

The Road to Reconciliation

Since the end of World War Two, significant changes have occurred which made people aware of the need for reconciliation between First Nations and other Canadians. Some are listed below.

1945 End of World War Two

The atrocities that were committed during World War Two forced a change in social consciousness and brought about many social and political changes around the world. Canada joined with other countries to sign The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Many people in Canada saw the disconnect between the service of Aboriginal war veterans, who had stood alongside other Canadian soldiers on the battlefields, and their treatment when they returned home, particularly the fact that they could not vote in elections. The time was ripe for changes to the Indian Act and in 1946 a Special Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons began to consider major revisions to the Indian Act.

1949 BC First Nations get the provincial vote

In 1948, the parliamentary committee recommended that Aboriginal people receive the vote, but it came with conditions contrary to the issues of Aboriginal Rights and Title. However, in 1949 British Columbia became the first province to give First Nations the vote without conditions, and without losing status. For other First Nations across Canada, the time it took to win the right to vote provincially varied considerably. The date for achieving the vote in the provinces (except for Nova Scotia and Newfoundland) were: Manitoba – 1952, Ontario – 1954, Saskatchewan – 1960, P.E.I. – 1963, New Brunswick – 1963, Alberta – 1965 and Quebec – 1969.

1951 Indian Act amendments

In the wake of the post-war social conscience and the signing of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Canada was forced to modernize the Indian Act. Generally, many of the oppressive clauses were removed. For example the definition of “person” as someone who was not an Indian was removed. The Anti-Potlatch laws were also taken out. University graduates were no longer automatically enfranchised. Bands now had more autonomy in managing the affairs of their reserves, although the Minister still had powers to intervene. Concerning education, the Act allowed the government to enter into agreements with provincial school systems for the education of First Nations children. The term “residential schools” replaced “industrial and boarding schools.”

1960 All First Nations given the vote in Canada without having to give up status

Under Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, all “status Indians” were given full citizenship with the unconditional right to vote federally as of July 1, 1960. They were no longer required to give up their treaty rights and lose their status.

1969 The federal government takes over operations of residential schools from the churches

In the 1950s and 1960s, the government shifted its policies towards integration of First Nations students into the public school system. However, the churches continued to operate the residential schools which in many cases were used as dormitories for high school students who attended local high schools. The federal government began hiring teachers directly in 1954, but the schools were still run by the churches until 1969, when the federal government took over all operations and gradually began to close the residential schools.

1972 *Indian Control of Indian Education* published

The first comprehensive policy paper on education for Aboriginal people was published by the National Indian Brotherhood. *Indian Control of Indian Education* was presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs on December 21, 1972. The policy advocated local control, parental responsibility, culturally based curriculum, and the importance of adult education. The government initially responded positively to the paper but in practice, the interpretation and implementation by the Department of Indian Affairs resulted in limited changes being made.

1982 The Constitution Act affirms rights of Aboriginal Peoples

By this act the Canadian Constitution became an act of Canadian rather than British parliament. It contains the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, as well as Section 35 which recognizes and protects Aboriginal and treaty rights. It also defines “Aboriginal Peoples of Canada” to be Indian, Inuit and Métis.

1986 United Church apologizes for imposing western civilization on First Nations people

The apology by the head of the United Church was the first public acknowledgment by a church that its policies had been misguided and damaging, saying “We imposed our civilization as a condition for accepting the gospel.” It did not directly refer to Indian Residential Schools.

1988 Publication of *Resistance and Renewal, Surviving the Indian Residential School*

This is one of the first books to bring the abuses of Indian Residential Schools into the open. It is based on interviews with thirteen survivors of the Kamloops Indian Residential School.

1990 Oka Crisis, Quebec

The Oka Crisis was a 78-day standoff between Mohawk protestors, Quebec Police, RCMP and the Canadian Arm. The dispute arose over proposed development on land that included a Mohawk burial ground. The escalating levels of armed response by government shocked many Canadians and brought public attention to many unresolved Aboriginal issues. It was a key factor that led to the creation of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People in 1991.

1994 Publication of *Breaking the Silence*

The Assembly of First Nations published *Breaking the Silence: An interpretive study of residential school impact and healing as illustrated by the stories of First Nation individuals*. This was one of the first examination of the effects of the Residential Schools on First Nations people, and was based on the stories of survivors.

1991-1998 Churches apologize for involvement in Residential Schools

During the 1990s the Roman Catholic, United, Presbyterian and Anglican issued apologies for their roles in the Indian Residential School system. This was a broad public recognition that residential school system was inherently wrong and damaging.

1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal People Final Report

Established in 1991, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People held hearings throughout Canada to gather testimony in relation to its major in-depth examination of the relationship between Aboriginal People and the rest of Canada. The final report, containing 4000 pages in 5 volumes, contains detailed analysis of the history of the relationship, and makes 440 recommendations for changes to Aboriginal Affairs.

1996 National Aboriginal Day first declared

One of the recommendations of the Royal Commission that was acted upon was the creation of a National Aboriginal Day to bring positive awareness of Aboriginal culture and successes. It is held every year on June 21, on or near the summer solstice.

1999 Nisga'a Treaty signed

This was the first modern day treaty to be signed in British Columbia, indicating a changing relationship between First Nations and other BC citizens.

2006 Indian Residential School Agreement

In the 1990s Indian Residential School survivors began to take legal action to get compensation for physical and sexual abuse they had suffered. By 1998 there were more than a thousand claims against the federal government. The number of claims continued to grow, and in 2002 a National Class Action was filed for compensation for all former Indian Residential school students in Canada, as well as their family members. As a result of further judgements by the Supreme Court going against Canada, and the overwhelming number of lawsuits seeking compensation, Canada and nearly 80,000 survivors reached an agreement, called the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, in 2005. It was ratified in 2006 and implemented in 2007. Out of this agreement came the commitment not only for individual compensation, but for the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and moneys dedicated to a healing process.

2008 Government of Canada apologizes to former residential school students

Arising out of the Indian Residential School Agreement was the desire by Aboriginal leaders and the courts for an apology by the Canadian government. The Prime Minister's statement on July 11, 2008 in the House of Commons by the Prime Minister put on record in the Canadian Parliament the governments' acknowledgement of the injustices of the Indian Residential School System.

2008 Truth and Reconciliation Commission created

Part of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement called for the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to uncover the full truth and history of the Residential School system, and moved towards a reconciliation between all Canadians. Through the Commission, the possibility of a true reconciliation and a new relationship was born.

2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report

The work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came to an end in June 2015, with the delivery of its Final Report. It included 94 recommendations in a document called *Calls to Action* which were intended to redress the legacy of Indian Residential Schools and advance the process of Reconciliation. The National Research Centre on Indian Residential Schools was established at the University of Winnipeg to house the statements, documents and other materials gathered by the Commission. They will be available to any interested person to view.