

Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

Stage 1: Separate Worlds

Stage 2: Nation-to-Nation Relations

Stage 3: Respect Gives Way to Domination

Stage 4: Renewal and Renegotiation

Oka



- In 1990, armed conflict between Mohawk and non-Aboriginal forces at Kanesatake (Oka) had tarnished Canada's reputation abroad - and in the minds of many citizens.

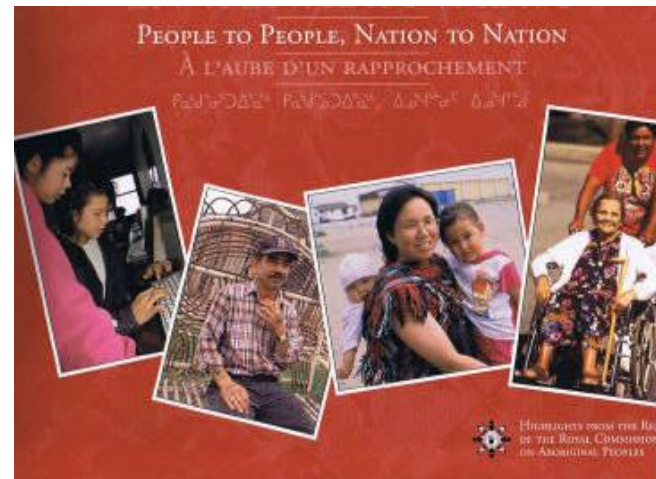
- The story of Canada is the story of many such peoples, trying and failing and trying again, to live together in peace and harmony.
 - But there cannot be peace or harmony unless there is justice.
- It was to help restore justice to the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada, and to propose practical solutions to stubborn problems, that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was established. In 1991, four Aboriginal and three non-Aboriginal commissioners were appointed to investigate the issues and advise the government on their findings.

The Reasons...

The Commission identified four compelling reasons to do this research:

1. Canada's claim to be a fair and enlightened society depends on it.
2. The life chances of Aboriginal people, which are still shamefully low, must be improved.
3. Negotiation, as conducted under the current rules, has failed to settle grievances.
4. Continued failure may lead to violence.

The Process



- They held 178 days of public hearings, visited 96 communities, consulted dozens of experts, commissioned scores of research studies, reviewed numerous past inquiries and reports. Our central conclusion can be summarized simply:

The main policy direction, pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial then by Canadian governments, has been wrong.

The Report

Through all the research, the Commission determined that you could best understand how we have come to where we are today by grouping the time frames or history into 4 main stages. This is how they organized the report.

- Stage 1: Separate Worlds
- Stage 2: Nation-to-Nation Relations
- Stage 3: Respect Gives Way to Domination
- Stage 4: Renewal and Renegotiation

Stage 1 Separate Worlds



- Pre-contact was a time when Aboriginal peoples in the Americas and European peoples lived on separate continents and knew nothing about each other.
 - The variety in languages, cultures and social traditions was enormous on both sides



Before 1500

Both societies developed along separate paths.

- There were vast differences between the Americas and Europeans, but each were independent with their own social, economic and political systems that flourished and grew

- In North America

- The plentiful resources of sea and forest enabled west coast peoples to build societies of wealth & sophistication.
- On the prairies and northern tundra, Aboriginal peoples lived in close harmony with vast, migrating herds of buffalo and caribou.
- In the forests of central Canada, Aboriginal peoples harvested wild rice from the marshes and grew corn, squash and beans beside the river banks, supplementing their crops by fishing, hunting and gathering.
- On the east coast and in the far north, the bounty of the sea and land - and their own ingenuity - enabled Aboriginal peoples to survive in harsh conditions.



Stage 2 Nation to Nation Relations



- During the early years of contact First Nations and European nations developed fragile relations of peace, friendship and rough equality. Cautious cooperation, not conflict, was the theme of the period, which lasted into the 1700s and 1800s.
 - Early contact unfolded starting with mutual curiosity and apprehension
 - An exchange of goods, tentative at first then expanding steadily
 - Barter and trade deals, friendships and intermarriage, creating bonds between individuals and families
 - Military and trade alliances, creating bonds between and among nations

For the most part, First Nations and European nations saw each other as separate, distinct and independent. Each was in charge of its own affairs. Each could negotiate their own military alliances and trade agreements. This cooperation is seen in treaties, both those in writing and those recorded by First Nations oral history and wampum belts, as well as the Royal Proclamation of 1763

Stage 3

Respect Gives Way to Domination

- In the 19th C power tilted toward the Euro Canadian peoples and their governments European settlers displaced First Nations and Métis from their lands and tried to impose European ways upon them. Euro Canadian peoples gained power during this period from four changes that were transforming the country...
 - The population mix was shifting to favour settlers. Immigration continued to add to their numbers, while disease and poverty diminished Aboriginal nations. By 1812, immigrants outnumbered Aboriginal peoples in Upper Canada by 10 to 1
 - The fur trade was dying and with it the economic partnership between traders and trappers. The new economy was based on timber, minerals and agriculture. It needed land – not labour- from Aboriginal peoples who began to be seen as impediments to progress instead of valued partners.

What is colonization?

- Colonization is the attempt to control another country and change it into a facsimile of the colonizing country.

(Kanai Board of Education Métis Nation of Alberta Northland School Division Tribal Chiefs Institute of Treaty Six, 2005 – adapted from People to People, Nation to Nation: Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, which was published in 1996).

- Colonial governments in Upper and Lower Canada no longer needed Aboriginal nations as military allies. The British had defeated all competitors north of the forty ninth parallel. South of it, the United States had fought for self government against the British and won. The continent was at peace.
- An ideology proclaiming European superiority over all other peoples on Earth was taking hold. Europeans traveled throughout the world, taking charge of colonies to add to their countries' wealth. The ideology of superiority provided a rationale for policies of domination and assimilation that slowly replaced policies of partnership in the North American colonies.

Ironically, the transformation from mutual sovereignty to domination by Euro-Canadian laws and institutions began with the documents of the era of nation to nation relations; treaties and the Royal Proclamation of 1763. These documents offered First Nations peace and friendship, respect and some degree of equality as well as some protection.

The government's policy of protection was the leading edge of domination. At first it meant preservation of lands and cultural integrity from encroaching of settlers. Later it meant assistance, which in reality meant help in assimilating into Euro Canadian settler society. Policies of protection took the form of compulsory European style education, economic adjustment programs, social and political control by federal agents and more.

Step 4 Renewal and Renegotiation

- Policies of domination and assimilation battered traditional institutions sometimes to the point of collapse. Poverty, ill health, and social disorganization grew worse.
- Resistance to assimilation went underground. In the fourth stage resistance caught fire and began to grow into a political movement. One stimulus was the federal government's *White Paper* on Indian policy, issued in 1969.
- First Nations were nearly unanimous in their rejection of proposed changes. With Inuit and Métis communities, they began to realize the full significance of their cultural survival in the face of sustained efforts to assimilate them.
 - They began to see their struggle as part of a world wide human rights movement of indigenous peoples. They began to piece together the legal case for their continuity as peoples – nations within Canada and to speak out about it.
- This is the stage of contemporary Aboriginal political, economic and social renewal in Canada.

Some Questions to Answer

- What do you think about each of these stages?
- How do you think the Métis Inuit and First Nations experiences may have differed during these different stages?
- How useful is the summary?
- Do you feel it adequately shows the changing relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians?
- Would you divide the history into different stages to represent the history in a different way?
- If so how and why would you do this?
- Research who the Royal Commission and prepare a summary that answers the questions
- Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?