

A BRIEF HISTORY OF FIRST NATIONS COLONIZATION AND IMPACTS

10 000 years ago- Aboriginal Peoples lived in BC, among them myriad bands and tribes, each with their own rich cultural and spiritual practices, and different languages. Despite a traumatic recent history, these bands and nations remain an active part of the BC landscape.

Colonization:

Mid 1700's- 1763 –	European explorers arrive and begin to establish claims King George III recognizes Aboriginal rights and title to land through the Royal Proclamation. However, the new settlers are given permission to colonize and purchase First Nations lands.
1820- 1830-	Industrial and residential school system opened and run by Christian churches Indian Reservation System created reserves set aside for “Indians” to live on. Both the residential school systems and reserve systems are created with the intention to civilize and Christianize Indians.
1867-	Indian Act is created as a policy that focuses on the assimilation of Aboriginals into society. The Enfranchisement Act of 1867 legally enables this assimilation.
1923-	Aboriginal children are legally enforced to attend residential and industrial schools. Children are forced to renounce their language, cultural practices and beliefs, and any connection to Aboriginal way of life.
1927-	Indian Act is revised to ban any Indian political organization or financing without government approval. The revision also legally bans Aboriginal spiritual and cultural ceremonies and activities.
1951-	Ban on Aboriginal ceremonies lifted
1960-	Aboriginal men can vote in federal elections
1982-	Government affirmation of Aboriginal land and treaty rights
1996-	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (examination of historical and contemporary aboriginal & European relations. Last Indian Residential School in Canada closed (in BC last one closed in 1984).

Impacts (based on the four parts of aboriginal wellness):

Physical	Reserve system created resource limitations Diseases and alcohol were introduced creating health and addiction issues Communities became childless- segregation and isolation Appearance changed (clothing, hair) Change to “nuclear” family dwellings (opposed to communal living) Rampant physical and sexual abuse in residential schools
Emotional	Traditional values changed- language changed Family disconnection Shame and guilt for being “savages” i.e. not civilized Feelings of not belonging, depression, anger Life purpose lost

Mental Approach to learning changed- residential schools
Governance structure changed (no political voice)
Traditional knowledge discouraged and devalued
Family roles changed, family history and connections lost

Spiritual Banned ceremonies, feasts, dancing
Christian beliefs and values imposed
Separation from each other and the land
Prayer became secret or Christian
Loss of traditional cultural understanding, beliefs, knowledge

Ongoing Impacts:

The residential school systems and colonization impacts can still be seen and felt today. It is estimated that as many as 100,000 Aboriginals alive today were in the residential schools. The impact has been intergenerational. The abuse that took place at the schools was routine in order to constantly reinforce their inferiority. When they returned to their families, carrying the shame, self-hatred and violence, communities were disoriented. Families no longer understood or trusted one another, and became fragmented. Survivors struggled with the impact of abuse and neglect, and consequently, some have passed on the same patterns to their own children.

As a result, First Nations communities have a higher rate of suicide (6 X higher than mainstream society), addictions, health problems, diabetes (3 X higher), unemployment, illiteracy, high school drop out (63 % do not graduate), and domestic abuse, violence and sexual abuse (3-6 X higher). While continuing to live through the impacts of trauma, Aboriginal people endure racism, external and internalized oppression, which contributes to further alienation.

Aboriginal Healing:

However, throughout this painful history, there has always been a strong Aboriginal counter movement. Through much protest and struggle, many of the bans on Aboriginal way of life has been lifted, laws have been changed, churches have offered apologies, and the Canadian government is in treaty negotiations with many First Nations. The legacy of pain and abuse is being acknowledged and many elders, activists, and members of our community are working together to heal generations of wounded Survivors. Many Aboriginal groups are reclaiming cultural and spiritual identity, and educating Non-Aboriginals on their history and experience. It is a time of change with First Nations resilience.

This information was gathered from the following websites and publications:

<http://www.wherethechildren.ca>

<http://www.irsss.ca>

"Working With First Nations Communities" Workshop Manual. Hulitan Social Services. www.hulitan.com

For further information and education please refer to the above websites, as well as the following:

<http://www.ahf.ca/>

<http://www.gov.bc.ca/arr/treaty/regional.html>

http://www.cln.org/themes/fn_history.html