REVIEW ESSAY

Kelm, M-E. & Smith, K. (2018). *Talking back to the Indian Act: Critical readings in settler colonial histories*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Reviewed by Jennifer Jilks, B.A., B. Ed., M. Ed., is a retired teacher, avid reader, writer, hospice volunteer, naturalist, amateur photographer, and blogger.

This book is a bit of a frustrating read, but it is an important one. I have prided myself on tackling contentious issues, and - difficult read or not - I want to learn more. In the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation, I have endeavoured to read up on the past. My only criticism is the small font chosen for the paperback.

I understand that this is aimed at a younger, university-aged crowd. I am thinking, however, that it would work for those Truth and Reconciliation Committees, which exists in many communities. Here in Lanark County it is called: *Lanark County Neighbours for Truth & Reconciliation*. People engage in education, ceremony, understanding, and learning about the past, and relationships between Indigenous and White Settler communities.

It is important, following the Truth and Reconciliation Act, to bear witness to the misogyny, the gender bias, and the stereotypical attitudes of those who wrote the Indian Act, and created abusive Residential Schools. First Nations have spent much time, energy, and willpower, fighting back peacefully, and in the courts.

The Indian Act (1876) is a disturbing means by which the Britain Crown rounded up First Nations, treated them like children, and banished them to reserves, where they were treated, at best, as wards or children of the state, or slaves, to endure violence, indignities, and abuse. This text provides specific letters and documents which demonstrate this attitude. Eventually, we understand, the Crown went from recognizing First Nations as an equal nation, to trying to eradicate and eliminate Indigenous Peoples.

The book is an excellent tool for a professor; charged with facilitating student learning, critical thinking and reflection. Certainly, an aforementioned committee, or a book club could use this as a reference. It contains the texts of salient acts and letters, maps, footnotes within each chapter, lists of questions to stimulate thinking, a chronological list of Indian Act timelines, and an index. I think I would have appreciated a list of acronyms, as well.

Some salient points:

5 C's of Historical Thinking

Five concepts that are the foundation of historical thinking: Change over time, context, causality, contingency, and complexity.

4 Rs of Indigenous Methodologies

Touchstones of Indigenous methodologies: Relationship, responsibility, respect, and reciprocity.

My conclusion, and that of many scholars, is that the British government, and its white, male representatives, moved from an attitude of respect for and protection of Indigenous Peoples to an attempt to integrate them into white society. In doing so, every means possible was used to reduce First Nations culture and society to rubble. As shown in this book, the Indian Act of 1876 was part of this steadfast determination to eradicate the culture, traditions and values of the peoples they had so recently promised to preserve.

Speech made by Chief Deskaheh, March 10th, 1925

As Ottawa purportedly attempted an Indian Advancement strategy and Washington persisted in its assimilation of Chief Deskaheh's people (in this case, the Iroquois or Haudenosaunee), he made a powerful speech, denouncing policies of "forced acculturation":

We are tired of calling on the governments of pale-faced peoples in America and Europe. We have tried that and found it was no use. They deal only in fine words... We want justice from now on. After all that has happened to us, that is not much for us to ask. You got half of your territory here by warfare upon red-men, usually unprovoked, and you got about a quarter of it by bribing their chiefs, and not over a quarter of it did you get openly and fairly (p. 74-79) ■■