LESSONS IN LEGITIMACY
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Introduction

In light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), many Canadians are coming to terms with Canada’s history of schooling and colonialism. After years of extensive research and consulting Survivors, the TRC released its final report in 2015 to raise public awareness about the history of the Indian Residential School (IRS) system. The report revealed that approximately 150,000 Indigenous children and youth attended more than 130 federally funded and church-run boarding schools across the country between the 1880s and 1990s. Separated from their families, thousands died, and many were mentally, physically, and sexually abused by staff in institutions that the Government of Canada, in its 2008 apology to Survivors, acknowledged were designed to “kill the Indian in the child.” The TRC’s conclusions shocked many settler Canadians but confirmed what generations of Indigenous Peoples experienced:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as “cultural genocide.”

The TRC’s findings challenged Canadians to grapple with the “complex truth” that their own government, in partnership with various churches, devised, deployed, and defended a genocidal school system for more than a century.
The TRC’s focus on “truth determination” and “truth-telling” was meant to correct Canada’s long history of denying or downplaying the devastating effects of schooling and colonialism for Indigenous Peoples. Its final report, complete with ninety-four Calls to Action, stressed that Canadians must confront their country’s colonial history before reconciliation, or the process of “establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” with Indigenous Peoples, can begin. Though many individuals and institutions are responding to the Calls to Action, the TRC chair, Murray Sinclair, voiced concerns that Canada is rushing reconciliation and leaving the truth behind. Some Canadians want to skip to redemption without acknowledging the root of the problem. According to Sinclair, refusing to recognize historical injustices is a recipe for disaster. “This history is not going to stay in the past,” he remarked, “it is going to get critical.”

Sinclair’s prediction became a grim reality in 2021, when the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc Nation announced that it had located approximately 215 potential unmarked graves on the site of the Kamloops Indian Residential School in the interior of British Columbia. This revelation, and similar announcements by other Indigenous Nations, sparked an international outpouring of grief and outrage, as well as renewed calls for Canada to reckon with its colonial past and present. Recent events thus confirm the TRC’s conclusion that if settler Canadians are serious about repairing relations with Indigenous Peoples, the full extent of Canada’s history of education and colonialism – including schooling for settlers – must first be understood and addressed. There are no easy shortcuts. We need truth before reconciliation.

This book contributes to the important project of truth telling about Canada’s history of schooling and colonialism. Specifically, it examines the role played by various kinds of schooling in helping to build British Columbia, first as a British colony and then as a Canadian province, between 1849 and 1930. Because of its large Indigenous population and rapid socioeconomic development, British Columbia offers a compelling microcosm of Canada’s colonial project. My central argument is that colonial and then provincial and federal governments gradually and strategically took on greater responsibility for educating Indigenous and
non-Indigenous people. They administered various kinds of primary and secondary schooling — such as public schools, Indian Day Schools, and Indian Residential Schools — in ways that helped catalyze and legitimize the making of British Columbia as a capitalist settler society. Indeed, as Helen Raptis and members of the Ts’msyen Nation argue, residential schooling was just “one plank” of the larger colonial project, and a more comprehensive accounting of the history of schooling and the creation of British Columbia is sorely needed. Lessons in Legitimacy addresses that need.

Building on the work of historians such as Adele Perry and Laura Ishiguro, I place the making of British Columbia in a transnational context, and I situate my study in relation to international literature that examines the history of education and imperialism in the British Empire. Historians show how British colonies used schooling — “as and for legitimacy,” in the words of M. Kazim Bacchus — to help build capitalist settler societies. Anti-colonial theorist Albert Memmi contends that in colonial settings, it is impossible for colonizers “not to be aware of the constant illegitimacy” of their status. Memmi explains, “In order for the colonizer to be the complete master, it is not enough for him to be so in actual fact, but he must also believe in his legitimacy.” As a result, colonizers, particularly those who possess the most social, economic, and political power as Aileen Moreton-Robinson points out, developed various techniques of rule to legitimize colonial hegemony. “Ruling by schooling,” as sociologist Bruce Curtis calls it, was one such technique. Schooling had a “hidden curriculum,” or what I call lessons in legitimacy: the formal and informal teachings that justified the colonial project and normalized the unequal social relations of settler capitalism as commonsensical. Schools, in short, served as important laboratories for learning colonial legitimacy throughout much of the British Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In many British colonies, education for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people developed in distinct yet overlapping ways. Colonial governments supported schooling for Indigenous children and youth, often overseen by Christian missionaries, as a “civilizing” project aimed at disrupting and delegitimizing Indigenous lifeways and recalibrating
pupils for subordinate roles in the new colonial society. Historian Catherine Hall shows that Europeans who emigrated to British settler colonies also needed to be “civilized” and trained to be effective colonizers, and so colonial governments supported the creation of schools for their children. Hall suggests that these schools were key sites of making colonial subjects and subjectivities that supported ongoing colonization. Students got lessons in everything from history and civics to home economics and calisthenics in ways that built their character and prepared them for their future roles as loyal subjects and defenders of empire. Schooling not only preserved social order in the colonies, it actively helped produce and reproduce — and legitimate — that order. In this way, schooling for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people played different but complementary roles in expanding the British Empire and securing what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call “settler futurity.”

Shifting the focus to Canada, and to the vast and varied province of British Columbia, *Lessons in Legitimacy* examines the relationship between colonialism, capitalism, and the rise of state schooling in a different corner of the empire. This book unsettles the conventions of education history by bringing schooling for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, often studied separately, into one analytical frame. To do so, I draw on literature in the fields of education history and Indigenous history. Historians R.D. Gidney and W.P.J. Millar point out that though schooling shares national characteristics, education in Canada comes under provincial jurisdiction. As a result, a rich body of literature looks at the history of schooling in British Columbia, which I engage directly. Important new books by Timothy J. Stanley and Helen Raptis examine various aspects of education and colonialism in British Columbia, though they focus on the twentieth century and do not fully interrogate the nineteenth-century origins of schooling. In fact, no book-length study has investigated the province’s early schooling history since 1964, when F. Henry Johnson published his survey, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia*. His book helpfully documents the development and expansion of state-run schooling, but it does so uncritically. It also advances an “onward and upward” Whiggish narrative, in which it wrongly assumes that “the more schools there are,
the bigger they become and the greater the number of children attending them, the better everything was supposed to be getting.” In contrast, recent works by Paul Axelrod, Mona Gleason, Amy von Heyking, Bruce Curtis, Jason Ellis, and Funké Aladejebi understand schooling more as a project of rule, an important but contested process of socialization and subject formation. However, no book-length study builds on the insights of this literature to critically re-examine the origins of schooling in British Columbia. *Lessons in Legitimacy* does this.

I also draw on works of Indigenous history that investigate the relationship between education and Indigenous Peoples. Under the terms of the British North America Act and due to the quirks of Canadian federalism, schooling is a provincial jurisdiction, but what is known as “Indian education” was the official responsibility of the federal government. Important works by historians such as J.R. Miller and John S. Milloy carefully interrogate Canada’s IRS system as a project of colonial rule, but significant gaps remain. First, as Gwichyà Gwich’in historian Crystal Gail Fraser points out, most studies tend to focus only on residential schools and do not give enough attention to the early mission schools that predated them or to the Indian Day Schools that operated concurrently and often accommodated as many or more students. Second, most historians either trace the national contours of the IRS system or closely examine one school. As a result, the provincial perspective is largely neglected or presented in incomplete ways. Third, the majority of scholarship disconnects the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by treating their histories of schooling as separate subjects. Though researchers unconsciously reproduce this approach as they follow scholarly convention and archival ordering, the result is that most strictly adhere to official policy lines that in practice were blurred, broken, and challenged in everyday life. British Columbia’s public schools, for example, often accommodated both Indigenous and settler children. Public school classrooms are thus better understood as what Mary Louise Pratt calls “contact zones” or “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism.” By examining the various kinds of schooling for Indigenous and non-Indigenous
people and showing how they sometimes overlapped, this book, as a kind of “experiment in historiography” to borrow E.P. Thompson’s phrase, offers a different way of understanding the history of education in Canada.36

It also builds on theoretical insights from Critical Indigenous Studies, historical materialism, and political economy to comprehend the braided histories of colonialism, capitalism, and state schooling in British Columbia. I draw on Critical Indigenous Studies literature to acknowledge the centrality of land and dispossession/white possession to examinations of colonialism, specifically what Cree scholars Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt call the “structures and operations” of settler colonialism.37 Patrick Wolfe makes clear that the “elimination” and “erasure” of Indigenous Peoples from the land to gain “access to territory” is the “primary motive” of settler colonialism, and Sioux scholar Nick Estes argues that colonialism in the Americas has always been “about the land: who stole it, who owned it, and who claimed it.”38 The same holds true for British Columbia, where colonizers have “come to stay.”39 Indeed, Secwépemc leader Arthur Manuel stresses, “It began with our dispossession: our lands were stolen out from underneath us.”40

Similar to the enclosures in eighteenth-century Britain, the “British Columbia Clearances” consisted of the mass expropriation of territory and resources that directly led to the creation of a new capitalist society.41 Colonizers stole, surveyed, sold and resold, and (re)settled Indigenous lands, remaking them into what is now known as British Columbia. Scholars such as Dene political theorist Glen Sean Coulthard and Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson argue that land is not simply a resource or a commodity for Indigenous Peoples. Instead, it is a reciprocal relationship that imparts crucial lessons to human and non-human beings about interconnection and interdependence.42 Acknowledging the land as a lifeforce enables us to understand that the deliberate attempts of colonial dispossession to sever that relationship were – and still are – devastating for Indigenous Peoples. Indigeneity is enduring, and organized resistance to land theft is ongoing, as Kanaka Maoli scholar Kēhaulani Kauanui and Secwépemc historian Sarah Nickel emphasize, but Arthur Manuel and Grand Chief Ronald M. Derrickson
put the consequences of dispossession/white possession in stark terms: “Indigenous lands today account for only 0.36 per cent of British Columbia territory. The settler share is the remaining 99.64 per cent.”

It is important to recognize, however, that settler colonialism is not only about colonizers showing up and stealing land. Colonial invasion, as Wolfe writes, is a “structure not an event.” It “destroys to replace.” Ojibwe political scientist Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark states that it “is not just reductive, it is productive, actively producing both the settler state and its accompanying legitimizing narratives.” Colonizers reproduce and reaffirm, in the words of Moreton-Robinson, their “ownership, control, and domination” through “perpetual Indigenous dispossession.” Drawing on the insights of geographer Cole Harris, I thus argue that colonial dispossession in British Columbia serves a specific purpose: restricting Indigenous Peoples to small reserves and transforming their territories into private property to be possessed — sold and controlled — by government for the purposes of resettlement and capitalist accumulation. Indeed, Coulthard clarifies that in Canada, “the ends [of colonial dispossession] have always remained the same: to shore up continued access to Indigenous Peoples’ territories for the purposes of state formation, settlement, and capitalist development.” To better theorize settler capitalism and the making of British Columbia, then, I build on the recent engagement of Indigenous scholars with historical materialism to analyze the connections between dispossession — commonly referred to as “primary” or “primitive” accumulation — and the exploitative economic system that the newcomers developed.

Drawing on historical materialism, I examine settler colonialism alongside other kinds of coercive dispossession to better understand the process of destruction and development that helped build British Columbia. Instead of disaggregating the “colonial-relation” and the “capital relation,” as some scholars do, I employ a dialectical appreciation of how colonial dispossession fed capitalist accumulation and the creation of new markets in the mid- to late nineteenth century only to have new forms of capitalist expansion in the early twentieth century require renewed dispossession. Land pre-emption policies and the creation of private property and Indian reserves went hand in hand with
the processes of proletarianization and pauperization that divorced most working-class settlers and many Indigenous Peoples from the land, though in uneven ways as Coulthard emphasizes.\textsuperscript{51} Separated from the land, the vast majority of settlers, and an increasing number of Indigenous Peoples, had little choice but to live by selling their labour power in exchange for wages to purchase goods and services from the emerging market economy.\textsuperscript{52} But advancing capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also required new waves of dispossession, including the “cutting off” and sale of Indian reserve lands, as well as the imposition of taxes and rents, the increased regulation of women and the poor, and the introduction of new methods of education to further disrupt Indigenous lifeways and compel the growing masses into wage labour.\textsuperscript{53} To be clear, so-called primitive accumulation was neither a one-time invasion nor a simple handmaiden of capitalism; various kinds of coercive dispossession sustained accumulation and social formation over the longue durée. In the pages that follow, I build on David Harvey’s concept of “accumulation by dispossession” and present it as a permanent and dialectical force. It is a simultaneously destructive and generative process facilitating the ongoing development of British Columbia as a capitalist settler society.\textsuperscript{54}

To clarify the role of the state and schooling in this process, I turn to political economy as a “way of seeing” to determine who benefits the most from socioeconomic development in colonial settings.\textsuperscript{55} Locating and defining “the state” in British Columbia, especially for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is a task that Perry describes as akin to catching a “slippery fish.”\textsuperscript{56} Admittedly, as the coming pages reveal, many overlapping jurisdictions and competing kinds of state power were at play – imperial/colonial, federal, provincial, and municipal – all in various stages of development.\textsuperscript{57} Though some historians have recently downplayed the power of the state in Canada, political economists have demonstrated the instrumental, and distinctly interventionist, role that state actors, in an evolving network of institutions, including government, bureaucracy, judiciaries, and the police and military, play in continued accumulation by dispossession.\textsuperscript{58}
Political economists have shown that the state is not a neutral arbiter between social groups. Instead, scholars such as Leo Panitch illustrate that differing levels of government and state agencies act on the behalf, but not at the behest, of dominant or ruling classes. A range of state actors carries out various duties, consciously or unconsciously, in ways that serve the dual roles of facilitating capitalist accumulation and ensuring the continued development and legitimation of society. Moreover, institutions such as schools, as “agencies of legitimacy,” are administered by state actors such as government officials, superintendents of education, inspectors, and trustees in overt and covert ways that help to secure hegemony. Indeed, political theorist Antonio Gramsci argues that the state in capitalist societies can be understood “as an educator” and that “every relationship of ‘hegemony’ is necessarily an educational relationship.” Building on these insights, I deploy a dual view of the state and schooling as a kind of domination – a project of rule – as well as a site for struggle. Schooling, as Terry Wotherspoon shows, can reinforce and reproduce oppressive social structures but can also be an arena for contestation and possible social transformation. By employing a political economy approach, which takes both top-down and bottom-up perspectives into account, I emphasize agency and highlight instances of conflict, compromise, and resistance by various individuals, including politicians, reformers, school officials, Indian agents, teachers, parents, students, and community members. I present the rise of state schooling in British Columbia as a powerful but negotiated and contested historical phenomenon.

In terms of methodology, key tools of the historian – examining context, interpreting causality, and tracing the contours of change over time – are central to this book. Equally important, however, is incorporating Indigenous methodologies that emphasize the role of relationships and respect in producing knowledge about the past in the present. As I explained in the Preface, I am a white settler scholar who is a “continuing beneficiary” of Canada’s colonial project, and thus it is essential that I engage respectfully with Indigenous methodologies to guide my work as it relates to Indigenous history. This is important because, as Métis
political scientist Adam Gaudry argues, academic research on Indigenous Peoples is “often an extractive process” that can “reproduce tired colonial narratives that justify occupation and oppression.” This need not be the case. Mary-Ellen Kelm and Keith D. Smith stress that historical thinking and Indigenous methodologies can be seen as “nested practices” to produce “new and better ways to understand the past.” Similarly, Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that “coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges.”

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith outlines a number of projects for researchers. I take up the project of “reading” to critically interrogate the archival records produced by governments, churches, and schools that I use as evidence in this book. Writers such as Ann Laura Stoler suggest that scholars approach the archives as producers of colonial knowledge and power. We must read along and against the archival grain, she suggests, to understand how the archive is coded in colonial common sense and how it makes available some knowledges while serving to bury others. In the context of British Columbia, historians such as Perry, Nickel, and John Sutton Lutz show that the archival record largely privileges settler conceptualizations of history but can nevertheless offer an important window onto the past. Building on the work of Kelm and Smith and Mary Jane Logan McCallum and Perry, I aim to consult and “converse” with archival sources in ways that challenge colonial common sense and the erasure of Indigenous Peoples and their perspectives on the past. In this way, *Lessons in Legitimacy* draws on and reads a range of sources along and against the grain. I examine public school and Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) records, Colonial Office (CO) correspondence, church records and missionary accounts, newspapers, photographs, educational materials such as textbooks and curriculum documents, and newly digitized school files and church records related to the creation and administration of mission schools and Indian Day Schools and Indian Residential Schools. As well, I consult Indigenous autobiographies and published oral histories as a way of showcasing Indigenous Peoples challenging and talking back to the colonial archive.
I also engage Smith’s project of reframing to offer a different perspective on the educational past. Instead of consulting colonial sources to document progress, I critically examine my sources to better understand the central tendencies, or what Gidney and Millar call the “structural functions and operating procedures,” of schooling. Unlike Gidney and Millar, though, I am interested not only in explaining “how schools worked” but also in examining why they operated as they did to determine who benefitted most from the rise of state schooling. In doing so, I ask: What factors influenced the shift from voluntary education around the middle of the nineteenth century to compulsory state schooling in the early twentieth century? Who paid for schooling and why? How did colonial officials, church agents, provincial administrators, DIA staff, reformers, school trustees, teachers, parents, community members, and students debate, shape, and influence the meaning and outcomes of schooling? Why were Indigenous and non-Indigenous children mostly schooled separately, and how did the different school systems develop? What accounts for examples where Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and youth attended the same schools? How were relationships between and hierarchies of colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist rule normalized and legitimized but also resisted and subverted between 1849 and 1930? The pages that follow address these questions.

Responding to Cree political scientist Kiera Ladner’s call to re-story Indigenous-settler relations in ways that reject narratives of convergence/assimilation, I use a parallel structure to trace the distinct but overlapping histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous schooling. Lessons in Legitimacy is organized chronologically into three parts that correspond to phases of colonization and the building of British Columbia. Each part consists of two chapters: the first examines settler schooling and the second discusses Indian education, but they are intended to be read contrapuntally, as a totality. I also draw attention to instances where colonial binaries and the official boundaries between the systems were challenged and traversed. Overall, I show how different schooling projects for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people played complementary roles in catalyzing and legitimizing the making of British Columbia’s capitalist settler society.
Part 1 explores the emergence of schooling in the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia between 1849 and 1871. Chapter 1 shows that it shifted from ad hoc education for the offspring of elite Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) officers to a government-supported system of common schooling that was open to all classes of mostly, though not exclusively, settler children. HBC and colonial officials reluctantly agreed to pay for schooling, in exchange for increased power over education. Chapter 2 reveals that officials invited missionaries to start schools for Indigenous Peoples in the context of settler anxiety about their resistance to colonization. Their purpose was to convince Indigenous Nations to accept colonization and develop skills to contribute to the new economy.

Part 2 looks at the rise of state schooling between 1871 and 1900. Chapter 3 shows that the provincial government transformed common schooling into a centralized public system after British Columbia joined Canada in 1871. During the early 1870s, the government agreed to cover almost the entire cost of the new system in exchange for increased power over education. By the late 1880s, it still retained this authority but started to shift costs and some administrative responsibilities to local levels. In response, municipalities taxed the property of ratepayers to raise funds for schooling. Thus, accumulation by dispossession – taxing stolen and occupied Indigenous lands – underwrote the growing school system. Chapter 4 discusses the federal government’s new system of Indian education – which consisted of day, boarding, and industrial schools – that took root in British Columbia by the late 1880s and early 1890s, as part of its strategy to expand Canada’s capitalist confederation.

Part 3 shows that provincial and federal governments reformed schooling in the early 1900s to support the development of an industrial capitalist economy. As Chapter 5 outlines, the provincial government normalized mass public schools by making attendance mandatory and introducing new educational methods to better prepare students for their eventual roles as citizens and wage workers. Chapter 6 examines Ottawa’s continued commitment to Indian Day Schools and Indian Residential Schools as a way of disrupting and delegitimizing Indigenous lifeways to support ongoing settler capitalism and Canadian nation building. This
chapter looks at the federal government’s insistence on making Indian education compulsory and the emphasis on industrial training, but it also highlights what Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson calls Indigenous “refusal” as well as resistance. Such episodes, Simpson argues, strike at the heart of colonial hegemony and call state authority and its legitimacy into question.80 Taken together, Chapters 5 and 6 show that Indigenous and non-Indigenous schooling played an important, though still contested, role in the consolidation of British Columbia by 1930.

This study ends in 1930 for a number of reasons. Obviously, neither school reform nor the making of British Columbia halted at that point. However, by the late 1920s and early 1930s, British Columbia’s transformation to successful province was largely complete. New phases of colonial dispossession, proletarianization, and capitalist accumulation continued, of course, and regional development proceeded in uneven ways, but by this time the foundations were firmly established. Moreover, mass schooling had become the norm by the late 1920s, and the onset of the Great Depression slowed school reform efforts, federally and provincially, with few major educational changes occurring in British Columbia schools until after the Second World War.81

For the Conclusion, I synthesize my major findings. Stepping back to evaluate the book as a totality, I highlight the lessons learned from presenting separate but similar – and sometimes overlapping – histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous schooling in tandem. I also connect these lessons to the present and to the calls made by the TRC and by Indigenous leaders such as Arthur Manuel for Canadians to put truth before reconciliation.82

In 2015, as the TRC prepared to release its final report, Murray Sinclair pointed out that “education is what got us into this mess,” but he added that new kinds of education, including learning how to reckon with and address the colonial past and its ongoing legacies, are “the key to reconciliation.”83 Building on the work of the TRC, and bringing the histories of schooling for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people into one analytical frame, this book contributes to the project of truth telling about Canada’s history that is required to support decolonization and meaningful reconciliation.