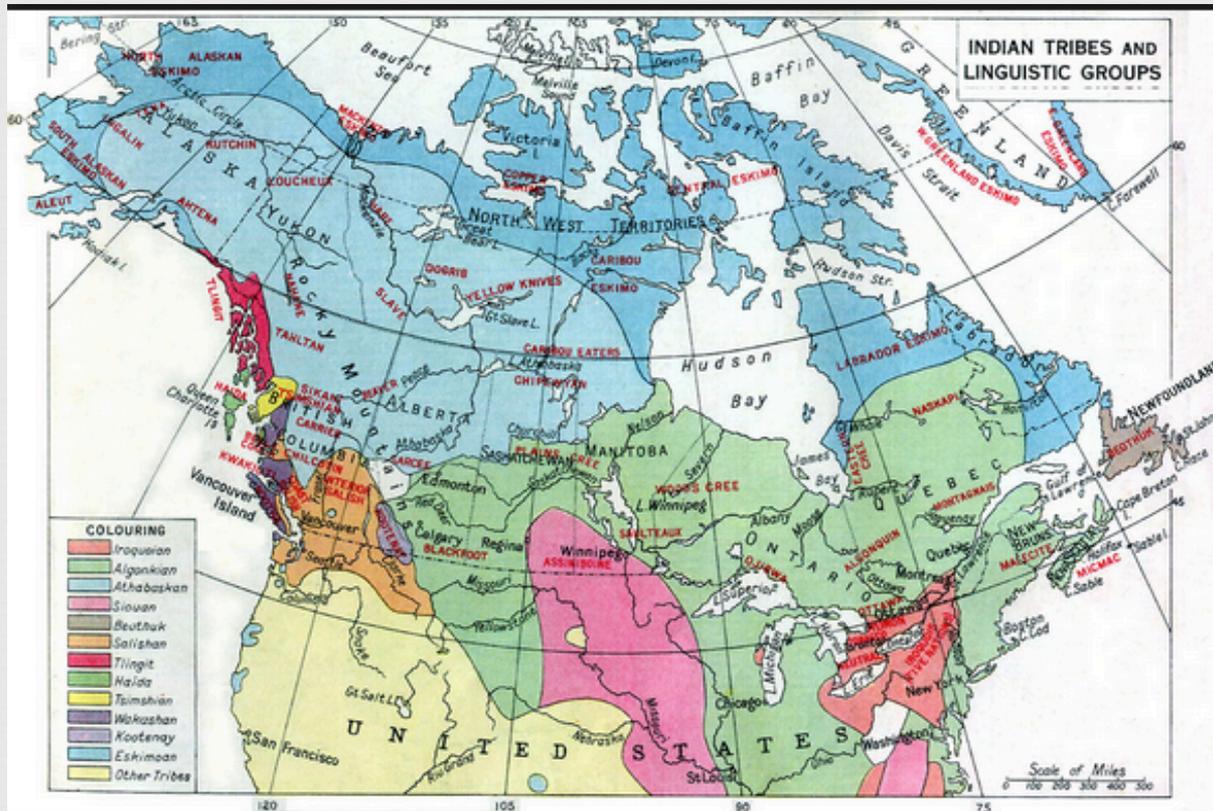


Aboriginal History in Canada 1914-2015



First Nations Groups in Canada



Terminology



- ❧ Indian – an older/outdated term for Aboriginal person
- ❧ First Nations – an Aboriginal person (usually who is recognized as having status under the Indian Act)
- ❧ Metis – an Aboriginal person with mixed First Nations and European heritage. Mostly used to refer specifically to the Metis people who formed when Cree First Nations women intermarried with Scottish, French and British fur traders in Manitoba.
- ❧ Inuit – A group of First Nations people in the far North of Canada
- ❧ Aboriginal – a general term for First Nations and Metis (status or non-status)
- ❧ Indigenous – same as Aboriginal but used more internationally (for example United Nations Declaration on Rights Of Indigenous Peoples)

Contact and Colonization

- ❧ When White people came First Nations people usually welcomed them
- ❧ First Nations people and White people were partners in the fur trade
- ❧ First Nations people would trade furs for money or manufactured goods (such as guns, pots, blankets)
- ❧ First Nations people did not know that White people would want to settle and take over their land

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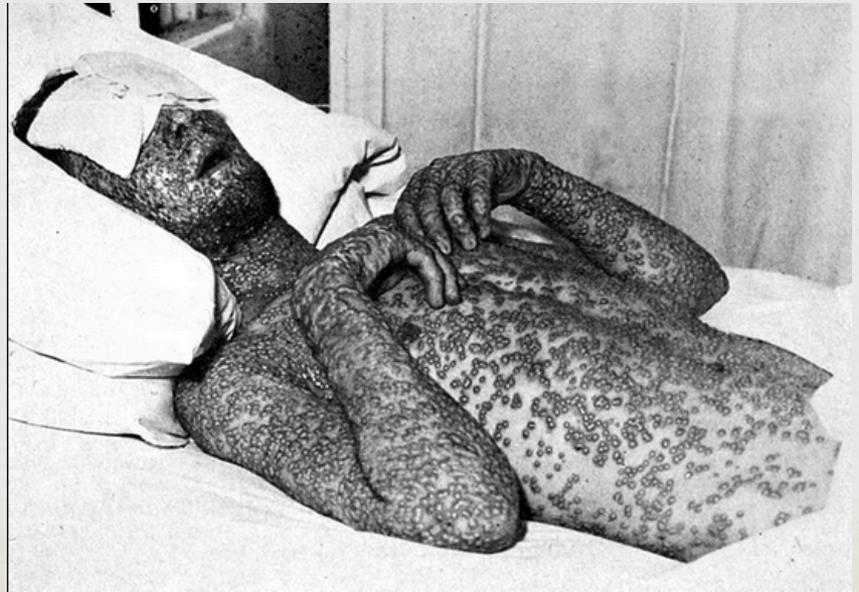
Reasons for Colonization

- ❧ White people came to Canada for three reasons:
 - ❧ God – to convert First Nations people to their religion
 - ❧ Gold – to earn money (because there were not a lot of opportunities in Europe)
 - ❧ Glory – to have a better life and gain social status and prestige

Disease



- ❧ Before contact First Nations people were much healthier, had better medicine, and lived longer than Europeans
- ❧ Europeans brought diseases that First Nations people had no immunity to
- ❧ Smallpox was the worst and sometimes killed up to 90% of a population



Cultural Misunderstandings

- ❧ When First Nations started to sign treaties with White people they often did not have the same understanding of what the treaties meant
- ❧ For White people it meant First Nations were giving up all rights to their lands forever
- ❧ For First Nations people it sometimes meant they would allow White people to use their lands but First Nations people could also continue using them at the same time

Land and Treaties (Canada)

- ❧ Treaties were used to take land away from First Nations people
- ❧ First Nations people were often sent to reserves that were too small to sustain them through traditional lifestyles (hunting, gathering, farming)
- ❧ So First Nations people had to find another way to survive (such as through trade)

Land and Treaties (Canada)

- ❧ When White people first came to Canada sometimes they signed treaties with First Nations and other times they just started living on their land without asking
- ❧ In 1763 the King of England issued the “Royal Proclamation of 1763” which said that White people must sign treaties with First Nations before settling on their land
- ❧ From that point on many treaties were signed between Eastern Canada and Alberta

Land and Treaties (BC)



- ❧ In BC things were different
- ❧ White people came to BC much later (1800s, not 1500s)
- ❧ They didn't think the laws of Canada applied to them
- ❧ At first they signed some treaties on Vancouver Island (called "Douglas Treaties" after Sir James Douglas, the first premier of BC). These treaties were not very good because First Nations people were not fairly compensated for their land.

Land and Treaties (BC)



- ❧ But after Sir James Douglas, the next Premier of BC decided not to bother with treaties.
- ❧ White people settled wherever they wanted and didn't ask.
- ❧ First Nations people were weakened by smallpox and couldn't stop the settlements, even though they tried to resist.
- ❧ That is why most land in BC is still "unceded territory" and some First Nations are still working on treaties with the government.

Reserves



- ❧ Reserves were often tiny (“postage stamps”) and White people moved them around when it was convenient for them.
- ❧ For example, First Nations in Victoria were moved from inner harbour to Esquimalt when Victoria started to grow.



Indian Act



- ❧ In 1876 Canada passed the Indian Act
- ❧ This law considered Aboriginal people “wards of the state” like children. The federal government became responsible for them like parents.
- ❧ It was a “paternalistic” approach.
- ❧ The Indian Act still governs First Nations today and makes the federal government responsible for funding and directing many First Nations activities.
- ❧ Although First Nations are starting to control more and more on their own (such as healthcare)

Indian Act



- ❧ The Indian Act controlled many aspects of First Nations people's lives. For example:
 - ❧ They had to ask permission from an Indian Agent (who worked for the federal government) to leave the reserve.
 - ❧ They had to ask permission about where they could live, where they could bury people, etc.
 - ❧ They were not allowed to drink or gamble or dance
 - ❧ They were not allowed to go to post-secondary or hire a lawyer
 - ❧ They were not allowed to borrow money from banks, own private land, or sell fish from their traditional lands – made economic development very hard

Defining “Indians”



- ❧ The Indian Act gave the federal government the right to decide who was legally “Indian”
- ❧ Status: The federal government recognizes you as a First Nations person
- ❧ Non-status: You identify as a First Nations person but the federal government doesn’t legally see you as one.

Defining “Indians”



- ❧ If a First Nations woman married a non First-Nations man, she and all her children and grandchildren would lose status
- ❧ Now they have changed that but grandchildren still didn't regain status
- ❧ If a First Nations man married a non-First Nations woman, that woman would gain status (even if she was White)
- ❧ If a First Nations person went to University they would lose status
- ❧ Some First Nations people lost status after fighting in World War One or Two

Assimilation



- ❧ One goal of the federal government was to assimilate First Nations people, meaning make them like White people and destroy First Nations culture
- ❧ White people thought First Nations culture was dying
- ❧ Saying: “Kill the Indian, save the man.”
- ❧ They passed many laws to assimilate First Nations.
- ❧ For example, First Nations people were not allowed to practice traditional ceremonies such as potlatch and sundance (although they did so in secret)

Assimilation



Potlatch Ban



- ❧ The potlatch was a very important part of First Nations governance and economies in BC.
- ❧ They continued to practice in secret and were sometimes arrested. Sometimes regalia (ceremonial dress) were stolen by the White officers.

Residential Schools



- ❧ Another assimilationist policy was residential schools.
- ❧ They opened in the 1840s in Canada and the last one closed in 1996.
- ❧ All schools were different, but all aimed to wipe out First Nations culture and replace it with White culture.



Thomas Moore before and after his entrance into the Regina Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan in 1874.

Library and Archives Canada / NL-022474

Residential Schools



- ❧ First Nations children were separated from their families (often against their will – parents would be sent to jail or fined if they didn't send their children)
- ❧ Their hair was cut and they had to wear clothes like white people
- ❧ They were not allowed to speak their language or practice their culture at all
- ❧ Some schools were abusive: living conditions were unhealthy, there was not enough food, and/or the staff physically, mentally and sexually abused children

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Impact of Residential Schools

- ❧ Children who went to these schools did not learn about living in a family or being a parent – thus they sometimes had trouble parenting when they became parents.
- ❧ They did not learn their language.
- ❧ They did not learn how to live off the land like their ancestors.
- ❧ They did not learn their culture. Sometimes they grew to hate their own culture.
- ❧ They were converted to Christianity.
- ❧ If abused they suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – sometimes alcohol was used as self-medication

National Indian Brotherhood

- ❧ In 1960s First Nations people across Canada came together to form the National Indian Brotherhood, which represented Status First Nations
- ❧ They fought for First Nations rights in Canada through government lobbying and the justice system
- ❧ Now known as the “Assembly of First Nations”

White Paper



- ❧ In 1969 the Prime Minister of Canada (Pierre Trudeau) proposed a “White Paper” which would eliminate Indian Status, reject land claims, and assimilate First Nations into Canada without considering them a distinct group.
- ❧ First Nations objected strongly.
- ❧ National Indian Brotherhood presented the “Red Paper” which argued against the White Paper.
- ❧ The White Paper was dropped.

Right to Vote



- ❧ First Nations people got the right to vote in Canada in 1960. Until then they were not allowed to vote.
- ❧ They were the last group in Canada to get the right to vote (after women and other non-White people)

Sixties Scoop



- ❧ In the 1960s, the child welfare system began removing large groups of Aboriginal children from their homes
- ❧ Because of residential schools and poverty, there was a lot of turmoil in Aboriginal communities
- ❧ Often children were removed because homes were poor or overcrowded (not because of abuse)
- ❧ Sometimes busloads of children were taken and placed with White families
- ❧ A new type of assimilation? Today there are more Aboriginal children in care than EVER went to residential schools.

Landmark Court Cases



- ❧ Calder (1973): Nisga'a Nation in BC argued that they had never given up rights to their land. Government argued that First Nations title to land no longer existed at the time the land was taken. Ruling: Nisga'a did hold title to their land when the colonial government was formed.
- ❧ Sparrow (1990): A Musqueam man was arrested for illegally fishing in his traditional territory. He argued he was exercising his Aboriginal right to fish. Court said he could not claim Aboriginal rights without a treaty. Supreme Court overturned this and said he could claim Aboriginal rights under the Constitution.

Delgamuukw



- ❧ Delgamuukw (1990): Chiefs from two First Nations in BC sued the provincial government for ownership of 57,000 square kilometers of their traditional territory.
- ❧ Supreme Court of Canada ruled that Aboriginal title had never been extinguished and also that courts needed to accept oral history as evidence.

Self-government



- ❧ First Nations wanted more control over decisions about how their traditional territories were used and how their communities were run
- ❧ Canada recognizes self-government as an Aboriginal right
- ❧ First Nations are starting to have more control over things like resource development in their territories, health care and social services, etc.

Traditional Governance



- ❧ The Indian Act changed First Nations governance
 - ❧ Previously it was often hereditary (inherited) and males or females could be leaders
 - ❧ Since Indian Act chiefs and councilors had to be elected
-
- ❧ Now some communities have both elected and hereditary leaders

Constitution Act (Section 35)

- ❧ In 1982 Canada decided to bring Constitution back from England (repatriation)
- ❧ First Nations wanted to make sure Aboriginal rights were included.
- ❧ Constitution Express: They rode a train across the country to Ottawa, visited many countries in Europe to raise awareness
- ❧ In the end Constitution included Aboriginal Rights

Section 35



- ❧ 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.

Oka Crisis (1990)



- ❧ In Montreal, a golf course wanted to expand over land that was traditional burial grounds for Mohawk people
- ❧ First Nations set up a blockade to stop the golf course from using this land
- ❧ Canada sent in police and army
- ❧ There was a standoff for over two months
- ❧ After it ended, the golf course expansion was cancelled
- ❧ Drew a lot of media attention to Aboriginal rights

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RCAP



- Partly as a result of Oka, Canada decided to investigate the situation of Aboriginal people with the “Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.”
- The RCAP demonstrated the impacts of colonization on Aboriginal people, and acknowledged that things needed to change to allow Aboriginal people to heal from colonization

Nisga'a Treaty (1996)



- ❧ Nisga'a people in northern BC had been fighting for right to negotiate treaties for over 100 years.
- ❧ Finally in 1990, the BC government agreed to negotiate treaties.
- ❧ The Nisga'a Treaty was the first one signed and gave the Nisga'a nation self-governing powers
- ❧ Many other First Nations have been working towards treaties, and a few more have been signed.
- ❧ It takes a long time and costs a lot of money

Truth and Reconciliation



- ❧ The government of Canada set up a process for healing from the experience of residential schools
- ❧ Sessions were held across the country where First Nations people spoke publically about the impact of residential schools on their lives and communities.
- ❧ The first time many of these stories had been told.
- ❧ Some money was set aside for healing programs (but this was later cancelled by the federal government).



United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples



- ❧ The United Nations has a declaration that recognizes Indigenous rights for people around the world.
- ❧ Canada refused to sign at first but then signed on in 2010 – saying it was “aspirational” rather than currently applicable.
- ❧ Rights include: land rights, culture heritage rights, equality rights, language rights, governance rights, and many more.

Métis People



- ❧ Metis people are a distinct Aboriginal group that formed when French, English and Scottish fur traders married Aboriginal women.
- ❧ They have a unique language: Michif
- ❧ They have a unique culture
- ❧ They are not usually status First Nations



Urbanization



- ❧ Since 1960 many First Nations people have moved to urban areas
- ❧ The majority of First Nations people do not live on reserve. They live in towns or cities.
- ❧ Friendship Centres were established by Aboriginal people so that they could connect with other Aboriginal people and practice their culture in urban areas, as well as get social support (education, housing, employment, youth programs, etc.)

New Bills about FN governance

- ❧ In 2014 there was a major court case in BC in which supreme Court recognized Tsilhqot'in title to their traditional lands
- ❧ States governments must try to make an agreement with First Nations about development on their land
- ❧ Another proposed federal law (2012) would allow First Nations to treat their land as private property, and lease or sell it without consent of the whole nation
- ❧ This law faced much opposition from First Nations

Ongoing today...



- ❧ The struggle over land rights, cultural identity and equality continues
- ❧ First Nations people continue to heal and recover from impacts of colonialism