

Indigenous Peoples of Canada

History - A Board Meeting

Aram:

But in a country like Canada, how is this possible - that the First Peoples in Canada are still living under such conditions in this country.

John:

Well, I know that it sounds impossible, you know, that the First Nations people would have poorer economic and health outcomes than the rest of the population in a country as wealthy as Canada, but it is a reality. If you don't know the history of Canada, I could understand why you wouldn't understand that. When Europeans first came to Canada, the first thing they did was they made trade alliances with the First Nations people. Over time those trade alliances turned into military alliances. But after the War of 1812 the European settlers no longer needed First Nations people. And it was at that point that the First Nations people were put onto reserves - actually forced onto reserves. The thought was that they would eventually just disappear. When that didn't happen the state came onto reserves and they took the children away from their parents, and put them in the residential schools.

Katya:

This is something that we have never been told. It hardly seems possible.

Pria:

My parents had similar problems in India. The war stripped us of our homes. Our businesses disappeared. We never felt safe.

Katya:

Yes. The same thing in Kosovo. Our family was smuggled into Hungary; we lost each other and feared the worst. I thought I'd lost my son to the soldiers killing everyone trying to escape. We were so thankful to finally have a chance to start again.

Aram:

I don't understand why your people can't make it. I spent three years in a refugee camp with nothing. And I made it!

John:

You say you came here with nothing, but that's not completely true.

Aram:

What do you mean? I was virtually penniless.

John:

Well that may be true, but you came here with something far more valuable than money. You came here with your language, your culture, and your spiritual beliefs intact. Those things were taken away from me by the state.