

# INDIGENOUS ECONOMIC HISTORY AND RELATIONS IN CANADA

The background of the page features a stylized illustration in shades of orange and brown. In the foreground on the left, there is a large, detailed feathered headdress. In the middle ground, a long, narrow canoe is shown on a body of water, with several figures inside. In the background on the right, another figure wearing a large feathered headdress is visible, possibly on a shore or in a smaller boat. The overall style is reminiscent of traditional Indigenous art.

For thousands of years, Indigenous Peoples have lived in the land now known as Canada. Early relations between Indigenous Peoples and European (non-Indigenous) settlers were based on military and commercial alliances and included collaborative economic relationships based on early systems of trade. However, this changed dramatically over the colonial history of Canada. Following contact with European settlers, and well into today's modern social and economic environment, the effects of colonialism have had a profound impact on the participation of Indigenous Peoples within the Canadian economy.

Below is a brief timeline of milestones within the history of economic relations in Canada.

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For further learning visit the **Resources and References** sections in the *Business Reconciliation in Canada Guidebook*

## PRE-CONTACT

Long before first contact, Indigenous Peoples led dynamic and diverse economies. For thousands of years the First Peoples of Canada (Or Indigenous, Aboriginal peoples) have called the lands and waters of what it now known as Canada their home. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, Indigenous peoples of Canada had their own established societies, cultures, laws, economies and governance structures.

## COVENANT CHAIN, 1700S

Acting as a symbolic agreement between First Peoples (“Indigenous Peoples”) of Western Canada, the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe, and the “Crown” (or Government of Canada), the Covenant Chain of Silver was an extension of the great law of peace and is represented in various wampum belts. The Covenant Chain agreement represented diplomacy, good will and friendship between all parties and the white wampum shell beads symbolized sacredness and purity of treaty agreements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Nations.

*“We shall each travel the together, side by side, but in our own boat. Neither of us will steer the other’s vessel.”*

## THE INDIAN ACT, 1876

The Indian Act was established in 1876 under the “Crown” (Government of Canada), combining the laws affecting Indigenous Peoples into one document. It included general provisions to limit and control traditional ways of life, along with laws and amendments that outright excluded Indigenous people’s meaningful participation in the economy.

Examples of these laws and provisions include:

- Declaring Indigenous cultural ceremony and potlach illegal;
- Denying Indigenous Peoples the right to vote;
- Enforcing enfranchisement, or the loss of status and rights, for Indigenous Peoples who were admitted to university;
- Establishing permit system to limit and control Indigenous farmers sale of agriculture products (cattle, grain, produce, hay, etc);
- Restricting Indigenous Peoples from leaving designated reserve lands without permission from the Crown through an Indian Agent.

## TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA – BUSINESS AND RECONCILIATION CALLS TO ACTION, 2015

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was developed in 2008 to bring awareness and recognition to the dark history of colonialism in Canada. Through the voices of former students (Survivors) of the Indian residential school system (Residential Schools), the TRC commissioned a series of reports detailing the impacts of Canada’s colonial history and actionable steps toward healing for Indigenous Peoples and all Canadians through 94 *Calls to Action*.

### Call to Action 92 calls on Corporate Canada to:

*Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.*

*Ensure that Aboriginal Peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.*

*Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal Peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.*

## CONTACT AND POST-CONTACT – 1600S-1763

Upon the arrival of European settlers to the lands of Canada, pre-conquest relations began between Indigenous Peoples and Europeans and were based upon building new economic, military and political alliances.

The cornerstone of early economic relations was the fur trade, being built upon the foundations of the intrinsic network of trade, commerce and political systems Indigenous peoples long held within Canada. Indigenous Peoples participated as trappers, traders and suppliers. Indigenous participation in the fur trade continued into the modern era, although engagement declined dramatically after World War II.

## ROYAL PROCLAMATION, 1763

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 was foundational for the constitutional recognition and protection of Aboriginal rights to land and title in Canada. However, as the King claimed dominion over the region, the Crown became the “essential agent in the transfer of Indigenous lands to colonial settlers.”<sup>1</sup> Reserve lands were designated for Indigenous Peoples in exchange for the entire land of what is today called Canada.<sup>2</sup> Section 25 of the Constitution Act 1982 referenced the Royal Proclamation for formalizing the modern rights and recognitions of Aboriginal Peoples.

## THE CALDER CASE AND COMPREHENSIVE LAND CLAIMS POLICY - CALDER V. BRITISH COLUMBIA, 1973

Frank Calder, a Nisga’a Chief, asked the supreme court to recognize Nisga’a title to land. The case was dismissed on a technicality, but three of the judges recognized that the Nisga’a right to land was never surrendered by a treaty or statute. This case created precedent for later land claims legislation.

This led to the development of the *Comprehensive Land Claims Policy* and the first modern treaty, the *James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement 1975*.

## RECOGNITION OF TREATY RIGHTS AND INDIGENOUS TITLE – CONSTITUTION ACT, 1982

Treaty agreements have long been used by Indigenous Peoples to establish relationships among Indigenous nations of equity and peace. Upon the arrival of Europeans into Canada, treaties have been used as early and present-day agreements to establish the rights and responsibilities between Indigenous peoples and Governments in Canada, both Federal and Provincial.

*Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982* defines the treaty rights of Indigenous Peoples as constitutional rights and recognizes the inherent right to title of these lands for Indigenous Peoples.

There are two types of treaties with Indigenous Peoples:

- Historic treaties agreed to peace, co-existence and sharing of resources with the Crown and defined European and Indigenous rights to the land (such as the Royal Proclamation);
- Modern Treaties with the Government of Canada were enacted through Comprehensive Land Claim Agreements that were not covered by historic treaties but provided similar rights and obligations.

## “THE DUTY TO CONSULT”, 2010

Between 2004 and 2010, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in five case decisions that any time Indigenous community rights will be affected by development activities, the community must be consulted and concerns addressed. The Duty to Consult establishes that the Government of Canada has the duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous Peoples when its projects or activities may infringe on Aboriginal or treaty rights.<sup>3</sup>

## TODAY

Today, Indigenous Peoples remain the fastest growing and youngest demographic in Canada, representing rich culture, heritage, languages, and economies. There are more than 50,000 Indigenous-owned businesses located across Canada, with Indigenous peoples creating new businesses at 9 times the Canadian average. Indigenous Peoples contribute over \$30 billion annually to Canada’s GDP , with the Indigenous private economy alone contributing roughly \$12 billion annually.

To continue to foster the growth of the Indigenous economy and prosperity for all Canadians, the principles of Business Reconciliation provide an opportunity for meaningful collaboration. Business reconciliation means actively promoting equal economic opportunity for all Canadians through building respectful business partnerships and practices.

1. Anthony J. Hall, Gretchen Albers. The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Royal Proclamation of 1763”. 2015. <<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/royal-proclamation-of-1763>> retrieved June 2019.  
2. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. Royal Proclamation of 1763: Relationships, Rights and Treaties – Poster <<https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1379594359150/1379594420080>> retrieved May 2019.  
3. Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, “Government of Canada and the duty to consult,” Government of Canada, April 16, 2019, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1331832510888/1331832636303>

## BUSINESS RECONCILIATION IN CANADA

*Business Reconciliation* is the shared path towards ensuring equal economic opportunity for Indigenous Peoples and prosperity for all Canadians. Corporate Canada and the business community have a direct role to play in supporting reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples through the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRC) Call to Action # 92.

*The Business Reconciliation in Canada Guidebook* provides a starting point for your journey in fostering respectful economic partnerships and building a prosperous Canada, together.

Scan to download the full guidebook here:



## ABOUT THE CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR ABORIGINAL BUSINESS (CCAB)

The CCAB is committed to the full participation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's economy. A national, non-partisan association, CCAB offers knowledge, resources and programs to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous owned companies that foster economic opportunities for Indigenous Peoples and businesses across Canada.

For more information visit [www.ccab.com](http://www.ccab.com)