

The political climate of Canada is changing. Shortly after the historic release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report in 2015, Canadians elected a new prime minister committed to repairing the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the Canadian state. Within the past year, there has been a significant shift in the status quo—from deeply rooted attitudes and stereotypes that question why Aboriginal peoples can't simply "get over it" to an understanding of the intergenerational impacts of colonization and a commitment to truth and reconciliation as a national project for all Canadians. In the words of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, "reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country.

The colonization of North America attempted to assimilate Aboriginal people into the settlers' European ways of living. Settler policies and attitudes meant that Aboriginal people were cut off from their traditional culture, languages, spirituality, economies, systems of governance and other important parts of their identity. Understanding Canada's colonial history and debunking the racist myths that run through Canadian society is an important part of the truth and reconciliation process.

Unfortunately, discrediting myths and negative stereotypes is not the only challenge we face. The legacy of colonization has affected the daily lives of millions of Canadians across many generations— and continues to affect the practical, everyday existence of millions today. Increased understanding does not necessarily provide us with the concrete tools for making change.

Research shows that the consequences of trauma are not limited to the person immediately exposed to the traumatic event. People close to the individual may experience vicarious trauma, which can have impacts similar to the impacts of personally experienced trauma. The concept of vicarious trauma emerged in the 1960s from studies of the prolonged effects of the Holocaust on survivors and their families. This area of research now includes survivors of natural disasters, Japanese internment camps, war, Indian residential schools and child abuse. Intergenerational trauma is any trauma, including historical oppression, that has an impact across more than one generation. This impact includes shared collective memories that affect the health and well-being of individuals and communities and that may be passed on from parent to child, and beyond.