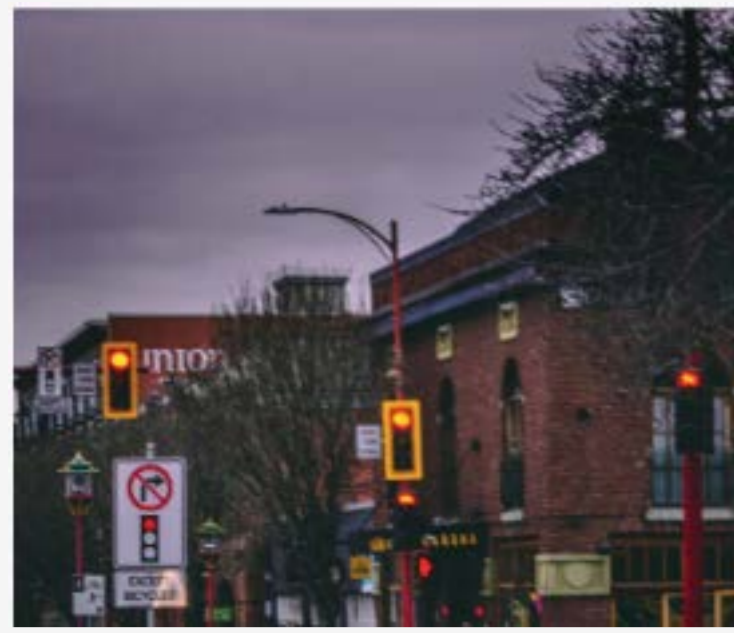


# The Pacific Coast-The Taking and Making of the Lands now known as British Columbia

Week Thirteen



Images via: Piktochart

## KEY TERMS:

**Settler Colonialism:** is a structural system that functions to replace Indigenous communities with a settler population (white-Europeans colonizing Turtle Island). Seeks to replace the original peoples of the lands being settled/colonized, creating a new society; for Canada, this was the formation of a hierarchal Western society.

**White Supremacy:** belief that white society is a dominant and superior force that should have control over marginalized and racialized groups. An ideology used by state actors to enforce and justify assimilatory policies and racist legislation.

**Racialization:** the implementation of racist practices applied to colonized populations to sustain systems of exclusion and categorize people based on ethnic and cultural markers, ostracizing them from the dominant white society. The creation of categories to justify moves of power and sort people into mutually exclusive groups.

**Treaties:** legal agreements between two or more sovereign states that theoretically establish formal equality and reciprocal relationships grounded in trust, respect and accountability. Indigenous peoples believed they were entering negotiations that would ensure peaceful relations, however, Western stakeholders used treaties to dispossess Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands and assimilate them into mainstream society.

**Immigration:** was a central tactic used to further 19th-century colony building because it dispossessed Indigenous peoples off of their lands, creating space for a European-dominant society to settle. It was used as both an inclusion and exclusion action, marginalizing Indigenous peoples and minimizing the presence of non-white settlers, while also sustaining white migration.

**Nuclear/Domestic Families:** viewed as a necessary component of life and encouraged by mid-19th-century colonial patriarchal laws, nuclear families saw men as the heads of families and women as unequal partners. Nuclear family formations allowed white men to gain 50 acres of free land and an additional 10 acres for every child born under 10.

**Multiculturalism:** the existence of multiple diverse/distinct cultural or ethnic groups in one area, used to describe a place that is home to several different cultural groups.

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## ● Settlement and the Dispossession of Indigenous Nations in BC

- The Doctrine of Discovery and notions of Terra Nullius are used to justify the theft of Indigenous lands and the implementation of assimilatory policies such as The Indian Act and The Residential Schooling System
- Initially, explorers were welcomed by Indigenous nations, but, as the number of uninvited guests increased, settlers acted less like guests and more like colonizers/owners of the land
- Douglas used treaties to gain control of the traditional lands of Indigenous nations, viewing them as land purchases/surrenders, while Indigenous peoples saw them as peace agreements
- Illegal land surveys were conducted on Indigenous lands to promote and increase white-settlement
- Indigenous lands were taken/claimed as British possessions without the consent of local nations, and settlers used armed forces to end any opposition to the colonial agenda and state formation
- The settlement of BC required the eviction/dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands and the destruction of governance systems, culture, nationhood and traditional ways of being/living

## ● The Making of British Columbia

- In 1821 the Hudson's Bay Company merged with The Northwest Company, and George Simpson established Fort Victoria (1843, Bastion Square) as a new fur-trading post
- The colonization of BC took place long after Eastern settlement had occurred in 1849, and Britain sought control over Vancouver Island after the 49th parallel was created
- British subjects were granted free movement throughout the empire, increasing immigration to the new colony of Victoria
- In 1858, BC is established as a separate colony ('the mainland'), merging with Vancouver Island in 1866, and in 1868 Victoria becomes the capital, and by 1871 BC joins Confederation to ensure the creation of a white settler society

## ● Tsilhqot'in War

- The events of 1864 demonstrate ongoing tensions between Indigenous communities and colonial officials
- Workers entered the territory of the Tsilhqot'in without permission under the direction of Alfred Waddington to build a road from Bute Inlet to the Cariboo to further settlement post-Gold Rush
- In response to the uninvited work-crews stores were looted, and the Tsilhqot'in were told that smallpox would be gifted to them as punishment for their behaviour. In response to this threat, the Tsilhqot'in killed 12 out of 15 workers as they slept, defeating any further opposition
- Two months later, peace talks were underway, but colonial officials viewed this as a surrender and tried the war chiefs as criminals, hanging 6 of them. Although the road work had ultimately stopped, Indian agents and surveyors slowly entered the territory to dispossess the Tsilhqot'in of their lands
- The Tsilhqot'in were betrayed by the colonial government in their relations of trust and peace
- While the government apologized in 2018 for the hanging of the chiefs, the events of 1864 demonstrate the power of Indigenous resistance towards imposed colonial state projects and the true intentions of the state and colonial stakeholders, settlement and ownership of Indigenous lands

## ● Exclusion of the Chinese

- Chinese communities immigrated to BC post-Gold Rush, often becoming labourers
- Chinese presence threatened expansion and the colonial agenda because stakeholders were unsure how their votes would influence political decisions
- 1885 Electoral Franchise Act took voting rights away from racialized communities because they were seen as biologically inferior and different from other 'Canadians'. There was concern that if the Chinese could vote that they would have too much political power, polluting the purity of white society. Chinese disenfranchisement until 1947 ensured the colonization of Indigenous lands
- Although Chinese labour was essential to the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which brought white labourers into BC, the historical narrative is ironic because it depicts the Chinese as 'late arrivers' and 'outsiders' to the colony
- The 1885 Head Tax, was imposed to limit Chinese immigration, as money had to be paid for every Chinese person entering the country (initially \$50 to \$100 in 1900, and \$500 in 1903). The tax didn't stop immigration, instead it just increased the burden of immigrants

## ● Creating a White Society- Becoming More English than the English

- The formation of a dominant white-European society required the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands and the implementation of policies to limit the authority of racialized communities (Chinese, Indians, Germans, Scottish, Irish and Hawaiians)
- Racist ideologies became normalized within society to justify colonial measures of settlement and exclusion, creating a narrative of a white-colonial fantasy, erasing the presence of other groups
- Immigration from white-European countries was encouraged, further dispossessing Indigenous peoples, creating an imperial society governed by colonial forces
- The creation of a 'white colony' required active engagement and intervention from state actors to assert notions of white supremacy, privileging Atlantic rather than Pacific immigrants
- BC had to join Confederation to become a white settler colony, as the promise of a railroad would allow for the transportation of white settlers
- Indigenous histories are hidden from prevailing narratives to produce a new settler society that sought to reproduce white British civilization, implementing a colonial patriarchal hierarchy
- The racialization of groups into distinct categories furthered colonial ideals, cementing white superiority at every turn
- Historical accounts have functioned to perpetuate narratives of BC being a white-dominant settlement, erasing the presence of Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups, creating a settler colony grounded in British and Victorian ideals, depicting a picture of being 'more English than the English'

## ● Concluding Thoughts

- The creation of a dominant white-society required the active intervention of colonial actors to implement policies of racialization to limit the powers of marginalized groups. The settlement of Victoria and the depiction of it as a place 'more English than the English' required the ongoing dispossession, assimilation and colonization of Indigenous nations. Colonial actors sought to erase Indigenous presence from the lands, using treaties to project ideas of land surrenders, limiting the authority of communities despite their resilience. Settlers sought to ensure white supremacy and dominance at every turn, denying Indigenous people of their inherent rights. It is crucial to understand how historical narratives are constructed, functioning to erase the stories of Indigenous nations and other marginalized groups, strengthening accounts of colonial dominance. One must acknowledge how the sources we learn from project particular historical accounts and question whose story is being told to us, while also analyzing whose is being erased, working to uncover realities and unearth the truth.

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