

...RESPECT INDIGENEITY (6)

PAST

European empires have colonized the new world and dispossessed Indigenous people (IP) from their land and resources. Globally, this common displacement has taken many forms: slavery, forced residential schools, genocide, racism, war, and removal of natural resources. Although subtle, some of these patterns still continue today and the resulting contemporary trauma is intergenerational as well as historical.

IP have a shorter life expectancy than the global population. They attend family funerals and go through grieving processes at a higher rate than other citizens. They often live in abject poverty and suffer to a greater extent than colonial society from suicide, ill health, substance abuse, or teen pregnancy. Historically, IP have been systemically devalued as uncivilized or inferior. Here are some suggestions for reversing these trends by showing respect for Indigeneity.

PRESENT

Honor the land. Begin with a public statement of thanks for living, working, playing, travelling or stopping on ancestral territories of a local IP.

Present your voice. Next, explain who you are (name), where you come from (origin/home), and who your family/ancestors are (lineage).

Seek permission. Make a formal verbal request (written if necessary) to use, adopt or adapt IP sacred practices or cultural traditions, and/or to cross over or camp on ancestral lands. Do not be openly offended if your request is denied.

Do not misappropriate. Do not use a story, representing symbol, sacred practice or cultural tradition without permission. Fair use is only possible with the originating IP's permission; everything else is misappropriation.

Learn how to behave. Hold a discussion of how to conduct oneself in sacred spaces. Highlight that all lands are sacred to someone. Ask a local

Knowledge Keeper to perform the appropriate offering when allowed to visit IP's sacred lands.

Know the land. Ancestral lands are the source of culture, language, knowledge, medicines, and life. IP have always had a special relationship with the natural world, but colonial resource extraction (from fur trapping through forestry to mining) has impacted that. This was and still is particularly devastating when IP witness the damage to the lands they previously stewarded, are forced to work in the industry, and must live in the waste areas with air and water pollution, flooding concerns, and linked health problems.

Recognize diversity. Avoid lumping all IP into a single identical or homogenous collective. Each self-governing group has its own unique culture and while some may connect through language or traditional similarities, each is independent. Avoid romanticizing or stereotyping Indigeneity.

FUTURE

The Chair of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has written: *"it is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and [the] miseducation of all Canadians, that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation."*

Educate yourself. Take time to learn about the current issues, support IP communities and IP businesses, and donate to grass root IP causes that reverse systemic oppression or colonialism.

Educate others. Share this information with others and make it part of your staff training. Engage a local IP Elder to contribute more.

Help others. If possible, support the healing of intergenerational trauma from dispossession. Accept the importance of the land as a healing source and assist IP to access ancestral lands. Respect IP (especially youth, women, and 2 spirit) in their efforts to practice and sustain language, culture, and life.

*McClellan Hall (Elder of Cherokee descent) &
Simon Priest*