



Orientation to Ontario

ANTI-INDIGENOUS RACISM

Indigenous peoples have lived in Canada for thousands of years before European settlers arrived, or as many Indigenous people believe, since time immemorial. They have rich histories, cultures and languages. The Indigenous peoples of Canada include three main groups, the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

The First Nations comprise many different communities across Canada, each with its own distinct culture, language and traditions. There are over 600 First Nations in Canada and over 70 distinct languages and dialects.

The Inuit live primarily in the northern regions of Canada, including Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Labrador and parts of Quebec. The Inuit have their own languages, such as Inuktitut, and traditional practices closely tied to their Arctic environment. Inuit is plural, while Inuk is singular.

The Métis are a post-contact Indigenous people of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry. They have their own unique culture, language and history.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF COLONIZATION

Europeans, primarily French and British, began setting up colonies in Canada in the 17th and 18th century. This marked the beginning of significant changes and challenges for Indigenous people. At first, contact between Indigenous peoples and Europeans involved trade, mutual aid and cooperation. However, as more settlers

arrived, their desire for land and dominance led to the mass displacement of Indigenous communities through a variety of efforts over time, including the creation of reserves and residential schools. Colonization involved systematically taking land and resources, often justified by a belief in European superiority. Treaties between the British and Indigenous peoples were signed, but many of these agreements were and are not honoured, resulting in the loss of traditional lands and livelihoods.

A major aspect of colonization was the forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples into European culture. In Canada, residential school system played a significant role in this process, as several generations of Indigenous children were taken from their families, typically through force or coercion, and placed in institutions designed to erase their cultural identities and languages. These institutions prohibited Indigenous children from speaking their languages or practising their traditions, leading to deep psychological trauma that continues to affect Indigenous communities today. Many children also experienced physical and sexual abuse in the residential school. Over 130 residential schools operated in Canada between 1831 and 1997.

MODERN ANTI-INDIGENOUS RACISM

The effects of colonization, oppression, and generational trauma are still present, with many Indigenous peoples facing high rates of

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poverty, health disparities and discrimination.

Historical Trauma: Many Indigenous communities suffer from the effects of colonialism, which include loss of land, language and cultural practices. The residential school system, which forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families to assimilate them into Euro-Canadian culture, has resulted in inter-generational trauma and identity loss. Many survivors of residential schools are still alive today.

Discrimination: Indigenous peoples often face discrimination in employment, education, healthcare, and the larger society. For example, Indigenous individuals may encounter stereotypes that portray them negatively, leading to biases in hiring practices or unequal treatment in schools and hospitals.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit (MMIW2S): Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately affected by violence. Reports show that Indigenous women face higher rates of homicide and missing persons cases than non-Indigenous women. It is estimated that between 1956 and 2016, around 4,000 Indigenous women and girls (as well as 600 Indigenous men and boys) have gone missing or been killed. Two-spirit Indigenous people are also subjected to this type of violence at higher rates. Cases are often overlooked or remain unsolved. This issue is often made worse by systemic racism in law enforcement and the justice system.

Incarceration of Indigenous Men: Although Indigenous people make up about 5% of Canada's population, Indigenous men represent over 30% of the prison population. This overrepresentation is due to the long-lasting effects of colonization, such as poverty, systemic discrimination and lack of access to housing, education and healthcare.

Poverty: Many Indigenous communities struggle with high rates of poverty, unemployment and poor health outcomes. These issues are often linked to a lack of access to resources, education and healthcare, stemming from historical

injustices and ongoing systemic discrimination.

Broken Treaties: Indigenous peoples often face challenges when asserting their rights over land and resources. While treaties were established to recognize Indigenous rights, many were not honoured by the government, leading to disputes and conflicts over land use and rights.

Children in Care: Indigenous people make up an estimated 5% of the total population, and Indigenous children are less than 8% of all children under 15 in Canada. However, over half of all the children in foster care are Indigenous.

KEY RESOURCES

Anti-Indigenous racism in Canada (nccih.ca)

Key Concepts in Anti-Indigenous Racism – Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Practice (torontomu.ca)

Residential School History - NCTR

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) (nativehope.org)

Our Mandate, Our Vision, Our Mission | MMIWG (mmiwg-ffada.ca)

“Overpoliced and underprotected”: UTM study finds search for missing Indigenous women hampered by police apathy | University of Toronto Mississauga (utoronto.ca)

DID YOU KNOW?

The multi-coloured striped wool point blankets sold today at The Bay originated with the Hudson's Bay Company during the fur trade of the 18th and 19th centuries. Many Indigenous peoples valued these blankets for their warmth and durability and traded for them at the company's trading posts. However, some people associate these blankets with the spread of smallpox. When European settlers first arrived in the Americas they brought with them diseases like smallpox that Indigenous peoples had never encountered before and did not have the immunities to protect against. This had catastrophic consequences, devastating Indigenous communities throughout North, Central, and South America. If blankets used by Europeans were passed on to Indigenous communities, they would spread the disease more quickly. Some historical writings suggest this may have been done deliberately in some cases. Today, these blankets and their design, which are symbolic of Canada's history, are often seen by Indigenous peoples as symbols of colonization and oppression.