



Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.
People to people, nation to nation:

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

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NOTE TO READERS

This book introduces you to some of the main themes and conclusions in the final report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. That report is a complete statement of the Commission's opinions on, and proposed solutions to, the many complex issues raised by the 16-point mandate set out by the government of Canada in August 1991.

It was not possible to include in this book the great wealth of information, analysis, proposals for action and recommendations that appear in the report. Each of its five volumes presents the Commission's thoughts and recommendations on a range of interconnected issues. Chapters are devoted to major topics such as treaties, economic development, health, housing, Métis perspectives, and the North. Volume 5 draws all the recommendations together in an integrated agenda for change. The five volumes are entitled:

1. Looking Forward, Looking Back
2. Restructuring the Relationship
3. Gathering Strength
4. Perspectives and Realities
5. Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment
6. The five chapters in this book correspond to the five volumes of the report.

A WORD FROM COMMISSIONERS

Canada is a test case for a grand notion - the notion that dissimilar peoples can share lands, resources, power and dreams while respecting and sustaining their differences. 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.

We began our work at a difficult time.

It was a time of anger and upheaval. The country's leaders were arguing about the place of Aboriginal people in the constitution. First Nations were blockading roads and rail lines in Ontario and British Columbia. Innu families were encamped in protest of military installations in Labrador. A year earlier, armed conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal forces at Kanesatake (Oka) had tarnished Canada's reputation abroad - and in the minds of many citizens. It was a time of concern and distress. Media reports had given Canadians new reasons to be disturbed about the facts of life in many Aboriginal communities: high rates of poverty, ill health, family break-down and suicide. Children and youth were most at risk. It was also a time of hope. Aboriginal people were rebuilding their ancient ties to one another and searching their cultural heritage for the roots of their identity and the inspiration to solve community problems.

We directed our consultations to one over-riding question: What are the foundations of a fair and honourable relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people of Canada?

There can be no peace or harmony unless there is justice.

We 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.

Successive governments have tried - sometimes intentionally, sometimes in ignorance - to absorb Aboriginal people into Canadian society, thus eliminating them as distinct peoples. Policies pursued over the decades have undermined - and almost erased - Aboriginal cultures and identities. This is assimilation. It is a denial of the principles of peace, harmony and justice for which this country stands - and it has failed. Aboriginal peoples remain proudly different. Assimilation policies failed because Aboriginal people have the secret of cultural survival. They have an enduring sense of themselves as peoples with a unique heritage and the right to cultural continuity. This is what drives them when they blockade roads, protest at military bases and occupy sacred grounds. This is why they resist pressure to merge into Euro-Canadian society - a form of cultural suicide urged upon them in the name of 'equality' and 'modernization'.

Assimilation policies have done great damage, leaving a legacy of brokenness affecting Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. The damage has been equally serious to the spirit of Canada - the spirit of generosity and mutual accommodation in which Canadians take pride.

Yet the damage is not beyond repair. The key is to reverse the assumptions of assimilation that still shape and constrain Aboriginal life chances - despite some worthy reforms in the administration of Aboriginal affairs.

To bring about this fundamental change, Canadians need to understand that Aboriginal peoples are nations. That is, they are political and cultural groups with values and lifeways distinct from those of other Canadians. They lived as nations - highly centralized, loosely federated, or small and clan-based - for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans. As nations, they forged trade and military alliances among themselves and with the new arrivals. To this day, Aboriginal people's sense of confidence and well-being as individuals remains tied to the strength of their nations. Only as members of restored nations can they reach their potential in the twenty-first century.

Let us be clear, however. To say that Aboriginal peoples are nations is not to say that they are nation-states seeking independence from Canada. They are collectivities with a long shared history, a right to govern themselves and, in general, a strong desire to do so in partnership with Canada.

The Commission's report is an account...

...of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that is a central facet of Canada's heritage.

...of the distortion of that relationship over time.

...of the terrible consequences of distortion for Aboriginal people - loss of lands, power and self-respect.

We hope that our report will also be a guide to the many ways Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can begin - right now - to repair the damage to the relationship and enter the next millennium on a new footing of mutual recognition and respect, sharing and responsibility.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

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LOOKING FORWARD LOOKING BACK

After some 500 years of a relationship that has swung from partnership to domination, from mutual respect and co-operation to paternalism and attempted assimilation, Canada must now work out fair and lasting terms of coexistence with Aboriginal people.

The Starting Point

The Commission has identified four compelling reasons to do so:

- Canada's claim to be a fair and enlightened society depends on it.
- The life chances of Aboriginal people, which are still shamefully low, must be improved.
- Negotiation, as conducted under the current rules, has proved unequal to the task of settling grievances.
- Continued failure may well lead to violence.

Canada as a Fair and Enlightened Society

Canada enjoys a reputation as a special place - a place where human rights and dignity are guaranteed, where the rules of liberal democracy are respected, where diversity among peoples is celebrated. But this reputation represents, at best, a half-truth.

A careful reading of history shows that Canada was founded on a series of bargains with Aboriginal peoples - bargains this country has never fully honoured. Treaties between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal governments were agreements to share the land. They were replaced by policies intended to

...remove Aboriginal people from their homelands.

...suppress Aboriginal nations and their governments.

...undermine Aboriginal cultures.

...stifle Aboriginal identity.

It is now time to acknowledge the truth and begin to rebuild the relationship among peoples on the basis of honesty, mutual respect and fair sharing. The image of Canada in the world and at home demands no less.

The foundations of a fair and equitable relationship were laid in our early interaction.

The Life Chances of Aboriginal People

The third volume of our report, *Gathering Strength*, probes social conditions among Aboriginal people. The picture it presents is unacceptable in a country that the United Nations rates as the best place in the world to live.

Aboriginal people's living standards have improved in the past 50 years - but they do not come close to those of non-Aboriginal people:

-
- Life expectancy is lower.
- Illness is more common.
- Human problems, from family violence to alcohol abuse, are more common too.

- Fewer children graduate from high school.
- Far fewer go on to colleges and universities.
- The homes of Aboriginal people are more often flimsy, leaky and overcrowded.
- Water and sanitation systems in Aboriginal communities are more often inadequate.
- Fewer Aboriginal people have jobs.
- More spend time in jails and prisons.

Aboriginal people do not want pity or handouts. They want recognition that these problems are largely the result of loss of their lands and resources, destruction of their economies and social institutions, and denial of their nationhood.

They seek a range of remedies for these injustices, but most of all, they seek control of their lives.

Failed Negotiations

A relationship as complex as the one between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is necessarily a matter of negotiation. But the current climate of negotiation is too often rife with conflict and confrontation, accusation and anger.

Negotiators start from opposing premises. Aboriginal negotiators fight for authority and resources sufficient to rebuild their societies and exercise self-government - as a matter of right, not privilege. Non-Aboriginal negotiators strive to protect the authority and resources of Canadian governments and look on transfers to Aboriginal communities as privileges they have bestowed.

Frequent failure to come to a meeting of minds has led to bitterness and mistrust among Aboriginal people, resentment and apathy among non-Aboriginal people.

In our report, we recommend four principles for a renewed relationship - to restore a positive climate at the negotiating table - and a new political framework for negotiations. We discuss the principles at the end of this chapter and the new framework in Chapter 2.

Canada can be a diverse, exciting, productive, caring country...a country where every child has an equal opportunity to grow up full of hope and enthusiasm for the future.

*Martha Flaherty
President, Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Organization*

Risk of Violence

Aboriginal people have made it clear, in words and deeds, that they will no longer sit quietly by, waiting for their grievances to be heard and their rights restored. Despite their long history of peacefulness, some leaders fear that violence is in the wind.

What Aboriginal people need is straightforward, if not simple:

- control over their lives in place of the well-meaning but ruinous paternalism of past Canadian governments
- lands, resources and self-chosen governments with which to reconstruct social, economic and political order
- time, space and respect from Canada to heal their spirits and revitalize their cultures

We are getting sick and tired of the promises of the federal government. We are getting sick and tired of Commissions. We are getting sick and tired of being analyzed... We want to see action.

*Norman Evans
Pacific Metis Federation*

The Ghosts of History

Every Canadian will gain if we escape the impasse that breeds confrontation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people across barricades, real or symbolic. But the barricades will not fall until we understand how they were built.

Studying the past tells us who we are and where we came from. It often reveals a cache of secrets that some people are striving to keep hidden and others are striving to tell. In this case, it helps explain how the tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people came to be, and why they are so hard to resolve.

Canadians know little about the peaceful and co-operative relationship that grew up between First Peoples and the first European visitors in the early years of contact. They know even less about how it changed, over the centuries, into something less honourable. In our report, we examine that history in some detail, for its ghosts haunt us still.

The ghosts take the form of dishonoured treaties, theft of Aboriginal lands, suppression of Aboriginal cultures, abduction of Aboriginal children, impoverishment and disempowerment of Aboriginal peoples. Yet at the beginning, no one could have predicted these results, for the theme of early relations was, for the most part, co-operation.

The relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people evolved through four stages:

- There was a time when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people lived on separate continents and knew nothing of one another.
- Following the years of first contact, fragile relations of peace, friendship and rough equality were given the force of law in treaties.
- Then power tilted toward non-Aboriginal people and governments. They moved Aboriginal people off much of their land and took steps to ‘civilize’ and teach them European ways.
- Finally, we reached the present stage - a time of recovery for Aboriginal people and cultures, a time for critical review of our relationship, and a time for its renegotiation and renewal.

Stage 1:

Separate Worlds

Before 1500, Aboriginal societies in the Americas and non-Aboriginal societies in Europe developed along separate paths, in ignorance of one another. The variety in their languages, cultures and social traditions was enormous. Yet on both sides of the Atlantic, independent peoples with evolving systems of government - though smaller and simpler than the nations and governments we know today - flourished and grew.

America, separated from Europe by a wide ocean, was inhabited by a distinct people, divided into separate nations, independent of each other and the rest of the world, having institutions of

their own, and governing themselves by their own laws. It is difficult to comprehend... that the discovery of either by the other should give the discoverer rights in the country discovered which annulled the previous rights of its ancient possessors.

*Chief Justice John Marshall
United States Supreme Court
Worcester v. Georgia (1832)*

In the southeastern region of North America, the Cherokee were organized into a confederacy of some 30 cities - the greatest of which was nearly as large as imperial London when English explorers first set eyes on it. Further south, in Central and South America, Indigenous peoples had carved grand empires out of the mountains and jungles long before Cortez arrived.

The forging and maintaining of these confederacies are evidence of great political skill...

*Bruce Trigger referring to the Huron [Wendat] Confederacy in
The Children of Aataentsic*

In northern North America, Aboriginal cultures were shaped by environment and the evolution of technology:

- The plentiful resources of sea and forest enabled west coast peoples to build societies of wealth and 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.
- The Americas were not, as the Europeans told themselves when they arrived, terra nullius - empty land.

Whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to Our Interests and the Security of Our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians, with whom we are connected and who live under Our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved for them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds... Royal Proclamation of 1763

Stage 2: Nation-to-Nation Relations

Encounters between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people began to increase in number and complexity in the 1500s. Early contact unfolded roughly as follows:

- 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.

Non-Aboriginal accounts of early contact tend to emphasize the 'discovery' and 'development' of North America by explorers from Europe. But this is a one-sided view. For at least 200 years, the newcomers would not have been able to survive the rigours of the climate, succeed in their businesses (fishing, whaling, fur trading), or

dodge each other's bullets without Aboriginal help.

Cautious co-operation, not conflict, was the theme of this period, which lasted into the eighteenth or nineteenth century, depending on the region. For the most part, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people saw each other as separate, distinct and independent. Each was in charge of its own affairs. Each could negotiate its own military alliances, its own trade agreements, its own best deals with the others.

Co-operation was formalized in two important ways:

- In treaties, which were set down in writing by British, French and other European negotiators and solemnized by Aboriginal nations in oral and visual records, including wampum belts.
- In the extraordinary document known as the Royal Proclamation of 1763

Treaty Making

Treaty making among Aboriginal peoples dates back to a time long before Europeans arrived. Aboriginal nations treated among themselves to establish peace, regulate trade, share use of lands and resources, and arrange mutual defence. Through pipe smoking and other ceremonies, they gave these agreements the stature of sacred oaths.

European traditions of treaty making date to Roman times, but in the seventeenth century, they took on new importance. They became the means for the newborn states of Europe to control their bickering and warfare - indeed, to end it for long periods. Treaties were a way of recognizing each other's independence and sovereignty and a mark of mutual respect.

In the colonies that became Canada, the need for treaties was soon apparent. The land was vast, and the colonists were few in number. They feared the might of the Aboriginal nations surrounding them. Colonial powers were fighting wars for trade and dominance all over the continent. They needed alliances with Indian nations.

The British colonial government's approach to the treaties was schizophrenic. By signing, British authorities appeared to recognize the nationhood of Aboriginal peoples and their equality as nations. But they also expected First Nations to acknowledge the authority of the monarch and, increasingly, to cede large tracts of land to British control - for settlement and to protect it from seizure by other European powers or by the United States.

Over several hundred years, treaty making has been used to keep the peace and share the wealth of Canada.

The Aboriginal view of the treaties was very different. They believed what the king's men told them, that the marks scratched on parchment captured the essence of their talks. They were angered and dismayed to discover later that what had been pledged in words, leader to leader, was not recorded accurately. They accepted the monarch, but only as a kind of kin figure, a distant 'protector' who could be called on to safeguard their interests and enforce treaty agreements. They had no notion of giving up their land, a concept foreign to Aboriginal cultures.

In my language, there is no word for 'surrender'. There is no word. I cannot describe 'surrender' to you in my language, so how do you expect my people to [have] put their X on 'surrender'?

*Chief Francois Paulette
Treaty 8 Tribal Council
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories*

The Two Row Wampum, a belt commemorating a 1613 treaty between the Mohawk and the Dutch, captures the understanding of Aboriginal peoples - treaties were statements of peace, friendship, sharing or alliance, not submission or surrender:

A bed of white wampum symbolizes the purity of the agreement. There are two rows of purple, and those two rows represent the spirit of our ancestors. Three beads of wampum separating the two purple rows symbolize peace, friendship and respect. The two rows of purple are two vessels travelling down the same river together. One, a birch bark canoe, is for the Indian people, their laws, their customs and their ways. The other, a ship, is for the white people and their laws, their customs and their ways. We shall each travel the river together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither of us will try to steer the other's vessel.

The Royal Proclamation

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 was a defining document in the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in North America. Issued in the name of the king, the proclamation summarized the rules that were to govern British dealings with Aboriginal people - especially in relation to the key question of land.

It is a complex legal document, but the central messages of the proclamation are clear in its preamble. Aboriginal people were not to be "molested or disturbed" on their lands. Transactions involving Aboriginal land were to be negotiated properly between the Crown and "assemblies of Indians". Aboriginal lands were to be acquired only by fair dealing: treaty, or purchase by the Crown.

The proclamation portrays Indian nations as autonomous political entities, living under the protection of the Crown but retaining their own internal political authority. It walks a fine line between safeguarding the rights of Aboriginal peoples and establishing a process to permit British settlement. It finds a balance in an arrangement allowing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to divide and share sovereign rights to the lands that are now Canada.

More than a hundred years later, in 1867, the arrangement we know as Confederation would also allow for power sharing among diverse peoples and governments. But the first confederal bargain was with First Peoples.

Stage 3: Respect Gives Way to Domination

In the 1800s, the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people began to tilt on its foundation of rough equality. The number of settlers was swelling, and so was their power. As they dominated the land, so they came to dominate its original inhabitants. They gained power as a result of four changes that were transforming the country:

1. The population mix was shifting to favour the settlers. Immigration continued to add to their numbers, while disease and poverty continued to diminish Aboriginal nations. By 1812, immigrants outnumbered Indigenous people in Upper Canada by a factor of ten to one.
2. The fur trade was dying, and with it the old economic partnership between traders and trappers. The new economy was based on timber, minerals, agriculture. It needed land - not labour - from Aboriginal people, who began to be seen as 'impediments to progress' instead of valued partners.
3. Colonial governments in Upper and Lower Canada no longer needed Aboriginal nations as military allies. The British had defeated all competitors north of the 49th parallel. South of it, the United States had fought for self-government and won. The continent was at peace.
4. An ideology proclaiming European superiority over all other peoples of the earth was taking hold. It provided a rationale for policies of domination and assimilation, which slowly replaced partnership in the North American colonies. These policies increased in number and bitter effect on Aboriginal people over many years and several generations.

History has not been written yet from the Indian point of view.

*Violet Soosay
Montana First Nation community
Hobbema, Alberta*

Ironically, the transformation from respectful coexistence to domination by non-Aboriginal laws and institutions began with the main instruments of the partnership: the treaties and the Royal Proclamation of 1763. These documents offered Aboriginal people not only peace and friendship, respect and rough equality, but also ‘protection’.

Protection was the leading edge of domination. At first, it meant preservation of Aboriginal lands and cultural integrity from encroachment by settlers. Later, it meant ‘assistance’, a code word implying encouragement to stop being Aboriginal and merge into the settler society.

Protection took the form of compulsory education, economic adjustment programs, social and political control by federal agents, and much more. These policies, combined with missionary efforts to civilize and convert Indigenous people, tore wide holes in Aboriginal cultures, autonomy and feelings of self-worth.

*[The Indian Act] has...deprived us of our independence, our dignity,
our self-respect and our responsibility.*

*Kaherine June Delisle
Kanien'kehaka First Nation
Kahnawake, Quebec*

Policies of Domination and Assimilation

No Canadian acquainted with the policies of domination and assimilation wonders why Aboriginal people distrust the good intentions of non-Aboriginal people and their governments today.

The Doctrine of Assimilation

- Colonial and Canadian governments established ‘reserves’ of land for Aboriginal people - usually of inadequate size and resources - with or without treaty agreements. The system began in 1637, with a Jesuit settlement at Sillery in New France. Reserves were designed to protect Aboriginal people and preserve their ways, but operated instead to isolate and impoverish them.
- In 1857, the Province of Canada passed an act to “Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes”. It provided the means for Indians “of good character” (as determined by a board of non-Aboriginal examiners) to be declared, for all practical purposes, non-Indian. As non-Indians, they were invited to join Canadian society, bringing a portion of tribal land with them. Only one man, Elias Hill, a Mohawk from the Six Nations, is known to have accepted the invitation.
- By the beginning of the nineteenth century, significant numbers of Métis people were living in almost all parts of Canada. Their heritage of Aboriginal, French and British cultures, combined with their experience as intermediaries between the factions competing for trade and territory, resulted in their emergence as distinct peoples with their own culture, institutions and lifeways.

*The promises we have to make to you are not for today only,
but for tomorrow, and not only for you but for your children*

born and unborn. And the promises we make will be carried out as long as the sun shines above and the water flows in the ocean.

*Alexander Morris, Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories
Address to the Cree and Salteaux, Fort Qu'Appelle (1874)*

But British and Canadian policy toward Métis people was dismissive. They were not 'Indians,' and they were not legitimate settlers. The usual practice was to declare them 'squatters' and edge them off the land they were farming when preferred settlers moved in.

Under Louis Riel, the Métis of the Red River Valley struggled for their own land and government. They were promised both in the Manitoba Act of 1870, but those promises were later denied. Many moved further west and north, where they again fought for land and political recognition. In the spring of 1885 their forces were crushed at Batoche by a military expedition sent by Ottawa. The people were dispersed again, and to this day, their claims for a secure land base and their own forms of government have not been settled.

*Our Indian legislation generally rests on the principle that the Aborigines are to be kept in a condition of tutelage and treated as wards or children of the state... It is clearly our wisdom and our duty, through education and other means, to prepare him for a higher civilization by encouraging him to assume the privileges and responsibilities of full citizenship.
Annual Report of the Department of the Interior (1876)*

- Confederation, declared in 1867, was a new partnership between English and French colonists to manage lands and resources north of the 49th parallel. It was negotiated without reference to Aboriginal nations, the first partners of both the French and the English. Indeed, newly elected Prime Minister John A. Macdonald announced that it would be his government's goal to "do away with the tribal system, and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion."
- The British North America Act, young Canada's new constitution, made "Indians, and Lands reserved for the Indians" a subject for government regulation, like mines or roads. Parliament took on the job with vigour - passing laws to replace traditional Aboriginal governments with band councils with insignificant powers, taking control of valuable resources located on reserves, taking charge of reserve finances, imposing an unfamiliar system of land tenure, and applying non-Aboriginal concepts of marriage and parenting.

These laws, and others, were codified in the Indian Acts of 1876, 1880, 1884 and later. The Department of the Interior (later, Indian Affairs) sent Indian agents to every region to see that the laws were obeyed.

- In 1884, the potlatch ceremony, central to the cultures of west coast Aboriginal nations, was outlawed. In 1885, the sun dance, central to the cultures of prairie Aboriginal nations, was outlawed. Participation was a criminal offence.
- In 1885, the Department of Indian Affairs instituted a pass system. No outsider could come onto a reserve to do business with an Aboriginal resident without permission from the Indian agent. In many places, the directives were interpreted to mean that no Aboriginal person could leave the reserve without permission from the Indian agent. Reserves were beginning to resemble prisons.
- In 1849, the first of what would become a network of residential schools for Aboriginal children was opened in Alderville, Ontario. Church and government leaders had come to the conclusion that the problem (as they

saw it) of Aboriginal independence and 'savagery' could be solved by taking children from their families at an early age and instilling the ways of the dominant society during eight or nine years of residential schooling far from home.

Attendance was compulsory. Aboriginal languages, customs and habits of mind were suppressed. The bonds between many hundreds of Aboriginal children and their families and nations were bent and broken, with disastrous results.

- During this stage in the changing relationship, Canadian governments moved Aboriginal communities from one place to another at will. If Aboriginal people were thought to have too little food, they could be relocated where game was more plentiful or jobs might be found. If they were suffering from illness, they could be relocated to new communities where health services, sanitary facilities and permanent housing might be provided. If they were in the way of expanding agricultural frontiers, or in possession of land needed for settlement, they could be relocated 'for their own protection'. If their lands contained minerals to be mined, forests to be cut, or rivers to be dammed, they could be relocated 'in the national interest'.
- In each world war, more than 3,000 registered Indians and unrecorded numbers of Inuit, Métis and non-status Indian people volunteered for the Canadian Armed Forces. Their contributions of life, limb and money were appreciated at home, and most of the volunteers found acceptance on the battlefield. Hundreds lost their lives there or were wounded.

Those who survived asked for no special honours, but they expected to be treated as other war veterans were on their return to Canada. They were not. They were denied many of the benefits awarded to other vets. Land was taken from their reserves and used 'for military purposes' or awarded to non-Aboriginal veterans. Those left alive today are still seeking recognition for their part in the war effort and compensation for their later losses.

- Treaties were still the chosen means of managing the relationship. But the treaty process was increasingly strained by conflicting interpretations of their purpose.

The purpose of the treaties, in Aboriginal eyes, was to work out ways of sharing lands and resources with settlers, without any loss of their own independence. But the representatives of the Crown had come to see the treaties merely as a tool for clearing Aboriginal people off desirable land.

To induce First Nations to sign, colonial negotiators continued to assure them that treaty provisions were not simply agreed, but guaranteed to them - for as long as the sun shone and the rivers flowed.

Stage 4: Renewal and Renegotiation

Policies of domination and assimilation battered Aboriginal institutions, sometimes to the point of collapse. Poverty, ill health and social disorganization grew worse. Aboriginal people struggled for survival as individuals, their nationhood erased from the public mind and almost forgotten by themselves.

Resistance to assimilation grew weak, but it never died away. In the fourth stage of the relationship, it 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.

The fact is that when the settlers came, the Indians were there, organized in societies and occupying the land as their forefathers had done for centuries. This is what Indian title means...

*Supreme Court of Canada
Calder v. Attorney General
of British Columbia (1973)*

The White Paper proposed to abolish the Indian Act and all that remained of the special relationship between Aboriginal people and Canada - offering instead what it termed equality. First Nations were nearly unanimous in their rejection. They saw this imposed form of 'equality' as a coffin for their collective identities - the end of their existence as distinct peoples. Together with Inuit and Métis, they began realize the full significance of their survival in the face of sustained efforts to assimilate them. They began to see their struggle as part of a worldwide 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.

They studied their history and found evidence confirming that they have rights arising from the spirit and intent of their treaties and the Royal Proclamation of 1763. They took heart from decisions of Canadian courts, most since 1971, affirming their special relationship with the Crown and their unique interest in their traditional lands. They set about beginning to rebuild their communities and their nations with new-found purpose.

The relationship between the government and Aboriginals is trust-like rather than adversarial, and... contemporary recognition and affirmation of Aboriginal rights must be defined in light of this historic relationship.

*Supreme Court of Canada
R. v. Sparrow (1990)*

The strong opposition of Aboriginal people to the White Paper's invitation to join mainstream society took non-Aboriginal people by surprise. The question of who Aboriginal people are and what their place is in Canada became central to national debate.

A dozen years of intense political struggle by Aboriginal people, including appeals to the Queen and the British Parliament, produced an historic breakthrough. "Existing Aboriginal and treaty rights" were recognized in the Constitution Act, 1982.

This set the stage for profound change in the relationship among the peoples of Canada, a change that most governments have nevertheless found difficult to embrace.

The Way Forward

The policies of the past have failed to bring peace and harmony to the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. Equally, they have failed to bring contentment or prosperity to Aboriginal people.

In poll after poll, Canadians have said that they want to see justice done for Aboriginal people, but they have not known how. In the following chapters, we outline a powerful set of interlinked ideas for moving forward.

In the years since the White Paper, Canadian governments have been prodded into giving Aboriginal communities more local control. They have included more Aboriginal people in decision making and handed over bits and pieces of the administrative apparatus that continues to shape Aboriginal lives.

But governments have so far refused to recognize the continuity of Aboriginal nations and the need to permit their decolonization at last. By their actions, if not their words, governments continue to block Aboriginal

nations from assuming the broad powers of governance that would permit them to fashion their own institutions and work out their own solutions to social, economic and political problems. It is this refusal that effectively blocks the way forward.

The new partnership we envision is much more than a political or institutional one. It must be a heartfelt commitment among peoples to live together in peace, harmony and mutual support.

For this kind of commitment to emerge from the current climate of tension and distrust, it must be founded in visionary principles. It must also have practical mechanisms to resolve accumulated disputes and regulate the daily workings of the relationship.

We propose four principles as the basis for a renewed relationship: recognition, respect, sharing and responsibility

We propose four principles as the basis of a renewed relationship.

1. Recognition

The principle of mutual recognition calls on non-Aboriginal Canadians to recognize that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants and caretakers of this land and have distinctive rights and responsibilities flowing from that status. It calls on Aboriginal people to accept that non-Aboriginal people are also of this land now, by birth and by adoption, with strong ties of love and loyalty. It requires both sides to acknowledge and relate to one another as partners, respecting each other's laws and institutions and co-operating for mutual benefit.

2. Respect

The principle of respect calls on all Canadians to create a climate of positive mutual regard between and among peoples. Respect provides a bulwark against attempts by one partner to dominate or rule over another. Respect for the unique rights and status of First Peoples, and for each Aboriginal person as an individual with a valuable culture and heritage, needs to become part of Canada's national character.

3. Sharing

The principle of sharing calls for the giving and receiving of benefits in fair measure. It is the basis on which Canada was founded, for if Aboriginal peoples had been unwilling to share what they had and what they knew about the land, many of the newcomers would not have lived to prosper. The principle of sharing is central to the treaties and central to the possibility of real equality among the peoples of Canada in the future.

4. Responsibility

Responsibility is the hallmark of a mature relationship. Partners in such a relationship must be accountable for the promises they have made, accountable for behaving honourably, and accountable for the impact of their actions on the well-being of the other. Because we do and always will share the land, the best interests of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will be served if we act with the highest standards of responsibility, honesty and good faith toward one another.

The Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy have described the spirit of the relationship as they see it in the image of a silver covenant chain. "Silver is sturdy and does not easily break," they say. "It does not rust and deteriorate with time. However, it does become tarnished. So when we come together, we must polish the chain, time and again, to restore our friendship to its original brightness."

*Chief Jacob E. Thomas
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We propose that treaties be the mechanism for turning principles into practice. Over several hundred years, treaty making has been used to keep the peace and share the wealth of Canada. Existing treaties between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, however dusty from disuse, contain specific terms that even now help define the rights and responsibilities of the signatories toward one another.