**TIMELINE OF CANADIAN COLONIALISM & INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE**

By Tim Kitz

**Look kids! Cut these timeline entries into cards, shuffle the cards, and invite your friends to put them in order! It’s decolonial fun for the whole family!**

---

**1700s**

**RESISTANCE TO SETTLEMENT**

European governments have defined the land as legally ‘empty,’ but when waves of settlers begin arriving, Indigenous communities resist the theft and destruction of their land and ways of life. European settlers and colonial governments have to contend with the active resistance of communities that undermine Indigenous nationhood and rights. The Crown and First Nations are often broken up into smaller ‘bands’ and existing leaders are not considered members. The Act defines who is ‘Indian’ without any consultation, and the Act is reformed, and some of its provisions are abandoned.

**ROYAL PROCLAMATION OF 1763**

Settlers and colonial governments have contended with the presence and resistance of First Nations on territories that they want to exploit. The British Crown releases a Proclamation acknowledging ‘Indian title’ but also creating a process by which this title can be extinguished. Earlier treaties are largely about establishing a peaceful relationship between the Crown and First Nations, one where they will share the land. The Proclamation of 1763 enforces treaties as a way for settling land battles. It outlaws Indigenous land transfers, putting a check on American settlements in particular. This enforces the American colonies and contributes to their success in 1776. The right to recognize Crown sovereignty and cede Indigenous territory is extended to the Crown – extinguishing notice-to-saction diplomacy, but mostly so the Crown can acquire First Nations land.

**1800s**

**TREATIES**

Indigenous nations continue to make treaties – some willingly, some under pressure or outright coercion – with colonial governments in order to safeguard their land and ways of life. They see the treaties as agreements to share the land that initiate mutual relationships that must be maintained and renewed, colonial governments see them as one-time transactions which must be written down. English versions of the treaties often include languages where First Nations recognize Crown sovereignty and cede Indigenous territory to the Crown, while the English versions of the treaties often include languages where First Nations recognize Crown sovereignty and cede Indigenous territory to the Crown, while the English versions of the treaties often include languages where First Nations recognize Crown sovereignty and cede Indigenous territory to the Crown. In general, treaties are promised an inalienable ‘reserve’ of their traditional lands.

In return for accepting existing white settlements, First Nations are generally promised an inalienable ‘reserve’ of their traditional lands. They are taught to live on and are told that they can continue their traditional use of the rest of their territory. Allen G. Harper, an Indian Affairs official, later describes reserves as ‘the cinders of the colonial era’, civilizing and secularizing Indigenous people, forcing them to adopt European norms. Provincial agents control band finances, direct band council meetings, and manage Indigenous economies.

**INDIAN ACT**

With Indigenous nations asserting their treaty rights and still trying to use their territories and reserves in traditional ways, colonial governments turn to assimilation as a way of eliminating their ‘Indian problem.’ In Canada, efforts to assimilate natives centre on the Indian Act. The Act defines who is ‘Indian’ without any consultation, excluding many individuals that Indigenous communities consider members. The Act states that Indigenous women who marry settlers lose their status, as well as their children. Nations are often forced to create ‘bands’ and existing leaders are not recognized. A Western electoral system is imposed on most bands, ignoring traditional selection processes and excluding Indigenous women. The overall goal is to ‘civilize’ Indigenous people by Christianizing them and forcing them into permanent agricultural settlements. They are also forced to sell land by the sale of reserve land. Processes are created for indigenous people to be estranged from Canadian citizenship and individual property owners, and for Indigenous nations to be assimilated into the bottom of the governmental order as municipalities. Estranged individuals would lose their legal status as ‘Indians,’ while municipalized communities would cease to exist as distinct nations.

Canadian politicians like John A. Macdonald assume this assimilation is inevitable and will be seen as desirable by Indigenous people, remarking that ‘the great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects.’

---

**TERRA NULLIUS & THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY**

In the 16th century, the Spanish and Portuguese gave European governments the Doctrine of Discovery and the Terra Nullius doctrine, the former of which allowed them to claim land for their own nations. These legal doctrines say that Turtle Island is ‘empty land’ that belongs to no one. According to this reasoning, Indigenous nations and peoples who are ‘aboriginal’ are simply no one’s equal partners so long as they retain their cultural identity and Indigenous status. Assimilation would also completely eliminate the governments’ ‘Indian problem’ – and this is as true today as it was for early colonial governments. But, as this timeline will show, Indigenous resistance to assimilatory efforts is almost nothing new.

---

**1900s**

**INDIGENOUS WELCOME**

Indigenous nations are generally welcoming when Europeans arrive on their territory. They trade with the change newcomers from a position of strength and prosperity, having developed local economies and systems that have grown and flourished over the course of millennia. Europeans view Indigenous lands as unoccupied and unled by a stable legal order, and many see their natural resources and ecological systems as exploitable.

**TERRA NULLIUS & THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY**

**Conflict**

In 1606, the English government formally established the government's right to the land. In 1670, the English government established the Doctrine of Discovery and the Terra Nullius doctrine, the former of which allowed them to claim land for their own nations. These legal doctrines say that Turtle Island is ‘empty land’ that belongs to no one. According to this reasoning, Indigenous nations and peoples who are ‘aboriginal’ are simply no one’s equal partners so long as they retain their cultural identity and Indigenous status. Assimilation would also completely eliminate the governments’ ‘Indian problem’ – and this is as true today as it was for early colonial governments. But, as this timeline will show, Indigenous resistance to assimilatory efforts is almost nothing new.

---

**1900s**

**INDIGENOUS WELCOME**

Indigenous nations are generally welcoming when Europeans arrive on their territory. They trade with the change newcomers from a position of strength and prosperity, having developed local economies and systems that have grown and flourished over the course of millennia. Europeans view Indigenous lands as unoccupied and unled by a stable legal order, and many see their natural resources and ecological systems as exploitable.

---

**1900s**

**LATE 1800s – EARLY 1900s**

**RESISTANCE TO CIVILIZING REPORTS**

Many elected band councils refuse to use the limited authority granted to them by the Indian Act. Almost no individuals choose to become Anglicized and most nations refuse to recognize individual deeds granted to those who do. Metis and First Nations, both under control by the Canadian government, often successfully farm programs, meant to replace Indigenous subsistence practices, are deemed a failure. Missionaries struggle to make progress and they become frustrated by the inability to halt traditional ceremonies. On the prairies, the Métis and Cree launch an armed rebellion against the policies placed on travelling off-reserve. They tend to initially hope that residential schools will help their children adjust to new realities and flourish – and in turn, help their communities do the same.

**CULTURAL REPRESSION & RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS**

Since Indigenous Peoples will not voluntarily ‘civilize’ themselves (i.e. assimilate), the Canadian government decides to force them. It bans spiritual and cultural practices. Indians Affairs and its on-reserve agents enforce tributary control over the lives of Aboriginal people, forcing them to adopt European norms. Agents control band finances, direct band council meetings, and can take the decisions made in the band as a whole to the Indian Act without permission. Individuals cannot, for example, legally write a will, sell cropland, slaughter livestock, or leave the reserve. Indigenous rights are granted the power to oversee councils and chiefs, and dispose them at will. Band council control of the disposed reserve land, their land is leased without permission, and ‘surplus’ reserve land is sold to waves of new settlers.

Most importantly, Indigenous children are taken away from their families, homes, and culture for schooling in settler culture. Attendance in residential schools is mandatory, and children are punished for speaking their languages, or engaging in spiritual and cultural practices. Conditions are deplorable: thousands die from malnutrition and disease. Death rates reach as high as 69% in some institutions. Thousands of students are physically and psychologically traumatized. Survivors return home years later to family they barely know.

With land loss and ecological destruction making most Indigenous communities destitute, they have little choice but to accept the colonial clampdown. Bands are also isolated by the fragmenting of reserves and the assimilation of students placed on travelling off-reserve. They tend to initially hope that residential schools will help their children adjust to new realities and flourish – and in turn, help their communities do the same.

**LATE 1940s – EARLY 1970s**

**INDIGENOUS ACTIVISM**

Ironically, residential schools help foster a consciousness of being ‘Indian’ rather than simply members of particular bonds with one another. In 1960, the Indian Act is revised in tandem with the formation of groups like the National Indian Brotherhood. A former residential school student leads a protest on Parliament Hill. The campaign to improve the lot of Indigenous peoples find support among settler civil society. This pressure forces the Canadian government to make improvements to the Indian Act for the first time. The Act is reformed, and some of its problems are alleviated.

**WHITE PAPER & COLONIAL MEGAPROJECTS**

Trudeau’s Liberal government introduces the ‘White Paper’ on Indian Policy in 1969. It uses a rhetoric of individual rights and the ‘surplus’ reserves sold to waves of new settlers.

---

**THE HISTORY CONTINUES ON PAGE 11.**
**1970s - 80s**

**RED POWER, PUBLIC OPINION, AND THE MORAL ORDER**

Fuelled by outrages at Liberal amorality, the Red Power movement asserts Indigenous sovereignty and calls for treaties to be honoured. Its emphasis on pride in Indigenous identity also birthed a cultural and spiritual renaissance.

Meanwhile, Indigenous resistance to National projects gains significant press coverage and public support, forcing the government to negotiate and start negotiating with the Cree, Inuit, Dené, and Métis. The Native Peoples’ Congress and the Constitution Express – both grassroots-organized cross-country tasks from B.C. to Ottawa — raise awareness about broken treaties, Indigenous grievances, and the need to recognize Indigenous rights.

Having regained access to the courts and control over band finances, Indigenous groups challenge government control of hunting, fishing, and land in the courts. Eventually the Supreme Court acknowledges the continued existence of aboriginal title, to the chagrin of Trudeau’s Liberals.

**MODERN-TIME TREATIES AND THE CANADIAN CONSTITUTION**

Trudeau’s Liberals abandon the White Paper and its assimilatory principles. While they refuse to call it a treaty, they sign the James Bay Agreement with the Cree and Inuit of Quebec, which includes a recognition of aboriginal title and self-government; while the accord is vague, it does legitimize the “aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada.” It leaves the title unresolved.

Later, bowing to the pressure from the courts, First Nations leadership, and grassroots Indigenous activists, Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, recognizes the aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada, if they existed before 1982. It also includes the recognition of Indigenous peoples’ rights to self-government.

**BUFFALO JUMP REPORT**

This leaky cabinet memo from Maclean’s, the country’s leading weekly magazine, reveals the government’s desire to shift land claims through the Indian Act’s “crown claims” process. It also reveals the government’s wish to end reserve development and significant territorial and financial settlements — but only in return for the extinguishment of aboriginal title over portions of their territories.

When the Crown fails to extinguish these claims, the land remains in reserve status and the government can claim the land is uncleared land.

**LATE 90s - 2000s**

**THE BIRTH OF NOWRAP**

Ever since opposition to the James Bay Hydro Project coalesced among the Inuit, the opposition to the Crown’s attempt to settle the area through an international tribunal in 1992, this project has become a symbol of the struggle for Indigenous rights. It was the first test of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which affirms Indigenous Peoples’ rights to self-determination and sovereignty, and to the recognition of their rights to lands, resources, and self-government.

**ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE LAND CLAIMS PROCESS**

The Crown has used the land claims process to extort concessions from Indigenous groups, including the recognition of their rights to self-government and control over their lands. This process has been characterized by a lack of transparency and accountability, and has been marred by corruption and fraud.

**COMPREHENSIVE LAND CLAIMS PROCESS**

The Comprehensive Land Claims process is a major achievement of the Indian Act. It establishes a framework for the resolution of land claims by Indigenous groups and the federal government. The process involves a series of negotiations between the government and Indigenous groups, which are intended to result in the signing of agreements that recognize the rights of Indigenous groups to their lands and resources.

**THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE (RCAP)**

In the wake of the Oka and Mohawk prototypes, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) was established in 1981. Its mandate was to investigate the social, economic, and political conditions of Indigenous peoples in Canada and to make recommendations for their betterment.

The RCAP submitted its report in 1991, which included a comprehensive set of recommendations for the betterment of Indigenous peoples. These recommendations included the recognition of Indigenous rights, the establishment of a new constitutional relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples, and the creation of new institutions to support Indigenous communities.

**SOME INSIGHTS INTO THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE (RCAP)**

The RCAP report was widely criticized for its failure to address the underlying causes of Indigenous poverty and inequality. The report was also criticized for its failure to address the pressing issues of governance, land rights, and resources.

**COMPREHENSIVE LAND CLAIMS PROCESS**

The Comprehensive Land Claims process is a major achievement of the Indian Act. It establishes a framework for the resolution of land claims by Indigenous groups and the federal government. The process involves a series of negotiations between the government and Indigenous groups, which are intended to result in the signing of agreements that recognize the rights of Indigenous groups to their lands and resources.

**THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE (RCAP)**

In the wake of the Oka and Mohawk prototypes, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) was established in 1981. Its mandate was to investigate the social, economic, and political conditions of Indigenous peoples in Canada and to make recommendations for their betterment.

The RCAP submitted its report in 1991, which included a comprehensive set of recommendations for the betterment of Indigenous peoples. These recommendations included the recognition of Indigenous rights, the establishment of a new constitutional relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples, and the creation of new institutions to support Indigenous communities.

**SOME INSIGHTS INTO THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE (RCAP)**

The RCAP report was widely criticized for its failure to address the underlying causes of Indigenous poverty and inequality. The report was also criticized for its failure to address the pressing issues of governance, land rights, and resources.

**THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE (RCAP)**

In the wake of the Oka and Mohawk prototypes, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) was established in 1981. Its mandate was to investigate the social, economic, and political conditions of Indigenous peoples in Canada and to make recommendations for their betterment.

The RCAP submitted its report in 1991, which included a comprehensive set of recommendations for the betterment of Indigenous peoples. These recommendations included the recognition of Indigenous rights, the establishment of a new constitutional relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples, and the creation of new institutions to support Indigenous communities.

**SOME INSIGHTS INTO THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE (RCAP)**

The RCAP report was widely criticized for its failure to address the underlying causes of Indigenous poverty and inequality. The report was also criticized for its failure to address the pressing issues of governance, land rights, and resources.

**THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE (RCAP)**

In the wake of the Oka and Mohawk prototypes, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) was established in 1981. Its mandate was to investigate the social, economic, and political conditions of Indigenous peoples in Canada and to make recommendations for their betterment.

The RCAP submitted its report in 1991, which included a comprehensive set of recommendations for the betterment of Indigenous peoples. These recommendations included the recognition of Indigenous rights, the establishment of a new constitutional relationship between the federal government and Indigenous peoples, and the creation of new institutions to support Indigenous communities.