

**Historical Timeline and Contextualization of Settler Colonialism and Racialization in British
Columbia**

Created by Research Assistant Shirina Evans with the Colonial Injustices and Current Realities:
University of Victoria Research Collective

This timeline highlights the role of law in structuring dispossession and racial hierarchy in what is now Canada. Core milestones include landmark moves such as the 1763 Royal Proclamation, the *Indian Act*, immigration and franchise restrictions, property rules, and residential schooling, but also more mundane instruments such as statutes and surveys that redistributed land and authority. Further, we see from turning to the modern constitutional era of so-called Aboriginal rights and even the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that recognition of rights co-exists with persistent forms of dispossession, most notably in jurisdiction and land.

PRE-CONTACT & EARLY CONTACT (Before 1763)

- **Pre-1492** – Thriving Indigenous societies, languages, kinship systems, and economies across Turtle Island; also Indigenous cooperation, land, and resource stewardship via treaty-making
- **1541** – Although their initial settlements did not last, early French colonial expeditions bring European racial ideologies to Turtle Island shores

CONFEDERATION & TREATY ERA (1763–1927)

Constitutional Milestones & Dominion Expansion

- **1763** – *Royal Proclamation* affirms Indigenous land rights and requires treaties, but also tries to impose settler sovereignty
- **1843** – Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) establishes Fort Victoria; trades blankets and goods with local First Nations for fur and salmon
- **1846** – *Treaty of Washington (Oregon Treaty)* defines US–British boundary on the Pacific Coast
- **1849** – Britain “grants” Vancouver Island to HBC

Douglas Treaties Timeline (1850–1864)

- **1850** – Chief Factor James Douglas begins negotiating 14 land agreements with Island First Nations, providing limited compensation and recognizing village sites and fishing and hunting rights. Douglas dishonestly treats these as land surrender, not peace and friendship treaties
- **1851–1854** – Further Island treaties at Fort Rupert, Saanich Peninsula, and Fort Nanaimo

- **1855** – British authorities confirm HBC land grant to expire in 1859
- **1858** – Douglas becomes Governor of both Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia. No further treaties until 2000
- **1862** – Reports of similar treaty at Cowichan that was not officially recognized and is often absent from lists of “Douglas Treaties”
- **1864** – Douglas retires; settler memory of BC treaties fades for a century

Post-Douglas Treaty Silence (1864–1964)

- **1866** – Vancouver Island merges with Colony of British Columbia
- **1871** – BC joins Confederation with Canada, as per the *Constitution Act, 1867*, assuming jurisdiction over “Indians and lands reserved for Indians”
- **1875** – First written publication of Douglas Treaties
- **1913** – Snuneymuxw Elder Dick Whoakum testifies before McKenna/McBride Commission, disputing not just specific 1854 Nanaimo treaty terms but the Commission’s whole attempt to reduce reserve lands in BC
- **1934** – Saanich Chief David Lattass publicly disputes settler interpretation of Douglas treaties as land surrender rather than land-sharing documents
- **1964** – *R. v. White and Bob*: Canadian courts recognize Douglas agreements as legally valid

Indian Act & Colonial Control

- **1857** – *Gradual Civilization Act* introduced to assimilate Indigenous peoples
- **1876** – *Indian Act* consolidates federal control over “Indians” and reserves; subjugates reserve governance to federal authority; and promotes so-called enfranchisement as an assimilation tool
- **1880–1927** – *Indian Act* amendments further restrict culture, governance, movement, and legal advocacy, including banning potlach and other ceremonies (1884), making residential school attendance compulsory (1920), and banning First Nations from hiring lawyers or fundraising for land-claim purposes (1927)

Legal Reaffirmation of Douglas Treaties

- **1984** – *R. v. Bartleman* affirms right to hunt over traditional territories

- **1989** – *Claxton v Saanichton Marina Ltd* halts development infringing on Tsawout nation’s Douglas treaty fishing rights
- **2017** – Coast Salish-language versions of Douglas Treaties produced by Esquimalt and Saanich Elders

Numbered Treaties

- **1871–1921** – Treaties 1–11 signed under often coercive or misleading terms, furthering Canadian efforts to turn treaties into land-surrender documents. These include:
 - **Treaty 1** – August 3, 1871, at Lower Fort Garry, Manitoba
 - **Treaty 2** – August 21, 1871, at Manitoba Post
 - **Treaty 3** – October 3, 1873, at Northwest Angle of Lake of the Woods
 - **Treaty 4** – September 15, 1874, at Fort Qu’Appelle (with additional signings at Fort Ellice, Swan Lake, Fort Walsh)
 - **Treaty 5** – September 20, 1875, at Berens River, Norway House, Grand Rapids (adhesions in 1876 and 1908)
 - **Treaty 6** – August 28, 1876, at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt (adhesions followed in later years)
 - **Treaty 7** – September 22, 1877, at Blackfoot Crossing and Fort Macleod (supplementary signing on December 4, 1877)
 - **Treaty 8** – June 21, 1899, near Grouard, Alberta (adhesions through 1900–1901 at Peace River, Fort Vermilion, etc.)
 - **Treaty 9** – November 6, 1905, at Osnaburgh and other Northern Ontario posts (expanded in 1929–30)
 - **Treaty 10** – November 7, 1906, at Île-à-la-Crosse and Lac du Brochet, Saskatchewan (adhesions in 1907)
 - **Treaty 11** – June 27 to August 22, 1921, at Fort Providence, Fort Simpson, and other NWT posts (further signings in July 1922 at Liard)

SETTLER COLONIALISM, IMMIGRATION & RACE POLICY (1858–1960s)

Immigration & Labour Displacement

- **1858** – Chinese migrants arrive during the gold rush, continuing through the 19th century to flee poverty and political unrest
- **1891–1914** – Ukrainians and other European migrants arrive, attracted by “free” land taken by Canada from Indigenous nations, particularly on the Prairies; financial incentives favour British migration in particular

- **1901–1914** – Mass European, British, and US immigration under minister Clifford Sifton
- **1904** – Italians begin arriving in Montréal
- **1904-1907** – Immigrants from Indian subcontinent arrive in Vancouver and Victoria, often to work in logging camps and lumber mills
- **1914** – Canada responds to racism in BC by negotiating exit limits that curtail migration from Japan

Discriminatory Legislation

- **1885-1923** – So-called “head tax” severely curtails Chinese migration and encourages indentured servitude of indebted migrants
- **1920** – *British Columbia Indian Lands Settlement Act* reduces reserve land in contravention of federal government promises at BC’s entry into Confederation
- **1923** – *Chinese Immigration Act* (known widely as the Chinese Exclusion Act) replaces head tax regime and effectively bars Chinese immigration until 1949

War, Discrimination, & National Identity

- **1914-1918** – World War I: more than 8,000 persons, many of Ukrainian origin, interned as “enemy aliens”
- **1929-1939** – Global stock market crash and Great Depression; immigration slows
- **1939–1945** – World War II: over 20,000 Japanese Canadians interned (until 1949) and permanently dispossessed; many forcibly exiled
- **1945** – Mass European refugee migration begins
- **1946** – *Canadian Citizenship Act* replaces British subject status with Canadian citizenship

Postwar Expansion & Policy Reform

- **1950s** – Postwar economic boom and increased immigration
- **1960s** – Immigration policies become less racially restrictive, moving to a so-called “points system” focused only on labour market and language skills and thus, at least formally, unconcerned with country of origin

UNIVERSITY & LOCAL EDUCATIONAL HISTORY (1843–1963)

- **1843–1911** – Songhees relocation negotiations begin, under duress, in Victoria
- **1876** – Victoria High School established – same year as the *Indian Act*

- **1890–1896** – Post-secondary system expands
- **1902-1915** – Victoria College (UVic’s institutional predecessor) incorporated: affiliated with McGill University, which formally grants the degrees
- **1908** – University of British Columbia incorporation act passed, with significant “grant” of Musqueam lands to the future university for its endowment
- **1914** – McGill Building opens in Victoria
- **1915** – Provincial Normal School opens
- **1920–1963** – Victoria College becomes affiliated with UBC
- **1938** – Victoria College student essay critiques treatment of ethnic minorities
- **1945** – Victoria College Council established

Federal Legislation

1. *Dominion Lands Act (1872)*

- Spurs Western settlement with 160-acre homestead grants to white settlers
- Provides for Dominion Lands Survey, which organizes private property grid system
- Imposes increasingly smaller reserve sizes

2. *Canada Lands Surveys Act (1985)*

- Further standardizes land surveying, registration, and development

3. *First Nations Land Management Act and Registry Regulations (1999)*

- Modernizes aspects of reserve land-management provisions, offering more opportunities for community decision-making, but leaves untouched the reserve system’s legal architecture, which severely limits First Nation freedom and empowerment, and leaves Ottawa as the ultimate authority

LAND, SETTLEMENT, AND RACIAL POLITICS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Early Treaties & Land Dispossession

- **1774** – Spanish exploration, followed by British, brings fur trade and disease epidemics
- **1846** – *Oregon Treaty* sets border with US with no Indigenous input, divides WSÁNEĆ lands

- **1850–54** – Douglas Treaties on South Vancouver Island recognize fishing and hunting rights
- **1858** – Lower Mainland lands made new colony, also under governorship of Douglas
- **1858** – Douglas invites Black settlers, but most later leave due to racism
- **1864** – Chinese settlers petition for legal equality
- **1860–64** – Douglas begins narrowing settler interpretations of and adherence to South Island treaties
- **1864** – Joseph Trutch replaces Douglas, taking much harsher stance that explicitly regards Indigenous peoples as “inferior savages”
- **1866** – Vancouver Island and Lower Mainland colonies united as British Columbia; Trutch drastically reduces size of existing reserves; Indigenous peoples protest
- **1870** – Trutch denies existence of Aboriginal title and denies that there is legal force to treaties
- **1871** – BC joins Confederation, refusing treaty-making and reducing reserve sizes; continues this position into the 1990s; 90% of BC First Nations still untreated today

Disfranchisement & Resistance

- **1871-1990s** – BC’s denialist land and treaty policies persist
- **1870s** – In comparison, Prairie treaty-making acknowledges Aboriginal title but is also used to force nations off traditional lands to make way for the Canadian Pacific Railway
- **1872** – Indigenous and Chinese people disfranchised in order to allow white rule at a time when whites were a numerical minority
- **1900–1903** – Tomekichi “Tomey” Homma challenges disenfranchisement but loses case
- **1874** – Ottawa urges 80 acres per family for reserves; BC refuses
- **1876** – Canadian Governor-General urges BC to acknowledge Aboriginal title
- **1912** – McKenna–McBride Commission created as joint BC-federal investigation into the land question
- **1913–16** – Indigenous witnesses appear before Commission to demand treaties and larger reserves
- **1916** – Allied Tribes of British Columbia formed

- **1916** – McKenna–McBride Commission ignores mandate and Indigenous presentations, recommending severe cuts to reserve lands
- **1916–20** – Intensified Indigenous protest and renewed potlatch activity
- **1920** – Federal parliament reduces reserves; potlatch arrests begin
- **1921** – Judicial Committee of the Privy Council affirms Aboriginal title, prompting the 1927 Indian Act changes preventing Native land claimants from going to court
- **1924** – Reserve cut-offs proceed
- **1972–75** – BC’s NDP government considers returning cut-off lands but continues to treat claims as a sole federal responsibility
- **1980s** – BC continues to demand that any Native land issues be resolved with exclusively federal funding

MODERN CONSTITUTIONAL & TREATY ERA (1982–2025)

- **1982** – *Constitution Act* entrenches Charter of Rights and Freedoms and recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights; refusal of federal and provincial governments to negotiate rights in good faith leaves their definition up to Canadian courts
- **2000** – Nisga’a Final Agreement creates first modern treaty in BC
- **2004–2005** – *Haida Nation* and *Mikisew* cases confirm Crown’s duty to consult and accommodate Indigenous peoples and interests on lands subject to title claim
- **2014** – *Tsilhqot’in Nation v British Columbia* is first finding of Aboriginal title to a specific land area by a Canadian court
- **2015** – Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report offers 94 Calls to Action demanding far-reaching systemic reforms
- **2019** – British Columbia Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act commits province to aligning laws with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
- **2021** – Federal United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act appears to do the same but is weaker than BC legislation
- **2016** – *Daniels v Canada* recognizes federal responsibility for Métis and non-status First Nations

- **2009–2016** – Some modern BC treaties in British Columbia (e.g., Tsawwassen [2009], Maa-nulth [2011], Tla’amin [2016]) reached amidst mixed progress and ongoing disputes

Works Consulted

Legislation

An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Laws Respecting Indians, 39 Vict, c 18 (1876).

An Act to Amend the Indian Act, SC 1926–27, c 32.

An Act to Make Better Provision for the Qualification and Registration of Voters. 39 Vict, c 66 (1876).

British Columbia Indian Lands Settlement Act, SC 1920, c 51.

British Columbia University Act, SBC 1890, c 48.

Canada Lands Surveys Act, RSC 1985, c L-6.

Canadian Citizenship Act, SC 1946, c 15.

Chinese Immigration Act, SC 1923, c 38.

Constitution Act, 1982. Being Schedule B to the Canada Act 1982 (UK), 1982, c 11.

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, SBC 2019, c 44.

Dominion Lands Act, SC 1872, c 23.

Emergencies Act. RSC 1985, c 22 (4th Supp).

Federal Real Property and Federal Immovables Act, SC 1991, c 50.

First Nations Land Management Act, SC 1999, c 24.

First Nations Land Registry Regulations, SOR/2007-231.

Gradual Civilization Act, 1857, 20 Vict, c 26.

Indian Act, RSC 1985, c I-5.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. SC 2021, c 14.

University Site Act, SBC 1918, c 94.

War Measures Act, SC 1914, c 2.

Jurisprudence

Claxton v Saanichton Marina Ltd, [1989] 4 CNLR 48 (BCCA).

Cunningham v Tomey Homma, [1903] AC 151 (PC).

Daniels v Canada (Indian Affairs and Northern Development), 2016 SCC 12, [2016] 1 SCR 99.

Delgamuukw v British Columbia, [1997] 3 SCR 1010.

Haida Nation v British Columbia (Minister of Forests), 2004 SCC 73, [2004] 3 SCR 511.

Mikisew Cree First Nation v Canada (Minister of Canadian Heritage), 2005 SCC 69, [2005] 3 SCR 388.

R v Bartleman, [1984] 3 CNLR 114 (BCCA).

R v Marshall, [1999] 3 SCR 456.

R v Sparrow, [1990] 1 SCR 1075.

R v Van der Peet, [1996] 2 SCR 507.

R v White and Bob, [1965] 52 DLR (2d) 481 (BCCA).

Tsilhqot'in Nation v British Columbia, SCC 44, [2014] 2 SCR 257.

Other Materials

British Columbia. *Japanese Canadian Internment Sites of the Second World War (1942–49): Revelstoke–Sicamous Road Camp*. n.d. Online (PDF): Government of British Columbia. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/driving/japanese-internment-signs/revelstoke-sicamous_road_camp.pdf.

British Columbia. “Nisga’a Nation.” Online: Government of British Columbia. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/consulting-with-first-nations/first-nations-negotiations/first-nations-a-z-listing/nisga-a-lisims-government>.

Canadian Museum for Human Rights. “Japanese Canadian Internment and the Struggle for Redress.” 19 May 2017. Online: Canadian Museum for Human Rights. <https://humanrights.ca/story/japanese-canadian-internment-and-struggle-redress>.

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. “About the Final Agreement between Tla’amin Nation, Canada and British Columbia.” Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1397050017650/1542999641532>.

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. “Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement Implementation: Report 2013–2014.” Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1494511760118/1542997086421>.

- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "The Numbered Treaties (1871-1921)." 15 March 2023. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1360948213124/1544620003549>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Tla'amin Final Agreement." Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1397152724601/1542999321074>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty Texts - Treaties No. 1 and No. 2." 30 August 2013. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028664/1581294165927>. [Crown Indigenous Relations Canada](#).
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty Texts - Treaty No 3." 30 August 2013. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028675/1581292569430>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty Texts: Treaty No 4." 30 August 2013. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028689/1581293019940>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty Texts - Treaty No. 5." 30 August 2013. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028699/1581292696320>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty Texts: Treaty No. 6." 22 September 2021. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028710/1581292569426>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty Texts: Treaty and Supplementary Treaty no. 7." 30 August 2013. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028793/1581292569446>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty Texts - Treaty No. 8." 30 August 2013. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028813/1581292569456>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty Texts - Treaty No. 9." 30 August 2013. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028863/1581292569470>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty Texts - Treaty No. 10." 30 August 2013. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028874/1581292941464>.

- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "Treaty No. 11 (1921)." 30 August 2013. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028916/1581292569480>.
- Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. "The Royal Proclamation of 1763." 14 November 2024. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1370355181092/1607905122267>.
- Government of Canada. "Address by the Prime Minister on the Chinese Head Tax Redress." 22 June 2006. Online: Government of Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/news/archive/2006/06/address-prime-minister-chinese-head-tax-redress.html>.
- Government of Canada. *Government to Government: Aboriginal Peoples and British Columbia*. Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1991. Online (PDF): Government of Canada. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/bcp-pco/Z1-1991-1-41-81-eng.pdf.
- Indigenous Foundations. "Royal Proclamation, 1763." Online: The University of British Columbia. https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/royal_proclamation_1763/.
- Kanakos, Jeannie L. *The Negotiations to Relocate the Songhees Indians, 1843–1911*. MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 15 April 1983. Online (PDF): Hallmark Heritage Society. <https://hallmarkheritagesociety.ca/archives/history-articles/the-negotiations-to-relocate-the-songhees-1843-1911/>.
- Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. "1872 - Indigenous and Chinese Peoples Excluded from the Vote." Online: Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. <https://www.leg.bc.ca/learn/discover-your-legislature/1872-indigenous-and-chinese-peoples-excluded-from-the-vote>.
- McFarland, Dana. *Indian Reserve Cut-offs in British Columbia, 1912-1924: An Examination of Federal-Provincial Negotiations and Consultation with Indians*. MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1990. Online: UBC Open Collections. <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/42023>.
- Mitchell, Darcy A., and Paul Tennant. *Government to Government: Aboriginal Peoples and British Columbia*. Paper prepared as part of the Research Program of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, October 1994.
- Parks Canada. "Cunningham v. Tomey Homma." Backgrounder. 7 December 2017. Online: Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/parks-canada/news/2017/12/cunningham_v_tomeyhomma.html.

- Parks Canada Agency. "Cunningham v. Tomey Homma National Historic Event." *Directory of Federal Heritage Designations*. Online: Government of Canada. https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=13075.
- Parris, John. "There's No Racism in Canada: A Timeline." 28 August 2020. Online: Parris Consulting. <https://parrisconsulting.ca/2020/08/28/theres-no-racism-in-canada-a-timeline/>.
- Smith, Peter L. *A Multitude of the Wise: UVic Remembered*. Victoria: Alumni Association of the University of Victoria, 1993.
- Statistics Canada. *Timeline of Canadian Historical Events that Affected Immigration, 1867 to 1967*. 2017. Online (PDF): Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/kits-trousses/projet-cyber-project/pdf/5022895-eng.pdf>.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report*. Ottawa: TRC, 2015.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015.
- Tsawwassen First Nation. "Treaty and Constitution." Online: Tsawwassen First Nation. <https://tsawwassenfirstnation.com/governance-overview/treaty-and-constitution/>.
- University of Victoria Art Collections. "Gordon Head Campus." *Architectural Modernism in Victoria*. Online: https://uvac.uvic.ca/Architecture_Exhibits/UVic_campus/buildings/Gordon_Head_Campus/.
- University of Victoria. "History of Campus Planning." Online: <https://www.uvic.ca/campusplanning/about/historycampusplanning/index.php>.
- University of Victoria. "Vancouver Island (Douglas) Treaties." Treaties Timeline. Online: <https://douglastreaties.uvic.ca/treaties.html#timeline>.
- University of Victoria Libraries. "Victoria's Chinatown: A Gateway to the Past and Present of Chinese Canadians." UVic Vault digital exhibit. Online: <https://vault.library.uvic.ca/collections/78559ab2-eb0d-433e-8336-ce061aac3a7c>.
- Yow, Clare. "Chinese Students Strike Against Segregated Schools, 1922–23." 5 March 2021. Online: ActiveHistory.ca. <https://activehistory.ca/2021/03/05/remember-resist-redraw-29-chinese-students-strike-against-segregated-schools-1922-23/>.

