

# 20<sup>th</sup> Century Aboriginal Experiences & Issues



- Before delving into 20<sup>th</sup> century issues facing First Nations in Canada, a little bit of context is necessary...

# Context.

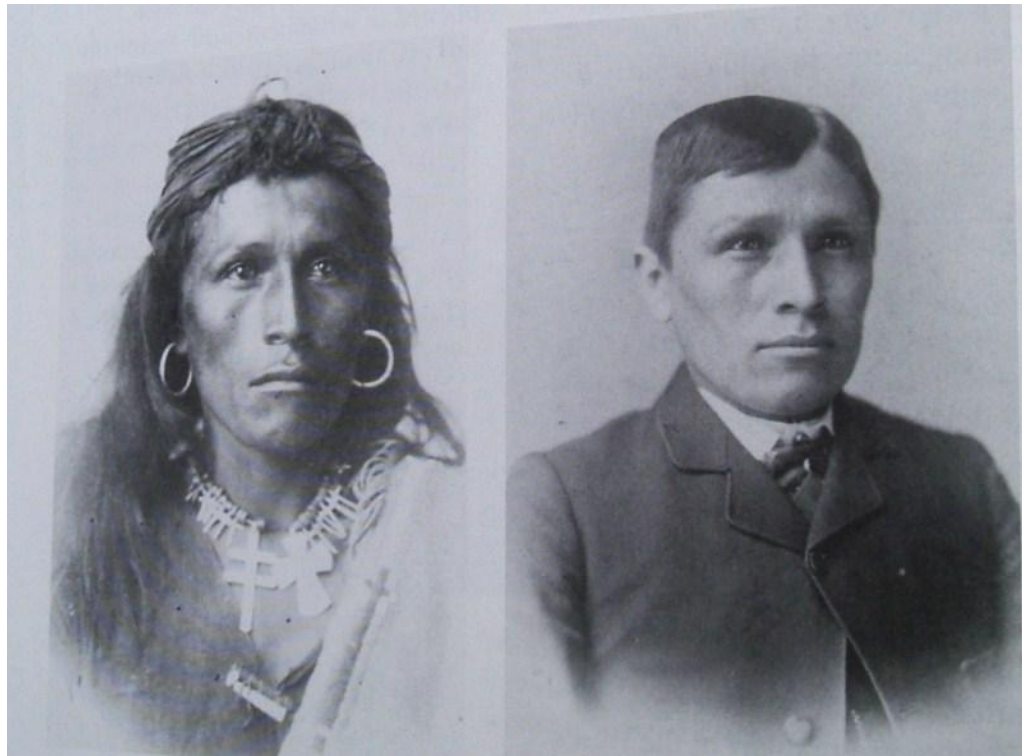
- Archaeological evidence confirms that some aboriginal peoples have been living in Canada for **at least 11,000** years.



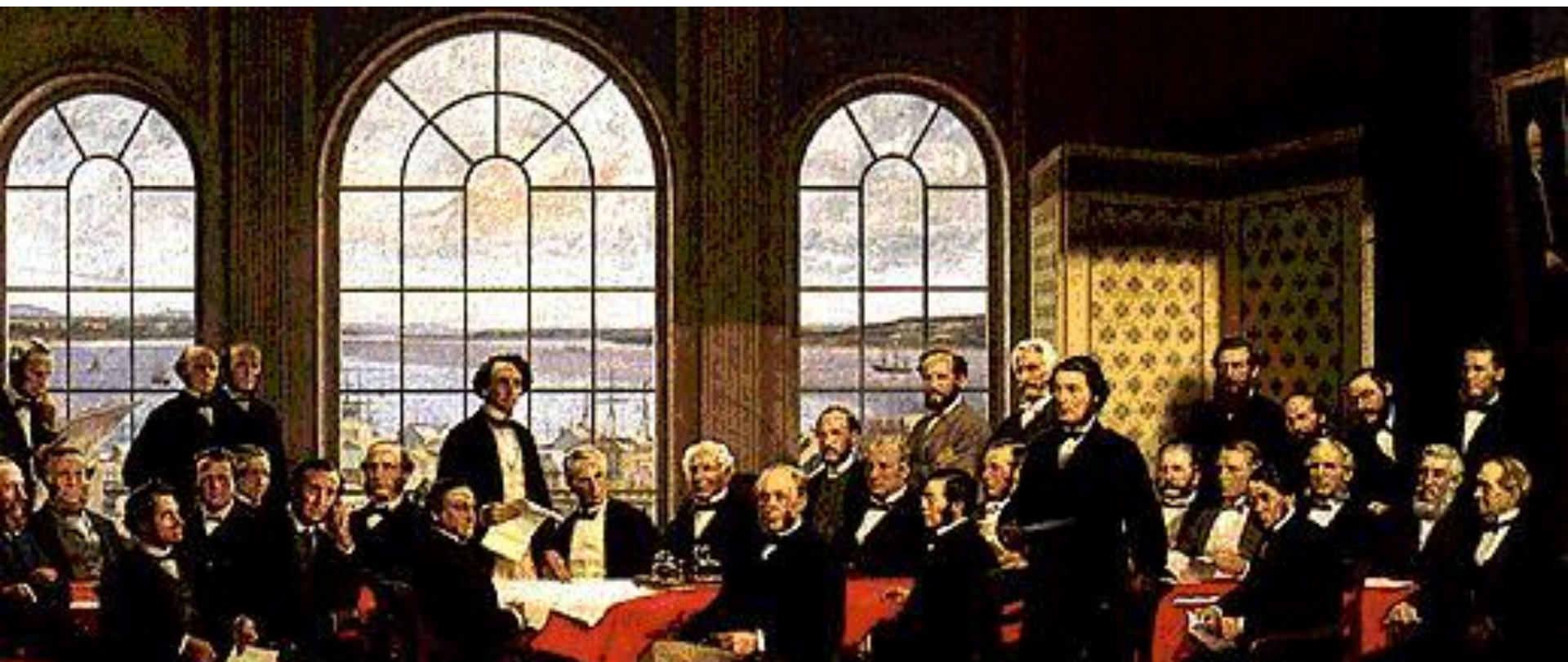
- Geographical diversity led to the emergence of a broad range of cultures.



- Leading up to Confederation, European settlers decided that the aboriginal way of life was **inferior** to the Euro-Canadian one.



- In the years leading up to Confederation, **no aboriginal leaders** were invited to Confederation negotiations.



- During this time, the goal became to **assimilate** (**absorb**) aboriginal nations into the Canadian mainstream.



- The **Indian Act of 1876** was the Canadian govt's official way of 'encouraging' aboriginal peoples to give up their own culture and traditions.





- The Act provided schools, hunting & fishing rights, and annual treaty payments. Also provided some tax exemptions for Aboriginals.



- However, Aboriginals were deemed “**wards of the state**” – essentially children to be cared for.



- Aboriginals were **denied the right to vote** and **own land** as others could. Many traditional activities were outlawed.

- To vote or own property, one had to first give up all Native claims and **relinquish their status.**



- When a male head of a family decided to give up his legal status, his entire family was stripped of theirs as well.

- Native women who **married** non-Native men **automatically lost their status.**



- Residential schools were established to “kill the Indian in the child”.



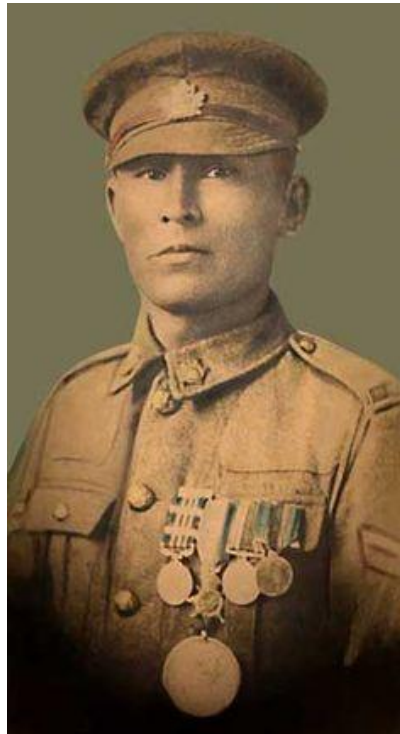
- First Nations children were taken from their homes and forced to abandon their language and culture. Schools were administered by Protestant and Catholic missionaries.



- In many schools conditions were very poor, abuse was common, and few progressed beyond 6<sup>th</sup> grade.



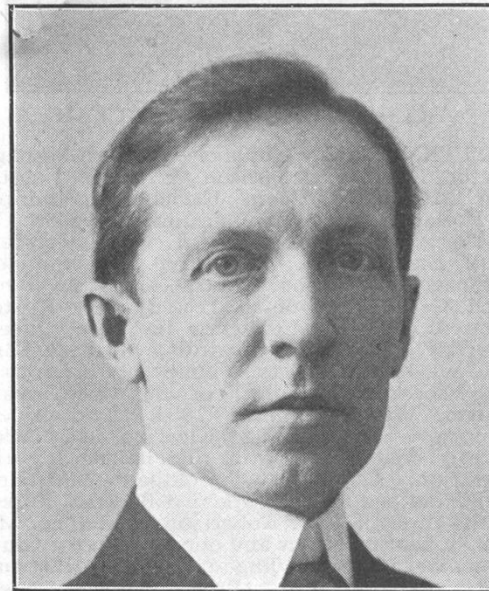
- Even in the midst of such treatment, many First Nations enlisted to fight in WWI between 1914-1918.



**Francis Pegahmagabow**



- The interwar years were a bad time for First Nations in Canada.



DUNCAN CAMPBELL SCOTT, F.R.C.S.

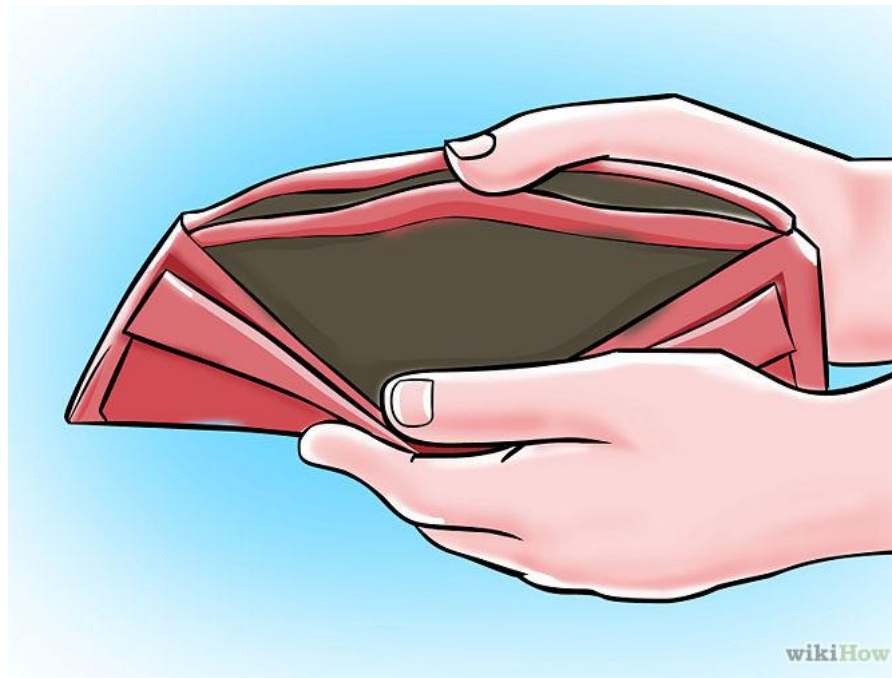
- The man in charge of Indian policy between 1913-32 was **Duncan Campbell Scott**.

- Scott's goal was to continue until “not a single Indian remained” that was unassimilated.



- He introduced stiff fines for FNs wearing traditional dress, and in 1927 **outlawed FN political organizations.**

- The size of **reserves** continually **shrank**. Few economic activities were permitted on reserves. Little opportunity for economic advancement.




- Despite this, First Nations **enlisted in proportionally higher numbers** during WWII (1939-1945) than did **any other segment of Canadian society!**



DID YOU KNOW CANADIAN  
**CREE & MÉTIS**  
WERE *CODE-KEEPERS*  
DURING **WORLD WAR II** ?



THEY SENT 

**TOP SECRET**  
WARTIME MESSAGES  
**IN CREE**



- Upon their return from war, the inequalities of Canadian society became glaring.



- FN war veterans became **increasingly politicized** and increasingly **vocal** in their demands.

- In **1960**, First Nations were **finally** granted the **right to vote** in Federal elections.



- In the late 1960s, with **Pierre Trudeau** in power, you had to be careful what you asked for.



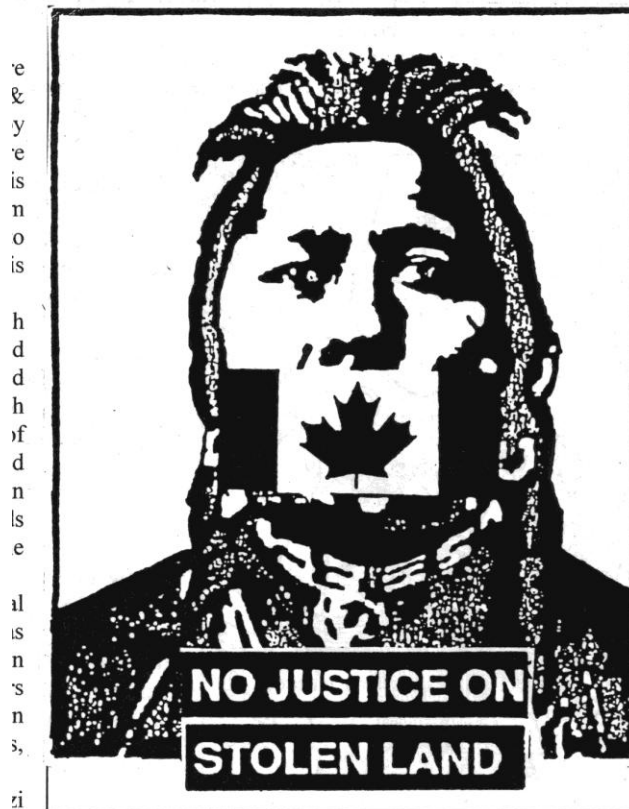
- When FN groups complained that the **Indian Act was discriminatory**, Trudeau said, “**Fine. Get rid of it.**”



- In 1969, Trudeau's Minister of Indian Affairs (Jean Chretien), presented a **white paper** on FN issues.



- Gov't documents are colour coded - A white paper is an **official but non-binding policy proposal**.





- The policy proposed (among other things):

- ▣ **Abolishing the Indian Act**

- ▣ **Eliminating reserve lands and ending special status for First Nations in Canada**

- The ultimate aim was to **dismantle the reserve system** and bring FNs into mainstream society.



- In other words, **equality through assimilation.**

- The vast majority of FN **did not** support the proposal.



- FN rights had suddenly become a hot political issue, and Trudeau was forced to back down – a rare event indeed. **Withdrew the White Paper.**

- In the late 1970s, FNs groups began entering into **Land Claims** and **Treaty Negotiations**.



- Most negotiations involved FNs surrendering certain territories for the rights to self-government, money, and smaller tracts of land.

# Oka Crisis



- It started with a golf course, and ended with a gun battle, the death of a police officer, and an armed showdown that captured headlines around the world.







TO BE  
CONTINUED...

A stylized graphic of a marker tray is integrated into the letter 'C' of the word 'CONTINUED'. The tray contains several colored markers in a row: yellow, light blue, green, red, purple, and black. To the right of the markers, there are two small circles and three vertical lines, resembling a standard marker tray design.