead. “The Violent Edge of Empire.” In *War in the Tribal Zone: Expanding States*

- and *Indigenous Warfare*, edited by R. Brian Ferguson and Neil L. Whitehead, 1–30. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1992.
- Gaudry, Adam. “The Métis-ization of Canada: The Process of Claiming Louis Riel, Metissage, and the Metis People as Canada’s Mythical Origin.” *Aboriginal Policy Studies* 2, no. 2 (2013): 64–87.
- Graham, Sean. “History Slam Episode Sixty-Three: Metis and the Medicine Line.” Produced by Active History. *History Slam*. June 25, 2015. Podcast, MP3 audio, 51:07. <http://activehistory.ca/2015/06/history-slam-episode-sixty-three-metis-and-the-medicine-line/>
- Hogue, Michel. “Podcast: Setting the Plains on Fire: How Indigenous Geo-Politics and the U.S.-Dakota War shaped Canada’s Westward Expansion.” Produced by Active History. *History Chats*. May 12, 2018. Podcast, MP3 audio, 26:30. <http://activehistory.ca/2018/05/podcast-setting-the-plains-on-fire-how-indigenous-geo-politics-and-the-u-s-dakota-war-shaped-canadas-westward-expansion/>
- Hoy, Benjamin. “Little Bear’s Cree and Canada’s Uncomfortable History of Refugee Creation.” *Active History*, September 9, 2015. <http://activehistory.ca/2015/09/little-bears-cree-and-canadas-uncomfortable-history-of-refugee-creation/>
- Innes, Robert Alexander. “Historians and Indigenous Genocide in Saskatchewan.” Shekon Neechie: An Indigenous History Site, 21 June 21, 2018. <https://shekonneechie.ca/2018/06/21/historians-and-indigenous-genocide-in-saskatchewan/>
- Many Guns, Cecile, and Annie Buffalo. “Interview with Mrs. Cecile Many Guns Grassy Water) and Mrs. Annie Buffalo (Bear Child).” By Dila Provost and Albert Yellowhorn Sr. University of Regina, oURspace, 1973. <http://ourspace.uregina.ca/handle/10294/586>
- McCoy, Ted. “Legal Ideology in the Aftermath of Rebellion: The Convicted First Nations Participants, 1885.” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 42, no. 83 (Mai-May 2009): 175–201.
- Milloy, John. “‘Our Country’: The Significance of the Buffalo Resource for a Plains Cree Sense of Territory.” In *Aboriginal Resource Use in Canada: Historical and Legal Aspects*, edited by Kerry Abel and Jean Friesen, 51–70. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1991.
- Read, Geoff, and Todd Webb. “‘The Catholic Mahdi of the North West’: Louis Riel and the Metis Resistance in Transatlantic and Imperial Context.” *Canadian Historical Review* 93, no. 2 (June 2012): 171–95.
- Smith, Keith. *Liberalism, Surveillance, and Resistance: Indigenous Communities in Western Canada, 1877-1927*. Edmonton: University of Athabasca Press, 2009.
- Stark, Heidi Kiiwetinesiiik. “Criminal Empire: The Making of the Savage in a Lawless Land.” *Theory and Event* 19, no. 4 (2016).
- Stonechild, A. Blair. “The Indian View of the 1885 Uprising.” In *1885 and After: Native Society in Transition*, edited by Laurie Barron and James B. Waldrum, 155–70. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1986.
- Waiser, Bill. “They Have Suffered the Most: First Nations and the Aftermath of the 1885 North-West Rebellion.” In *Roots of Entanglement: Essays in the History of Native-newcomer Relations*, edited by Myra Rutherdale, Kerry Abel, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, 233–58. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018.

# PART 3: CULTURE CRISIS CHANGE CHALLENGE



# Introduction



*Traditional materials and clothing styles were among the many aspects of Indigenous cultures that were targeted in residential schools. Source: J. F. Moran, School Children—Residential at R. C. Mission, [Fort] Resolution, N.W.T., ca. 1928, photograph, Online MIKAN no.3381466, Library and Archives Canada/PA-102519. Public Domain.*

After public enquiries, journalists' investigations, official apologies, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and novels and movies devoted to the subject, it is difficult to ignore the historic arc that produced a campaign of cultural genocide. A century of residential schools fractured generations of Indigenous families, severed links with traditional languages, hollowed out communities. There were egregious abuses of children in the care of adults in the schools and the existence of what can only be described as systematic tortures. Physical and mental health issues, along with substance abuse and chronic addiction, are other legacies. It is a grim tale and, given ongoing truth-seeking and truth-telling efforts, it is not yet complete. These experiences of despair and tragedy have generated an outcry, as well as renewal and strength born of resilience. Residential schools are, however, only one part of a lengthy history of cultural transformation, some of which was imposed by settler colonialism and some of which was initiated and managed—with varying degrees of success—by Indigenous peoples themselves.

This section explores Indigenous experiences under settler colonialism at the community and personal level. Missionaries—agents of European Christian ideologies—appear in New France in the early 1600s; they continue to inform settler-Indigenous relations to this day. The European urge to change Indigenous cultures is demonstrable and consistent, although its meaning and methods vary widely across four centuries and thousands of kilometres. What purpose were imported Christian beliefs meant to serve? What did Indigenous peoples see in the settlers' creed that allowed them to tolerate the presence in their midst of these alien spiritualists? What strategies were deployed by Europeans to “convert” and “save” Indigenous peoples, and what tactics were used by Indigenous peoples to resist, recast, comprehend, and make use of agendas of cultural change?

This introduction sets the stage for state-sponsored efforts to Christianize, Westernize, modernize, and eliminate Indigenous cultures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The topics that follow focus on the highly disruptive tactics, laws, and experiments imposed by the settler regime and colonial agents since Confederation that had, ultimately, the goal of eradicating Indigenous cultures, identities, and distinct communities. These will include the residential schools and bans on (and the policing of) traditional cultural practices, including the speaking of Indigenous languages. The abduction of children by state agencies occurred beyond the residential school system in the form of what is known as “the Sixties Scoop.” Children were thus at the frontlines of the cultural genocide project, as is explored in Chapter 9. Women were targeted as well. The experiences of Indigenous women under settler colonialism are explored in Chapter 10. Indigenous peoples across “Canada” mounted a variety of political responses to federal and provincial policies and agencies over the last 200 years, their efforts becoming more visible in the last 40 years of the twentieth century. Chapter 11 situates these events and trends historically. Indigenous health—physical, spiritual, community, and mental—is largely a product of settler colonialism’s obsession with modernity. Chapter 12 explores the question of health, with a focus on fresh water supplies. How is it possible, we must ask, that one First Nation after the next, living in areas absolutely saturated with lakes and rivers, cannot get a glass of clean water to drink, even now? How did it come to pass that settler colonialism and modernity became literally toxic?

This section is followed by reflections on Truth and Reconciliation—both the official report and the challenges it presents for historians and for histories. Educators, civil servants, Indigenous and settler-community leaders, the media, social workers, and “Canadians” in the broadest sense have been presented with a challenge. The gauntlet has been dropped. In picking it up—in whichever community we belong to—we have to be aware of our obligations to tell the truth about the past as best we can, to refract new light on our histories, and to refuse to take shelter behind simplistic and reassuring tales. If the nation of Canada is built on a series of stories of explorers, voyageurs, soldiers, nurses, engineers, farmwomen, scientists, suffragists, politicians, and novelists, then we must be ready to ask what it means if those characters were involved in something that was (and is) objectively inhumane. If Canadians have chosen to look the other way, then this is the time to be Idle No More.

## What is “Cultural Genocide”?

The word “genocide” was minted during the Second World War to describe attempts to murder entire “races” of human beings. Racism—as a policy and an ideology and a way of seeing the world—mutated in the nineteenth century from a way of cataloguing different cultures into something sharper and inherently hostile. Little discriminations grew into barriers; barriers sprouted barbed wire. Attempts to eradicate the Armenian population in the Ottoman Empire (Turkey) began in the mid-nineteenth century and culminated in the wholesale slaughter of 1.5 million people during and after the First World War. Twenty years later, the Jewish population of Europe was systematically destroyed, principally by the National Socialist government in Germany. Some six million were murdered. In both instances, these were non-combatants, and the motivation of the regimes responsible for the exterminations was “purification” of their own—and not enemy—populations. These two horrors of the twentieth century gave birth to the word “genocide” in 1943.

Given the potent and visceral history of the word, it is not brandished lightly. Settler society in Canada adjusted its racist attitudes and policies as regards many non-Anglo-Celtic or non-French groups in light of what became widely known (from about 1945–50) of the Jewish “holocaust” in Europe. It did not, however, rush to examine the impacts of assimilationist policies on Indigenous peoples. The term “ethnocide” was developed in the 1940s to address cultural attacks on identifiable groups, but it failed to gain much traction.

And there was little sense in settler Canada that “ethnocides” had ever occurred here. By the 1970s and certainly the 1980s, Indigenous leaders were weaving the terms “genocide” and “cultural genocide” into the Canadian conversation, albeit in the face of tremendous resistance from non-Indigenous people. By 1994, the term had acquired legitimacy at the United Nations, specifically in a draft of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Thereafter, a progressively wider slice of the world’s population was prepared to recognize that this is what had happened to Indigenous people—that this is what Canadian governments had perpetrated.

Definitions of cultural genocide vary. The 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) addressed inconsistent use of the term by defining it on the first page of their report. The TRC thus forefronts this concept so as to tell us that it is embedded in the settler-Indigenous relationship:

*Physical genocide* is the mass killing of the members of a targeted group, and *biological genocide* is the destruction of the group’s reproductive capacity. *Cultural genocide* is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.

In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things.<sup>1</sup>

As the topics ahead reveal, “cultural” is a modifier. The point of settler efforts in this regard was to eliminate Indianness, and several means were deployed to that end.

## Culture Campaigns

Conscious efforts by non-Indigenous peoples to change Indigenous cultures are relatively easy to highlight. Most of them arise from policies that are clearly articulated by clergy, empires, militaries, and local administrations. There are, of course, changes that occur less directly: the adoption of European technologies (which may include anything from metal scraping tools, copper pots, guns, and alcohol to electronic media) might be encouraged by non-Indigenous peoples, but rarely with the goal of causing cultural change, let alone erasure. So we shall set these aside and focus on the explicit efforts to impose transformation.

Whether the goal is assimilation or subordination—that is, re-crafting Indigenous cultures so as to be effectively a part of settler society, or degrading the same cultures to the point of being no obstacle to settler goals—the tools are largely the same. Indigenous leaders in the sixteenth century were prepared to exchange individuals (sometimes hostages) with Europeans so as to acquire a greater understanding of the culture with which they were coming into sustained contact.

1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Ottawa: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 1.

Samuel de Champlain famously proposed a symbiosis between the French colonists and the Wendat in 1633 when he promised them that “our young men will marry your daughters, and we shall be one people.” At least one historian advises us to consider the possibility that Champlain was “proposing closer relations between the two groups by using marriage as a metaphor of political and economic alliance and cooperation.”<sup>2</sup> This may be splitting hairs and it may, too, be moot: Jesuit missionaries supported intermarriage only when it involved Catholic sacraments and led to (or was even preceded by) Wendat conversions to Christianity. The diplomatic and economic goals thus became bound up in cultural and religious agendas.<sup>3</sup>

For the most part, however, the first two hundred years of contact was not characterized by aggressive policies associated with assimilation. Missionaries in New France concentrated their efforts in the St. Lawrence Valley, and so those Indigenous peoples who spent more time in that region were exposed to greater cultural risks. The same is true of Acadia, wherein the Catholic clergy were very active. One has to keep in mind that the clergy had their own marching orders: the conversion of souls and holding the Protestant English/British influence at bay was their literal job. Colonial regimes, however, were not consistently enthusiastic. In New France, there were conflicts between military leadership, fur traders and merchants, and the “black robes,” the Recollet and Jesuit missionaries who inserted themselves into every key element of colonial life and business. Conversions among the Wendat were incentivized with the promise of more and better trade goods, but new religious alignments in Wendake Ehen created factionalism that wasn’t in anyone’s best interests and which could be exploited by the Haudenosaunee. There was among the missionaries, too, disagreement as to whether Indigenous people had to be changed into Europeans before they could become “real” Christians, or whether conversion to Christianity under Indigenous terms would lead to closer relations. Historian of New France, Peter Moogk, offers insights into what attracted Wendat converts and where they drew a line. The Wendat perceived:

. . . Jesus of Nazareth as a protective spirit who was supposed to bring good fortune to the devotee and to avert misfortune. This utilitarian approach to Christ explains the quick abandonment of the new faith when the Hurons were beset by imported diseases and by Iroquois attacks. Native Christians fared no better than traditionalists, and so, when Jesus failed as a guardian spirit, disillusioned converts reverted to aboriginal practices and beliefs. Their initial view of Jesus explains why there were so many apostates among the Hurons.<sup>4</sup>

Indigenous engagements with Christianity were not, however, always strictly strategic. After all, “Christianity” was bound up in European ways of doing things, some of which could be adopted and adapted without much compromise to existing and traditional practices. Flipping that particular coin, there were aspects of European belief and values that simply did not fit within Indigenous practices. For example, the Algonquin “eat-all” or “leave-nothing” feast (also common to Wendat culture) followed a successful hunt and made sense in the context of community obligation, a largely nomadic society in which food preservation and freighting posed challenges, and the seasonality of protein supplies (something that would not worry, say, sedentary pig-farmers). But such feasts looked to European Christians

2. Leslie Tuttle, *Conceiving the Old Regime: Pronatalism and the Politics of Reproduction in Early Modern France* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 87.

3. *Ibid.*, 88–9.

4. Peter Moogk, “Writing the Cultural History of Pre-1760 European Colonists,” *French Colonial History* 4 (2003): 2.

like gluttony, a sin in their eyes.<sup>5</sup> What might look to a Jesuit missionary like immorality or resistance to the Christian message was, in such instances, common sense coupled to valued ritual.

In the centuries that followed, the attractions of the Judeo-Christian traditions would ebb and flow among Indigenous peoples. The imposition of these beliefs by a much more aggressive—and yet, ironically, a much more secular—state after 1867 would serve to cripple Indigenous cultures and plunge the churches into a moral crisis of their own creation.

## State Making and Guardianship

The British North American colonies modeled many of their “Indian policies” on initiatives launched by the British. Imperial objectives (in London) and colonial objectives (on the ground in either the former British colonies to the south or in what became British North America after 1783) were not always consistent, nor were they consistently in agreement. Policy and perceptions on the part of colonial and imperial interests so often took sharp turns that it is probably unwise to think of it as an evolutionary path or some carefully considered developmental process. Jennifer Pettit surveys some of the key landmarks in the history of Indigenous-colonist relations and shows how there were important detours and fads along the way from the pre-revolutionary years to Confederation.

### Aboriginal – Newcomer Relations before Confederation ([CC BY 4.0](#))<sup>6</sup>

Jennifer Pettit, Mount Royal University

Cognizant of the value and importance of military alliances with Indigenous peoples, in 1755, the British government established the British Indian Department, which was divided into two parts: a Northern Department under Sir William Johnson (1715-1774) who was named Superintendent of Indian Affairs, and a second department that was to manage affairs with Indigenous peoples farther south. Both departments were under the jurisdiction of the Commander of the British Forces in North America. Shortly after the creation of the Indian Department, the Seven Years' War broke out in which rivals Britain and France fought for control not only of what would become the country of Canada, but beyond on a global scale. The main goal of the Indian Department during these battles was to ensure that various Indigenous groups were

5. Timothy Pearson, “Reading Rituals: Performance and Religious Encounter in Early Colonial Northeastern North America,” in *Mixed Blessings: Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada*, Tolly Bradford and Chelsea Horton, eds. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016), p.27; Denys Delâge, *Bitter Feast: Amerindians and Europeans in Northeastern North America, 1600–64* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993), p.76.
6. Jennifer Pettit, “Aboriginal-Newcomer Relations before Confederation,” in John Douglas Belshaw, *Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016), section 11.4. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

allies, or at the very least remained neutral. In the end, the British would gain control of Canada from the French, and Indigenous peoples would officially fall under British imperial authority.

In 1763 shortly after the end of the Seven Years' War, the British passed the Royal Proclamation that set aside a large territory west of the British-American Thirteen Colonies and that more importantly, also recognized inherent Indigenous land tenure rights or Aboriginal title to the land. The Proclamation set out a fiduciary or protector relationship in which the Crown would act as a trustee who would supposedly act in the best interests of Indigenous peoples, overseeing the policy that Aboriginal title could be extinguished only by treaty with the Crown. The Royal Proclamation also promised that Indigenous peoples would "not be molested or disturbed." Alongside these changes, the Indian Department grew in size and complexity, in part, because of the failure of the Royal Proclamation to keep colonists off Indigenous lands, but primarily due to a series of other battles including the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783). Thus, the main goal of the British government remained to maintain Indigenous peoples as allies.

The end of the War of 1812 (1812-1815) initiated a new era of relations with Indigenous peoples. As the threat of future North American wars retreated, increasingly, Indigenous peoples were seen as a "problem."<sup>7</sup> This situation was exacerbated by the decline of the fur trade in some areas, growing demand for Indigenous land by settlers, and increasing costs of supplying presents to First Nations groups to ensure their loyalty. With costs rising and returns dwindling, the British government sought a new direction for their interactions with Indigenous peoples. Thus, in 1829 under Major General H.C. Darling, Superintendent of Indians, a new plan was proposed that would supposedly address the "Indian problem."

Darling proposed a plan to "civilize" Indigenous peoples by assimilating them into Euro-Canadian society. This plan would shape Canadian Indian administration thinking for many years. Whether or not this plan was assimilation or genocide has been debated, although assimilation did become a justification in Canada for colonialism. The plan to civilize and protect Indigenous peoples resulted in significant changes to the Indian Department in 1830, including moving control of the Department from the military to the civil arm of government.

This new "civilization" plan sought to turn Indigenous peoples into self-sufficient Christian farmers who would integrate into settler society and no longer be a costly expense for the government. To keep up with the economic, technological, and social changes in the Canada, Indigenous peoples were to be converted to Christianity; taught to practice a trade (usually farming); and educated on how to live, act, and dress as Euro-Canadians. As a result, model farming communities such as the one at the Coldwater Narrows reserve near Lake Simcoe were built. In addition, treaties moved from a model of largely peace and friendship to treaties whose goal was land cession in which First Nations peoples would be placed on reserves. The government argued that this was for the protection of Indigenous peoples until they could assimilate or until they disappeared completely (what many at the time saw as an inevitability). It also, of course, helped clear the path for non-Indigenous settlement.

Government officials felt it would be best to begin "civilizing" at an early age, which would take place in schools in which children would be removed from the influences of their parents. While day schools existed, there was not yet a manual labour or industrial school system in place in which students would receive

7. See Noel Dyck, *What is the Indian "Problem": Tutelage and Resistance in Canadian Indian Administration* (St. John's, NF: Institute of Social and Economic Studies, 1991).

basic academic instruction and also be taught a trade. Soon, the first of these industrial schools, the Mohawk Institute, opened in Brantford, Ontario in the 1830s under the auspices of the New England Company. While there would be an initial outlay to construct and maintain the schools, these costs were borne largely by the churches, and it was assumed that assimilation would happen quickly. Some officials such as Lieutenant-Governor Sir Francis Bond Head (1793-1875), however, argued in the mid-1830s that any attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples were folly and that the Indigenous peoples of what is now Ontario should be gathered up and moved to Manitoulin Island. Bond Head's plan failed to gain support, and the government forged ahead with Darling's civilization plan instead.

From the 1830s to the 1850s, the British government also undertook a number of investigations into Aboriginal affairs in the newly created united Province of Canada. As was the case up to this point, these inquiries were made without any consultation with Indigenous peoples. One of the earliest of these studies, the Bagot Commission, reported in 1844, argued that changes needed to be made to a number of areas including the management of Indigenous land. A number of Acts followed, including the *Gradual Civilization Act* (1857), which promoted voluntary enfranchisement and the gradual dissolution of reserve lands. Another significant change took place in 1860, when the British government transferred the control of Indian affairs to the Province of Canada.

In 1867, that responsibility for building and maintaining relations with Indigenous communities was passed to the new Dominion of Canada. Pause to contextualize this change: relationships—good, bad, and indifferent—had been built up by settler authority (and settlers) and Indigenous peoples over centuries in what was now New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Québec and then, in the first decade after Confederation, the influence of these settler societies would extend across almost half of the continent in a leap. The Niitsitapi, to take one example, in 1867 could be found in the foothills of the Rockies, more than 2,000 km from the nearest part of “Canada.” They had dealt with the HBC and they knew Canadien and Canadian fur traders out of Montréal, as well as Iroquois, Abenaki, and Métis participants in the fur trade. But that's a far cry from being governed by a colonial political elite housed in Ottawa (a further 1,500 km to the east). In terms of distance and difference, it would be roughly comparable to Regina coming under the authority of Mexico City. The Canadian declaration that Indigenous peoples like the Niitsitapi were now “wards” of Ottawa seems, in this light, almost absurd. The consequences, however, were very real.

Rather suddenly, Indigenous peoples found themselves faced with strident and forceful critiques of ancient spiritual practices. Efforts to undermine systems of creating and disseminating knowledge across generations were underway. These campaigns had their roots in the nineteenth-century expansion of missionary crusades, the growth of evangelical movements within Protestantism and Catholicism, and the appearance of the first “Indian schools.” In this phase—which extends through the twentieth century to the present day—we can see evidence of that third aspect of settler colonialism cited earlier: “settler colonization [seeks] the ending of colonial difference in the form of a supreme and unchallenged settler state and people.”<sup>8</sup> Colonial difference could also be erased through a vigorous campaign of assimilation and the consequent effective disappearance of Indigenous people.

8. Adam Barjer and Emma Battell Lowman, “Settler Colonialism,” *Global Social Theory*, accessed October 2, 2018, <https://globalsocialtheory.org/concepts/settler-colonialism/>.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this section:

Dickason, Olive, and David McNab. *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, 4th ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2009. See esp. pp. 258–457.

MacDonald, David B. *The Sleeping Giant Awakens: Genocide, Indian Residential Schools, and Challenge of Conciliation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

Miller, J. R. *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Native-Newcomer Relations in Canada*, 4th ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. See esp. chap. 8, 11–16.

Pearson, Timothy. “Reading Rituals: Performance and Religious Encounter in Early Colonial Northeastern North America.” In *Mixed Blessings: Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada*, edited by Tolly Bradford and Chelsea Horton, 21–37. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016.

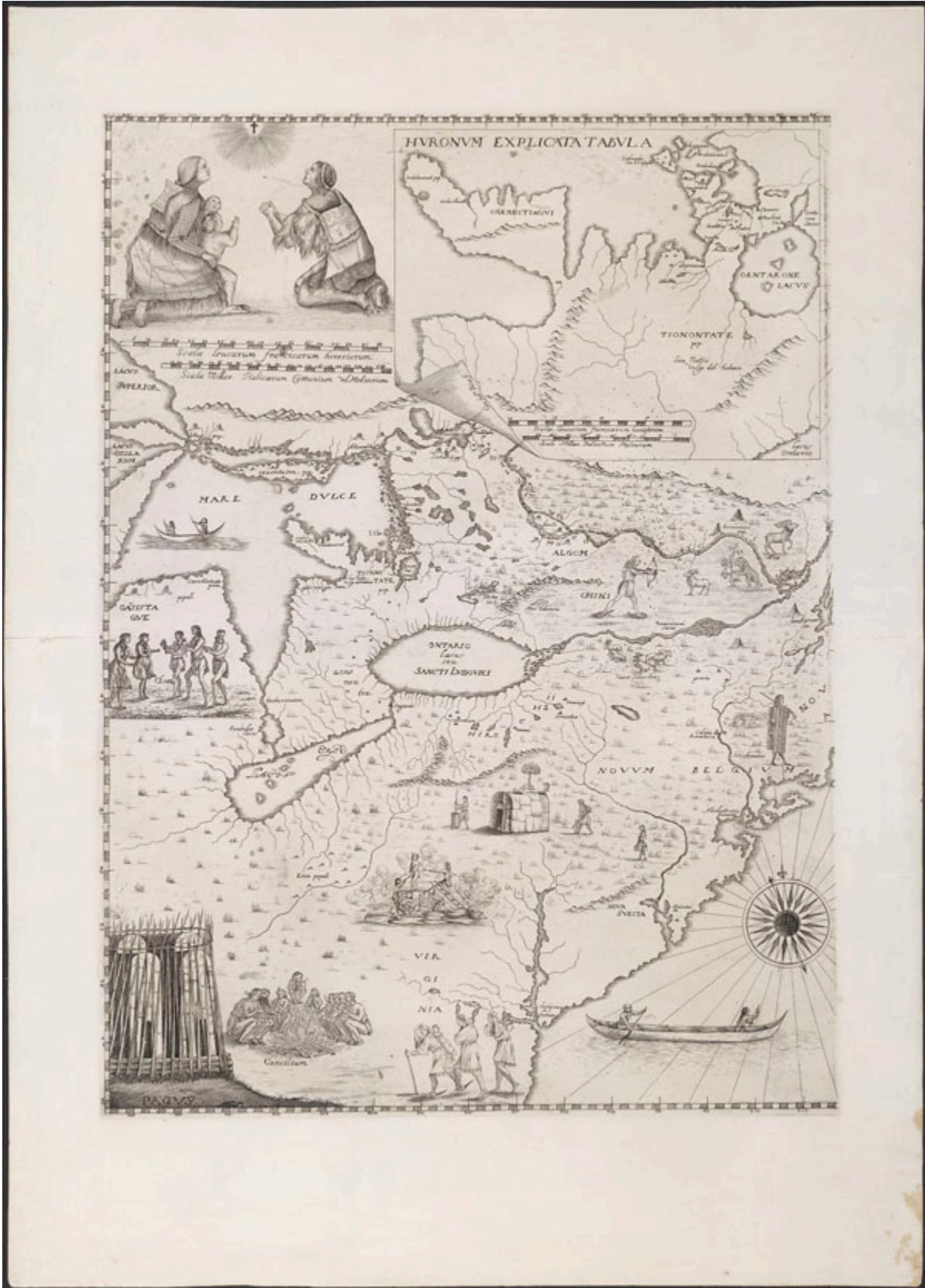
# Chapter 9: Cultural Genocide—Belief Systems, Residential Schools, Potlatch Laws, “Sixties Scoop”

As the 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* points out, negotiations between colonial elites set the stage for the Confederation project through the 1860s:

At no time, however, were First Nations included in the discussion, nor were they consulted about their concerns. Neither was their future position in the federation given any public acknowledgement or discussion. Nevertheless, the broad outlines of a new constitutional relationship, at least with the First Nations, were determined unilaterally. The first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, soon informed Parliament that it would be Canada’s goal “to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion.”<sup>1</sup>

“Assimilation” in this context meant, in part, religious conversion and an end to many Indigenous cultural practices.

1. René Dussault et al., *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: 1996), 165.



A seventeenth-century map of New France and Wendake Ehen (Huronian) represents the interior of North America as Indigenous space while promoting the goal of converting Indigenous men and women to Catholicism (in the upper right corner). Source: Francesco Giuseppe Bressani, *Novae Franciae accurata delineatio* 1657 (East sheet), map, Online MIKAN # 3805607, Library and Archives Canada. Public domain.

## Indigenous Peoples and Christianity

It is difficult to know with absolute certainty what Indigenous peoples thought of early European efforts at indoctrination. The sources to which we might turn are overwhelmingly filtered accounts transmitted by the missionaries themselves. What we can say for certain is that seventeenth-century representatives of Catholicism had neither the power nor numbers to force Christianity on anyone, nor was it the case that all Indigenous peoples were entirely unreceptive.

From 1615–29, the Innu, Algonquian, and Wendat studied the spiritual message of the Recollets. In less than fifteen years, it was clear that the first of the “black robes” had failed to persuade more than a handful of people into converting. Tolerating and cooperating with the Recollets was broadly acceptable among Indigenous communities, but indulging all of their views was not. Besides which, the Recollets were primarily concerned with preserving Christian behaviour and attitudes among the French traders. This was not the approach taken by the Jesuits.

The Society of Jesus owed much to military traditions. Its members embraced hardship and martyrdom in ways that other Catholic orders simply did not. Wendat communities found this, at least, interesting. What’s more, the Jesuits were directly linked to the commercial interests of the French colony. This enabled the missionaries to blur the lines between commerce and conversion. Their strategy was to appeal to whole communities rather than to individuals. They opened an all-boy seminary near Québec in 1636, with the goal of converting these young men and returning them to Wendake Ehen as a vanguard of Christianity. They also established a base in Wendake Ehen, where the Jesuits closely observed the spiritual practices of the Wendat and attempted to meet the Wendat on their own spiritual ground. Jesuit accounts of the Wendat Feast of the Dead show genuine awe and respect, noting both the richness of the multi-day ritual and also the ways in which it bound together the communities of Wendake Ehen. From the Jesuit perspective, as historian Erik Seeman observes, there were analogies to be drawn with Catholic ideas:

Both groups adhered to religions that focused on the mysteries of death and the afterlife. Both believed that a dead person’s soul traveled to the afterlife. Both believed that careful corpse preparation and elaborate mortuary rituals helped ensure the safe transit of the soul to the supernatural realm. And both believed in the power of human bones.<sup>2</sup>

Historians are divided as to the place of Christianity in Wendake Ehen. Bruce Trigger saw Wendat interest in conversion as perhaps a disingenuous bluff to gain access to more trade goods (especially and increasingly guns). Seeman doesn’t entirely disagree, but he qualifies this equation by pointing to the spiritual investment Wendat people made in material goods. The fact that perfectly good copper pots were regularly interred with the bones of the dead indicates that the lines between material and spiritual were oftentimes very thin indeed. Victoria Jackson examined the experience of three Jesuit-schooled Wendat boys—Satouta, Teouatiron, and Andehoua—and concluded that the children served successfully as cultural diplomats, less so as conduits for Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The jury, in short, is still out.

As smallpox tore up Wendake Ehen in the 1630s, burial and reburial rituals became larger, and spiritual exhaustion seems to have set in. The Jesuits offered both a salutary message of spiritual reunion in the afterlife and the problematic practice of deathbed baptisms. Since Wendat physicians were simultaneously spiritual practitioners, traumatized Wendat households looked to the Jesuits to occupy a similar position and understood baptism to be a kind of curing ritual. But deathbed baptisms by definition almost always end in a death, and that compromised the missionaries’ reputation. The devastation of the smallpox epidemics, in which approximately half of Wendake Ehen’s population died,

2. Erik Seeman, *The Huron-Wendat Feast of the Dead: Indian-European Encounters in Early North America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 2.
3. Victoria Jackson, “Silent Diplomacy: Wendat Boys’ ‘Adoptions’ at the Jesuit Seminary, 1636–1642,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, New Series, 27, no. 1 (2016): 139–168.

was followed a decade later by a renewal in Haudenosaunee attacks. Together these developments contributed to a crisis in Wendat belief systems. It also drove a wedge between “Christian” and “traditionalist” Wendat, many of the latter calling for the removal of the missionaries and a return to older Wendat belief systems. Relinquishing the Jesuits, however, meant jeopardizing the supply of weapons and other metal goods, much of which were needed in the battle against the Haudenosaunee. In the end, it was the Five Nations raiders who, in 1649, relieved Wendake Ehen of the Jesuits—by means of torture and eventual execution.

The Wendat encounter with the Jesuit (and even Recollet) black robes reveals a few important patterns. First, the Wendat showed a genuine interest in European spiritual knowledge; the Wendat were neither passive recipients of cultural imperialism, nor were they immovable in their beliefs. The seventeenth-century Wendat had the curiosity and the intellectual wherewithal to selectively engage another belief system and selectively and incrementally adopt and adapt elements. Also, European willingness to study Indigenous cultures and to become functional in, in this case, the Wendat language indicates that the missionaries’ goal was spiritual transformation and not cultural assimilation. The 1996 *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* set the scene thus:

To the Jesuits their mission was akin to a war against satanic forces and was intended to reap a rich harvest of souls. In their battle, the missionaries were armed with formidable intellectual weapons, since all had studied and taught a variety of academic subjects for at least six years in prestigious French colleges. What ensued was a remarkably sophisticated philosophical discourse, in which some of the most educated men of Europe engaged in long arguments deep in the Canadian wilderness with shamans and village elders equally adept at debating metaphysical issues from their own cultural perspective.<sup>4</sup>

What the *Royal Commission* fails to mention—although it is as good as implied here—is that European concepts of “educated” imply credentials from formal institutions. Indigenous systems of “education” included reflection and metaphysics as well. The absence of fine universities did not disadvantage Indigenous debaters.

Power relations would change in subsequent centuries and in different settings, European attitudes toward Indigenous beliefs would become increasingly contemptuous, and the saving of souls (as the missionaries understood it) would play less a role than cultural assimilation. Some of this transition in purpose and attitudes can be seen at Port Simpson on BC’s Northwest Coast in the late nineteenth century. There, a Methodist mission was actively pursued by the Ts’msyan community, whose leadership “sought missionaries’ practical skills and newcomer knowledge as a means of helping their people to accommodate to the dramatic changes occurring all around them.”<sup>5</sup> A home—a kind of refuge—was established for Indigenous girls (some of them orphans), and it quickly transitioned into a place of incarceration in which their behaviours were more heavily monitored, policed, and challenged. Removal from family and community increasingly became the strategy pursued by the Methodist missionary family.<sup>6</sup> This approach was consistent with the tactics of the colonial state after 1867.

4. Dussault et al., *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 103–4.

5. Jan Hare and Jean Barman, *Good Intentions Gone Awry: Emma Crosby and the Methodist Mission on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), xix.

6. At the same time, the missionaries found their status challenged by a Ts’msyan leadership disappointed in the benefits of their arrangement: the Ts’msyan subsequently recruited Salvation Army missionaries to act as their culture guides. Hare and Barman, *Good Intentions*, xxii.

## The State Steps In

Responsibility for “Indian Affairs” passed in 1860 from Britain to the colonies. In 1867, the individual colonies-cum-provinces relinquished that brief to the new federal government in Ottawa. Subsequent joiners—BC in 1871 and PEI in 1873—would follow suit. Article 13 of BC’s Terms of Union spells this out in a way that was both self-congratulatory and deceptive:

The charge of the Indians, and the trusteeship and management of the lands reserved for their use and benefit, shall be assumed by the Dominion Government and a policy as liberal as that hitherto pursued by the British Columbia Government shall be continued by the Dominion Government after the Union.<sup>7</sup>

However “liberal” the colonial policy had been under the pre-Confederation regimes of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, it had taken a seriously illiberal turn under Joseph Trutch, a surveyor who became chief commissioner of land and works and a member of the Legislative Council. Reserves were hacked back, land grants ended, and the whole concept of “aboriginal title” denied. Trutch was at the negotiating table in Ottawa on behalf of the new province, and his goal was to ensure that Ottawa would be “as liberal” but *no more* liberal than his own illiberal regime. He needn’t have worried. Ottawa’s influence in the lives of Indigenous people and communities involved, from 1867 on, a heavy hand.

### Aboriginal-Newcomer Relations since Confederation ([CC BY 4.0](#))<sup>8</sup>

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Section 91, Subsection 24 of the British North America Act made the federal government responsible for all matters related to Indigenous peoples, and made First Nations peoples into wards of the Federal Government. The portfolio of Indian Affairs was placed under the guidance of the Secretary of State and, despite some early failures, much of the earlier legislation and policies were maintained including the civilization plan, treaties, and the reserve system. Additionally, some new legislation was passed including the Enfranchisement Act (1869), which made enfranchisement compulsory in some cases (such as when an Indigenous woman married a non-Indigenous man), promoted individual land ownership, and granted the government the power to impose an elective band council system of governance. As had been the case in the past, these changes were made largely to benefit non-Indigenous society without consultation with First Nations peoples. The government was concerned with the territorial growth of Canada; acquiring land from the Hudson’s Bay Company in the West; creating the new provinces of Manitoba, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island; and creating an Indian Lands Branch in the new Department of the Interior in 1873.

7. Senate of Canada, “Article 13 of Schedule: Address of the Senate of Canada to the Queen,” in *British Columbia Terms of Union* (UK: Court at Windsor, 16 May 1871), accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cs-j-sj/constitution/lawreg-loireg/p1t42.html>.
8. Jennifer Pettit, “Aboriginal-Newcomer Relations since Confederation.” Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license.

The most significant piece of legislation in this period was the passage of the Indian Act of 1876.<sup>9</sup> Consisting of 100 sections, the Indian Act consolidated earlier legislation and addressed a wide variety of areas concerning lands, status, and governance. At the core of the Act was the reinforcement of the policy of aggressive assimilation and colonization. This Act, among other things, defined who was and was not an “Indian” according to the government, described band election procedures, defined a band and reserve, and discussed the management of resources including timber and band monies. Invasive and paternalistic, the Indian Act ignored the diversity among Indigenous groups in Canada, and treated Indigenous peoples as children who required management. Made into wards of the state, Indigenous peoples were no longer autonomous according to the government. As was the case in the past, central to the Indian Act and new policies was the plan to separate Indigenous peoples from their land through a system of treaty-making and reserves, and increased farming instruction and schools for Indigenous children. This plan was particularly important in Western Canada to clear the way for settlers who were central to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald’s National Policy, one part of which was the settlement of the West through immigration. However, first, the government had to extinguish Indigenous title through a series of treaties signed in the early and mid-1870s.

Given the changes brought about by the numbered treaties and the expanding importance of the Indian Affairs portfolio, in 1880, the Indian Branch of the Department of the Interior was turned into a separate department called the Department of Indian Affairs, although the Minister of the Interior continued to act as Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs and oversaw the new department. There would be much to focus on, including strengthening the civilization program through the promotion of farming instruction and schools.

As we’ve already seen, the Indian Act (1876) aimed to transform Indigenous peoples. Efforts to eradicate behaviours and beliefs that were regarded as profoundly different from or inferior to those of mainstream European-Christians were undertaken at governmental levels. The banning of the potlatch, for example, was motivated by a sense that it was wasteful, that it disinclined participants from working steadily for a living, and that it was an offence to the Christian/settler values of thrift, hard work, private property, and the accumulation of savings and wealth. One Methodist missionary to the Stó:lō spoke for most of his Christianizing peers when he said that “Of the many evils of heathenism, with the exception of witchcraft, the potlatch is the worst, and one of the most difficult to root out.”<sup>10</sup> Dances that accompanied potlatch ceremonies—many of which were generations-old stories and involved life lessons—appeared, in the eyes of some Christian outsiders, as invocations of evil spirits. All of these factors—along with a growing Protestant sense of the individual’s importance as a soul to be saved, as an economic actor, and as a private citizen—combined to produce hostility toward ceremonies in what is now British Columbia and an outright ban on the potlatch in 1884. Some of these arguments were also made against the Plains cultures’ “Sun Dance,” and it too was banned in 1885.

The literature focuses on these aspects of culture, but it tends to ignore governance: it is as though the early post-contact impression held by Europeans that Indigenous societies lacked any form of government haunts historical writings. The Indian Act, however, was clear on this score: existing systems for selecting community leaders would be replaced by regular elections overseen by the Indian agent. Hereditary systems were to be dismantled and/or ignored; “Indian chief” became an actual job and, by the 1920s, it came with a special badge and hat, and sometimes a uniform.

9. See John Leslie, *The Historical Development of the Indian Act* (Ottawa, ON: Treaties and Historical Research Centre, 1978).

10. Thomas Crosby, *Among the An-Ko-me-nums*, 106, quoted in Smith, “11.6 Living with Treaties.”

In response to these settler society policies, Indigenous peoples were, of course, inclined to disbelief. Why would anyone attempt to shut down rituals, celebrations, and institutions that glued whole societies together and made them economically viable? Why indeed.

Indigenous people and communities responded with protest and, probably more importantly, quiet defiance of these restrictions. As far as was possible, injunctions against community self-determination in government were ignored. In the case of the Mi'kmaq, fifty years of Canadian interference witnessed resistance, rejection, work-arounds, and exploitation of the new system when it served a purpose.<sup>11</sup> Farther west, the potlatch and Sun Dance (and other practices) continued, though increasingly with great discretion. The Indian agent, the RCMP, and the Provincial Police could not be everywhere at once. In 1922, however, the potlatch laws came down hard at the north end of Vancouver Island. 'Namgis chief Pa'nakwala Wakas (more widely known as Dan Cranmer) and his peers, along with dozens of guests, held what may have been the largest potlatch in a century at 'Mimkwamlis in Kwakwaka'wakw territory. An alert and zealous Indian agent ensured that arrests took place; jail sentences of as much as three months were ordered for nearly two dozen women and men who were shipped off to a Vancouver-area penitentiary. What is more, a great mass of privately-owned cultural belongings—masks, regalia, carved figures—were seized by the BC Provincial Police and sold off to non-Indigenous collectors or shipped east to museums in Toronto, DC, and London.<sup>12</sup>

These events sent a chill through many Northwest Coast communities; settler society hostility toward the potlatch and the Sun Dance got worse before getting better. As the Summary Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission observes:

In 1942, John House, the principal of the Anglican school in Gleichen, Alberta, became involved in a campaign to have two Blackfoot chiefs deposed, in part because of their support for traditional dance ceremonies. In 1947, Roman Catholic official J. O. Plourde told a federal parliamentary committee that since Canada was a Christian nation that was committed to having “all its citizens belonging to one or other of the Christian churches,” he could see no reason why the residential schools “should foster aboriginal beliefs.” United Church official George Dorey told the same committee that he questioned whether there was such a thing as “native religion.”<sup>13</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth*, 5–6.

It was not until the 1950s that the laws criminalizing the potlatch and Sun Dance were relaxed sufficiently to encourage an open return to the traditional observances. It is worth pausing at this point to reflect on the fact that Indigenous people at this time were, in some cases, incarcerated in the Canadian penal system because they very simply refused to relinquish beliefs and values.<sup>14</sup>

These colonialist initiatives were intended, in the words of the deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs,

11. Martha Elizabeth Wells, *No Need of a Chief for this Band: The Maritime Mi'kmaq and Federal Electoral Legislation, 1899–1951* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).
12. Two studies by the late Doug Cole remain important resources in this field: Douglas Cole and Ira Chakin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990); Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995).
- 13.
14. The repatriation of Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch gear began in 1973. While much remains outside of Canada and in the hands of private collectors, the material that was recovered led to a renewal in potlatching in Kwakwaka'wakw communities. This is described in Harry Assu with Joy Inglis, *Assu of Cape Mudge: Recollections of a Coastal Indian Chief* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989), 104–21.

Duncan Campbell Scott, in 1920 “to prepare [Indigenous people] for a higher civilization.” That “higher civilization” was, of course, Canadian settler society. This was an age of efficiency experts in industry and business; their ideals shine through in Scott’s words: “Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question.”<sup>15</sup> The most aggressive, long-standing, and now notorious measure taken to achieve assimilationist goals was the residential schools.

## Residential Schools

Why residential schools? One thing to keep in mind is that public schooling was, in the late nineteenth century, still something of a recent innovation in colonial society. Child labour laws in the 1870s were unevenly defined and poorly enforced; consequently, attendance at settler schools other than those for the elite was marked by high levels of truancy and absenteeism. It was rare for a child in Canada to complete more than a few years of formal education. Institutionalized education was, however, seen as a means of addressing social problems, specifically hordes of young unsupervised children in the Dominion’s growing cities. In short, schools were viewed by many not as a tool with which to enlighten generations to come but as a means of controlling and changing the inmates. That at least partly explains why the federal government regarded schools as the right instrument to use in transforming Indigenous children. But why residential? John A. Macdonald, speaking in the House of Commons in 1883, explains:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the [Indian Affairs] Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.<sup>16</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth*, 2.

Jennifer Pettit describes the origins of the residential school system and how it followed on the heels of agricultural schools promised in numbered treaties. Pettit points out how the original stated goals of the system were visibly failing by the 1920s. It took another thirty years before substantial changes in the formal schooling system took place. In the box that follows, John Belshaw describes the arc of the residential school story from the 1970s on and also surveys the Sixties Scoop and other interventions by the state in the lives of Indigenous children.

From Agricultural Training to Residential School ([CC BY 4.0](#))<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Pettit,

15. Quoted in Dussault et al., *Royal Commission*, 168–9. See also the website of the [U'mista Cultural Centre](#), accessed February 12, 2019.

16.

17.

“From Agricultural Training to Residential School,” in John Douglas Belshaw, *Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016), section 11.7. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license, except where otherwise noted.

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By the time the numbered treaties and the reserve system were created, Indigenous peoples in what is now Western Canada faced dire conditions. Many communities were ravaged by diseases such as smallpox, and devastated by the whisky trade. The bison, on which they relied, was almost extinct.<sup>18</sup> The Canadian government once again decided that the solution was model farms to accompany a policy of peasant farming through which Indigenous families were to receive “2 acres and a cow” – and through which they were not encouraged to utilize any labour-saving machinery. The government felt this would ensure Indigenous peoples would be converted to sedentary farmers, but would not be so successful that they would compete with the new settlers moving west. Not surprisingly, the plan failed. Government bureaucrats at the time blamed the supposed “lazy” nature of First Nations peoples. Historian Sarah Carter has since proven that Indigenous peoples were interested in farming, but that the government’s policies and practices undermined reserve agriculture.<sup>19</sup> More important to the government was a new system of schools for Indigenous children.

Though they had weak results in the early schools in central Canada, the Federal Government was optimistic that expanding schools into the Prairies made sense, hopeful that the Indigenous peoples there could also be “civilized and Christianized.”<sup>20</sup> Starving and destitute, some Indigenous peoples also hoped the schools would teach their children the skills necessary to adapt to changing conditions and, ideally, to learn a trade that would make them self-supporting. What remained to be determined though was what kind of education system would best serve the Indigenous peoples living in the West. To help answer that question in 1879, the government enlisted Nicholas Flood Davin (1840-1901), a Regina newspaper editor and the M.P. for Assiniboia West, to study the American system of industrial schools for Indigenous peoples. Notably, as was the pattern in government dealings with Indigenous peoples, Davin did not consult First Nations. He concluded that industrial schools in which children learned a trade and which were similar to those in the United States would be appropriate and useful in the West, despite disappointing results in similar schools in Central Canada. Davin also suggested that the Canadian government forge alliances with

18. See James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains*.

19. See Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests*.

20. See J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1996) and John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1999).

the churches to manage the schools.<sup>21</sup> These “industrial” schools were costly, however, and as a result, a parallel system of day and boarding schools was also created. Boarding schools were similar to the industrial schools, but were typically smaller with a much reduced focus on trades instruction. The first of the industrial schools – the Qu’Appelle Industrial School and the Battleford Industrial School located in the future province of Saskatchewan, and the St. Joseph’s School (also known as the High River or Dunbow school) southwest of Calgary – opened in the 1880s. These schools would lay the groundwork for a system of schools that would eventually spread across the Prairies and into British Columbia and the North.

By the time the last school closed in 1996, over 130 would have operated and over 150,000 Indigenous children would have been forced to attend what would ultimately be deemed tools of cultural genocide.<sup>22</sup> Indigenous children were taken from their homes, separated from their communities and families, and were forbidden to speak their languages or practice their culture. Students were poorly fed; subjected to medical experiments; forced to undertake manual labour; and were subjected to physical, sexual, and mental or spiritual abuse.<sup>23</sup> The legacy of this appalling treatment is still being felt in Indigenous communities today.<sup>24</sup>

To ensure the schools “succeeded,” the government enacted a number of measures including compulsory attendance in 1894 (and reinforced in further legislation in 1920). However, the parents of Indigenous students were not passive participants in the plans of church and state to “civilize” their children, and many did whatever they could to prevent their children from attending these schools and to demonstrate their displeasure. Parents were angered that their children were being abused and that they were taken so far away from the reserves. Parents were also upset that students were alienated from their culture, were forced to work long hours, were not properly cared for, and could not find employment after graduation. This opposition took place, however, in a power relationship in which Aboriginal peoples were unable to bring about real change. Thus, their opposition had only a limited effect. What did sway the administrators was rising costs.

Originally thought to be a quick and relatively inexpensive way to deal with what administrators deemed the “Indian Problem,” the schools had evolved into a costly and complicated system that was not producing significant results. As a consequence, Duncan Campbell Scott (1862-1947), who was appointed to the position of Superintendent of Indian Education in 1909, changed the professed goal of schools for Indigenous peoples from integration to segregation (in the words of Scott: “for civilized life in his own environment”). In 1923 officials merged the industrial and boarding schools to create a new category of

21. Nicholas Flood Davin, Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds, March 14, 1879, *Library and Archives Canada*, Record Group 10, Vol. 6001, File 1-1-1.
22. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth*, 3.
23. Ian Mosby, “Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1952,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 46, no. 91 (2013): 615–642.
24. Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Vol. 5: Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment. In For Seven Generations: An Information Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, (Ottawa: Libraxus, 1997), CD-ROM.

schools known as “residential schools.”<sup>25</sup> Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1986). Scott, though, still very much believed in a policy in which Indigenous peoples should be obliterated as a distinct community. In 1920 he made this now famous statement: “I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone.... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question . . .”<sup>26</sup> Indian Act amendments of 1920, *Library and Archives Canada*, Record Group 10, vol. 6810, file 470-2-3, volume 7, pp. 55 (L-3) and 63 (N-3).

In the box that follows, John Belshaw describes the arc of the residential school story from the 1970s on and also surveys the Sixties Scoop and other interventions by the state in the lives of Indigenous children.

## The Legacy of the Residential Schools ([CC BY 4.0](#))<sup>27</sup>

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The goals of the Residential School system were explicitly assimilationist. The program existed precisely to replace Indigenous economic practices with those of the mainstream colonial economy, substitute English and French for indigenous languages, erase indigenous belief systems with some kind of Christianity, and interrupt the transmission of social practices (including fundamental familial relationships) by capturing children and keeping them away from their parents, siblings, and other relations. This needs to be underlined: there was nothing accidental about the way the residential schools turned out; these were clearly stated goals and tactics.

At the peak in the 1930s, there were roughly 80 residential schools in Canada. They were in seven of the nine provinces; there were none in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, nor in the Dominion (later, the province) of Newfoundland. Most of the schools were located far from urban centres. As institutions go, the large brick or stone structures were universally imposing. At Kamloops (Tk'emlúps), for example, the Indian Residential School, opened in 1893, was the largest brick structure in the Thompson Valleys and, indeed, between the Lower Mainland and the CPR hotels of the Rocky Mountain national parks. A brick-works was established to enable its construction. On Kuper Island, at Alert Bay, and in town after town

25. Brian

26. Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, testimony before the Special Committee of the House of Commons examining the

27. John Douglas Belshaw, “Residential Schools,” in *Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016), section 11.11. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license, except where otherwise noted.

across the Prairies, two- and three-storey buildings were erected to enable the warehousing and transformation of generations of Native children.

The involvement of the nation's Christian churches from the outset, was viewed by officials as a good way to transmit Euro-Canadian cultural values, morals, and discipline. It was, as well, cheap, because missionary groups would effectively work for free. Over half of the schools were run by the Catholic Church, most of the rest by the Anglicans, and the remainder by the United Church and the Presbyterians. Conditions varied from place to place, but few were adequately funded; by the second quarter of the twentieth century, child labour was an essential component of the residential school business model. Through most of their history, the general practice at residential schools was to provide only half-day schooling; the rest of the day was dedicated to labour in the fields and workshops and mopping the floors, all in an effort to keep the children busy and reduce operating costs. The schooling the students received was light on the humanities, lighter still on sciences and math, and heavy on religion and theology. Generally speaking, girls were taught domestic skills like cooking and sewing, while boys were taught basic agricultural skills and some crafts.

Children were housed in dormitory rooms. Rows of beds allowed for little privacy. Boys and girls were separated and kept separate: stories abound of brothers and sisters who were allowed no contact despite being kept in the same building. Showers and baths were spartan. Meals were Dickensian, and children suffered from malnutrition. Complaints of cold facilities are sustained by a terrible record of mortalities from illnesses, including tuberculosis (which claimed as many as 60% of the student population). Every residential school has its own sad little graveyard, and some of them aren't that little. As Mary-ellen Kelm has pointed out, some schools kept their mortality statistics low by shipping fatally ill children home to their families, which consequently inflated mortality rates on reserves. Kelm also has noted that the transformation of Indigenous diets to Euro-Canadian foods was part of an attempt to colonize not only the mind but the Indigenous body as well.<sup>28</sup> Mary-ellen Kelm, *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900-50* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1998).

Whether Indigenous leaders found the concept of the industrial and then residential schools helpful to their people or not, the reality fell very far short. Parents often resisted sending their children away, and it was one of the functions of the RCMP and units like the BC Provincial Police to assist the clergy with annual roundups of students. It wasn't until the late 1950s that the educational curriculum improved and children were allowed to visit with family over the holidays. The record suggests that a great many parents discovered that their child had died at school only when the summer holidays began.

Beginning in the 1950s, Indigenous children were permitted to attend public schools for the first time, and as day-students. Family connections were rebuilt, but the residential schools remained in place for most of the youngest Indigenous children in the country. In 1969 the D.I.A. took over the operation of the schools from the churches, which coincided with the Red Paper and the rise of Indigenous political organizations. However, this is not to say that there was unanimity among Indigenous peoples as to what should happen next. Gradually, the responsibility for the schools' operations shifted to local band councils. By 1986 all of the schools were in the hands of Indigenous managers, and many had been closed down entirely.

In the 1960s and 1970s, as plans advanced to end the schools program, the consequences of a century of

residential schools were everywhere visible. Traumatized children became traumatized adults and they were systematically pathologized by settler professionals. Social workers drawn from the colonizing society were sent to reserves – often with RCMP and other police supports – to “rescue” children from dysfunctional environments in which colonialism itself was heavily implicated. In the decade after 1955, as a study by Christopher Walmsley points out, “Aboriginal children in the care of the Province of British Columbia jumped from less than 1% to 34.2%, and this pattern was repeated in other parts of Canada during the same time.”<sup>29</sup> Christopher Walmsley, *Protecting Aboriginal Children* (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 2. Just as residential schools were being closed, the Federal Government’s monopoly over the management of Indigenous communities on-reserve began to fray, and provincial involvement increased:

The principal response of provincial child welfare authorities during the 1960s was the apprehension and removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities. Known as the “sixties scoop,” social workers explained their actions by arguing that they were in the best interests of the children.<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–15.

Citing poverty, health concerns, and even malnutrition, the secular authorities perpetuated the alienation of children from their communities that had begun under the missionaries and residential schools. Indigenous children in care were placed with non-Indigenous families, and some were exported to the United States. In almost every case, the link between child and ancestral culture was severed. Whether in care or in residential schools, the same outcomes prevailed: practices – especially, but not exclusively, those censured by the anti-potlatch and sun dance laws – were inadequately passed from one generation to the next; the skills taught at woefully underfunded schools prepared students for nineteenth century field labour but not twentieth century factories or offices, let alone professions. Substance abuse on reserves, particularly alcohol, was extensive as people self-medicated to deal with everything from a personal sense of diminished self-worth to cultural alienation to systemic poverty and – from generation to generation – the loss of children. Whereas the reserve system and pass system were designed to keep Indigenous people physically in check, the residential school system and the intervention of colonialist social workers and police authorities were intended to keep them culturally in check.

The enormous educational, social, and moral failures of the residential school system are now widely known. The system contained a single ineluctable contradiction: it proceeded from an explicitly racist assumption that indigenous cultures were inferior and proceeded to strip away those features with an eye to assimilating native people into “mainstream” society, but neglected to address the inherent racist and discriminatory perspectives of Euro-Canadians who would not hire, marry, work with, drink with, study with, lend money to, extend the franchise to, or vote for Indigenous people, regardless of whether they were “schooled” or not. “Assimilation” was entirely about change, and not about inclusion. It could hardly be otherwise under the circumstances.

It is reckoned that 150,000 children passed through the system from the end of the nineteenth century to the mid-1980s. Some of the structures are still standing: St. Eugene near Cranbrook has been converted into a luxury resort/casino and now generates revenue for the Ktunaxa First Nation; the Kamloops Indian

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Residential School houses offices and a museum for the highly entrepreneurial Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc. Other schools are no more: the Penelakut/Kuper Island school was demolished in the 1980s, as was St. Michael's at Alert Bay very recently – in both cases, the prohibitive costs of repair and rehabilitation were a factor, as was an unwillingness to tolerate the gloomy presence of the buildings any longer.

There were, clearly, systemic weaknesses and shortcomings to the residential schools. Underfunding alone would have produced many of the negative outcomes that have been so widely documented. Tales of physical and sexual abuse operate at a different level. The principle Christian denominations were viewed by Euro-Canadian society as moral guardians; as a result, Canadians found it difficult to accept tales of abuse. Evidence began to accumulate and patterns began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1990 the leader of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Phil Fontaine (b. 1944), publicly disclosed the sexual abuse he suffered as a child in residential schools, along with his reckoning that every boy in his class was similarly mistreated. This disclosure led to others and, in 1991, a Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was convened. Seven years later, the Minister of Indian Affairs issued a formal apology to victims of sexual abuse in the schools, and a multi-million dollar fund for healing was established. While this process uncovered some very grim tales, it did not speak to the psychological, physical (in addition to sexual), and emotional abuse experienced routinely in the schools. Priests and nuns alike, as well as secular workers at the schools, were named, some charged, and some convicted of a wide range of sadistic practices. One survivor of St. Anne's Residential School at Fort Albany, Ontario, shall have the last word. She went on record to describe the kind of abuse meted out by one nun:

I remember being in the dining room having a meal. I got sick and threw up on the floor. Sister Mary Immaculate [Anna Wesley] slapped me many times and made me eat my own vomit. So I did, I ate all of it. And then I threw up again ... Sister Mary Immaculate slapped me and told me again to eat my vomit. ...I was sick for a few days after that.<sup>31</sup> Jesse Staniforth, "Cover Up of Residential School Crimes a National Shame," *The Star* (Toronto, ON), August 25, 2015, <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/08/25/cover-up-of-residential-school-crimes-a-national-shame.html>.



The Kuper Island Residential School on Penelakut was demolished in the 1980s. Source: Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs, *Indian Residential School, Kuper Island, B.C., June 19, 1941, panorama*, Online MIKAN no.4674066, Library and Archives Canada. Public Domain.

Residential schools were not the only institutions attended by Indigenous children. Day schools run by the DIA (rather than the clergy) replaced many residential schools, and pupils numbered nearly eighteen thousand by 1955. The option to attend settler society's public schools became another more attractive option for a growing number of teens. Although these changes did little to reverse the tide of cultural colonization—*assimilation* and *integration* are, ultimately, different tactics with the same goal—they improved educational outcomes for some. And simply by dint of not being held within the walls of residential schools, Indigenous teens were protected from some of the worst abuses in the church-run facilities. The option of attending a public school was, of course, only available to those Indigenous youths living close to settler communities. In the meantime, residential schools remained open.

In 1969, the clergy relinquished control of the residential schools to the DIA, and the system was incrementally shut down. Over the course of little more than a century, there were twenty-eight residential schools in British Columbia alone. Of these, three were operated by the Anglican Church, five by the Methodists, three by the Presbyterians, and the majority—sixteen—by the Catholic Church. Thirteen were still in operation in 1970, and the last—the now-state-run St. Mary's at Mission, BC—closed in 1985. The last residential school in Canada—Gordon Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan—remained in operation until 1996. The process of winding down the system, in other words, was not pursued with great alacrity.

## The Métis and Inuit Experience

Things unfolded rather differently in Métis and Inuit communities. There were substantial variations from coast to coast to coast. Different mainstream Christian and evangelical denominations were involved, and they conducted themselves differently with respect to the students, their parents, and even with the DIA and Ottawa.

Successive federal governments had little patience for the Métis after the events of 1869–70, and less still after 1885. There were few treaties signed with the Métis<sup>32</sup>—despite their clear wish to establish a treaty relationship—and so the Métis regularly fell outside the framework of colonial oversight. When it came to education, this meant that the federal government tried to offload onto the provinces the responsibility and cost for schooling Métis children. Overwhelmingly Catholic, Métis families looked to orders like the Oblates to provide their children with schooling. In some communities, such as Mission in the Fraser Valley, the only Catholic school was the residential school. Bit by bit, Ottawa denied Métis children access to these facilities; it did the same, on the whole, to children who were ancestrally mixed Indigenous and Euro-Canadian—described at the time as “halfbreeds”—but who did not share the cultural inheritance of the Métis.<sup>33</sup> As a consequence, separate residential schools were established by provincial and church authorities to address the demand for schooling from the Métis and “halfbreed” communities. There is an irony here in that many of the educators in this system were themselves Métis. As the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reminds us, Louis Riel was teaching at a boarding school for Métis boys in Montana on the eve of the 1885 rebellion, and his sister Sara taught at the Île-à-la-Crosse boarding school for Métis students.<sup>34</sup> This occurred because nineteenth-century Métis communities largely embraced Western notions of institutional education, within and without the Church system.

As we shall see in Chapter 10, the question of “status” under the Indian Act had particular and intentional impacts on Indigenous women and their children. Loss of status—through marriage to a non-Indigenous man—cost any offspring their status and thus their right to an education paid for by Ottawa. Despite many exceptions, the general pattern was one of “least eligibility”: reducing the cost of running federally-funded schools by removing Métis/“halfbreed” children. This was increasingly the case in the 1930s as the economy collapsed and federal funding became more lean. In 1937, the federal government declared that it never had an obligation to educate Métis children, and blocked any further enrolments.<sup>35</sup>

The education of Métis children at Île-à-la-Crosse and in a few other locations was in many respects hardly different from that of Indigenous children elsewhere. Conditions were poor and their treatment was bad. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, however, makes the point that we know far less about the history of Métis children in residential or public schools than we do of the experiences of status Indian students. The situation of Inuit children was also exceptional.

Ottawa paid little attention to Inuit peoples’ needs before the middle of the twentieth century. The Klondike Gold Rush presented an opportunity and necessity for treaties north of 60, but it wasn’t until the Second World War and the building of the Alaska Highway that Ottawa renewed its interest in the region. In the 1950s, changes in technology and

32. The most obvious exception is Treaty 8, which was negotiated in 1899.

33. The term “halfbreeds” was applied to children of European/Euro-Canadian and Indigenous ancestry, often regardless of whether they might self-identify as Métis. Sometimes officials made the distinction; sometimes not. We use the term “halfbreed” here with care, so as to indicate populations of mixed ancestry while recognizing the particular cultural qualities of the Métis community.

34. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools: The Métis Experience* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University, 2015), 8–9.

35. *Ibid.*, 26–28.

infrastructure increased the possibility of Canadians accessing and extracting natural resources in the sub-Arctic and Arctic. The Diefenbaker government's "Roads to Resources Program" of 1957–63 was one expression of this new outlook. As the Cold War took off in the 1950s, too, there were growing concerns about expressions of Canadian sovereignty in the North: an official Canadian presence in Arctic communities thus served a variety of economic and political purposes.

Suddenly, then, Inuit children found themselves in newly-established residential schools funded by Ottawa. These built on and advanced the efforts of denominational schools, such as the Catholic Immaculate Conception Residential School established at Aklavik in 1925 and the neighbouring Anglican All Saints Indian and Eskimo Residential School (opened in 1936). The model used by the federal government in the North, however, was distinct. It included day schools and a close connection with public schools.<sup>36</sup> There were few non-Aboriginal students in the public schools so, in effect, they were all institutions catering overwhelmingly to Indigenous and Inuit children and youths. The dormitory or hostel schools were large, and they had an unusual impact on population distribution in the North. In the South, it was typically the case that children were removed from their families' reserves and homes and transported some distance to the residential schools; in the North, the hostels were constructed at nodes that met Ottawa's needs first, and then Inuit families migrated to those sites and established substantial towns as a result. Inuit dependence on Ottawa's Family Allowance system was accelerating in these years, as was the campaign against tuberculosis. These two developments further tied Inuit people to the emergent school communities.

The mission-run schools were gradually replaced by federally-funded institutions, although the clergy remained a critical piece of the education system. Bizarre circumstances arose in small communities. Inuvik provides a good example: there, the Anglicans' Stringer Hall and the rather more notorious Grollier Hall run by the Catholic Church stood side by side, with roughly 200 pupils in each. They shared grounds and other facilities, but the pupils were otherwise kept separate. There were even cases of siblings within view of one another but separated denominationally and allowed little or no contact. In northern Québec, beginning in 1960, there were both federally- and provincially-funded residential schools for Inuit children; Inuit families were in a position to choose to which school(s) they would send their children. The federal system wound down in the early 1970s, and in 1975 the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement led to both the Inuit and the Innu (a.k.a. northern Québec Cree) establishing their own autonomous school boards.

As a final note on the northern experience, Labrador stands apart in several ways. There were Moravian missions in Labrador from 1771, and mission schools for Inuit children were an early feature. In the late nineteenth century, evangelical British organizations arrived and largely ignored the Inuit population until the 1920s. As a result, neither St. John's in the period before Newfoundland's union with Canada, nor Ottawa after 1949, took much of a direct interest in these residential/dormitory schools. Regardless, conditions were much the same: speaking Inuktitut was forbidden on pain of punishment; siblings were separated; food was both alien to the Inuit children and insufficient to nourish them properly; abuses occurred.<sup>37</sup>

## Historians and the Residential Schools

Historians have played an important role in developing public awareness of the residential school system, the individual schools, and the conditions therein. Landmark publications that spurred settler-society attention and Indigenous community responses include Celia Haig-Brown's 1988 book, *Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School*. Some historians, like Jim Miller in his important article, "Owen Glendower, Hotspur, and Canadian Indian Policy,"

36. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The Inuit and Northern Experience* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University, 2015), 8–9.

37. *Ibid.*, 190–4.

show how Indigenous peoples acted to use or resist coercive efforts at assimilation.<sup>38</sup> This position—and similar, contemporary arguments made by Tina Loo, Doug Cole, and Ira Chaikin in the 1990s—have been criticized by other historians for apparently minimizing the negative effects of colonialism. “Resilience” and “agency” in this context is read by some as a “colonialist alibi.” To which Miller, Loo, Cole and Chaikin replied, their colleagues were “motivated by a ‘sense of contrition . . . a wish to do penance by “redressing past injustices.””<sup>39</sup> Historians have, as a whole, conceded that Indigenous agency in the face of institutions like residential schools existed, was resourceful, and mattered, but that—in the longer haul—it faced tremendous challenges.

Other historians have focused on fully documenting the extent of abuses and deplorable conditions in church- and government-run facilities. All are in agreement with BC historian Jean Barman that the quality of education provided was substantially—and in most cases purposefully—so far below what was available in settler society schools as to render Indigenous students uncompetitive and badly under-prepared for work in and engagement with modern society.<sup>40</sup> These studies are both informed by and reflect the kind of resistance Miller documented. And in some measure they set the stage for the wider public discussion in the 1980s and ’90s of the residential schools debacle, leading to two public apologies by the federal government.

Having said that, two points need to be underlined: first, historical studies make it clear that settler society representatives and organizations involved in these projects knew what they were doing and what conditions were like *at the time*, and they chose to endorse, accept grudgingly, or turn a blind eye to those conditions; a few protested but without result. Second, whatever the contribution of scholars to this discussion, it pales before the courageous testimony of “survivors” of residential schools.

## Conclusion

Much effort has been spent by colonial society on changing Indigenous people’s metaphysical, material, and social knowledge—indeed, everything we conventionally bundle together as “culture”—and most of that has been aimed at children. Like Noel Annance, many Indigenous childhoods in mission villages, in the care of early French missionaries, in schools, in foster care, and even in penal institutions, have involved *captivity*. Of course, children—if things go well enough—become adults, and so it is the case that behind every adult there is a child. Which is to say, the experience of “captivity” of this kind is carried forward through adulthood. Some relationships between settler societies and Indigenous societies, however, focus specifically on one category of adult: women. The next chapter considers the histories of Indigenous women with an eye to the gendering of settler-Indigenous relations.

38. J. R. Miller, “Owen Glendower, Hotspur, and Canadian Indian Policy,” *Ethnohistory* 37, no. 4 (Autumn 1990): 386–415.

39. See Alan C. Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times,” in *Roots of Entanglement: Essays in the History of Native-newcomer Relations*, eds. Myra Rutherdale, Kerry M. Abel, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 414–6.

40. Jean Barman, “Schooled for Inequality: The education of British Columbia Aboriginal Children,” in *Children, Teachers and Schools in the History of British Columbia*, 2nd ed., eds. Jean Barman and Mona Gleason (Edmonton: Brush Education, 2003), 55–80.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

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- Barman, Jean. *Abenaki Daring: The Life and Writings of Noel Annance, 1792–1869*. Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016. See esp. pp. 39–66.
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- Miller, J. R. *Residential Schools and Reconciliation: Canada Confronts its History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017.
- Morgan, Cecilia. "Dr. Cecilia Morgan Question 3 – Methodism and the Anishinaabe." TRU, Open Learning. October 28, 2015. Video, 3:01. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEkID7BY6Jc>
- Podruchny, Carolyn, and Kathryn Magee Labelle. "Jean de Brébeuf and the Wendat Voices of Seventeenth-Century New France." *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme* 34, no. 1–2 (Fall 2011–Winter 2012): 97–126.
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# Chapter 10: Experiences of Indigenous Women under Settler Colonialism



*Indigenous women's labour was an essential part of the fur trade and other commercial relationships. While the meta-narratives have tended to highlight males boldly challenging rapids in canoes, it was female labour that made those vessels in the first place. Source: George Harold Finland, *Indian Women Making a Canoe at Stanley or Churchill River, Saskatchewan, ca. 1931*, photograph, Online MIKAN # 3648524, Library and Archives Canada/PA101496. Public domain.*

If the meta-narrative of Canadian history excluded Indigenous peoples' stories, it rendered Indigenous women doubly invisible. Indigenous women show up at the peripheries of older settler histories, often exoticized by European observers whose understanding of sexual relationships were peculiarly rigid. Individual women slip in and out of the fur trade records if and when they married and then were deserted by European and Canadian men; they might reappear if they married a successor trader from Montréal or Scotland. A small number loom large. There's Kateri Tekakwitha, the first Indigenous person in North America to be canonized by the Pope. The campaign to recognize Kateri began in 1680, shortly after her death at about twenty-four years of age, and culminated in sainthood in 2012. Her story—or versions of it—is familiar to the Catholic Indigenous communities and beyond.<sup>1</sup> Another widely-known character is

1. Allan Greer's video on Saint Kateri is listed in Chapter 9. Also, see his book, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine*

Thanadelthur (ca. 1697 to 1717), held out as a heroic figure in bringing peace to the Dēnesųlīné (Chipewyan) and Cree of western Hudson's Bay. But for all of that, she was dead by the time she was about twenty years old.<sup>2</sup> Konwatsi'tsiaienni (a.k.a. Molly Brant) had a longer career as a diplomat and leader of her people, the Kanien'kehá:ka, and a life that ran from ca. 1736 to 1796. There are other female figures who stand out in the meta-narratives, but not many, and none are so prominent as these three. By the time the Dominion of Canada had taken over responsibility for colonial relations with Indigenous people, Victorian society had ceased to see women as participants in political life: Indigenous women were treated by the Canadians as outsiders in treaty negotiations, and they were excluded from federally-recognized leadership positions within their communities. "Colonial values," as Carmen Watson points out:

. . . thus began to relegate Indigenous women to apolitical environments, effectively restructuring the socio-political dynamics that had existed pre-contact. Colonizers viewed Indigenous men as the gateway to establishing political, or seemingly political relationships. Women, however, were seen as an impediment to the process, taking up spots that could be occupied by men.<sup>3</sup>

Given this erasure over the course of hundreds of years of colonial history-making, how do we go about recovering and making sense of the histories of Indigenous women?

## Women in History

The dominant European narrative of North American history for centuries paid little attention to women's presence, much less their roles and experiences. Merchants and military leaders from Europe operated within gendered spaces in which women's roles were very limited; they were wearing those blinkers when they came to North America and, as a consequence, they saw and recorded only what they expected to see. Historian Jan Noel tracked this phenomenon in a study of Haudenosaunee women in the seventeenth-century fur trade. Accustomed to playing a more dynamic and direct role in commerce and community governance than was the case for women in European and settler societies, Haudenosaunee women's roles were consistently and significantly underestimated by colonial observers who operated from a patriarchal frame of reference.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the observations of Recollet and Jesuit missionaries on women generally have to be treated carefully insofar as they begin from a particular gendered worldview. By the same token, there was no institution in the British colonies equivalent to the Ursuline Order in New France, an important sisterly organization that placed women in positions of responsibility and relative autonomy. Ursuline accounts of Indigenous women offer a different insight, but they proceed—overwhelmingly—from the same Christian sense of gender as the *Jesuit Relations*.

*Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). A more recent Indigenous feminist and environmentalist take on the subject is Michelle M. Jacob's *Indian Pilgrims: Indigenous Journeys of Activism and Healing with Saint Kateri Tekakwitha* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016).

2. The familiar narrative of Thanadelthur is unpacked in Patricia A. McCormack, "The Many Faces of Thanadelthur: Documents, Stories, and Images," in *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, 2nd ed. (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2003), 329–64.
3. Carmen Julia Zarifeh Watson, "Unsettling Kin: Fractured Generations, Indigenous Feminism, and the Politics of Nationhood," unpublished B. A. Honours graduating essay, University of British Columbia, 2018, p. 8.
4. Jan Noel, "Fertile with Fine Talk."

And yet, ironically, these accounts reach us from a time when the fur trade and conflict were taking men away more regularly from Indigenous communities and thus leaving women in positions of necessarily greater authority, a process that continued through the whole of the fur trade era.

Karen Anderson, a historical sociologist, studied changes in women's experiences that took place along the St. Lawrence and in Wendake Ehen between 1608 and 1650. From a position of rough social equivalence—one in which men and women had different but complementary and equally valued roles—Montagnais, Naskapi, and Wendat women adopted positions that were significantly more deferential to males. This took place over about thirty years, the period during which the Jesuits were most active. The missionaries ascribed their success in creating this change—in manifesting the kinds of relationship they saw as ideal within Christian societies—to the calamitous social trauma caused by intensified conflict with the Haudenosaunee and exposure to epidemic diseases. Women who resisted conversion were defeated by repeated losses of kin to raids and pestilence. Wendat women in particular stood against any proposed change in their culture that would weaken their pivotal roles as clanmothers and decision-makers, but by 1650 they were submitting *en masse* to “the domination of their husbands and fathers.”<sup>5</sup> They were more accepting of Jesuitical rule, as well, because they had to seek refuge after the fall of Wendake Ehen.

What did they lose? The right to leave an unsatisfactory marriage, for starters. The Jesuits—who saw marriage as a lifetime commitment—were appalled by the freedom with which Indigenous women abandoned husbands who were regarded as poor providers or partners. They looked at this from the perspective of the Wendat male who, having married a woman for life, found himself abandoned and unable to remarry.<sup>6</sup> To the Jesuit eye, this was a case of women sowing chaos and unhappiness in their community. Over a few decades, the missionaries were able to inculcate in Wendat and Montagnais society a sense that female disobedience was punishable (in this world and in the next) and that female deference—to husband, father, priest, and God—was desirable. Had smallpox not arrived in the 1630s, it is impossible to say whether women's resistance to these directives (and there was a lot of resistance) would have been more effective.

The values espoused by the French missionaries were, in fact, *European* values, and they would withstand wars and conquest, the arrival of British-American Loyalists and waves of immigrants from Ireland, the transformation of Canada from a pocket of colonies into a trans-continental nation-state, and the inclusion of generations of immigrants from still more remote parts of the world. Settler colonialism, therefore, had a particular colonizing effect on Indigenous women and gendered roles. In some instances it piggybacked on existing gendered roles. This was the case in the fisheries of the Pacific Northwest, wherein men harvested fish while women prepared and preserved the catch; that longstanding practice was brought into canneries in the late nineteenth century in increasingly mechanized spaces that mirrored British, American, and Canadian textile mills in which female labour dominated. Historian Dianne Newell described these processes in a 1993 study:

. . . Indian women, girls, and old people who received wages or piece rates in the fish plants – for scraping and cleaning whole salmon in tubs of cold water; filling cans with salmon; lacquering, weighing, and labeling cans; pickling salmon; making or mending fish nets; and so on – worked in supervised, racially segregated factory settings unlike anything in their aboriginal processing routines. Until the 1940s, Chinese bosses coordinated the efforts of Indian plant workers. Cannery records usually identify Indian women as ‘Kloochmen’ and Indian plant work in general as ‘China labour’ or ‘China crew.’ This

5. Karen Anderson, *Chain Her by One Foot: The Subjugation of Native Women in Seventeenth-Century New France* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), 52.

6. *Ibid.*, 76–77.

set-up differs strikingly from the scenes of salmon-processing witnessed by Alexander Mackenzie [at Nuxalk] in the 1790s.<sup>7</sup>

Women working in canneries from the 1870s to the mid-twentieth century generated the cash needed in an increasingly cash-dependent economy. The purchase and maintenance of boats and nets, along with increased reliance on gasoline engines, reduced self-reliance as competitiveness became tied to the ability to afford better gear.

The labour of women is, in fact, where they show up most in the European record. Nowhere is this truer than in the fur trade.

## Métissage

Indigenous communities involved with the fur trade sought and exploited many opportunities to confirm commercial and diplomatic relationships with Euro-Canadians. This was the case when the delegation of Algonquin and Wendat – led by Iroquet and Outchetaquin – visited the French *habitation* on the St. Lawrence in 1609 with an eye to building a trading and raiding alliance with the French. A century and a half later, as the French were pressing deep into the interior of the continent and the British leaning in heavily from Hudson's Bay, communities along the Great Lakes and onto the Plains sought stability through alliances of various kinds. Of these, the most consequential was almost certainly marriage.

The work that women invested in the production/processing of pelts and hides put them at the centre of the fur trade relationship. They were able to influence the terms of trade from their community's side, and a remarkable number of goods obtained from Europeans—copper pots, knives, sewing needles, blankets—either served women's specific needs or liberated them from the production of equivalent goods. In communities such as those on the Northwest Coast, where potlatching rituals marked clan and household status—something in which women in these societies had a huge stake—whatever women could do to secure more and better goods for potlatching was a worthy project. To that end, women regularly entered into marital relationships with non-Indigenous (or, in some cases, Indigenous but not local) men. Doing so could secure gifts, a supply line of imported goods, better prices, and higher quality. Historian Jean Barman describes one union in the Columbia Valley—involving a daughter of local chieftain (sometimes described as “King”) Comcomly and a Scottish fur trader—that brings together many of these themes:

. . . Ilchee's relationship with [Pacific Fur Company] partner Duncan McDougall both ensured [Fort] Astoria's well-being and was profitable from her father's perspective by virtue of the expected gifts that thereby ensued. According to a contemporary writing in April 1814: “Mr. D. McDougall this afternoon completed the payment for his wife to Comcomly, whose daughter she was: he gave 5 new guns, and 5 blankets, 2 ½ feet wide, which makes 15 guns and 15 blankets, besides a great deal of other property as the total cost of this precious lady.” An Astoria clerk justified the exchange on the grounds that “every thing there went on well owing to Mr. McDougall's marriage with [Ilchee].” A decade or so later, Ilchee's sisters or half-sisters Raven and Timmee partnered . . . with HBC officers....<sup>8</sup>

Arrangements of this kind were fluid, more so than was the case in settler society. The partners could sever the marriage (usually a common-law union *à la façon du pays*) so as to take up with a different partner. It often happened that

7. Dianne Newell, *Tangled Webs of History: Indians and the Law in Canada's Pacific Coast Fisheries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 53.

8. Jean Barman, *French Canadians, Furs, and Indigenous Women in the Making of the Pacific Northwest* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 131.

Euro-Canadian partners departed the West or North for Canada, Britain, or the United States and thus dissolved their marriage. In this way, some women in “fur trade society” came to remarry a series of fur trade men and thus became more deeply woven into the fabric of the industry than any other participants. Along the way, they themselves produced generation after generation of fur traders. For a further example of this, see a brief history of the life and family of [Marguerite Waddens](#).<sup>9</sup>

Fur trade society was comprised of and produced thousands of children whose identities included and bridged, and then evolved beyond, those of their parents. Historian Susan Sleeper-Smith charted the personal and commercial influence of four women who converted to Catholicism and acted as cultural mediators between European society and Indigenous communities. She demonstrates how fur trade society was, for its inhabitants, a network of people, ideas, and loyalties, much more so than just a commercial activity.<sup>10</sup> The complexity of these communities and the speed at which they grew can be glimpsed in an account from a North West Company journal around the start of the nineteenth century. It records twenty-one men, four women, and four children at Red River in 1800, and thirty-seven men, twenty-seven women, and sixty-seven children at Fort Vermillion on the Peace River in 1809. “Henry’s Report of the North West Population, 1805 revealed that the combined total of women and children at individual fur trade posts often outnumbered the men.”<sup>11</sup> In this light, fur trade posts look more like communities and, as they mature, communities in which women’s lives are central to the story.

As a general rule, those individuals whose patrimony included Canadien or Canadian ancestry, and whose maternal line was (mainly) Anishinaabe or Cree, were and are described as Métis; the descendants of British traders associated with the HBC and women from the Dënesųłñé, Cree, and other nations were historically referred to by the British as “halfbreeds” and by historians as “country-born.” Of the two, the Métis more effectively forged their own culture and identity, one that was heavily inflected with Catholicism and an understanding of French and one or several Plains languages. As a community that first sprang up around French fur trade posts and forts in the late seventeenth century, they gradually pursued their own economic order. It was a synthesis of Canadien-style agriculture and Anishinaabe- and Nêhiyawak-style hunting. In this latter respect, they increasingly focused on the bison hunt—for food, the trade in hides, and the production and sale of pemmican. The “country-born” males tended to follow their fathers into the fur trade; some of them were sent to Britain for a conventional European education. Their identity was, thus, less identical. Their sisters tended to stay in North America and became conduits for Plains culture while sometimes marrying young up-and-coming traders in the HBC system. Amelia Connolly Douglas is a good example of how these boundaries are themselves fluid. Her father was Irish-Canadien and her mother, Miyo Nipiy, was Cree. Amelia Connolly was born in 1812 in what is now central Manitoba and spent the entirety of her life in fur trading posts and communities. In 1828 in what is now northern British Columbia, she married a young HBC trader, James Douglas, who reported to her father. She spoke Swampy Cree, some French, English, and possibly several other Indigenous languages. Insofar as any one identity dominated, Amelia was Cree. Should she be considered Métis? Certainly she was of mixed ancestry and came from a Catholic family, but she lacked the crucial connections to the Métis community along the Red River.

By the mid-nineteenth century, settler society was developing a sharper sense of racial boundaries in marriage and association. HBC fur traders (especially the leading traders in the field) increasingly sought non-Indigenous wives. Indigenous women and women of mixed ancestry found themselves marginalized by social sanctions and by new settler-society legal codes that denied them a right to claim inheritances from their settler husbands.

9. John Douglas Belshaw, “Identity Crisis,” in *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2015), section 13.7.
10. Susan Sleeper Smith, “Women, Kin, and Catholicism: New Perspectives on the Fur Trade,” *Ethnohistory* 47, no. 2 (2000): 423–52.
11. Racette, “Nimble Fingers and Strong Backs,” 150.

## Marrying-Out

The 1876 Indian Act did much to formally strip Indigenous women of their rights and roles. A document conceived and enforced by a patriarchal settler society, one of its goals was to impose and inculcate among Indigenous peoples the values of male land ownership, primogeniture, patrilineality, patrilocality, and female deference.

Under the Act, women gained “Indian status” through their fathers and husbands. This meant that a non-Indigenous woman could acquire status by marrying a man who held status. The flipside of the coin is that any woman with status who married a non-status person would lose her status. This had ramifications for people living on reserves insofar as a non-status woman lost her entitlement to services from Indian Affairs and the reserve bureaucracy.

In 1951, the Indian Act was revised in such a way as to intensify and complicate the implications of marrying out. Now, the children of a status woman who lost her status by marrying a non-status man were also re-categorized as non-status. None of them could vote in band elections or hold office on-reserve, regardless of whether they were male or female. What is more, non-status Indigenous women were, under these circumstances, not merely *allowed* the franchise; they had to take it.<sup>12</sup> Non-Indigenous women who married status men could gain status before 1951 but they lost it thereafter. Their children sometimes lost their status as well, but not always. The intent was to establish ‘least eligibility’ among Indigenous and status women and their offspring, but the rules were even more slippery in application.

### Excerpt from the Indian Act, 1876<sup>13</sup>

#### CHAP. 18.

An Act to amend and consolidate the laws respecting Indians. [Assented to 12th April 1876.]

#### TERMS

##### 3.3 The term “Indian” means

First. Any male person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular band;

Secondly. Any child of such person;

Thirdly. Any woman who is or was lawfully married to such person:

(a) Provided that any illegitimate child, unless having shared with the consent of the band in the distribution moneys of such band for a period exceeding two years, may, at any time, be excluded from the membership thereof by the band, if such proceeding be sanctioned by the Superintendent-General:

(b) Provided that any Indian having for five years continuously resided in a foreign country shall with the sanction of the Superintendent-General, cease to be a member thereof and shall not be permitted to become again a member thereof, or of any other band, unless the consent of the band with the approval of the Superintendent-General or his agent, be first had and obtained; but this provision shall not apply to any professional man, mechanic, missionary, teacher or interpreter, while discharging his or her duty as such:

12. Lianne C. Leddy, “Indigenous Women and the Franchise,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, April 7, 2016, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indigenous-women-and-the-franchise>.

13. Indian Act, chap. 18, § 3-3 (1876).

(c) Provided that any Indian woman marrying any other than an Indian or a non- treaty Indian shall cease to be an Indian in any respect within the meaning of this Act, except that she shall be entitled to share equally with the members of the band to which she formerly belonged, in the annual or semi-annual distribution of their annuities, interest moneys and rents; but this income may be commuted to her at any time at ten years' purchase with the consent of the band:

(d) Provided that any Indian woman marrying an Indian of any other band, or a non- treaty Indian shall cease to be a member of the band to which she formerly belonged, and become a member of the band or irregular band of which her husband is a member:

(e) Provided also that no half-breed in Manitoba who has shared in the distribution of half-breed lands shall be accounted an Indian; and that no half-breed head of a family (except the widow of an Indian, or a half-breed who has already been admitted into treaty), shall, unless under very special circumstances, be determined by the Superintendent-General or his agent, be accounted an Indian, or entitled to be admitted into any Indian treaty.

From the mid-twentieth century, Indigenous women organized resistance to the Indian Act. In 1985, their efforts were rewarded with reform of some of the Act's most egregious gender-bias. Bill C-31 addressed the issue of Indigenous women who lost status when they married a non-status male (Indigenous or otherwise), as well as the ramifications this element of the Indian Act had for their offspring. The new legislation restored status to those who had lost it, but the provision—and threat—concerning loss of status was effectively just postponed a generation. Think of it more as a temporary amnesty than a true revision of bad policy.

## Listening to Women

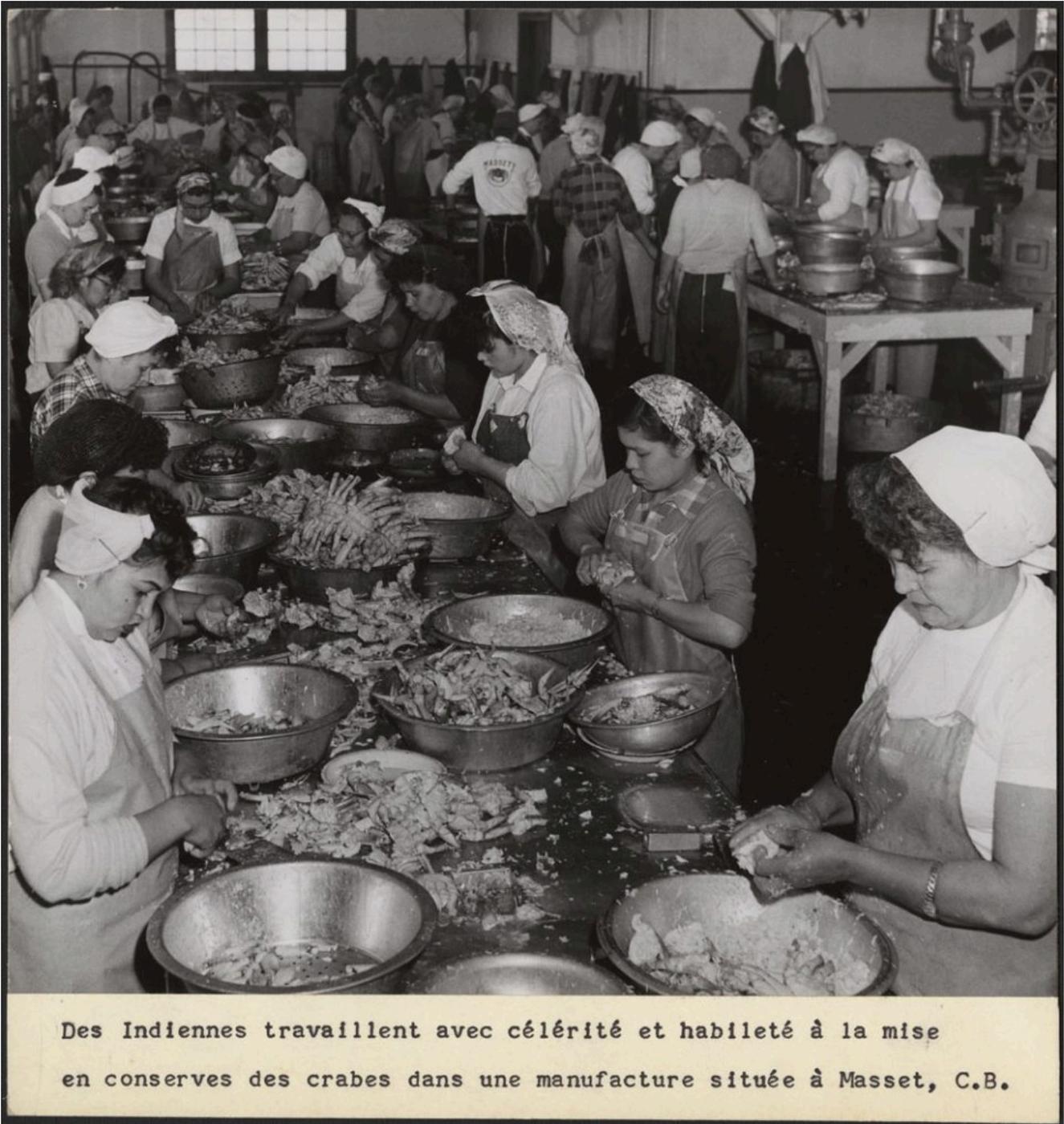
A great many of the life studies arising from Indigenous communities in the last twenty years have focused on women. These are, as well, works that are marked by collaborative practices in which the role of the scholarly historian is secondary to that of the knowledge-keeper. Many of these studies are rich with the details of life, rather than the kinds of political landscapes that litter the meta-narrative. Mary John (1913–2004), a Dakelh (a.k.a. Carrier) woman whose twentieth-century life witnessed enormous changes, collaborated with a journalist; her story provides a demonstration of the many acts of resistance that Indigenous women mounted.<sup>14</sup> Many similar partnerships have generated a large enough body of literature that it is now possible to look for commonalities and differences across many nations.

The experiences and activities of Indigenous women in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries indicate both variety and change. They also point to continuity and historic resilience. Women like Mary John worked through initially non-political organizations that emerged in 1968 as the BC Indian Homemakers Association, which had an explicitly political agenda. In doing so, Mary John, her peers, and her successors preserved and advanced a female voice in Indigenous politics.<sup>15</sup> There has been a gradual re-emergence of Indigenous women in positions of authority and

14. Bridget Moran, *Sai-k'uz Ts'eke: Stoney Creek Woman, the Story of Mary John* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1988, 1997).
15. See Sarah Nickel, "I Am Not a Women's Libber Although Sometimes I Sound Like One': Indigenous Feminism and Politicized Motherhood," *American Indian Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (Fall 2017): 2.

influence, perhaps ironically most visibly in the professions and at all levels of Canadian politics. At the same time that we see renewal in female Indigenous power, we witness with revulsion the continuing violence of what is now known by an acronym, MMIWG: missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. A long-running National Inquiry into the apparent disappearance and probable murder of anywhere from one thousand to four thousand individuals delivered its final report in June 2019, declaring violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people in Canada as the product of “a race-based genocide.”<sup>16</sup> The federal inquest reckons that Indigenous women—who constitute roughly 4 per cent of the female population in Canada—make up 16 per cent of all female homicide victims in the period 1980–2012.<sup>17</sup> The “Highway of Tears” in northern British Columbia has been one focus of the MMIWG Inquiry, as has the rate of female homicides in Winnipeg. While these tragedies have unfolded over decades—and continue to unfold—the rate of incarceration of Indigenous women remains badly skewed. In Alberta, roughly half the women in the prison system are Indigenous; nationally, they are 36 per cent of the female federal prison population.<sup>18</sup> The residential schools may be closed and subject to scrutiny by historians, but penal institutions—many of which owe their beginnings to the federal government’s annexation of the Prairies—continue to elude the same kind of scrutiny.

16. National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report*, <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>
17. Indigenous and Northern Affairs, “Background on the Inquiry,” Government of Canada, accessed November 14, 2018, [www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca](http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca).
18. Emma McIntosh and Alex McKeen, “Overrepresentation of Indigenous People in Canada’s Prisons Persists amid Drop in Overall Incarceration,” *The Star* (Toronto, ON), June 19, 2018, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2018/06/19/overrepresentation-of-indigenous-people-in-canadas-prisons-persists-amid-drop-in-overall-incarceration.html>; Geraldine Malone, “Why Indigenous Women are Canada’s Fastest Growing Prison Population,” *Vice Magazine*, February 2, 2016, [https://www.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/5gj8vb/why-indigenous-women-are-canadas-fastest-growing-prison-population](https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/5gj8vb/why-indigenous-women-are-canadas-fastest-growing-prison-population).



Food production remained an important part of Indigenous women's economic role in commercialized and industrialized fisheries. Source: Department of Manpower and Immigration, *Indian Women [First Nations] Work with Speed and Skill in the Canning of Crabs in a Factory Located in Masset (B.C.)*, photograph, Online MIKAN # 437, Library and Archives Canada. Public domain.

## Conclusion

As a political organization, the Indian Homemakers' Associations provide us with a segue into the next chapter. Women historically and consistently played leading roles in Indigenous communities' efforts to thrive and to confront

colonialism. The twentieth century would see experimentation with a wide variety of tactics and organizations whose aim was to mitigate and reverse the worst effects of colonialism.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

- Anderson, Karen. *Chain Her by One Foot: The Subjugation of Native Women in Seventeenth-Century New France*. London & New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Bailey, Norma, dir. *Women in the Shadows*. 1991. Montreal: National Film Board. [https://www.nfb.ca/film/women\\_in\\_the\\_shadows/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/women_in_the_shadows/)
- Barman, Jean. "Aboriginal Women on the Streets of Victoria: Rethinking Transgressive Sexuality during the Colonial Encounter." In *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, edited by Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale, 205–27. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005.
- Carter, Sarah, and Patricia McCormack, eds. *Recollecting: Lives of Aboriginal Women of the Canadian Northwest and Borderlands*. Edmonton: Athabasca University, 2011.
- Charlie, Rose. "Indian Homemakers' Association of British Columbia." Indigenous Foundations. Accessed February 13, 2019. [https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/indian\\_homemakers\\_association/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/indian_homemakers_association/)
- Erickson, Lesley. "Constructed and Contested Truths: Aboriginal Suicide, Law, and Colonialism in the Canadian West(s), 1823–1927." *Canadian Historical Review* 86, no. 4 (December 2005): 596–618.
- McCallum, Mary Jane Logan. *Indigenous Women, Work and History 1940–1980*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014.
- Raibmon, Paige. "The Practice of Everyday Colonialism: Indigenous Women at Work in the Hop Fields and Tourist Industry of Puget Sound." *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 3, no. 3 (2006): 23–56.
- Paul, Elsie. *Written as I Remember It: Teachings (P̓əms t̓əʔaw) from the Life of a Sliammon Elder*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014.
- Roy, Susan, and Ruth Taylor. "'We Were Real Skookum Women': The shishálh Economy and the Logging Industry on the Pacific Northwest Coast." In *Indigenous Women and Work: From Labor to Activism*, edited by Carol Williams, 104–19. Urbana, Chicago, & Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2012.
- Sangster, Joan. "Criminalizing the Colonized: Ontario Native Women Confront the Criminal Justice System, 1920–60." *Canadian Historical Review* 80, no.1 (March 1999): 32–60.
- Silman, Janet (as told to). *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out*. Toronto: Women's Press, 1987.
- Thorpe, Jocelyn. "Indian Residential Schools: An Environmental and Gender History." *NICHE: Network in Canadian History & Environment/Nouvelle initiative Canadienne en histoire de l'environnement*, April 27, 2016. <http://niche-canada.org/2016/04/27/indian-residential-schools-an-environmental-and-gender-history/>
- Trimble, Sabina. "A Different Kind of Listening: Recent Work on Indigenous Life History in British Columbia." *Canadian Historical Review* 97, no. 3 (September 2016): 426–34.
- Welsh, Christine, dir. *Finding Dawn*. 2006. Montreal: National Film Board. [https://www.nfb.ca/film/finding\\_dawn/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/finding_dawn/)

# Chapter 11: Renewal, Resurgence, Recognition—From White Paper to Armed Protest

As we've seen, resistance to settler colonialism took place at the community, household, and individual levels. There were many options available to Indigenous people and they were often seized upon, but scaling up resistance to a national or legislative response was nigh on impossible. Obstacles included Section 141 of the Indian Act, added in 1927, which made it illegal to raise funds for a court challenge to the federal government (precisely because Indigenous peoples were already mobilizing against colonialism). In a stroke, Ottawa had criminalized legal action in support of Aboriginal rights. Restrictions on free movement and the lack of access to financial resources were further barriers to building regional and national strategies among First Nations. Then, shortly after the Second World War, federal government and settler-society attitudes and positions began to shift. In 1951, Ottawa removed the barriers to raising funds for legal challenges; sanctions against the potlatch and other ceremonies were dropped; and steps were taken toward enfranchisement of "status Indians," a step that some Indigenous people rightly feared would entail loss of status. In the two decades that followed, however, it became clear that Ottawa policy-makers had in mind assimilation by other means.

## Electoral Reform

Democratic inclusion—the franchise—became, in the nineteenth century, the benchmark of real citizenship in many western countries. In Canada, as in the United States, Australia, Britain, and France, the vote was sought by groups such as working men, immigrants, and women. It was one token of inclusion, and its denial or termination was a sure sign of exclusion. The record of disenfranchisement in British Columbia provides a useful example of how electoral rights were bound up in ideas about race and gender. Indigenous people and Chinese immigrants in British Columbia had the right to vote until it was stripped from them in 1874; around the same time, women lost the right to vote at the civic level; Japanese immigrants and their descendants were disenfranchised in 1895; immigrants from India (lumped together as "Hindus") lost the vote just as their numbers began to become substantial, in 1907, a year that witnessed race riots in Vancouver. Doukhobors, too, lost the vote—in 1931. Disenfranchisement was experienced as a slap in the face, just as it was intended.

The experience of Indigenous peoples overall was more convoluted. Provincial regulations—such as the disenfranchisement of Indigenous voters in British Columbia in 1874—were sometimes at odds with federal laws. Ottawa's goal of assimilation is reflected in the 1876 Indian Act's provision for the enfranchisement of Indigenous people who lost or relinquished Indian status, so long as they met the property qualifications of the time. Any Indigenous person who was seen to be legitimately practising medicine or acting as a clergyman (note: man) or lawyer, or who earned a university degree, would also be eligible. It is almost needless to say that few qualified under these conditions. The rules were tweaked in the revised Indian Act of 1880 and in the Indian Advancement Act of 1884. The Electoral Reform Act of 1885 granted the franchise to any land-owning Indigenous male in Ontario, Québec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. (War between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples on the Western Plains in 1885 explains these geographic constraints.) Thirteen years later, these eligibilities were stripped away. (The irony here, worth noting, is that the franchise—limited though it was—had been granted by John A. Macdonald's government, and in 1898 the Liberal government of Wilfrid Laurier feared that grateful, pro-Conservative Indigenous voters in central and eastern Canada would tip the balance against Liberal candidates.)

There has probably been no time in the history of Canada before or since when so much concerted effort on Ottawa's part was put into assessing and reshaping Indigenous lives. The timing—the second half of the Victorian era—is

important. This was an age of state-making and, as has been pointed out elsewhere, “the state is in the business of making citizens.”<sup>1</sup> According to the 1996 *Royal Commission*, in the late nineteenth century:

. . . the federal government took for itself the power to mould, unilaterally, every aspect of life on reserves and to create whatever infrastructure it deemed necessary to achieve the desired end – assimilation through enfranchisement and, as a consequence, the eventual disappearance of Indians as distinct peoples. It could, for example, and did in the ensuing years, control elections and the conduct of band councils, the management of reserve resources and the expenditure of revenues, impose individual land holding through a ‘ticket of location’ system, and determine the education of Indian children.

This legislation early in the life of Confederation had an even more wide-ranging impact. At Confederation two paths were laid out: one for non-Aboriginal Canadians of full participation in the affairs of their communities, province and nation; and one for the people of the First Nations, separated from provincial and national life, and henceforth to exist in communities where their traditional governments were ignored, undermined and suppressed ....<sup>2</sup>

The tide turned again in 1917 for status Indians serving overseas during the First World War.<sup>3</sup> They obtained the right to vote in Conservative Prime Minister Robert Borden’s cynical attempt to get a renewed mandate and support for conscription. The Indigenous soldiers’ franchise, however, evaporated on their return home. Similar provisions would be made in the Second World War, arising in some measure from a more widespread settler society concern for poor conditions on reserves. It also reflected international developments and the impact of wartime propaganda and rhetoric that favoured liberal-democratic values. By 1939, Canada was one of a shrinking number of liberal-democracies left standing. Authoritarian regimes and dictatorships were springing up everywhere. The war pitted nation-states and economic empires against one another. It also created a discourse of democracy-versus-dictatorship, a narrative that continued into the post-1945 period and the Cold War. By this point, all adult women and men in the white settler community were enfranchised; in 1947 and 1949, the vote was extended to the Chinese, South Asian, and Japanese communities. Change was slower to come as regards Indigenous voting rights.

A post-war Special Joint Committee on the Indian Act in 1946 provided a rare forum for Indigenous leaders to speak to their many concerns. As regards the franchise, they were wary of anything that would undermine Indian status, tax exemption, and treaty rights. Despite the Joint Committee’s recommendations in favour of enfranchisement, successive federal governments hesitated, increasingly fearful of the impact status Indian voters would have on their electoral chances. Put plainly, they withheld democratic power because it might actually be used to express democratic will. In 1950, Indian Affairs shifted into the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, and for the next sixteen years the official position of Ottawa’s bureaucracy was that Indigenous peoples were “immigrants too” and had to be “Canadianized.”<sup>4</sup> The election of the Conservative government in 1957 led to further change. Prime Minister John

1. Cairns, “Aboriginal Research in Troubled Times,” 407.
2. Dussault et al., *Royal Commission*, 166.
3. For a summary of the experience of Indigenous soldiers in the twentieth century, see Scott Sheffield, “Status Indians and Military Service in the World Wars,” *Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016), section 6.12. For a more fulsome account, see Sheffield’s book, *The Red Man’s on the Warpath: The Image of the “Indian” and the Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).
4. Heidi Bohaker and Franca Iacovetta, “Making Aboriginal People ‘Immigrants Too’: A Comparison of Citizenship Programs for Newcomers and Indigenous Peoples in Postwar Canada, 1940s–1960s,” *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (September 2009): 427.

Diefenbaker—the MP from Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, a riding with a significant Indigenous population—championed the idea of inclusion and rights that extended to all Canadians. Status Indians got the franchise in 1960 without the feared corollary of loss of status. While it is true that Inuit were able to vote as early as 1950, the difficulties of polling a widely-dispersed and mobile population meant that, in practical terms, there was little in the way of Canadian electoral democracy in the far north until the early 1960s.

For many Indigenous people, the 1960 franchise was a welcome change and one that was long overdue. Indigenous soldiers in two world wars had experienced rights and a degree of inclusion that they typically lost on return to Canada. They were allowed to drink with their comrades when at war but barred from beer parlours once back home, for example. While cafés and restaurants in towns like Prince George had a reputation for inclusion, Indigenous people were regularly excluded in Penticton and hauled out of coffee shops in Vanderhoof by the RCMP.<sup>5</sup> The franchise went some way to ameliorate a sense of being second-class citizens, particularly among those Indigenous peoples who lived in urban or semi-urban areas, graduated from high schools alongside white settler “citizens,” and engaged in businesses that were impacted by local, provincial, and federal laws.

For others, while it was not necessarily a poisoned chalice, democracy was viewed as a kind of misdirection. Why would a people who were sovereign in their own right seek inclusion in a state that defined, regarded, and treated them as “wards”? What if democratic inclusion was just a precursor to assimilation into the larger Canadian project? These were questions that were sharpened to a fine point in the early days of Pierre Trudeau’s government.

## White Paper, Red Paper

Jennifer Pettit summarizes the course of reform of Ottawa’s policies in the 1960s and ’70s and, just as importantly, its approach to and philosophy as regards Indigenous people and issues.

“Citizens Plus” — The 1960s ([CC BY 4.0](#))<sup>6</sup>

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A stand-alone Department of Indian Affairs was created in 1966. Another significant event was the Hawthorn-Tremblay Report entitled *A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies*. Based on a series of cross-Canada consultations, the 1966-1967 Hawthorn Report concluded that Canada’s First Nations were marginalized and disadvantaged due to misguided government policies like the residential school system (which the Report recommended closing). Hawthorn argued that Indigenous peoples needed to be treated as “Citizens Plus” and provided with the resources

5. Carstens, *The Queen’s People*, 224; Moran, *Sai-k’uz Ts’eke*, 75.

6. Jennifer Pettit, “WWI to 1970,” in John Douglas Belshaw, *Canadian History: Post Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016), section 11.8. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license, except where otherwise noted.

required for self-determination. As a result of this report, the Canadian government decided to take policies in an entirely new direction, which were outlined in the **White Paper** of 1969.

In the White Paper, the stated goal of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and Jean Chrétien, Minister for Indian Affairs, was to achieve greater equality for Canada's First Nations. The White Paper called for an end to Indian status, the closure of the Department of Indian Affairs, the dismantling of the *Indian Act*, the conversion of reserve lands to private property, and immediate integration. While the federal government believed this to be desirable, Indigenous groups across Canada were outraged, and argued that forced assimilation was not the means to achieve equity and that the White Paper had not addressed their concerns. They responded with a document called *Citizens Plus*, which became known as the **Red Paper**. In the Red Paper, Indigenous peoples stressed the importance of land and upholding the promises made in the treaties, and called for political organization. In response, the government withdrew the White Paper in 1970.

## Reforming the Indian Act

Clearly, Indigenous political leaders had real qualms about the Indian Act, as did those in the settler community who sought a more inclusive society. The Indian Act, however, remains a problematic knot that binds the First Nations and non-Indigenous communities together.

In 1983, a Special Parliamentary Committee on Indian Self-Government (referred to as the Penner Report) recommended to Ottawa a form of autonomy that represented to most Aboriginal leaders an advance on what had gone before it. The general election in 1984, however, brought in a Conservative government informed by neo-conservative fears of fiscal mismanagement and public dependency. Led by Brian Mulroney, the new administration proposed a kind of municipal level of self-government, one that would cut the need for (and costs of) guardianship that had existed for a century. To many Indigenous leaders, this looked like White Paper 2.0. Few were interested in decentralized responsibilities that relieved Ottawa while setting up the First Nations and provincial governments for conflict. Mistrust was sown, and one consequence would be the failure of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990 (discussed later in this chapter).

## New Organizations

The political crisis generated by the release of the White Paper reinvigorated many existing Indigenous organizations. There was never just one strategy, nor just one avenue for change: policy changes were sought by some groups, social and cultural changes by others. The White Paper, however, necessitated a political response specifically, so Indigenous leaders and communities in Canada took their campaigns to the courts, to the legislatures and Parliament, to international forums, to the British Commonwealth, and to the streets. Harold Cardinal (1945–2005) produced a thoughtful and thorough critique of federal policy in *The Unjust Society* (1969), the title of which was a jab at Pierre Trudeau's call for a "just society." Two key organizations appeared at this time: the National Indian Brotherhood

emerged from the split within the National Indian Council in 1967–68, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs in 1969.<sup>7</sup> The Brotherhood was simultaneously a move to a larger, less provincial stage for what had been the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians and a break with the foremost Métis organization. This was one of many signals that the movement as a whole did not speak with one voice.

## George Manuel and the Fourth World

A Secwépemc leader from Neskonlith on the South Thompson River, George Manuel (1921–89) emerged as both a spokesperson and a theorist. His conception of the “Fourth World,” a category of predominantly small and colonized Indigenous populations around the globe, resonated with those advocating for Indigenous rights, informed the thinking of Indigenous organizations in Canada generally, and contributed to the establishment of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, which Manuel led in the mid-1970s. Manuel was able to secure federal funding for research into a variety of Indigenous claims and set the movement on a solid financial footing for the first time.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, as the Western world was convulsed with protests against *apartheid* in South Africa, Manuel was able to provide the intellectual firepower for a broader dialogue on oppressed peoples globally. In many respects, the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is a fruit of Manuel’s labours.

The National Indian Brotherhood pursued the goal of self-governance for Indigenous communities. This agenda worked best for First Nations that had treaty rights. Those that did not were more likely to look for advancements in constitutionally-enshrined rights, specifically “Aboriginal rights.” The two were not mutually exclusive and sometimes were even complementary, but the benefits of autonomy for off-reserve, urban Indigenous peoples—and those who lost or never had status—were less clear-cut. There was broad agreement that education and social welfare were areas of responsibility that ought to be stripped from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). To be clear, this was at a time when the extent of abuses in the residential schools was known to few, and then only anecdotally; likewise, the scale and ramifications of the “Sixties Scoop” were not yet fully appreciated. The 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s saw band offices take on greater and greater responsibilities. A generation of more entrepreneurial band managers emerged in some locations. At the same time, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN)—established in 1982 as the successor to the NIB—worked with the Union of BC Indian Chiefs to secure recognition for Aboriginal rights in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. This was no small victory.

7. On this topic, see Sarah A. Nickel, *Assembling Unity: Indigenous Politics, Gender and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019).

8. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*.

## Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982<sup>9</sup>

35. (1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.

(2) In this Act, “aboriginal peoples of Canada” includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

(3) For greater certainty, in subsection (1) “treaty rights” includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

(4) Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.

## In the Courts

Legal challenges to settler colonialism accelerated in the last thirty years of the century. A few landmark cases are worth citing here, beginning with the 1973 Calder case. The Nisga’a First Nation of British Columbia exhausted the provincial courts and then won a decision from the Supreme Court of Canada: title to their land had never been extinguished. Even though the Court was split as to whether Aboriginal title on the West Coast persisted after 1871, the federal government took the view that it did. The provincial government in Victoria disagreed and would drag its feet until an NDP government was elected in 1990. At that point, Victoria began negotiating a new generation of treaties. Since 1998, when the Nisga’a Final Agreement was reached, a handful of other post-Calder treaties have been negotiated under the BC Treaty Process—only three final agreements (involving the Tsawwassen, Maa-nulth, and the Tla’amin First Nations) have been finalized.

There was a similar return to treaty negotiations in Québec. In 1911, the province annexed the Ungava Peninsula, extending its boundaries across Inuit and Innu (a.k.a. Montagnais and Naskapi Cree) territories. Treaty negotiations were meant to occur, but they did not. First Nations were relocated from areas where massive hydroelectric projects were being built, despite protests. Then, in 1973, the provincial courts declared that negotiations were still mandatory. In contrast to the slow progress made in BC, by 1975 an agreement with the Grand Assembly of the Cree and the Northern Québec Inuit Association was in place.

What Calder and the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement demonstrated was the utility of the courts in achieving Indigenous goals. Smaller victories were secured in increments and then, in 1990, another watershed was crossed. Ronald Sparrow, a fisherman and member of the Xwméthkwiem (a.k.a. Musqueam or x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm) First Nation, was caught (in 1985) using a drift net larger than what was permitted under the Fisheries Act. Sparrow challenged the charge itself, claiming that Section 35(1) exempted Indigenous fishers from federal and provincial regulations. The case made its way to the Supreme Court of Canada, where *Regina v Sparrow* produced a unanimous decision that any activity or “right” that existed prior to 1982 continued, unless it had been explicitly and specifically extinguished. This was the first significant test of constitutional Aboriginal rights and an important win for First Nations.

## 9. Constitution Act, § 35 (1982).

## Elijah Harper and Constitutional Reform



Roy Carless, "Just Say No [Elijah Harper]", 1991, serigraph on wove paper, Online MIKAN no.2910105, Library and Archives Canada, David Neel collection, 1991-344, C-138082. Copyright: David Neel. Reproduced with the permission of David Neel. Restrictions on use: nil.

The Meech Lake Accord (1987) was meant to provide an amending formula to the Constitution Act of 1982. It required approval by Ottawa and each provincial legislature. First Nations consultation, however, was meagre, and many Indigenous leaders were outraged. Elijah Harper (1949–2013), an NDP member of the Manitoba legislature, made use of legitimate procedural delays to ensure that the legislature was unable to take a vote on the Accord until the deadline for approval had passed. Harper was the first “treaty Indian” in provincial office in Manitoba, a quiet force whose determined “No” drew breathless national attention to Indigenous issues. The absence of any language addressing Indigenous needs and authority in the Accord stood in sharp relief to the “distinct society” clause for Québec. After Harper, consultation and inclusion—though still far from perfect—improved.

The 1990s were, indeed, a busy decade in the courts. *Delgamuukw v British Columbia* saw the Gitksan-Wet’suwet’en First Nations initially frustrated badly. In 1991, Chief Justice Allan McEachern declared that Aboriginal rights only existed because the settler regime said they did. MacEachern also dismissed oral histories as unreliable. In 1997, the Supreme Court of Canada declared that McEachern was wrong on both counts. As regards oral history, the Supreme Court said:

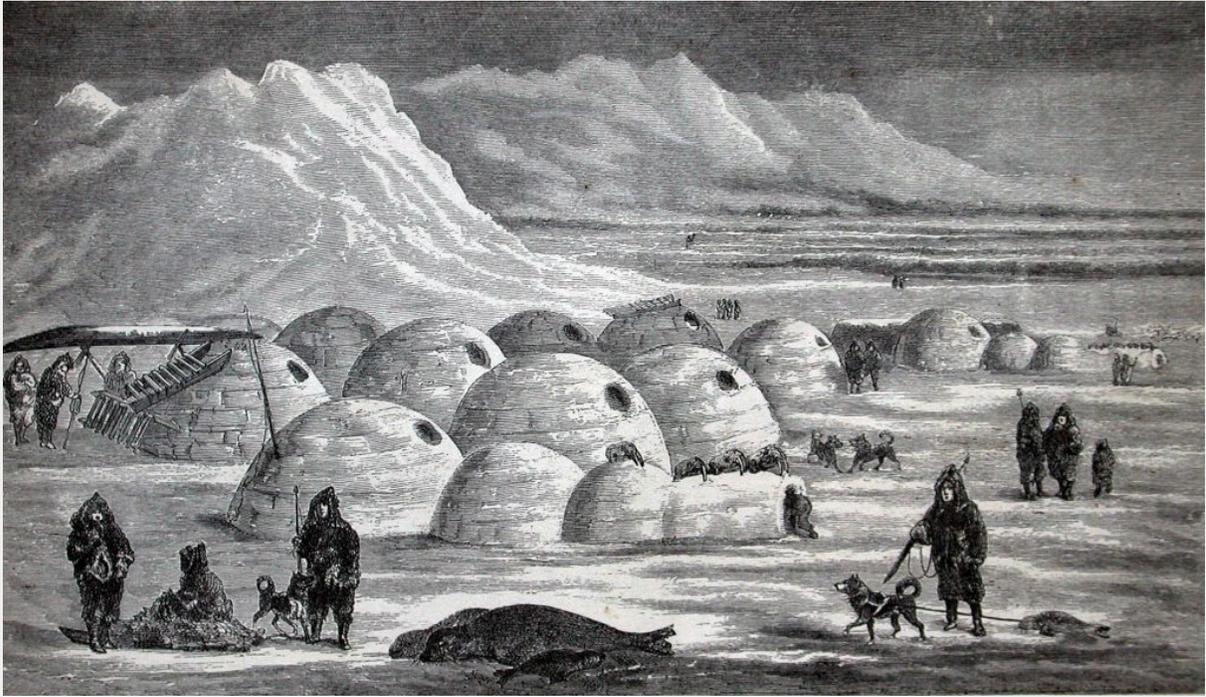
Notwithstanding the challenges created by the use of oral histories as proof of historical facts, the laws of evidence must be adapted in order that this type of evidence can be accommodated and placed on an equal footing with the types of historical evidence that courts are familiar with, which largely consists of historical documents.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, *Delgamuukw* clarified the laws on Aboriginal title. Echoing language in the Proclamation Act of 1763, the Court decided that title exists and specified the test for proving it.

The trends in *Sparrow* and *Delgamuukw* continued into the twenty-first century. *Haida Nation v British Columbia* in 2004 and *Tsilhqot’in Nation v British Columbia* in 2014 addressed the use of natural resources within unceded traditional territories. *Haida* took forty years to come to a conclusion—in the BC Court of Appeals this time—and *Tsilhqot’in* required a visit to the Supreme Court of Canada. But the effects were significant: no natural resources may be harvested/extracted on traditional lands without consent of the relevant First Nation(s). *Tsilhqot’in* is significant, too, in that it acknowledged title to a specific and large land base for the first time.

The trajectories of these cases reflect the form of Canadian federalism: natural resources, except for fisheries, are a provincial responsibility. So long as provincial revenue streams rely on stumpage fees, hydroelectricity sales, and mineral royalties, there is an incentive for Victoria, Edmonton, Québec City, or St. John’s to advocate for unfettered access. By contrast, Fisheries Canada plays a role that ostensibly supports both industry and conservation. In practice, however, Fisheries Canada has met its conservation targets not by heavily regulating industrial fishing operations, but by placing restrictions on Indigenous fishing rights. Where we see a greater congruence between the interests of Ottawa and the provinces lately has been in the realm of oil pipelines: the movement of goods across provincial boundaries is a federal jurisdiction. This has pitted the oil patch (and, to some degree the National Energy Board) against the interests of several First Nations.

10. *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010 at para. 84. File No.: 23799.



*Sustained and substantial contact between European and Arctic Indigenous peoples only began fitfully in the late nineteenth century, as this image from the 1860s suggests. Despite the impacts of missionaries, residential schools, and introduced diseases, delayed contact and a limited settler incursion improved the odds of cultural resilience. This was an important factor in the emergence of Nunavut. Source: Photograph of a book illustration of an Inuit village, Oopungnewing, near Frobisher Bay on Baffin Island in the mid-19th century. Drawn by unknown artist based on sketches by C.F. Hall and photographed from the book by User:Finetooth – Arctic Researches and Life Among the Esquimaux: Being the Narrative of an Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin in the Years 1860, 1861, and 1862 by Charles Francis Hall (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1865). Copyright expired.*

## Nunavut

In the late 1970s, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami of Canada (called, at the time, the Inuit Tapirisat) and the government of Canada began negotiations over claims to the eastern third of the NWT. A separate, autonomous Inuit administrative unit—unique in the spectrum of Indigenous communities in Canada—was designed and then confirmed in a 1982 referendum. In 1992, the complex Nunavut Land Claims Agreement Act was concluded, and the new Nunavut Territory emerged. Inuktitut is the first official language of the new jurisdiction, wherein about four-in-five are Inuk.



The enormity of Nunavut and its geopolitical significance is obvious in this map. Source: Wikipedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nunavut\\_in\\_Canada.svg?uselang=fr](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nunavut_in_Canada.svg?uselang=fr) CC-BY-SA 2.5

## Extra-Legal Protests

Litigation wasn't the only route taken by Indigenous activists and leaders. Inspired by the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the African-American civil rights movement, some (typically younger) Indigenous men and women were drawn to the "Red Power" movement. Road blockades, public demonstrations, the occupation of government and agency offices, and other "direct action" tactics were deployed. Protests in the 1970s were, in some instances, effective. Dene blockades in the Northwest Territories put the proposed Mackenzie Valley Pipeline on ice, pending the findings of a Royal Commission (1974–77). The Commission chair, Justice Thomas Berger, recommended that Ottawa make extensive land settlement agreements with Indigenous peoples in the region and that there be a moratorium on the pipeline in the meantime. Anti-Québec Hydro protests in northern Québec similarly pit Indigenous peoples against major infrastructure projects. The confrontation there between Innu and Inuit on the one hand and the province of Québec on the other, however, had the added effect of hardening Indigenous feeling against the Québec separatist movement (and vice versa). Some of these sentiments could be perceived in later events at Oka.

More widely known for its distinctive cheese, the village of Oka in 1989 approved plans to expand a private golf course. The land in question had been the subject of centuries of disputes between successive colonial regimes and the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) of Kanesatake. Some of the land involved included Indigenous burial sites. A nine-hole golf course was built in 1961—in the face of Kanien'kehá:ka opposition—so Oka's efforts to double the size of the course in the late '80s was a renewal of conflict and not something new. The Kanien'kehá:ka responded to this development with a blockade and demonstration. A sympathy blockade on the Mercier Bridge into Montréal by the Kanien'kehá:ka community at Kahnawake soon appeared. A firefight at the first blockade resulted in the death of a corporal of the *Sûreté du Québec*, putting the confrontation on television screens around the world. From a core group of fewer than three dozen, the protest rapidly grew to include six hundred. The RCMP joined the *Sûreté*, as did the Canadian Armed

Forces' Royal 22nd Régiment (the "Van Doos"—a historically francophone/Québécois regiment). The standoff ran for nearly three months, with mixed results. Ottawa purchased the land in question from the developers, but the courts have steadfastly rejected Kanesatake's claims.



*Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) protestors at Kanesatake watch news of the stand-off on television. Source: Benoit Auqin, photograph, digital MIKAN Image No.: 3602901, Copyright: Library and Archives Canada / e01093457. Restrictions on use: Nil.*

The Oka Crisis served to inspire further direct action. Five years later, in the summer of 1995, Secwépemc spiritual leaders sought to hold an annual Sun Dance near Gustafsen Lake (a.k.a. Ts'Peten). As relations deteriorated between the Secwépemc and the local rancher-settler who claimed the property, Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies gathered in growing numbers, and the RCMP (replete with armoured personnel carriers, helicopters, and as many as four hundred tactical squad members) were deployed. The RCMP also engaged in a campaign of disinformation designed to limit public sympathy for the protesters. Assurances that the protesters would be allowed to leave the site unmolested were broken, and many were arrested: fifteen individuals received sentences of six months to eight years.

Concurrently, another protest was underway at Ipperwash Provincial Park at the south end of Lake Huron. There, the dispute focused on a stretch of shoreline containing an Anishinaabeg burial site that had been expropriated from reserve lands under the War Measures Act during World War II. In 1994, members of the Kettle Point band initiated a round of occupations and protests to remind authorities that this issue was still on the table. A more formal and sustained protest began in September 1995. At the outset, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) attempted to achieve a negotiated outcome so as not to repeat the mistakes of Oka, or to echo events underway in BC. This approach did not last long: riot police with shields, batons, and helmets were deployed. On 6 September, the two sides confronted one another in the park; events quickly spiralled out of control. As at Oka and Ts'Peten, there was gunfire, and Dudley George (1957–95) was struck three times by a police sniper. Attempts to get George to a hospital were blocked by the OPP,

and the man bled out. The police sniper was subsequently tried and found guilty of criminal negligence. The Ontario Provincial Government, led by Conservative Premier Mike Harris (b. 1945), was resolutely opposed to the Anishinaabe protest. Harris was quoted by his attorney-general as saying “I want the fucking Indians out of the park.”<sup>11</sup> Twenty-one years on, a deal was struck between the federal government and the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation (CKSPFN), which will lead to the eventual return of the land to the CKSPFN. The decontamination of the site and the removal of explosive ordinance advances only very slowly.<sup>12</sup>

At Burnt Church, a Mi'kmaq community at the mouth of the Miramichi River in northeastern New Brunswick, another protest led to violence that has been described as a community-wide civil war. The catalyst in this instance was the Aboriginal right to harvest reasonable quantities of lobster “out of season.” As was the case with *Sparrow*, the Mi'kmaq argued that constitutional Aboriginal rights protected their practices. Commercial lobster trappers from the settler community attacked Mi'kmaq traps and equipment, and by 2002 the Department of Fisheries had become an aggressor, attacking Mi'kmaq boats as the whole region plunged into chaos. In the end, the Mi'kmaq won their point, but at the cost of a deeply fractured community.

Forty years of active resistance and protest have shown that confrontation can sometimes get a good result. As well, blockades and occupations had the additional advantage of becoming increasingly newsworthy—precisely because they were increasingly dangerous. From Oka through Burnt Church, protests were met with expressions of settler society power in the form of police forces, military, bureaucracy, and strident public (settler) opposition. In the win-loss columns, it mostly looks like a poor strategy, but as a means of keeping Indigenous issues in the public eye, galvanizing Indigenous community support, and drawing a line in the proverbial sand, the verdict is not so conclusive.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

The issues that cried out for resolution in Indigenous communities and in the relationship between treaty peoples were (and are) many and varied. The post-WWII era witnessed an acceleration and intensification of visible conflict and negotiation, in part because the constraints placed on Indigenous protest were lifted at mid-century. It is also a consequence of accumulating grievances paired with a shrinking margin on which Indigenous communities might continue. Any loss of land, resources, or personnel at this stage can be catastrophic to peoples whose ancestral territories and means of living were substantially reduced under colonialism. Repair to the fabric of damaged communities is called for at several levels. The next chapter explores some aspects of the health crisis on reserves and in the Indigenous population generally and how it is, ultimately, a crisis of history.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

11. Sidney B. Linden, *Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry*, Vol. 1 (Ontario: Government of Ontario, 2007), 363.
12. Christina Howorun, “22 Years after Fatal Shooting of Dudley George, Ipperwash Still Doesn’t Feel Like Home,” *City News*, August 15, 2017, <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2017/08/15/exclusive-22-years-after-fatal-shooting-of-dudley-george-ipperwash-still-doesnt-feel-like-home/>.
13. Elements of this section come from John Douglas Belshaw, “Canada and the Colonized, 1970–2002,” in *Canadian History: Post Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016), section 11.10. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license, except where otherwise noted.

- Belanger, Yale D., and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, eds. *Blockades or Breakthroughs?: Aboriginal Peoples Confront the Canadian State*. Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University, 2014. See esp. pp. 3–69, 166–221, 253–382.
- Clements, Marie, dir. *The Road Forward*. 2017. Montreal: National Film Board. [https://www.nfb.ca/film/road\\_forward/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/road_forward/)
- Coates, Kenneth S. "Reclaiming History through the Courts: Aboriginal Rights, the Marshall Decision, and Maritime History." In *Roots of Entanglement: Essays in the History of Native-newcomer Relations*, edited by Myra Rutherdale, Kerry Abel, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, 313–34. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018.
- Dennis, Darrel. "ReVision Quest Looks at Oka 20 Years Later." Produced by Wabanakwut Kinew. CBC Radio, *ReVision Quest*, July 14, 2010. Podcast, mp3 audio, 28:16. [http://podcast.cbc.ca/mp3/podcasts/revisionquest\\_20120918\\_38255.mp3](http://podcast.cbc.ca/mp3/podcasts/revisionquest_20120918_38255.mp3)
- Knickerbocker, Madeline Rose, and Sarah Nickel. "Negotiating Sovereignty: Indigenous Perspectives on the Patriation of a Settler Colonial Constitution, 1975–83." *BC Studies*, 190 (2016): 67–87.
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- Maracle, Lee. *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*. Toronto: Women's Press, 2017.
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- Obomsawin, Alanis, dir. *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*. 1993. Montréal: National Film Board. [https://www.nfb.ca/film/kanehsatake\\_270\\_years\\_of\\_resistance/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/kanehsatake_270_years_of_resistance/)
- Obomsawin, Alanis, dir. *Is the Crown at War with Us?* 2002. Montréal: National Film Board. [https://www.nfb.ca/film/is\\_the\\_crown\\_at\\_war\\_with\\_us/](https://www.nfb.ca/film/is_the_crown_at_war_with_us/)

# Chapter 12: Modernity—Health and Water



*In some cases, “Indian hospitals” were dedicated to Indigenous people because that was the principal population in the area. Elsewhere, these institutions were intended to segregate Indigenous patients from non-Indigenous populations. Source: National Film Board of Canada, Still Photography Division, Camsell Indian Hospital, October 1958, Online MIKAN # 4167190, Library and Archives Canada. Public domain.*

“ . . . in medical and public health journals, doctors, nurses, and public health experts wrote about Indigenous people as ‘isolated,’ ‘primitive,’ and ‘susceptible’ and used images of ‘vast’ and ‘empty’ Indigenous territories to inspire a vision for colonial health services that would efficiently integrate Indigenous bodies into the nation through various means, including relocation, surveillance, and assimilation.”<sup>1</sup>

Contemporary Indigenous communities are currently battling the daunting legacy of a colonial agenda that sought to impose the values and practices of modernity. These included medical science, the professionalization of healthcare, twentieth-century psychology, and ideas about nutrition that incorporate a belief in supplements in lieu of better and traditional foods. Another modernist value and goal is efficiency. In the case of many Indigenous communities, this meant mandatory relocation to sites selected by settler governments in order to receive healthcare, education, and state management/regulation. Modernity also entails a firm belief in “Big Science” and an ability to construct the huge infrastructure needed to connect markets, produce energy for rapidly growing urban areas, and deliver water to fields and city-dwellers. For every hydroelectric project, however, there is a rise in mercury levels in the water; for every relocation, there is a spike in suicide rates; for every new agency placed on a First Nations reserve, there are issues of tenuous funding and unreliable staffing. Modernity is, as well, a jealous god: it has little tolerance for alternative and traditional health knowledge, little time for food security, and no patience at all for protests against “progress.”

## The Doctor Will See You Now

Relocation of Indigenous communities was an important feature of modernization, one that accelerated in the twentieth century. In 1942, for example, twenty Mi'kmaq communities were consolidated into two with an eye to making administration more efficient and assimilation easier. This took place in the face of Mi'kmaq opposition and protest; within a decade, it was clear that the Mi'kmaq at Shubenacadie and Eskasoni were inadequately housed, and the services promised by the federal government had failed to materialize. Even after the policy of centralization was abandoned, these two communities remain the largest; and, of course, services to the smaller Mi'kmaq nodes deteriorated and, in some cases, disappeared entirely. Similar relocations took place in Labrador around the same time when Davis Inlet—a community that arose to serve the late nineteenth century fur trade—was abandoned and the community removed to “New Davis Inlet.” Existing social and internal political fissures widened after the move, manifesting in violence, abuse, and a high suicide rate.<sup>2</sup> Food resources, of course, changed in each of these instances, and concentrations of population living in poor housing made it easier for tuberculosis and other diseases to spread. Alcohol abuse existed at Davis Inlet; it became an epidemic at New Davis Inlet.

Predictably, declining health conditions in one reserve community after the next created conditions that settler society mistook for Indigenous in origin. Race and health had long been bound together in Euro-Canadian thinking,

1. Mary Jane Logan McCallum, “Starvation, Experimentation, Segregation, and Trauma: Words for Reading Indigenous Health History,” *Canadian Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (March 2017): 96–113.
2. Lynne D. Fitzhugh, *The Labradorians: Voices from the Land of Cain* (St. John's, NF: Breakwater, 1999), 261–263.

at the very least from the mid-nineteenth century. Immigrant groups living in poverty—from the pre-famine Irish in cholera quarantines through Chinese immigrants huddled in Chinatowns—were understood to be the engineers of their own ill health and poverty. “Race” was to blame, not social and economic barriers. This logic was applied to Indigenous communities, households, and individuals as well. There was, of course, little to no reflection on the common causes of suffering that might be bound up with colonial and/or racist policies. The twentieth century was, therefore, ripe for a modernist critique of Indigenous practices. Residential schools presented an opportunity to impose settler ideas about the human body and health on Indigenous peoples; likewise, incarceration of Indigenous adults and youth in the penal system provided a venue for control of the whole body and mind.<sup>3</sup>

The history of Indigenous health has become an important field of study in its own right. Mary-Ellen Kelm’s *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health and Healing in British Columbia, 1900–1950* appeared in 1999; it was one of the first studies to recognize ways in which settler institutions like residential schools attempted to impose settler biological norms and practices on Indigenous physiologies. The goal of these efforts was the assimilation of Indigenous bodies as well as minds. Maureen Lux examined parallel situations on the Prairies in her 2001 book, *Medicine That Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880–1940*. (She followed this with *Separate Beds: A History of Indian Hospitals in Canada, 1920s–1980s*.) The broad arc of these and similar studies in the first two decades of the twenty-first century is traced by Mary Jane Logan McCallum in “Starvation, Experimentation, Segregation, and Trauma: Words for Reading Indigenous Health History,” as quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

Between 2012 and 2016, three studies appeared that significantly shifted the paradigm of Indigenous health studies. The first of these we have already met: James Daschuk’s *Clearing the Plains*. Part of Daschuk’s argument is that federal decisions to withhold relief for the Nêhiyawak and the Niitsitapi in the two decades after the first prairie treaties were signed led to starvation and long-term consequences of malnutrition. Ian Mosby’s 2013 article, “Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1952,” caused a ripple and then a storm as its implications became more widely understood. Briefly, highly-placed DIA officials worked alongside two leading Canadian nutrition and paediatrics researchers to conduct experiments on Indigenous children that led to serious physical suffering and even deaths. In the words of a subsequent study in *Paediatrics and Child Health*, “In these experiments, parents were not informed, nor were consents obtained. Even as children died, the experiments continued. Even after the recommendations from the Nuremberg trial [of Nazi doctors accused of wartime atrocities], these experiments continued.”<sup>4</sup> Mosby’s research caught the attention of people involved in the early stages of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process. Battles were already underway and now intensified between those who sought access to closed federal documents under Freedom of Information (FOI) and officials in Ottawa who pushed back with claims of Protection of Privacy (POP). As this was unfolding, Adele Perry’s *Aqueduct: Colonialism, Resources, and the Histories We Remember* appeared. Perry shows how settler society literally leached health out of an Anishinaabe community, Shoal Lake 40, siphoning water for the thirsty city of Winnipeg to such an extent that the Anishinaabe were left without fresh drinking water for themselves.

What sets the Daschuk, Mosby, and Perry studies apart from much of what preceded them is the question of intent on the part of settler society. One could argue that the goal of the residential school project was always making Indigenous lives *better*, if by “better” we mean more like Euro-Canadian lives. Settler values may have been given precedence based on a racist (mis)understanding of Indigenous cultures and societies, but the objective was never to ruin lives. Similarly, reserves were conceptualized at least in part as a means of protecting Indigenous communities; they might have led to impoverishment, but that was not their goal. Daschuk, by contrast, uncovered consistent and compelling

3. On this topic, see Joan Sangster, “Criminalizing the Colonized: Ontario Native Women Confront the Criminal Justice System, 1920–60,” *Canadian Historical Review* 80, no.1 (March 1999): 32–60.
4. Noni E. MacDonald, Richard Stanwick, and Andrew Lynk, “Canada’s Shameful History of Nutrition Research on Residential School Children: The Need for Strong Medical Ethics in Aboriginal Health Research,” *Paediatrics and Child Health* 19, no. 2 (February 2014): 64.

evidence of intentional deprivation that was intended to bring a population to its knees without firing a shot (at least until shots were fired in 1885 and the hangman was called in thereafter). Perry found engineers and politicians acting in ways that not only worked against the interests of Indigenous peoples, but did so with high-handed disregard for consequences. Worse, Mosby found damning evidence of experiments whose purpose was to cause pain in children. The legacy of 1885 has been the creation of an ecology suitable for the epidemic spread of tuberculosis, a disease that haunts Indigenous communities still; the legacy of Shoal Lake 40 has been generations of ill-health and isolation; the legacy of the systematic residential schools' nutritional experiments has been—among other things—diabetes, an affliction that arises in response to nutritional depletion and which can be passed from one generation to the next.

Read a very abridged version of Adele Perry's research [here](#).<sup>5</sup> Mosby's study is listed below, along with other studies pertaining to Indigenous health in a historic context.

Increasingly, historic health studies are turning to questions of food security and cultures of healthcare, both of which have been ruptured by colonialism. Millennia of Indigenous health and nutritional knowledge were actively suppressed—and ridiculed—by colonial society and scientists; the consequences have been significant. It is, indeed, a kind of double jeopardy in which settler society imposed conditions calculated (intentionally or otherwise) to cause physiological change and damage and yet, at the same time, worked actively to limit the ability of Indigenous communities to mount their own response. These studies, as McCallum observes, might best be viewed as histories of trauma. Expect to see this area of studies grow.

## Conclusion

The nation-state and modernity were forged in the same furnace. It is difficult to imagine them as separate and distinct phenomenon. Insofar, then, that the nation-state is also a colonial enterprise, colonialism takes on modernist agendas and ideals. The enthusiasm for institutions (educational or penal), standardization (of everything from machinery to understandings of the human body), and “progress” (ideological, infrastructural, and technological) can be seen across the spectrum of settler-Indigenous encounters in the last 150 years or so. Modernity, too, offers tools to Indigenous communities with which to resist colonialism. The next and final chapter explores some of these.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

Burnett, Kristin. *Taking Medicine: Women's Healing Work and Colonial Contact in Southern Alberta, 1880–1930*.

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011.

Daschuk, James W. “The Nadir of Indigenous Health, 1886–91.” In *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*, 159–80. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2013.

Drees, Laurie Meijer. *Healing Histories: Stories from Canada's Indian Hospitals*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2013.

Drees, Laurie Meijer. “The Nanaimo and Charles Camsell Indian Hospitals: First Nations' Narratives of Health Care, 1945 to 1965.” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 43, no. 85 (2010): 165–91.

Kelm, Mary-Ellen. *Colonizing Bodies: Aboriginal Health in British Columbia, 1900–50*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998.

5. Adele Perry, “The Aqueduct and Colonialism,” in John Douglas Belshaw, *Canadian History: Post Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016), section 11.9.

- Luby, Brittany. "Transforming Indigenous Foodways." *Active History*, January 28, 2014. <http://activehistory.ca/2014/01/transforming-indigenous-foodways/>
- Lux, Maureen. *Medicine That Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880–1940*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.
- Lux, Maureen. *Separate Beds: A History of Indian Hospitals in Canada, 1920s–1980s*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. (A twenty-minute podcast summary of this study may be found in an interview: Lux, Maureen. "Witness to Yesterday: The History of Indian Hospitals." By Greg Marchildon. *The Champlain Society*. Accessed October 4, 2019. <https://champlainsociety.utpjournals.press/wty-ep24-en>.)
- McCallum, Mary Jane Logan. "Starvation, Experimentation, Segregation, and Trauma: Words for Reading Indigenous Health History." *Canadian Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (March 2017): 96–113.
- McCallum, Mary Jane Logan, and Adele Perry. *Structures of Indifference: An Indigenous Life and Death in a Canadian City*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2019.
- Mosby, Ian. "Administering Colonial Science: Nutrition Research and Human Biomedical Experimentation in Aboriginal Communities and Residential Schools, 1942–1952." *Histoire sociale/Social History* 46, no.1 (2013): 145–72.
- Mosby, Ian. "Of History and Headlines: Reflections of an Accidental Public Historian." *Active History*, April 29, 2014. <http://activehistory.ca/2014/04/of-history-and-headlines-reflections-of-an-accidental-public-historian/>
- Perry, Adele. *Aqueduct: Colonialism, Resources, and the Histories We Remember*. Winnipeg: ARP, 2016.
- Tobias, John L. "Canada's Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879–1885." *Canadian Historical Review* 64, no. 4 (1983): 519–48.

# MORE LIKE A BEGINNING THAN A CONCLUSION



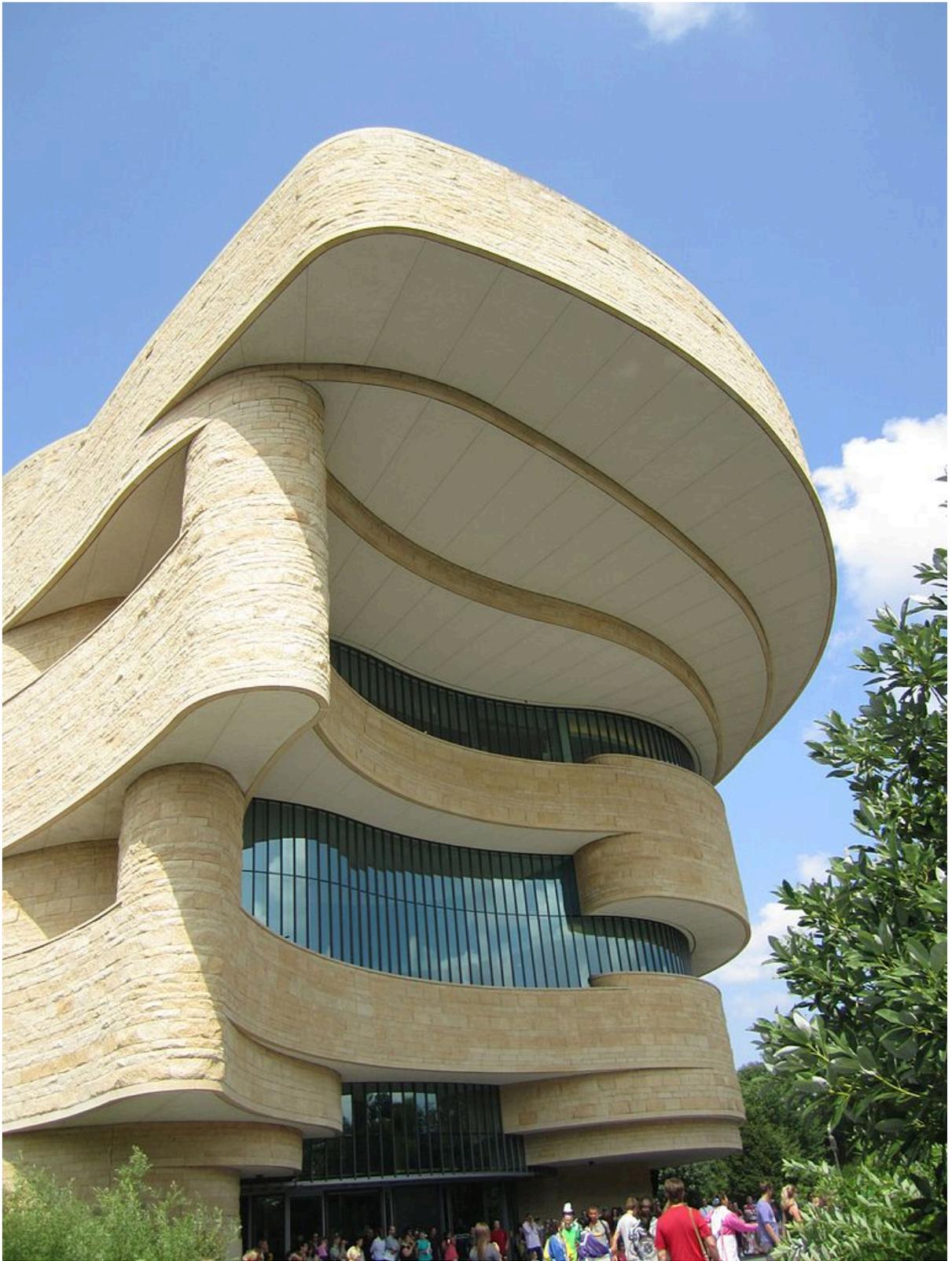
## Chapter 13: Truth and Reconciliation



*Twenty, even only ten years ago, the idea of an Inuit throat singer achieving national attention, popular airplay, and crossover performances in a variety of genres would have been unthinkable. And yet, the force of nature that is Tanya Tagaq has done just that. (CC BY 2.0) Source: Levi Manchak, Tanya Tagaq at Interstellar Rodeo, 2015, photograph, Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tanya\\_Tagaq\\_at\\_Interstellar\\_Rodeo,\\_2015.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tanya_Tagaq_at_Interstellar_Rodeo,_2015.jpg). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic license.*



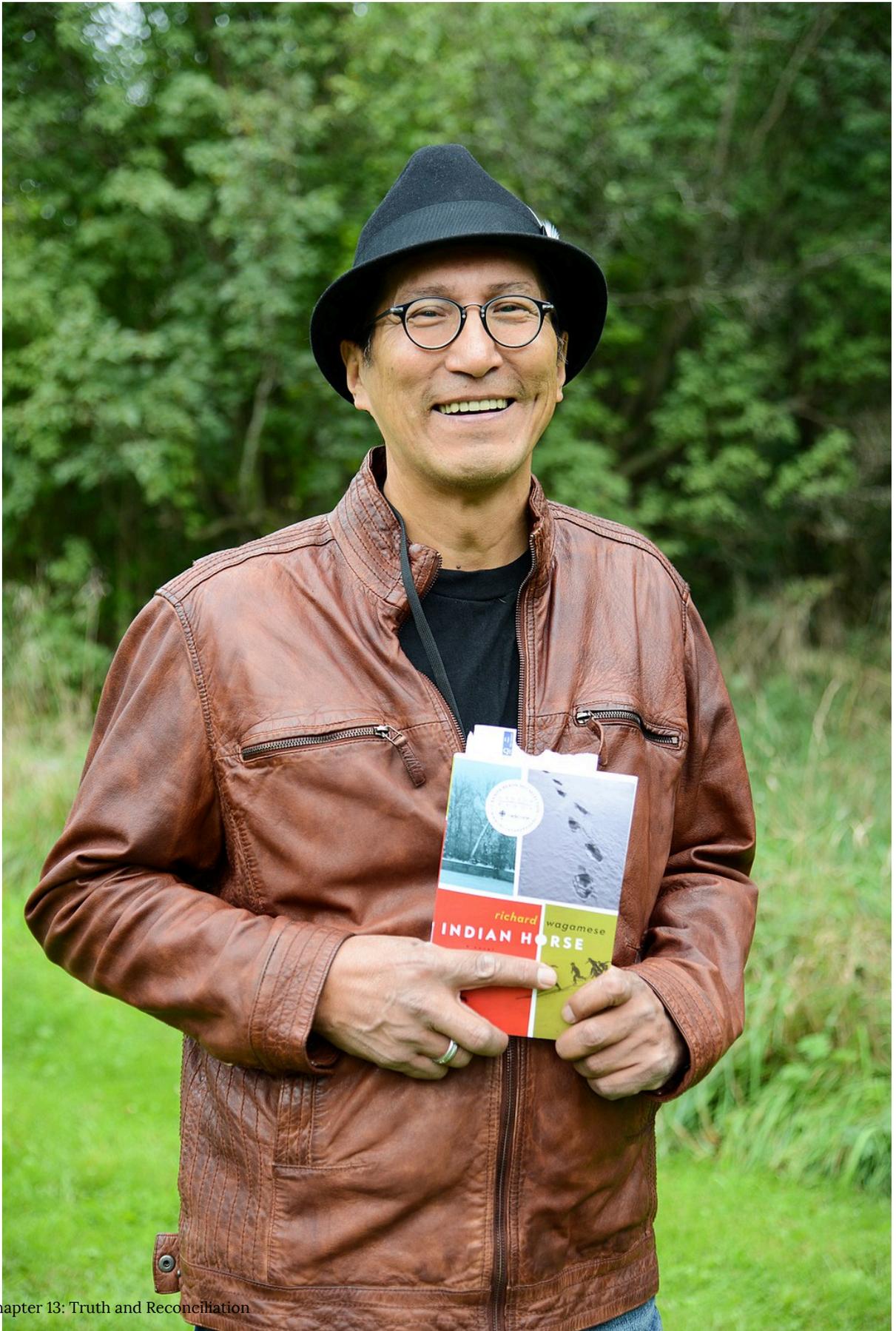
Brian Jungen (Dane-zaa and Swiss ancestry) produces startling sculptures made of “found” materials, including plastic lawn chairs, sports bags, and Nike Air Jordan sneakers. CC-BY 2.0 Source: Nevada Museum of Art, Reno, NV, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/punktoad/46048395274>



Douglas Cardinal is one of the best-known architects to emerge in Canada. Raised in Calgary and Red Deer, his ancestry includes Métis, Kainai, Algonquin, and German elements. Two of his most important and recognizable projects are the Canadian Museum of History in Ottawa and the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC (pictured above). CC-SA 3.0 Source: Photo by Grant Berg, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161021025429/http://www.panoramio.com/photo/66967089>



A Tribe Called Red consists of two core members: Tim “Zoolman” Hill of the Six Nations of the Grand River and Ehren “Bear Witness” Thomas of the Cayuga First Nation. The band launched their first album—a free internet download—in 2012, and were instantly recognized with a Polaris Award. Source: “A Tribe Called Red, playing in Vancouver’s Commodore on March 11, 2018” Wikipedia, accessed 2 January 2020, By Tim Nguyen – Sent to me personally, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=69566470>



Richard Wagamese's untimely death in 2017 robbed Indigenous literature (and literature in Canada generally) of one of its brightest and most prolific voices. Anishinaabeg and a member of the Wabaseemoong Independent Nations, Wagamese's home villages were effectively destroyed in the 1960s and '70s by mercury poisoning arising from hydro-electric projects. Addressing the legacy of residential schools, Wagamese said that the adult kin from his childhood "had suffered in an institution that tried to scrape the Indian out of their insides, and they came back to the bush raw, sore and aching." He capped a successful career in journalism with several novels, the most well known being *Indian Horse* (2012), which was made into a movie five years later, released a few months after his death. Source: "Richard Wagamese," Wikipedia, accessed December 21, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Wagamese](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Wagamese); image from Dan Harasymchuk, *Wagamese at the Eden Mills Writers' Festival, 2013*, photograph, Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Richard\\_Wagamese\\_-\\_2013\\_\(DanH-1847\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Richard_Wagamese_-_2013_(DanH-1847).jpg).

Twenty-first century Indigenous artists find ways to preserve traditional conventions while exploring new possibilities. Their successes are a reminder that the generation with which Canada must seek reconciliation is a millennial one. Consider these and other contemporary Indigenous artists/creators and the kinds of obstacles faced by their predecessors in colonial Canada. How has their indigeneity shaped them? How does their art express a reaction and resistance to colonialism?

More than a century of physical, political, and economic marginalization under colonialism impacted many aspects of Indigenous life. On the political front, these forces severely reduced the ability of Indigenous communities to collaborate as they sought redress. By the late twentieth century, however, modern communications systems—radio, television, film, and then the internet and social media—contributed to a revolution in Indigenous politics and diplomacy. The most outstanding example of that transformation was, of course, Idle No More. Mary-Ellen Kelm surveys the trail that began with apparent contrition on the part of Ottawa and led quickly to renewed frustration in Indigenous communities and then to rekindled protest.

## Idle No More ([CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/))<sup>1</sup>

Mary-Ellen Kelm, Department of History, Simon Fraser University

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper rose in Canada's House of Commons to give an official apology for residential schooling. He called the treatment of Aboriginal children in the schools "a sad chapter in our history," for which "the Government of Canada sincerely apologizes."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Harper and the

1. Mary-Ellen Kelm, "Idle No More," in John Douglas Belshaw, *Canadian History: Post Confederation* (Vancouver: BCcampus, 2016), section 11.12. Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license, except where otherwise noted.
2. Stephen Harper, "Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools," House of

other party leaders expressed palpable remorse for the past injustices of Canadian policy, and leaders representing First Nations, Métis, Inuit peoples, women, and urban Aboriginal people gravely responded to the apology from the floor of the House.

For many Canadians, this promised to be a turning point in our relations with Aboriginal peoples. Until the 1990s when stories of abuse in the schools hit the media and the courts, most Canadians had never heard of the schools. Now the Prime Minister of Canada was admitting that a government policy had been wrong and that the attitudes that inspired the policy have “no place in Canada.” More importantly, he promised a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadians, one of shared history, renewed understanding, and new respect for all cultures, traditions, and communities.

Two processes were meant to bring this new relationship about. First there was compensation for those who attended the residential schools. Second, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was tasked with documenting the full history of the schools. Restorative justice scholars gave the Harper apology high marks.<sup>3</sup>

However, the apology was not a turning point. Its major failing was that it situated all the wrongs of government policy in the past. It did not commit the Canadian Government in any concrete way to changing its actions towards First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in the present. This was a significant mistake because a changed relationship with Canada was what Aboriginal people wanted.<sup>4</sup>

By 2008, Aboriginal people in Canada had already begun to shift the conversation between themselves and Canadians in really fundamental ways. In the twentieth century, Aboriginal people demanded government recognition of their rights and title to the land. As a new generation of Aboriginal leaders arose, they increasingly sought resurgence – of their own cultures and communities – rather than recognition. They wanted a new relationship with Canada, the kind of relationship of sharing and mutual respect that their ancestors had expected when they signed treaties.

The trouble was that Aboriginal people have not shared equally in Canadian wealth. In some parts of Canada, Aboriginal people have poverty rates that are three times those of other Canadians.<sup>5</sup> Less money is spent on reserve schools and Aboriginal children are ten times more likely to end up in foster care.<sup>6</sup> So

Commons, Ottawa, June, 11, 2008, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>.

3. Sheryl Lightfoot, “Settler-State Apologies to Indigenous Peoples: A Normative Framework and Comparative Assessment,” *Journal of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* 2, no. 1 (2015): 33.
4. Beverley Jacobs, “Response to Canada’s Apology to Residential School Survivors,” *Canadian Woman Studies* 26, no. 3/4 (2008): 223.
5. Shauna MacKinnon, “The Harper ‘Apology’: Residential Schools and Bill C-10” (Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Manitoba Office, January 24, 2012); Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, [Aboriginal Children in Care: Report to Canada’s Premiers](#) (Ottawa: Council of the Federation Secretariat, 2015), 45.
6. Don Drummond and Ellen Rosenbluth, “The Debate on First Nations Education Funding: Mind the

while Mr. Harper was apologizing for the damage done to Aboriginal children and families by residential schools, the legacies of residential schooling continued unabated.<sup>7</sup>

The Cree community of Attawapiskat has become emblematic of Canada's dysfunctional relationship with Aboriginal people. An isolated community on the shores of James Bay, Attawapiskat made the news repeatedly in the early 2000s. Its only school was condemned as a health hazard, and student Shannen Koostachin took her demands for a new school to Ottawa in 2007. Four years later, Chief Theresa Spence (b. 1963) declared a state of emergency over inadequate housing. What made the situation worse was that the multinational corporation DeBeers was just 80 km away making a steady profit mining diamonds from Cree lands. The agreement DeBeers signed with Attawapiskat to share the mine's benefits did not include infrastructure, such as schools and houses, because that was, DeBeers maintained, the responsibility of the Canadian government.<sup>8</sup> On December 11, 2012, Spence announced that she would go on a hunger strike to protest unfulfilled treaties.<sup>9</sup>

When Spence announced her hunger strike, she joined an already growing wave of protest and resurgence among Aboriginal people. The protest centred on government Bill C-45, a 457-page omnibus bill that loosened legal restrictions inhibiting investment in Canadian resources. The changes that C-45 introduced to the Indian Act, for example, made it easier to lease or surrender reserve land by removing the democratic requirement for a community-wide vote. First Nations were not consulted on any of these changes. Within a month of C-45's first reading, on 10 November 2012, three Aboriginal women in Saskatoon (Sylvia McAdam, Nina Wilson, and Jessica Gordon, along with Sheelah McLean) conducted a teach-in on the bill, which they publicized under the name Idle No More.<sup>10</sup>

For the next six months, Idle No More exemplified Aboriginal resurgence. Social media was a major force in Idle No More: by May 2013, there had been over 1.2 million Twitter mentions of the #Idlenomore hashtag. The social media profile of Idle No More underscores an important feature of the movement: it was diverse and dispersed in its power and its leadership – not linked to any mainstream Aboriginal organization. Idle No More acknowledged the importance of women in Aboriginal communities, and they often took the stage at events. To honour her leadership, the movement rallied behind Chief Spence in her hunger strike.

To emphasize the social media component is, however, to miss the incredible live experience of the movement. Hundreds attended teach-ins across the country to learn more about Bill C-45, and how it violated treaty rights. Thousands marched on Parliament Hill on January 10, 2013 and participated in coordinated days of action across the country.

Gap," Working Paper, Queen's University Policy Studies (Kingston: Queen's University, December 2013); Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, *Aboriginal Children in Care*, 7.

7. Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, *Aboriginal Children in Care*, 6.
8. "Roots of Attawapiskat Crisis," Kelly Crichton, Producer, *8th Fire: Canada, Aboriginal Peoples and the Way Forward*, Documentary Series, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2012, accessed 8 December 2016, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2172306785>.
9. The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement* (Winnipeg, MB: ARP Books, 2014), 391.
10. *Ibid.*, 390.

The Harper apology in 2008 and the subsequent findings of the TRC, released in 2015, have given Canadians ample reason to reflect on their failed relationship with Aboriginal people. Yet Aboriginal people ask not that Canadians focus on the past, but on the present and the future. TRC Chair, Chief Justice Murray Sinclair, has said that Canada will fail to uphold the spirit of the 2008 apology unless it commits to involving Aboriginal people in decisions about their lands and resources.<sup>11</sup> This too was Idle No More's demand as the movement expressed renewed pride among Aboriginal peoples for their grassroots leadership and traditional methods of peaceful social change.

## Truth and Reconciliation

The recommendations of the TRC include several that are germane to the study and teaching of history. Recommendation 62 identifies the development and implementation of mandatory K-12 curriculum “on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada.”<sup>12</sup> Such a curriculum will require not only a summary of current knowledge, but also an ongoing rethinking of what it is we think we know. Historians have entered into this process with optimism and, largely, humility. In 2005, the “Make Poverty History” campaign in Britain and Canada generated a sour response from historians: history makes poverty. Context—the burden of historical events—without doubt contributes to the marginalization and incarceration of Indigenous communities and individuals but, more than that, the way in which “history” is written also has an impact. The stories we tell frame the futures we imagine. Generations of settler histories and social studies curriculum laid a foundation of blinkered colonialism and racism. A recent study of the borderlands in the Pacific Northwest in the nineteenth century show how state-making consciously makes use of erasure as a strategy for defining colonial character. Outwardly benign-looking institutions like the Oregon Historical Society took steps in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to obscure Indigenous people as they produced heroic histories of the “pioneers,” a cohort that was defined by its American roots, Protestant faith, and whiteness. Regional inhabitants of mixed ancestral descent fared even worse. School curriculum, film, and even video games continue to contribute to this process of erasure, one in which historians are implicated.<sup>13</sup>

With an eye to improving our track record, historians/historiographers like Susan Neylan have issued challenges to historical practitioners to take the settler out of the centre of Canadian history, to shake up the orthodox narrative, and to reposition the Indigenous story as something that is more than a dialectic of “natives and newcomers.”<sup>14</sup> Collaborations between Indigenous knowledge-keepers and scholarly historians are becoming both

11. APTN National News, “PM Harper Has Failed to Live up to Promise of 2008 Residential School Apology: TRC,” June, 2, 2015, <http://aptn.ca/news/2015/06/02/pm-harper-failed-live-promise-2008-residential-school-apology-trc/>.

12. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (Ottawa: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), 7.

13. Allan K. McDougall, Lisa Philips, and Daniel L. Boxberger, *Before and After the State: Politics, Poetics, and People(s) in the Pacific Northwest* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018).

14. Susan Neylan, “Colonialism and Resettling British Columbia: Canadian Aboriginal Historiography,

more common and more sophisticated. They have a high bar to meet. Some of the earliest collaborative works—including the three books that came out of the partnership between Okanagan elder Harry Robinson and UVic professor Wendy Wickwire, and *Spuzzum: Fraser Canyon Histories 1808–1939* by Annie York with Andrea Laforet—set a high standard indeed. The last decade has seen the field expand dramatically. Paige Raibmon, a historian at UBC, models what is currently regarded as best practices in her collaboration with Elsie Paul, a Sliammon Elder. The same may be said for the Kwaguł Gixsam Clan partnership with Leslie Robertson.<sup>15</sup> Many of the academics in these pairings are anthropologists first and foremost, a pedigree that may enable them to more easily shed some of the burdens of scholarly historical traditions. This is certainly the case with the work of Robin and Jillian Riddington, who have worked extensively with the Dane-Zaa First Nations.<sup>16</sup> Sophie McCall, an English professor at Simon Fraser University, has examined the structures, ethics, and challenges of this kind of collaborative project and a great many more, including movies and other media representations.<sup>17</sup> Academic historians, however, continue to have a role to play, one that is unlikely to be taken up by social scientists.

Academic historians have the capacity to situate local historical experiences within larger historical milieus. Technological, environmental, political, and economic changes in the past inform human experiences, and historical scholars are alert to changes in contexts across short, medium, and long timelines. Indigenous historians in the academy have, in some instances, done the reverse: they have located the meaning of “larger events” in Indigenous experiences. A good example of this is *The Creator’s Game*, a study of lacrosse by Allan Downey (Dakelh, Nak’azdli Whut’en, and a history professor at McMaster University). Downey shows how this ancient game was appropriated for nation-building purposes by settler society and then reclaimed by Indigenous communities who were able to use it to assert identity, resilience, and the goal of self-determination.<sup>18</sup> Studies like these continue to reorient historical thinking. The view east—and north and west and south—from Turtle Island is an increasingly common perspective among historians. These shifts will produce a changed meta-narrative, one that *reconciles* the plethora of Indigenous histories with the contradictions inherent in the invention of the colonial nation-state. That is hardly a cure-all for Indigenous histories and Canada, but it opens the possibility of a refreshed vision and new questions.

## Additional Resources

The following resources may supplement your understanding of the topics addressed in this chapter:

Downey, Allan. *The Creator’s Game: Lacrosse, Identity, and Indigenous Nationhood*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018. See esp. Prologue and chap. 5.

Downey, Allan, and Susan Neylan. “Raven Plays Ball: Situating ‘Indian Sports Days’ within Indigenous and Colonial Spaces in Twentieth-Century Coastal British Columbia.” *Canadian Journal of History* 50, no. 3 (2015): 442–68.

1992–2012” and “Unsettling British Columbia: Canadian Aboriginal Historiography, 1992–2012,” in *History Compass Journal* 11, no. 10 (Oct 2013): 833–44, 845–58.

15. Leslie Robertson with the Kwaguł Gixsam Clan, *Standing Up with Ga’axsta’las: Jane Constance Cook and the Politics of Memory, Church, and Custom* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).
16. Their most recent (and most hefty) contribution is Riddington and Riddington in collaboration with elders of the Dane-Zaa First Nations, *Where Happiness Dwells*.
17. Sophie McCall, *First Person Plural: Aboriginal Storytelling and the Ethics of Collaborative Authorship* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).
18. Allan Downey, *The Creator’s Game: Lacrosse, Identity, and Indigenous Nationhood* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018).

- Freeman, Victoria. "‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City." *Urban History Review* 38, no. 2 (2010): 21–35.
- Hammond, Joanne. "Decolonizing BC’s Roadside History." *Culturally Modified*, November 7, 2017. <https://culturallymodified.org/decolonizing-bcs-roadside-history/>
- Leddy, Lianne. "Intersections of Indigenous and Environmental History." *Canadian Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 83–95.
- Maracle, Lee. "Goodbye Snauq." *West Coast Line: A Journal of Contemporary Writing & Criticism* 42, no.2 (Summer 2008): 117–25. Reprinted in *Talking Back to the Indian Act: Critical Readings in Settler Colonial Histories*, edited by Mary-Ellen Kelm and Keith D. Smith, 188–99. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018.
- Miller, Bruce Granville. "Conceptual and Practical Boundaries: West Coast Indians/First Nations on the Border of Contagion in the Post-9/11Era." In *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-Ninth Parallel*, edited by Sterling Evans, 49–66. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006.
- Miller, J. R. "Residential Schools and Reconciliation." *Active History*. Accessed September 26, 2019. <http://activehistory.ca/papers/history-papers-13/>
- Miller, J. R. *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Native-Newcomer Relations in Canada*, 4th ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. See esp. chap. 17.
- Peers, Laura, and Robert Coutts. "Aboriginal History and Historic Sites: The Shifting Ground." In *Gathering Places: Aboriginal and Fur Trade Histories*, edited by Carolyn Podruchny and Laura Peers, 274–93. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010.
- Peters, Evelyn. "Our City Indians: Negotiating the Meaning of First Nations Urbanization in Canada." *Journal of Historical Geography* 30 (2002): 75–92.
- Stanger-Ross, Jordan. "Municipal Colonialism in Vancouver: City Planning and the Conflict over Indian Reserves, 1928–1950s." *Canadian Historical Review* 89, no. 4 (2008): 541–580.
- Vowel, Chelsea. "A Rose by Any Other Name Is a Mihkokwaniy." *âpihtawikosisân*, January 16, 2012. <http://apihtawikosisan.com/2012/01/a-rose-by-any-other-name-is-a-mihkokwaniy/>

# Glossary: Speaking the Names of Indigenous Nations

The glossary that follows is not exhaustive: it only covers Indigenous peoples whose histories are surveyed or mentioned in the text. It will, from time to time, require modification, corrections, and updating.

A'aninin (a.k.a. Atsina, Gros Ventre, Snakes)

Abenaki

Anihšínāpē (a.k.a. Nahkawiniwak, Saulteaux, Plains Ojibwa, Chippewa. See also Nawakē)

Anishinaabe (a.k.a. Ojibwa, Chippewa)

Apache (a.k.a. Indé)

Arapaho

Atsina (a.k.a. Gros Ventre, A'aninin, Snakes)

Attawandaron (a.k.a. Neutral)

Babine (a.k.a. Western Carrier. See also Wet'suwet'en)

Beothuk

Cree. Includes Assin'skowitiniwak (a.k.a. Rocky Cree), Nêhiyawak (a.k.a. Plains Cree), Maskiki Wi Iniwak, Mushkegowuk, Maskekon, and Mōsōni, (a.k.a. Swampy Cree), Nihithaw (a.k.a. Woodland Cree)

Dakelh (a.k.a. Carrier)

Dane-Zaa (a.k.a. Dunne-za, Beaver)

Dené (a.k.a. Dene, Athabaskan. Includes Denesuline, Tlich/Dogrib, T'atsaot'ine/Yellowknives, Deh Gah Got'ine/Deh Cho/Slavey, and Sahtu.

Dēnesūljīné (a.k.a. Chipewyan)

Diné (a.k.a. Navajo)

Erieehronon (Erie)

Gayogohó:no (a.k.a. Cayuga)

Gitxsan (a.k.a. Gitksan)

Gros Ventre (a.k.a. Atsina, A'aninin, Snakes)

Haida

Haudenosaunee (a.k.a., Iroquois, Five Nations, Six Nations. Comprised of Kanien'kehá:ka, Onondaga, Onyota'a:ka, Gayogohó:no and Seneca. After 1722 includes Skarù:re<sup>2</sup> as well.)

Heiltsuk (a.k.a. Bella Bella)

Innu (a.k.a. Montagnais and Naskapi, northern Québec Cree)

Inuit (a.k.a. Eskimo)

K'ómoks (a.k.a. Comox)

Káínaa (a.k.a. Bloods, Kanai)

Kanien'kehá:ka (a.k.a. Mohawk)

Ktunaxa (a.k.a. Kutenai, Kootenay)

Kwakwaka'wakw (a.k.a. Kwagiulth, Kwakiutl, Northern Kwakiutl)

Laich-kwil-tach (a.k.a. southern Kwakiutl, Ligwilda'xw, Lekwiltok)

Laurentian Iroquois (a.k.a. Hochelaga, Stadacona, and others)

Lenape (a.k.a. Delaware)

Lingít (a.k.a. Tlingit)

Mandan-Hidatsa

Mi'kmaq, (a.k.a. Micmac; singular form is Mi'kmaw.)

Mingo (Term used for the Gayogohó:no and Seneca together.)

Montagnais (a.k.a. Neenoilno, a branch of the Innu. See also Naskapi)

Mōsonī (a.k.a. Moose Cree)

Myaamiaki (Miami)  
 Nahkawiniwak (a.k.a. Anihšínāpē, Saulteaux, Plains Ojibwa, Chippewa)  
 Nakoda (a.k.a. Stoney)  
 Nakoda Oyadebi (a.k.a. Assiniboine, Nakota, Nakota Sioux)  
 Naskapi (a.k.a. Innu. See also Montagnais)  
     Nawakē (a.k.a. Saulteaux – particularly in Saskatchewan, Anihšínāpē, Plains Ojibwa, Chippewa)  
 Niitsitapi (a.k.a. Blackfoot, includes the Piikáni, Káínaa, Siksika, and the Tsuu T'ina.)  
 Nisga'a (a.k.a. Nishga)  
 Nlaka'pamux (a.k.a. Thompson)  
 Nuu-chah-nulth (a.k.a. Nootka)  
 Nuxalk (a.k.a. Bella Coola)  
 Odaawaa (a.k.a. Odawa, Ottawa)  
 Omàmiwinini (a.k.a. Algonquin)  
 Onyota'a:ka (a.k.a. Oneida)  
 Piikáni (a.k.a. Stoney, Piegan-Blackfoot)  
 Potawatomi  
 Salis (a.k.a. Flathead)  
 Secwépemc (a.k.a. Shuswap)  
 Sekani (a.k.a. Tsek'ehne)  
 Shaawanwaki (Shawnee)  
 Shoshone (a.k.a. Shoshoni)  
 Siksika (a.k.a. Siksikáwa, Blackfoot)  
 Skarù:reḡ (a.k.a. Tuscarora)  
 Skwxwú7mesh (a.k.a. Squamish)  
 Stl'atl'imx (a.k.a. St'at'imc, Lillooet)  
 Stó:lō (a.k.a. Sto:lo, Fraser River Indians, Lower Fraser Salish)  
 Syilx (a.k.a. Okanagan)  
 Tahltan (a.k.a. Nahanni)  
 Tionontati (a.k.a. Petun, Tobacco)  
 Tla-o-qui-aht (a.k.a. Clayoquot)  
     Tlingit  
 Ts'msyán (a.k.a. Tsimshian)  
 Tsétséhéstâhese (a.k.a. Cheyenne)  
 Tsilhqot'in (a.k.a. Chilcotin)  
 Tsuu T'ina (a.k.a. Sarcee)  
 Wabanaki (alliance including Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik, Abenaki, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy)  
 Wendat (a.k.a. Huron)  
 Wendat Confederacy (a.k.a. Wendake Ehen, Huron Confederacy)  
 Wenrohronon (a.k.a. Wenro)  
 Wet'suwet'en (a.k.a. Western Carrier. See also Babine.)  
 Wolastoqiyik (a.k.a. Wuastukwiuk, Malicite, Maliseet, Etchemins)  
 Xwméthkwiyeem (a.k.a. Musqueam or xʷməθkʷəy̓əm)

## Resource:

Native Land Digital. <https://native-land.ca/>

Aboriginal First Nations: Out Own Names and Our Locations. [https://ammsa.com/sites/default/files/articles/article-photos/11-sn\\_ws\\_can-givennames.jpg](https://ammsa.com/sites/default/files/articles/article-photos/11-sn_ws_can-givennames.jpg)

# About the Authors



**Dr. John Douglas Belshaw** is a settler-Canadian who currently resides and works on the traditional lands of the Coast Salish peoples (the  $x^w m\theta k^w \text{ə}y\text{əm}$ , Skwxwú7mesh, Stó:lō and Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh Nations). He has degrees in history from the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and the London School of Economics, and has been associated with Thompson Rivers University in several capacities, more or less continuously, since 1989. He is a specialist on British Columbia history, and is the author of *Colonization and Community: The Vancouver Island Coalfield and the Making of The British Columbian Working Class, 1848–1900* (2002) and *Becoming British Columbia: A Population History* (2009). He is also the co-author (with Diane Purvey) of *Private Grief, Public Mourning: The Rise of the Roadside Shrine in Rural British Columbia* (2009) and *Vancouver Noir: 1930–1960* (2011), and he is the editor of *Vancouver Confidential* (2014). He is the author, too, of the open textbooks, *Canadian History: Pre-Confederation* and *Canadian History: Post-Confederation*.



**Dr. Sarah Nickel** is a Tk'emlupsemc assistant professor of Indigenous Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. Her areas of research include comparative Indigenous histories, twentieth century Indigenous politics, gender, Indigenous feminisms, and community-engaged research. Her work has appeared in several journals, including *American Indian Quarterly* and *BC Studies*, and her first book, *Assembling Unity: Pan-Indigenous Politics, Gender, and the Union of BC*

*Indian Chiefs*, was released by UBC Press in 2019. Her latest co-edit collection *In Good Relation: History, Gender, and Kinship in Indigenous Feminisms* will be published by the University of Manitoba Press in May 2020.



**Dr. Chelsea Horton** is an historian and educator of settler heritage, with a PhD in Indigenous history from the University of British Columbia, who works at the intersection of academic and applied histories. Based in Snaw-Naw-As territory on Vancouver Island, her primary areas of practice are teaching and research related to Indigenous rights and title; Indigenous knowledge, land use, and occupancy; and settler colonial histories and their cumulative effects in Canada. Chelsea also has a longstanding interest in histories of religion and reconciliation. She is a co-editor (with Tolly Bradford) of *Mixed Blessings: Indigenous Encounters with Christianity in Canada* (2016) and a contributor to an upcoming volume on religion and irreligion in the Pacific Northwest. You can find her at [her website](#).