

A Syllabus for History After the TRC

Introduction

What does the teaching and researching of history in Canada look like after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)? The TRC was established in 2008 as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, an agreement between the federal government and approximately 8000 Indigenous people who had attended residential schools. Over the next six years, the TRC took on a staggering project of both research, public engagement, and advocacy. The TRC did extensive archival research in the papers left by Canadian governments and churches, twice going to court to compel Canada to produce promised archival records. As historian Mary Jane Logan McCallum notes, a serious commitment to gathering and analyzing oral testimony – and the different histories it told – differentiated the shape and mandate of the commission's research. ¹ The TRC created an oral archive based on interviews with more that 6,000 people, most of whom had themselves attended residential schools.²

The TRC's final report was published in 2015, and as a document, the report makes clear how the TRC was both a powerful work of history and an important moment in history. The TRC was focused on the particular question of Indian Residential Schools funded by the federal government between the 1880s and the 1990s. The church-run schools that preceded the federal system were excluded, as were the church, province, or First Nation administered schools, including many of those that Metis children attended. For all the specificity of this focus, the TRC became a vehicle for a wider, more critical discussion of the past *and* the present of Canadian colonialism, and the multiple ways it has cost Indigenous people and shaped Canada.

The TRC was in no small way a reckoning with Canadian history, and it makes sense that the work of history and historians played an important role in its work. A quick review of the Final Report's

¹ Mary Jane Logan McCallum, "Forward," John S. Milloy, A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School, 2nd edition (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2017)

² See Krista McCracken, "The Role of Canada's Museums and Archives in Reconciliation," *Active History*, 15 June 2015.

bibliography makes this clear: there are historians from Arthur Ray, Winona Stevenson/Wheeler, George Stanley, Sarah Carter, Mary-Ellen Kelm, Cornelius Jaenen, James Daschuk, Jean Friesen, along with the names of historians who have written what are generally considered the standard, monograph length studies on the history of residential schools, J.R. Miller and John Milloy.

The TRC's Final Report concludes with ninety-six calls to action designed to "redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation." Read at their most literal level, many of these concern the practice of historical scholarship and its production and application in classrooms, archives, and meetings rooms. Read broadly, the Calls to Action that concern education (6-12) and Language and Culture (13-17) speak to the practices of working historians in Canada. Call to Action 45 calls on Canada to jointly develop with Indigenous peoples a Royal Proclamation of Reconciliation that would build on the Royal Proclamation of 1764 and the Treaty of Niagara of 1764. Call to Action 57 calls on federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments to educate public servants 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." Calls to Action 62 and 63 calls on governments to create curriculum and the capacity to integrate it in classrooms.

Calls to Action 67 through 70 concern Museums and Archives, calling on the federal government to fund a national review of museum policies (67), establish a funding program for "commemorative projects on the theme of reconciliation" (68) and that Library and Archives Canada adopt and implement the documents, including the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, or *UNDRIP* which assert Indigenous peoples' "inalienable right to know the truth about what happened and why, with regard to human rights violations committed against them in the residential schools," ensure that its holdings related to residential schools are accessible to the public, and commit more resources to public education materials on residential schools. Call to Action 70 calls on the federal government to fund the Canadian Association of Archivists to work with Indigenous peoples to produce a national review of archival policies and a plan to implement international mechanisms as "reconciliation framework for Canadian archives." Calls to Action 71 through 76 address the need for more records and more cooperation to document the children who died at residential school.

Calls to Actions 77 and 78 concern the establishment of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Calls to Action 79 through 83 concern Commemoration, calling on the federal government to amend the Historic Sites and Monuments Act and to revisit the National Program of Historical Commemoration with an eye to integrating "Indigenous history, heritage values, and

³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Calls to Action (Winnipeg, TRC, 2015) 2.

⁴ TRC. Calls to Action, 8.

⁵ TRC, Calls to Action, 8.

memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history," develop a national heritage plan for commemorating residential schooling, and to establish a statutory holiday and monuments to Residential schools in capital cities.

Four years have passed since these Calls to Action were first issued. Historian Ian Mosby's regular accounting makes clear that concrete action on the calls remains overwhelmingly incomplete or partial. The calls to action have produced valuable institutional responses form some (though far from all) post-secondary institutions, units, and scholarly and professional organizations have engaged in a range of formal and informal responses to the TRC. These include the Canadian Federation of Library Association/Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques's very substantial "Truth and Reconciliation Report and Recommendations," the University of Regina's Faculty of Arts Statement and Report on Indigenizing and the TRC's Calls to Action.⁸

In the summer of 2017, the Canadian Historical Association/ Societé historique du Canadas struck a TRC response working group. Made up of Jo-Anne McCutcheon, Sarah Nickel, Adele Perry, and Alison Norman and steered by CHA/SHC Executive Director Michel Duquet, this working group has taken on a number of projects, including funding TRC related projects. Inspired by the "Indigenous Content Syllabus Materials: A Resource for Political Science Instructors in Canada" released by Canadian Political Science Association's Reconciliation Committee in September 2018, the CHA/SHC's TRC Response Committee decided that an appropriate next step would be to craft this document: A Syllabus for History After the TRC.

The goal of this syllabus is to gather together materials on Indigenous history in and around Canada that might be useful for people teaching, researching, writing history or working in public history. Throughout the syllabus, we seek to centre and highlight Indigenous scholarship, writing, and cultural production. As much as historical scholarship and research played in the TRC, it is also true that as discipline and a profession, history in Canada – and elsewhere in the settler colonial world – has had an at best uneven, and at worse decidedly negative relationship to Indigenous history as a

⁷ See "Curious about how many of the TRC's calls to actions have been completed? Check Ian Mosby's Twitter," 20 October 2017, <a href="https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/how-are-you-putting-reconciliation-into-action-1.4362219/curious-about-how-many-of-the-trc-s-calls-to-actions-have-been-completed-check-ian-mosby-s-twitter-1.4364330, accessed 18 December 2018.

https://www.uregina.ca/arts/assets/docs/pdf/Arts Indigenization Report-Final%202018.pdf
⁹ For more, see Sarah Nickel and Jo McCutcheon, "The TRC and the CHA," *Intersections*, 1:1 (2018) 20-22.

acsp.ca/documents/committees/Indigenous%20Content%20Syllabus%20Materials%20Sept%2024%202018[27].pdf

⁶ TRC, Calls to Action, 9.

⁸ Camille Callison, "Truth and Reconciliation Report and Recommendations," (Ottawa, CFLA-FCAB, 2016); University of Regina's Faculty of Arts "Statement and Report on Indigenizing and the TRC's Calls to Action," June 2018, found at

¹⁰ https://www.cpsa-

subject and to Indigenous scholars as practitioners.¹¹ In recent months, important parts of this issue has been raised by historian Allan Downey, and the CHA as an organization has and will continue to respond to these conversations, which are past due.

How does the TRC, and the questions that informed it and the ones that have been raised in the wake of its completion, prompt us to think differently about the work we do in classrooms, archives, museums, and meeting rooms? How have historians contributed to these conversations, and what needs to be done for us to produce books, articles, and syllabi that speak in more ethical, rigorous, and engaged ways to the questions raised by the TRC and by Indigenous Studies scholarship. As we complete this stage of the syllabus, the National Inquiry on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women/ l'Enquête nationale sur les femmes et les filles autochtones disparues et assassinées issued its final report, and how does this change our readings of Canada and its histories?

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¹¹ See, for a discussion and response, the special issue on "Indigenous Historical Perspectives," with an introduction by Dimitry Anastakis, Mary-Ellen Kelm, and Suzanne Morton, and essays by Brenda Macdougall, Leanne Leddy, Mary Jane Logan McCallum, and John Borrows, *Canadian Historical Review*, 98:1 (March 2017), 60-135. Also see Adele Perry, Adele Perry, «"Word from the President: Reading the Royal Historical Society's 2018 Report," *Intersections*, July 2019 1-4.

The organization of this syllabus is thematic

Right now, we have the following sections:

- 1. Long Histories
- 2. Research Methods
- 3. Politics, Resistance, Sovereignty and the State
- 4. Work and Labour
- 5. Colonial Schooling
- 6. Gender, Family, and Sexuality
- 7. Health, Medicine and Food
- 8. Treaties

Many of the works mentioned here might have fit well in more than one category but we have decided to list any given work only once. We have sought to emphasize work by Indigenous scholars and, as a general rule, work published within the last two decades. We are well aware that this is a partial syllabus, both in scope and execution. It reflects uneven scholarly production in a number of ways, including in French and English. We hope to update this syllabus as circumstances and resources allow.

1. Long Histories

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Sioui, Georges, Les Wendats: une civilisation méconnue (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1994)

Sioui, Georges, and Kathryn Labelle, "The Algonquian-Wendat Alliance: A Case Study of Circular Societies," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 34:1 (2014) 171-183.

Witgen, Michael, "The Native New World and Western North America," Western Historical Quarterly, 43 (Autumn 2012) 292-299.

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2. Research Methods

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