



CONNECTING IMMIGRATION TO CANADA'S INDIGENOUS PAST AND PRESENT

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Connecting immigration to Canada's Indigenous past and present

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In 2017, I participated in a walking fieldtrip organized by [First Story Toronto](#). It was an eye-opening experience. We explored various sites with significant Indigenous connections in downtown Toronto, Canada's primary immigrant-receiving city. Canada is both a nation of immigrants *and* a land belonging to Indigenous people, and the field trip addressed these diverging perspectives in a novel and hands-on way. As an academic, I'm used to dealing with issues through rigorous scholarship and conceptual theories, and to see this complex relationship presented in an experiential way was both humbling and inspiring.

My [own research](#) has revealed a gap that typically characterizes public debate related to Indigenous peoples in Canada and immigration and settlement. On the one side, we see Canada as a nation of immigrants that provides newcomers with a new home, no matter where they come from. On the other side, we see Indigenous peoples' claim to belonging to the land because they have always been here. We tend to separate these two narratives, choosing to discuss *either* immigration *or* reconciliation, but not how the two are related or how they can be reconciled. This gap needs to be bridged with open dialogue and policy changes.

In early 2018, I began a project in collaboration with the [Yellowhead Institute](#) and Ryerson University's [CELT initiative](#) to bridge this gap. The project provided funding to two students: one, an Indigenous undergraduate student, and the other, a graduate student in the [Graduate Program in Immigration and Settlement Studies](#). They were tasked with jointly developing an open-access resource guide for an [Indigenous City walking fieldtrip](#).

Inspired by First Story Toronto, the Indigenous City walking fieldtrip leads participants through significant sites on and around the Ryerson University campus in Toronto's downtown core. One stop is at the [statue of Egerton Ryerson](#), where attention is drawn to his role in establishing the residential school system and the need for reconciliation. Another stop at Young Street informs participants about the Indigenous origins of today's major transportation routes. There are ten stops in all, each one linking Indigenous peoples to the city's settler past and present.

The fieldtrip guide is publicly available and contributes to Ryerson University's general [efforts of reconciliation](#). The Indigenous student, Jeremie Caribou, who co-developed the fieldtrip guide has delivered the fieldtrip for the last two years to incoming students in the Immigration and Settlement Studies graduate program.

The fieldtrip serves as an engaging yet sobering introduction to immigration and settlement studies in Canada. It frames the entire curriculum by acknowledging past and current settler colonialism. The term "settlement" – which has been part of the program's name since its inception in 2004 – now acknowledges that newcomers arrive in a "settler" society.

In addition to conveying factual knowledge about colonialization, the fieldtrip speaks to the impact immigration has had on Indigenous lives. It also connects participants to the land. The Indigenous and settler past, present, and future converge at the concrete geographical sites that participants visit. This focus on location and how we share the land presents a way of thinking about society and our responsibilities towards each other that differs from a colonial understanding of Canada: as a sovereign nation-state organized around exploiting the human and natural resources in its territory.

Learning by connecting to the land, I think, is crucial to newly imagine how Indigenous peoples, newcomers, and settlers can relate to each other on the land that defines Canada today. In this way, the Indigenous City walking fieldtrip is a small step in a long journey towards reconciliation.